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Recommended Citation

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Defoe's *The Complete English Tradesman* and the Prostitute Narrative:

Minding the Shop in *Mrs. Elizabeth Wisebourn*,
Sally Salisbury, and *Roxana*

SHARON SMITH

ABSTRACT

Written in the aftermath of the South Sea Bubble collapse of 1720, Daniel Defoe's *The Complete English Tradesman* (1726) associates economic survival with the concept of mastery, or "minding the shop." This concept had been explored in prostitute narratives published earlier in the decade, including Anodyne Tanner's *The Life of the Late Celebrated Mrs. Elizabeth Wisebourn* (1721), Charles Walker's *Authentick Memoirs of the Life, Intrigues, and Adventures of the Celebrated Sally Salisbury* (1723), and Defoe's *Roxana: The Fortunate Mistress* (1724). When one reads *The Complete English Tradesman* in relation to these narratives, the figure of the female sex worker emerges as a model for Defoe's middle-class masculine ideal. Much like Defoe's tradesman, the protagonists of post-Bubble prostitute narratives represent an endangered masculinity that strives for mastery within a precarious economic environment. The "femaleness" of these protagonists—and consequently Defoe's tradesman—cannot be disregarded, however. Though the prostitute narratives discussed here are male-authored representations of masculine experience, they are also reflections of one of eighteenth-century England's most fascinating and powerful female figures, a figure associated, albeit loosely, with actual female sex workers. Defoe's tradesman clearly serves as a masculine ideal, but one that cannot escape its notorious "feminine" literary past.



But the safe tradesman is he, that . . . keeps close within the verge of his own affairs, minds his shop or warehouse, and confining himself to what belongs to him there, goes on in the road of his business without launching into unknown oceans.

—Daniel Defoe, *The Complete English Tradesman* (1726)

Introduction

The widespread financial devastation caused by the failure of the South Sea Company in 1720 created a heightened sense of anxiety regarding the unpredictable nature of the English economy.¹ The ill-fated scheme, concocted by a small group of English politicians and businessmen and backed by a Parliament eager to manage the nation's growing war debt, resulted in what may have been the "first international financial crisis" (Dale 1), ruining investors and destabilizing governments throughout Europe. As several critics have noted, Daniel Defoe's *The Complete English Tradesman*, a lengthy guidebook for shopkeepers first published in 1726, both reflects and confronts the anxieties generated in part by the South Sea Bubble's collapse.² Defoe wrote his post-Bubble guidebook, which Sandra Sherman identifies as "the most comprehensive anatomy of shopkeeping ever written" (*Finance and Fictionality* 97), during a time when the British economy seemed increasingly irrational. As Defoe writes in *The Complete English Tradesman*, "We see one grow rich, and the other starve, under the very same circumstances" (1: vii). Defoe claims that this is the "the temper of the times" (1: vii) and suggests there are simply too many variables beyond the tradesman's control within a complex and unpredictable economy.

As Defoe recognized, England's credit-based economy was becoming increasingly characterized by risk.³ Risk, however, provided the conditions for success as well as failure, and many writers—including Defoe—approached the notion of risk with ambivalence, as something that could and should be minimized, but that was also inevitable, necessary, and even desirable.⁴ Defoe teaches the tradesman how to negotiate risk, an endeavor that becomes inextricably tied to the concept of oversight, most particularly oversight of the space represented by the shop. His most essential piece of advice to the tradesman is simply to master his immediate environment, or to "mind the shop." As obvious as this advice seems, Defoe recognized that mastery, a quality he considered vital to the completion of the tradesman, was as elusive as it was necessary, and he returns to the concept repeatedly, if not obsessively, within the pages of his guidebook. *The Complete English Tradesman* is the clearest articulation of Defoe's middle-class life philosophy, a philosophy in which the businesses of trade and life are conflated, and the mastery of one depends upon the mastery of the other.

When the complete tradesman is considered in relation to other post-Bubble representations of economic mastery, it becomes clear that Defoe's masculine ideal emerged within a culture that was already preoccupied with this concept. This is particularly evident within the pages of prostitute narratives written in the aftermath of the South Sea Bubble's collapse, including the three prostitute narratives I explore here: Anodyne Tanner's *The Life of the Late Celebrated Mrs. Elizabeth Wisebourn* (1721), Charles Walker's *Authentick Memoirs of the Life, Intrigues, and Adventures of the Celebrated Sally Salisbury* (1723), and Defoe's own *Roxana: The Fortunate Mistress* (1724).⁵ Sometimes configured within prostitute narratives as a bawd, but most often configured as a prostitute, the woman who trades sex for money is constructed as an individual whose economic stability depends upon her ability to master not only herself, but also her circumstances, her environment, and her customers. When one reads *The Complete English Tradesman* within the context of such narratives, one of the eighteenth-century's most infamous figures—that of the female sex worker—emerges as a model for Defoe's middle-class masculine ideal.

As Laura Rosenthal explains, eighteenth-century prostitute narratives appear within a variety of genres—poetry, drama, fiction, biography, and autobiography, for example—and incorporate representations of bawds, courtesans, streetwalkers, and kept mistresses. In addition to *Roxana*, some of the more familiar and widely studied prostitute narratives include Aphra Behn's *The Rover* (1677), John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera* (1728), George Lillo's *The London Merchant* (1731), and John Cleland's *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* (1748). Thanks in large part to Rosenthal's recent editorial and scholarly work, lesser known prostitute narratives—including *Mrs. Elizabeth Wisebourn* and *Sally Salisbury*—have begun to receive attention as well. As recent critics have noted, eighteenth-century English prostitute narratives are problematic in that they reveal very little about the lives or perspectives of actual eighteenth-century sex workers.⁶ Rather, these representations tend to perform other kinds of cultural work, underscoring the scandalous nature of female authorship, for example, or serving as the antithesis of the emerging ideal of domestic feminine virtue.⁷ According to Rosenthal, prostitute narratives also explore the economic experience of the individual—male or female—within an increasingly commercial market culture.⁸ Undoubtedly, these narratives served a variety of purposes during the eighteenth century, depending not only on who produced

them, but also on the cultural, social, political, and economic contexts in which they were produced.

In the midst of the economic upheaval created by the failure of the South Sea Company, post-Bubble prostitute narratives often served as a means for constructing what would become a largely masculine ideal of middle-class entrepreneurship. In doing so, these narratives provided the foundation upon which Defoe constructed his economic philosophy. One might say that Defoe's tradesman actually began life as a sex worker, for in *The Complete English Tradesman*, Defoe transforms the female protagonist of the post-Bubble prostitute narrative into the male embodiment of economic mastery. In essence, the fundamental figure of feminine moral corruption becomes the early eighteenth-century masculine economic ideal. The tradesman functions in many ways as a reformed sex worker who both benefits from and attempts to conceal his unsavory literary past. As he does so, he engages in a precarious balancing act that requires him to demonstrate the business skills of the bawd or the prostitute without revealing himself to be one of her kind.

Other scholars have noted a connection between the tradesman and the sex worker. For example, both Bram Dijkstra and Sherman read *The Complete English Tradesman* in relation to *Roxana*. According to Dijkstra, Defoe's guidebook is a fairly straightforward advice manual that teaches the individual "how to survive and thrive in the dangerous and prosaic, but enormously exciting world of business" (7). Meanwhile, Sherman explores how *The Complete English Tradesman* offers a theory of fiction in a credit-based market in which individuals found it increasingly difficult to distinguish fiction from truth.⁹ Both Dijkstra and Sherman rely on their interpretations of *The Complete English Tradesman* to make sense of Defoe's earlier fiction; however, as they draw upon the ideas in Defoe's trade manual to shape their interpretations of *Roxana* and its protagonist, they do not consider how, in actuality, Roxana—along with the heroines of other prostitute narratives from the period—serves as a model for Defoe's tradesman. While Dijkstra in particular argues that Roxana embodies the qualities of Defoe's complete tradesman, it would be more apt to say that the complete tradesman embodies the qualities of Defoe's prostitute, particularly her ability to "mind the shop."

More recent readings of *The Complete English Tradesman* not only explore Defoe's dependence on eighteenth-century representations of femininity in the construction of his masculine ideal, but also note the ways in which this ideal depends in part on the idea of mastery, particularly "self-mastery" (Gregg 8) or "self-discipline" (Barr 158). According to these critics, the figure of the

tradesman is shaped in large part by gendered eighteenth-century assumptions regarding virtue. Rebecca Anne Barr, for example, asserts that Defoe's tradesman, though masculine, incorporates characteristics associated with feminine sexual virtue.¹⁰ Meanwhile, Stephen H. Gregg argues that the tradesman embodies a supposedly masculine virtue that is defined in opposition to a feminine and potentially effeminizing market.¹¹ For both, the tradesman's virtue—or his reputation for virtue, which in the eighteenth century was often represented as equally if not more important than actual virtue—is always endangered, for Barr by the circulation of malicious gossip, for Gregg by the influence of a corrupt and corrupting market.¹² According to both Barr and Gregg, the complete tradesman responds to such threats by exercising self-control—control of his behavior, demeanor, passions, and desires.¹³ While the concept of mastery is touched on in these readings of *The Complete English Tradesman*, however, it is not explored in depth, nor is it considered in relation to other representations of economic mastery that emerged during the decade after the Bubble's collapse. Considered within the context of these representations, it becomes clear that Defoe's masculine ideal embodies the qualities of the female sex worker, a feminine figure rarely associated with virtue.

Determining how gender functions within the configuration represented by the sex worker/tradesman proves problematic. Sex work, for example, was not an exclusively female enterprise, and men worked within the trade as both pimps and prostitutes, or "stallions" (Rosenthal, *Infamous Commerce* 6). Still, the sex trade then, as now, was populated largely by women, and the readers of eighteenth-century prostitute narratives undoubtedly read sex workers as female and were expected to do so by the authors of these narratives. The connection between fictional female sex workers and actual female sex workers—no matter how artificial—could never be far from the minds of the writers or readers of these narratives, which were often represented as biographical or autobiographical accounts of real-life bawds and prostitutes. Recent critics of prostitute narratives tend to read the figure of the eighteenth-century sex worker as female as well, often interpreting it as a feminine scapegoat for a variety of cultural anxieties, both sexual and economic. However, the apparent "femaleness" of the figure of the eighteenth-century sex worker should never be accepted at face value, for this figure sometimes reflected men's experience as much, if not more so, than women's.

In a number of eighteenth-century prostitute narratives, female protagonists not only embody and respond to economic fantasies and anxieties that

the culture associated with middle-class masculinity, they also function in many ways as representations of actually or potentially emasculated male figures who strive to gain, regain, or maintain their masculinity within an effeminating marketplace.¹⁴ In other words, they reflect not only the potential successes, but also the inevitable failures that were associated with the middle-class male entrepreneur. Defoe's complete tradesman inherits both the female sex worker's ability to master and the anxiety that inevitably accompanies this ability. In the prostitute narratives I discuss below, the female sex worker functions as a representation, even a fantasy, of economic control; however, her ability to master not only herself, but also her immediate environment, is always endangered and often incomplete. In *Mrs. Elizabeth Wisebourn*, the protagonist's mastery remains consistent throughout the narrative, but is repeatedly threatened. Meanwhile, in *Sally Salisbury*, the heroine's economic mastery ultimately proves incompatible with her inability to control her passions. Finally, in *Roxana*, the heroine's excessive reflection on her past life disrupts her ability to manage her affairs.

Of course, the reading of the female sex worker as the embodiment of the aspirations and fears of the middle-class tradesman is complicated by the fact that women as well as men experienced hope and anxiety in response to the possibilities and liabilities associated with an unpredictable economy. It is complicated even further by the fact that women participated in trade, not just as sex workers, of course, but in socially legitimate roles as well. As historians have noted, women worked in trade as apprentices, employees, business owners, shopkeepers, and entrepreneurs. Paula McDowell, for example, describes how women took advantage of the opportunities made possible by the rapid and initially chaotic growth of the printing trade to work as printers, publishers, booksellers, and binders.¹⁵ Meanwhile, Bridget Hill provides evidence for women's participation in a variety of English trades. According to Hill, women worked not only in "women's trades" as milliners, mantua makers, stay makers, and seamstresses, but also in "men's trades" as tailors, publicans, butchers, and bakers.¹⁶ As both Hill and Margaret R. Hunt note, a number of women worked in businesses alongside male family members, typically husbands, while many women—married and unmarried—owned their own businesses, usually due to inheritance, but often as a result of their independent efforts.¹⁷ According to Hunt, though there are numerous examples of successful female entrepreneurs, female traders were even more vulnerable than male traders during this period due to their contingent legal status within both the family and society-at-

large.¹⁸ Hunt writes, "Eighteenth-century women traders ran the same risks as did any businessperson, but they also encountered obstacles that were particular to their time and to their sex" (146). Defoe himself recognized not only that women could be incredibly successful in business, but also that they were especially vulnerable within England's precarious economic environment.¹⁹ Trade was a male-dominated enterprise during the eighteenth century, however, and was perceived and represented as such by those who commented on it. For individuals like Defoe who were intellectually, theoretically, and philosophically invested in the operations of trade—including its potential successes and failures—the ideal representative of this undertaking is a male figure. Nonetheless, much like a reformed prostitute who is unable to escape her disreputable past, he is a male figure who is unable to escape his literary past, a past haunted by the infamous female figure whose identity would come to define his own.

The Complete English Tradeswoman: Mrs. Elizabeth Wisebourn

In Anodyne Tanner's *The Life of the Late Celebrated Mrs. Elizabeth Wisebourn*, a purportedly biographical account of the notorious London bawd who died in 1720 at the age of sixty-seven, the female protagonist embodies the concept of economic mastery that would prove so significant during the decade after the collapse of the South Sea Bubble. Though technically a bawd, Mrs. Wisebourn would also have earned a reputation as a "whore," a word that—according to Rosenthal—was used during the eighteenth century to refer to any woman who engaged in or profited from "illicit sexual activity" (Introduction xii). Though Mrs. Wisebourn's business depended primarily on the labor of the young female sex workers who inhabited her house, Tanner never refers to her establishment as a brothel or the individuals who dwell there as prostitutes.²⁰ Rather, he euphemistically represents Mrs. Wisebourn as a matchmaker who brings together "Lovers" (20) in her "House" (10) or "Academy" (10). Meanwhile, in spite of the fact that Mrs. Wisebourn was famous for providing high-priced prostitutes to a distinguished male clientele, Tanner emphasizes the services she occasionally provided to genteel and aristocratic women. Though he provides detailed accounts of the activities of a number of her female prostitutes, he represents these activities as scandalous romantic affairs rather than economic transactions. Even so, the text emphasizes Mrs. Wisebourn's managerial activities as much as it does the sexual activities on which her livelihood depends. Often satirical in his representation of Mrs. Wisebourn, Tanner

nonetheless expresses sincere admiration for her devotion to her trade and her mastery of her business. In fact, he begins his narrative by suggesting that she serves as an example to be followed by others. Walker suggests the same in *Sally Salisbury*. Devoting several stanzas of verse to Mrs. Wisebourn, in whose house Sally resides for a time, he asserts, “*South Sea Directors* might have learnt from *Thee* / How to pay Debts, and wear an honest Heart!” (14). Mrs. Wisebourn’s business practices are represented here as the antithesis of the shadier dealings that had recently created economic upheaval for so many.

Like Walker, Tanner also discusses Mrs. Wisebourn in relation to the South Sea fiasco, but instead of contrasting her manner of doing business with that of the South Sea directors, he draws parallels between them. In fact, Tanner invokes rumors that Mrs. Wisebourn herself was connected with and perhaps even responsible for the failed South Sea investment scheme. Though he represents her involvement as uncertain, he nonetheless describes Mrs. Wisebourn’s participation in other subscription projects that operate similarly to that of the South Sea Company. The first is a series of masquerades designed to meet the sexual needs of upper-class women. The second is for the benefit of her male clientele. Prior to her death, Mrs. Wisebourn attempts to acquire a charter to begin a subscription service “for furnishing the Town with Ladies of the best and safest Sort, at a much cheaper Rate than at present; together with an Office of Insurance from Infection” that would ensure that anyone who became infected with venereal disease would be “cured at the Expence of the Company” (50). Her procurement of the charter, however, is interrupted “when the *Scire-Facias* came out, and put a Stop to the proceeding any further in it” (50). In other words, Tanner suggests that Mrs. Wisebourn’s subscription scheme for the provision of inexpensive and disease-free prostitutes was disrupted by the South Sea Company itself, which, just prior to its collapse, issued writs of *scire facias* to prevent several companies it perceived as competitors from selling subscriptions to the public.²¹

Though Tanner’s narrative obviously criticizes the South Sea Company, it does not necessarily implicate Mrs. Wisebourn in this criticism. Tanner’s narrative suggests that economic enterprises that solicit subscriptions from investors are not evils in and of themselves; rather, they become evils when they are motivated by greed and conducted without honesty and openness, when they are designed primarily to profit the projectors rather than contribute to the good of all involved. Though greed may have motivated the projectors and investors involved in the South Sea Company, it does not motivate Mrs. Wisebourn, her prostitutes,

or her clients. Wherever Mrs. Wisebourn “laid any Obligation, it was without the least Prospect of Return,” while those who participate in her enterprise do so not “out of Mercenary Views, but purely for each other’s *Recreation* and *mutual Solace*” (14–15). There is a substance to Mrs. Wisebourn’s business that the South Sea Company ultimately lacked. Though the South Sea Company initially intended to support its operations by engaging in trade in South America, renewed war with Spain prevented this, and the company came to function purely on the basis of innovative but risky—and often corrupt—financial practices. Initially lured by the belief that they were investing in an exotic trade enterprise, subscribers in reality paid for the promise of future wealth, a promise that proved hollow.²² Meanwhile, according to Tanner, Mrs. Wisebourn’s “academy” is a substantive undertaking. Mrs. Wisebourn delivers on her promises to her subscribers, providing them with a tangible “product” that is already at her disposal rather than empty assurances of wealth that has not yet been secured.

Tanner’s criticism of the South Sea enterprise hinges not only on its lack of substance, but also on its status as a monopoly, one which prevents the emergence of other business ventures, satirically represented in the text by Mrs. Wisebourn’s subscription scheme for affordable and disease-free prostitutes. Mrs. Wisebourn’s plan is similar to one that would be proposed with apparent seriousness in Bernard Mandeville’s *A Modest Defence of Publick Stews*, published four years later in 1724.²³ Mandeville—who, like Defoe, is concerned with the establishment of a stable, middle-class masculine ideal—asserts that prostitution threatens the public good because it undermines the ability of businessmen to carry on their trades, either by infecting them with venereal disease, which both weakens them as individuals and enervates the nation as a whole, or by emptying their pockets:

Wenching as it is very expensive in itself . . . often leads Men into a thousand other Vices to support its extravagance: Besides, after the Mind has once got this extravagant Turn, there naturally follows a Neglect and Contempt of Business; and Whoring of itself disposes the Mind to such a sort of Indolence, as is quite inconsistent with Industry, the main Support of any, especially a trading, Nation. (56)

Yet Mandeville also suggests that more damage is done when young, unmarried men do not have an easily accessible sexual outlet. They may masturbate too much, marry too early, or marry inappropriate women. Alternately, they may spend the time that should be devoted to business seducing virgins and

debauching wives. In an effort to ensure the stability of marriages, families, businesses, and the nation, Mandeville, like Mrs. Wisebourn before him, proposes a plan that will provide men with easy access to reasonably priced, disease-free prostitutes. The fundamental difference in their plans lies in Mandeville's insistence that prostitution function as a public, government-regulated enterprise that would disallow competition from private bawds or independent prostitutes. In other words, it would function as a government-run monopoly in which a bawd such as Mrs. Wisebourn would still monitor the movements and the health of the prostitutes in her house, but would do so as a regulatory agent for the government, not as a private businesswoman. Mrs. Wisebourn, however, is averse to monopolies of any kind not only because they inhibit the flow of trade, but also because they undermine the ability of the tradesperson to freely pursue his or her interests within the market.

Mrs. Wisebourn's distaste for monopolies is suggested by her increasing concern regarding the tendency of the women in her society to claim possession over particular men, or "to make a Monopoly of Lovers" (20), a practice that creates discord among the women and threatens to disrupt Mrs. Wisebourn's business. According to Tanner, Mrs. Wisebourn is a successful tradesperson in part because she has learned to regulate her emotions; she consistently carries herself with "*Moderation and Ease*" (5–6). This is the case even on her death bed, where "she was sensible of no Alterations in her Mind, whatever she was in her Body!" (11); however, controlling the emotions of the women in her house—for example, the "Jealousies and Dissentions" (20) that occur when a woman monopolizes a lover's affections—requires particular effort. Though Tanner asserts he does not know whether it is "by *Destiny*, or *Design*" (18), Mrs. Wisebourn finally eliminates these monopolies by taking advantage of a situation that erupts among three of the lovers in her house. When Rialta catches her lover Bellmour in bed with Cangia and threatens to murder them, Mrs. Wisebourn intervenes and determines "to try if she was not capable of turning this Misfortune (how difficult soever it might seem) to her Advantage" (19). She takes the three lovers before an assembly of women, presumably prostitutes, that has gathered in a different part of the house:

Mrs *Wisebourn* opened the Case, and after she had stated it with all the Truth and Impartiality peculiar to that *excellent Woman*; she with such *powerful Eloquence* set forth the pernicious Effects of *any one's* pretending to restrain, or be a Check upon the Inclinations of *another, in love*, that, *without dividing*, they gave the Cause in favor of *Cangia*. And it was further

resolv'd, *Nemine Contradicente*, That no *Member of this Society* should, under Pretence of *Kindred, Alliance, Marriage, or Keeping*, assume any *Authority*, or *Prerogative* over, or claim any *Right, Title, Privilege, or Property* in any *Person, or Persons*, independent of the rest of the *Society*, on Pain of being *Expelled*. (21)

In spite of the internal conflicts that threaten to disrupt her business, Mrs. Wisebourn is able to reestablish control and convince the assembly of women to vote unanimously against the monopolies which have proven “so contrary both to *her Interest* and *their own*” (20). The bawd’s regulation of the bodies and minds of her prostitutes comes to serve as a model of good commercial management. Meanwhile, Mrs. Wisebourn’s establishment of a parliament of prostitutes, a governing body over which she appears to exercise a significant influence, suggests that tradespeople themselves should oversee the regulation of trade.

At the same time, the “Monopoly of Lovers” episode suggests her business’s vulnerability to internal conflict. This vulnerability is reflected in her physical separateness from her “shop”—in other words, her brothel and the prostitutes that reside there. The figure of the independent prostitute responds to this anxiety by locating shopkeeper and shop within a single space—the prostitute’s body. As Rosenthal notes, the prostitute as Mandeville conceives of her in *A Modest Defence* functions as a mere commodity, never as an entrepreneur.²⁴ The independent prostitute represented in many prostitute narratives of the period is indeed a commodity, but she is also a tradesperson whose body represents the space in which she sells this commodity. Yet, even those narratives that combine self and shop within the body of a single individual exhibit the anxiety associated with England’s post-Bubble economic climate. In fact, the independent prostitute often proves even more vulnerable than the bawd, and both Sally Salisbury and Roxana meet tragic ends when they fail to adequately regulate their thoughts and emotions. Neither Walker nor Defoe addresses the failure of the South Sea Company as explicitly as Tanner does—Walker mentions it once in the aside noted above, while Defoe, whose story is set prior to the crisis, does not mention it at all. Nonetheless, their post-Bubble narratives represent heroines who navigate perilous economic environments that reflect the conditions created by the South Sea catastrophe. Unlike Mrs. Wisebourn, Sally and Roxana fail to maintain a sufficient level of mastery over their trade; as a result, their stories end tragically.

My Shop/My Self: Sally Salisbury

According to Rosenthal, prostitute narratives are concerned with the construction of an appropriate economic self, often exploring the “transformation of identity” (*Infamous Commerce* 14) that is required for survival within an expanding commercial culture. For Rosenthal, this transformation is characterized by a Mandevillian split between “external negotiations and internal desires” (14). One must control the “passions raised by commodity culture” (14) in order to survive within it. Such self-control requires the separation of the outer, or public, part of the self that engages rationally and deliberately within the marketplace from the inner, or private, part of the self that harbors irrational longings and impulsive desires. In eighteenth-century prostitute narratives, this split is represented as triumphant or tragic. According to Rosenthal, many of these narratives “record glorious transitions from private misery to public triumph that depend on strategic forms of Mandevillian, theatricalized self-division”; however, others represent the sacrifice of the “intimate part of the self to the marketplace” as “the most tragic form of human alienation possible” (14). The three prostitute narratives I discuss here suggest that the longings, stirrings, and promptings of the inner part of the self must be largely disregarded. Such disregard, however, is associated not with sacrifice but with mastery, specifically the sex worker’s mastery over her trade. In these narratives, the sex worker is configured as an entrepreneur whose survival within the marketplace is dependent on the denial of the desires, passions, and reflections associated with inner selfhood—a denial, in other words, of inwardness or interiority. These narratives suggest that the entrepreneur thrives by focusing primarily on exterior matters, specifically those associated with trade, or “the shop.” Because she and her shop are one, the prostitute embodies the potential for entrepreneurial success within an unstable marketplace. Success ultimately eludes Sally and Roxana, however; while Sally succumbs to passion, Roxana loses herself in reflection.

Walker’s *Authentick Memoirs of the Life, Intrigues, and Adventures of the Celebrated Sally Salisbury* is based on the life of the infamous eighteenth-century prostitute Sarah Priddon, who was sentenced to prison for stabbing her lover, supposedly in a disagreement over an opera ticket, and subsequently died there.²⁵ Walker’s narrative, which consists of a series of letters about Sally, purportedly from former clients, emerged while Priddon was in Newgate. In *Sally Salisbury*, the prostitute’s body—most particularly her genitalia—is graphically repre-

sented as the site of economic exchange, or the “shop.” In one scene, Sally participates in a game in which she stands on her head, each leg supported by two courtiers, while several men—most of them courtiers as well—attempt to throw coins into her vagina. Shaping the episode into a poem, the narrator states:

*Between two Marble-Pillars, round and Plump,
With Eye intent, each Sportsman took his Aim;
The merry Chuck-Hole border'd on the Rump, . . .
Within her tufted Chink, the Guineas shone,
And each that she receiv'd, was all her own.* (34)

This moment could be read as one in which a degraded Sally is subjected to a grotesque display of upper-class male power.²⁶ In the narrative as a whole, however, it is Sally who always has the last laugh, frequently getting the better of members of the genteel crowd among which she circulates, silencing and humiliating them, repeatedly asserting that she is as good as if not better than they. As she drains their estates and infects them with venereal disease, Sally routinely supports her own interests by both revealing and taking advantage of the weaknesses of the upper class. Sally is represented as having complete control over her body and, by extension, her product, her customers, and her trade.

Sally's management of her customers is illustrated numerous times throughout the text. When she is courted by a nobleman at Bath, for example, she heightens his desire for her services by refusing to respond to his initial advances, which take the form of a courtship rather than an economic exchange: “He found that no Intreaties could prevail upon her, for she with Whorish-Politicks, was as shy, and kept her self at as great a Distance, as if she had been an unspotted Virgin” (27). What Walker refers to as “Whorish-Politicks,” however, are actually signs of Sally's mastery of her business. Unable to impress her with references to his social standing, the nobleman finally offers Sally money:

His Grace at last convinced . . . that he could not overcome her by any meer verbal Argument, drew out a more powerful one from his Pocket, and throwing it into her Lap (just as Jove descended in a Shower of Gold upon Danae), made way for himself to a closer Admittance there. (28)

In this scene, the power the man draws forth from his pocket resides in his gold, not in his penis.²⁷ Meanwhile, Sally will offer her customers access to the

goods in her “shop” only if they pay: “In fine, the Nymph receiv’d the Gold, and she reciev’d the Man; and she receiv’d more Gold, and still receiv’d the Man; but when no more Gold was left, she would no more receive the Man” (28). Sherman notes how the increasing reliance on credit during this period intensified the uncertainty that characterized an already unstable economic climate.²⁸ Sally responds to this uncertainty by refusing to offer her services on credit. When one of her customers finds that “his Purse could not always keep Time to the Motions of his heart,” Sally rejects him, for she “was too much what she is and ever will be, to grant him Love Gratis, or *upon the tick*” (50). Sally manages her customers not only by withholding her services when they are unable to pay, but also by punishing them when they act in ways that threaten her or run counter to her interests. In fact, Sally often disciplines unruly clients with physical punishment, threatening one man who attempts to cheat her with a broken bottle, while nearly killing another with a poker.

These instances of Sally’s violence demonstrate her management of her clientele, but they also point to the quality of her character that eventually ruins her—her failure to control her emotions, most specifically her anger. The ultimate example of Sally’s inability to regulate her anger is, of course, the attack on her lover, an attack that leads to her own destruction. While Sally apparently offered passion as an excuse for her crime, Walker asserts it is not a valid one:

I think a *passionate Person* deserves *the least indulgence imaginable*. . . . It is certain, That *quick Sensibility* is inseparable from a *ready Understanding*; but why should not that good *Understanding* call to it self all its Force, on such Occasions, to master that sudden inclination to Anger. (9)

With a “*ready Understanding*” and a quick wit, Sally has mastered her circumstances so completely that she, for a time, becomes a wealthy and successful woman. Her failure to regulate her passions, however, ultimately leads to her destruction. Her imprisonment signifies her loss of control over her body, which in turn signifies her loss of control over her trade—her shop, her goods, her livelihood. A similar scenario emerges in Defoe’s *Roxana*, in which the heroine’s inner turmoil undermines her ability to “mind the shop.”

An Incomplete English Tradeswoman: *Roxana*

Of Defoe’s three most widely studied novels—a group of texts that also includes *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and *Moll Flanders* (1722)—*Roxana: The Fortunate*

Mistress, Defoe's last novel, is the only one that ends tragically. In fact, as Julie Crane asserts, Roxana is "the most hidden, the most tragic, and the most solitary of all Defoe's characters" (12). *Roxana* is the story of a woman who, after being left destitute by a shiftless husband who fails in his trade as a brewer, disposes of her children and begins to earn her livelihood as the kept woman of rich and powerful men, including a successful jeweler, a European prince, and an English king. With her faithful maid Amy in constant attendance, Roxana secures considerable wealth before finally retiring from her life as a mistress and marrying one of her former lovers, a Dutch merchant who is unaware of her previous profession and ignorant regarding the source of her wealth. After her retirement, Roxana locates her children and attempts to assist them anonymously; however, when Roxana's daughter Susan guesses her mother's identity and seeks an acknowledgment of their relation, the fiercely devoted Amy murders Susan without Roxana's approval in order to prevent her mistress's exposure.²⁹ Roxana is horrified at what Amy has done, and the novel ends abruptly with her cryptic observation:

I fell into a dreadful Course of Calamities, and Amy also; the very Reverse of our Former Good Days; the Blast of Heaven seem'd to follow the Injury done the poor Girl, by us both; and I was brought so low again, that my Repentance seem'd to be only the Consequence of my Misery, as my Misery was of my Crime. (329–30)

Critics generally focus on two questions regarding the conclusion of *Roxana*. The first concerns its artistry. Those who deny the artistry of the ending tend to agree with Maximillian Novak's assertion that the novel concludes too abruptly, though Dijkstra asserts that the novel goes on too long.³⁰ Meanwhile, those critics who, like Robert Hume, find the conclusion aesthetically appropriate focus on the ways in which it reflects the novel's broader themes.³¹ The second question concerning the conclusion of the novel—that of the tragic ending—has generated even more disagreement among critics. Though they differ regarding the exact reason for Roxana's downfall, most critics agree that the novel punishes Roxana for spiritual, moral, or economic failings that occur during her life as a prostitute.³² According to such readings, Roxana fails because, even after she leaves her old life behind, settles in a quiet part of London, and becomes the wife of a respectable merchant, she is unable to escape the immoral and sinful nature of her past. Not all critics believe Defoe's intention was to punish Roxana, however. Dijkstra, for example, asserts that Defoe

found no fault with his heroine, but felt pressured to add the tragic conclusion to meet page-length requirements and to fulfill readers' expectations for an exciting yet moralistic ending.³³ Meanwhile, Jesse Molesworth claims that the novel's conclusion reflects Defoe's growing understanding of life not as a simplistic cause and effect system of providential punishment and reward, but as "a web of interconnected and contingent events, all impinging unpredictably on one's fate" (497).

While these readings offer useful considerations of the ending, I argue for an alternative reading, one in which Roxana's tragic downfall may be understood as the outcome of mistakes she makes not during her life as a kept woman, but after she retires from this life. Sherman and Rosenthal are among the few critics who recognize that Roxana's most significant missteps occur during the final section of Defoe's narrative. Instead of suggesting that Roxana is punished for her past life, Sherman asserts that she fails because she attempts to "evade history" and "pretend that the past never happened" (*Finance and Fictionality* 157).³⁴ Meanwhile, according to Rosenthal, Roxana's story ends tragically because she cannot let go of her past by cutting her emotional ties to her children.³⁵ Certainly, Roxana fails to forge an appropriate relationship between her past and her present; however, her downfall is not the result of her refusal to acknowledge or reject elements of her past. Rather, it is the result of her failure to apply the skills she acquired in her past life to her present circumstances.

During her life as a mistress, Roxana is more actively involved in the management of her affairs, or "business."³⁶ As Dijkstra explains, after the death of her lover the jeweler, Roxana embarks upon an upward economic trajectory that culminates in her "entrance into the circles of high finance" and her development into "a paragon of financial management" (33). She attributes the success of her business to the fact that she oversees it herself: "By managing my Business thus myself, and having large Sums to do with, I became as expert in it, as any She-Merchant of them all; I had Credit in the Bank for a large Sum of Money, and Bills and Notes for much more" (131). Roxana learns that trusting others is often necessary within an economy based on credit and investment, and she seeks help from others when it serves her interests to do so; however, she maintains as much control as possible over her economic affairs. This control diminishes when Roxana leaves the life of a mistress behind and once again becomes a wife.

After moving into a quiet boarding house run by a Quaker woman and marrying the Dutch merchant, Roxana's life begins to unravel, largely because

she fails to apply the practices she has previously used to manage financial matters to the larger “business of life.” In this, she differs from Moll Flanders, who succeeds where Roxana fails because she is able to apply the skills she learned in her past life as a thief to her new “legitimate” life in the colonies. Roxana’s failure to adequately oversee the business of her current life culminates in the breakdown of her character when she ceases to maintain an appropriate construction of selfhood within an unpredictable and sometimes tumultuous environment. Molesworth acknowledges that Roxana moves within a “swirling ocean of contingency and uncertainty” (503), but he suggests that Roxana lacks the power to negotiate this chaos. The more Roxana retreats from her life, or her “business,” during the final section of the novel, however, the more chaotic her world becomes, and vice versa. Had she exerted the same level of control over her new life that she demonstrated in her old life, Roxana might have avoided her tragic downfall.

Instead, Roxana succumbs to two distractions that prove particularly inimical to mastery; namely, she begins to fixate on her social status and on her past. Because she and the Dutch merchant have begun to speak of marriage, Roxana is unsettled when Amy informs her that the European prince intends to find and marry her and devastated when he turns penitent and ceases his search. She is comforted only when the Dutch merchant, whom she subsequently marries, buys her two titles, one in England, the other in Holland. Roxana’s excessive reflection on her past life proves more problematic than her aristocratic aspirations, however. Critics often describe *Roxana* as the novel in which Defoe explores in the greatest detail the inner workings of his protagonist’s mind. Crane writes, for example, “Defoe will not let us escape from Roxana’s intelligence—her restless, turbulent, desperate energy as a thinking being” (13). Dijkstra contends that Roxana’s ruminations are meant to reassure the reader that she has “maintained her ability for moral discernment” and is “therefore by no means a lost soul” (22). However, the more Roxana thinks, the more lost she becomes. She begins to neglect her affairs, leaving the responsibility for overseeing them to others, most particularly Amy. Roxana explains:

My new spouse and I, liv’d a very regular contemplative Life, and in itself certainly a Life fill’d with all humane Felicity: But if I look’d upon my present Situation with Satisfaction, as I certainly did, so in Proportion I on all Occasions look’d back on former things with Detestation, and with the utmost Affliction; and now indeed, and not till now, those Reflections began to prey upon my Comforts, and lessen the Sweets of my other En-

joyments: They might be said to have gnaw'd a Hole in my Heart before; but now they made a Hole quite thro' it; now they eat into all my pleasant things; made bitter every Sweet, and mix'd my Sighs with every Smile. . . . I went about with a Heart loaded with Crime, and altogether in the dark, as to what I was to do; and in this Condition, I languish'd near two Years. (264–65)

The more Roxana fixates on her past life—and the more she concerns herself with what she is experiencing internally—the more she becomes incapable of planning or acting in her present life.³⁷ Roxana flounders in this state not for days or weeks, but for years; she serves as an extreme example of spiritual languishment, a destructive state in which spirituality itself begins to function as a form of sin, and—as Marilyn Westfall points out—in the work of Defoe “sin slowly murders the individual” (493).

Losing herself in reflection, Roxana becomes incapable of action and fails to adequately manage the events that begin to unfold in her life, events in which her daughter Susan plays a central role. As noted above, Roxana periodically relies on agents during her life as a mistress; however, in her new life, she allows her agents an excessive degree of control and rarely plays an active role in her affairs. Roxana’s husband and Quaker landlady serve as agents to some extent, but Amy becomes the primary agent in Roxana’s life during this period; in fact, Roxana begins to refer to Amy as her “manager” (209), her “agent” (317), and her “right hand” (318). Both Alison Conway and Christina L. Healey note that Amy functions as Roxana’s alter ego, while Molesworth argues that she serves as a “Satanic doppelganger for Roxana” (496–97).³⁸ Dijkstra argues that, when Roxana forces Amy to sleep with the jeweler early in the novel, she effectively “forces Amy to retreat to her proper position as Roxana’s servant—which from that point on in the narrative is never in doubt” (30). This reading, however, does not take into account the extent to which Roxana relinquishes control to Amy in the final section of the novel, when she essentially allows Amy to become the master. At first, Amy does as Roxana bids her, but as Roxana becomes increasingly unable to act, Amy begins to act more and more independently of her and sometimes in direct defiance of her wishes. As Conway notes, “Amy is a creature of Roxana’s own making who finally surpasses her in vitality and guile” (17). The greatest example of this, of course, is Amy’s murder of Susan, the event to which Roxana attributes her downfall.

Though Roxana interprets her ruin as punishment for Susan’s murder, her life disintegrates because her relentless reflection on her past conduct prevents

her from managing her affairs as she once did. She becomes the same kind of "Fool" (8) she accuses her husband the brewer of being in the opening pages of the book. As both Dijkstra and Gregg suggest, Roxana's first husband proves to be the exact opposite of Defoe's masculine ideal.³⁹ He insists upon dressing and acting like an upper-class gentleman and, while he spends his time engaging in activities typical of a man of leisure, he leaves the responsibility for running his business to those who work for him. As Gregg writes, he is "preoccupied with the luxurious trappings of gentility at the expense of business" (19). The consequences of the brewer's lack of direct and personal oversight are disastrous. Roxana states, "He began to find his Trade sunk, his Stock declin'd, and that, in short, he could not carry on his Business" (10). When the brewer sees his business failing, he abandons Roxana and their five children, leaving them impoverished and starving. As Dijkstra notes, Roxana's account of her first marriage not only illustrates the threat aristocratic values pose to the middle class, but also serves a didactic purpose, functioning in many ways as a cautionary tale for young women.⁴⁰ The primary purpose of Defoe's account of the failed brewer is to foreshadow Roxana's own tragic ending, however. Dijkstra, who views Roxana as the pure embodiment of Defoe's complete tradesman and wishes to read her story only in terms of her "climb up the ladder of economic mastery" (63), views the tragic ending of the novel as structurally incompatible with the rest of the text and argues that it is not the ending Defoe truly intended.⁴¹ According to Hume, however, this section of the novel is an integral part of the narrative because the ending leaves the reader in the same condition as Roxana, "hanging in a state of suspense and suspended expectation" (490). I would argue that the conclusion also brings the narrative full circle, as Roxana steps into the role played by her brewer husband at the novel's beginning.

During the two years in which she languishes in self-reflection, Roxana—much like her brewer husband before her—is fatally inattentive to her business. This sloth of the spirit goes far beyond the laziness of the brewer. Roxana's paralyzing fixation on her past causes her to neglect the business of her life, which in turn results in the failure of her narrative voice. While she is mistress to the European prince, Roxana discovers that her brewer husband, now a soldier, is stationed nearby, and she hires a trustworthy and competent agent to spy on him for her. She says of her husband, "The Journal of his Life, which I had constantly sent to me every Week, was the least significant thing of anything of its Kind, that was ever seen; as it had really nothing of Earnest in it, so it would make no Jest, to relate it; it was not important enough, so much as to

make the Reader merry withal; and for that Reason I omit it" (95). In Roxana's estimation, the events of her first husband's life are too insignificant to constitute a worthwhile narrative. He allowed the terms of his life to be dictated to him; ultimately—and ironically—Roxana does the same. As a result, she becomes irrelevant within the pages of her own autobiography.

"To Sell and Please": *The Complete English Tradesman*

In *The Night-Walker, or Evening Rambles in Search after Lewd Women* (1696), John Dunton represents the wives of shopkeepers as prostitutes who attempt to seduce the customers who enter their shops:

[They] sit Trict and Trim'd, and Rigg'd in their shops as if they had more mind to expose themselves to sale, than their Goods, or at least as if they had more confidence that their Modish Dresses and Wanton Glances would attract more customers than either their signs or the pictures and other Representations of their Merchandise could do. (12)

Dunton goes on to assert that these women may actually engage in acts of prostitution, using their husbands' shops and the goods within them as a cover for their libidinous transactions. According to Rosenthal, Dunton's representation of shopkeepers' wives as prostitutes suggests "the tendency of distinctions between infamous and legitimate commerce to collapse" (*Infamous Commerce* 53). I would argue, however, that the passage upholds rather than collapses the distinction between illegitimate and legitimate forms of commerce. Just as Mandeville represents women's bodies as a distraction to businessmen, Dunton represents them as a distraction to customers. The shopkeepers' wives undermine rather than support their husbands' businesses by seducing customers away from the goods sold in the shop. Instead of representing shopkeeping as a form of prostitution, Dunton suggests that prostitution is a disruption to legitimate economic transactions such as those practiced by the shopkeeper.

Whereas Dunton maintains the distinction between prostitution and legitimate forms of trade, Defoe suggests the artificiality of this distinction when, in *The Complete English Tradesman*, he describes shopkeeping in language that associates it with sex work. Initially, his words seem innocent enough: "The case is plain; it is his business to get money; to sell and please" (1: 104). Yet the sexual overtones coloring Defoe's assertion that the tradesman's business is not only to sell, but also to "please" become evident when he goes on to describe the tradesman's engagement with his clientele as a form of seduc-

tion, one in which he practices his own style of “Whorish-Politicks” (Walker 27). Defoe speaks particularly of the tradesman’s interactions with his female customers, whom he seduces into buying by displaying his “goods” (1: 104) in a gentlemanly manner designed to stimulate their desires. Defoe notes the tendency of certain female shoppers to survey the tradesman’s stock without ever purchasing anything, but—once again speaking in terms of the shopkeeper’s ability to provide pleasure—he asserts that the wise tradesmen would “tell the ladies they were welcome to look upon their goods; that it was their business to show them; and that if they did not come to buy now, they might see they were furnished to please them when they might have occasion” (1: 104). Defoe provides an example of such a tradesman when he tells the story of a woman who, in league with her friend, determines to test a mercer’s patience by surveying all of the goods in his shop without buying any of them. After two hours of “tumbling” his goods for her, he courteously responds to her apologies: “The trouble, Madam, is nothing, ‘tis my misfortune not to please you; but as to trouble, my business is to oblige the ladies my customers. . . . [I]f it is not a trouble to you, I’ll shew you every piece of goods in my shop laid out” (1: 110–11). The lady and her friend, in spite of their determination not to buy from the mercer, ultimately find themselves unable to resist his merchandise: “[T]he ladies went back with him into his inner-shop, and laid out between sixty and seventy pounds” (1: 114). The clandestine nature of the transaction and the language Defoe uses to describe it are sexually suggestive. Unlike Barr, who interprets the tradesman’s flirtatious interactions with his female customers as a form of coquetry that undermines the coquetry of the shopper who looks but never buys, I would argue that, because he seduces the women into actually buying his “goods” and gives them pleasure in exchange for money, the tradesman plays a role more like that of the sex worker than the coquette, who stimulates desire without providing gratification.⁴²

The tradesman’s similarity to the sex worker is not limited to the economic transactions in which he engages with his customers, however. Rather, Defoe’s construction of the tradesman’s entire identity draws upon earlier representations of sex workers, most notably the female protagonists of the post-Bubble prostitute narratives published earlier in the decade. Just as the prostitute functions as both shopkeeper and shop, in *The Complete English Tradesman* the tradesman and his shop come to embody one another, and the act of minding the self becomes synonymous with the act of “minding the shop”—a phrase which in and of itself suggests the connection between the psyche of the trades-

man and the physical space in which he pursues his trade. The tradesman's shop exists in the space outside of him, a physical separation that to some degree aligns him more with a bawd like Mrs. Wisebourn than with an independent prostitute. Nonetheless, Defoe's manual is informed by the same masculine economic fantasy that gives shape to the representations of figures like Sally and Roxana—a fantasy in which the shopkeeper becomes one with his shop. According to Defoe, the tradesman's mastery of his shop is dependent upon his nearly constant physical presence within it.⁴³ Trade is like a hand mill, Defoe writes: "It must always be turned about by the diligent hand of the master" (1: 57). If the shop cannot be inside the shopkeeper—as it is for the independent prostitute—then the shopkeeper must be inside the shop. The enclosure of the tradesman within the shop reflects in reverse the enclosure of the shop within the prostitute.

For the tradesman, as for the female sex worker, the price for failing to practice the level of mastery and oversight that Defoe describes is almost certain ruin: "A shop without a master is like the same shop on a middling holiday, half shut up, and he that keeps it long so, need not doubt but he may in a little time more shut it quite up" (1: 124). In *The Complete English Tradesman*, as in *Roxana*, Defoe demonstrates the inextricable link between the life of one's business and the business of one's life. Just as the health of the shop is an indicator of the health of the shopkeeper and vice versa, the dissolution of one threatens the dissolution of the other. When the tradesman's business begins to languish, Defoe writes, it "will not be long before he languishes too" (1: 132); however, what would appear to be a fairly simple act—the act of tending to one's business—proves complicated. As post-Bubble prostitute narratives suggest, regulating one's economic life depends upon regulating one's social, domestic, spiritual, and emotional lives as well. Like the prostitute narratives that preceded it, *The Complete English Tradesman* explores the middle-class entrepreneur's vulnerability within an uncertain economic climate, outlining the various distractions that perpetually threaten to disrupt the stability of the shopkeeper, the shop, and the connection that exists between them.

While the activities that Defoe identifies as those most likely to undermine the health of the tradesman's business are not intrinsically bad or immoral, they are problematic because they distract the tradesman from the proper focus of his attention—his shop. Much as Roxana is distracted by her desire to acquire an aristocratic, if not royal, title, the tradesman can easily become distracted by his desire to appear as if he is a member of the upper classes, engag-

ing in upper-class activities, pursuing upper-class fashions, and leading a leisurely upper-class life. Defoe never suggests that one should stay firmly within the station of one's birth, nor does he betray any anxiety about the lower classes contaminating the purity of upper ones. Rather, he is concerned about the threat upper-class practices pose to the middle class. According to Gregg, "the tradesman who indulges his desires for outward show is aligned with the effeminate fop" (25). Though his manliness may certainly be at stake, there are also purely practical reasons for discouraging the tradesman's emulation of an upper-class lifestyle. Trade, Defoe insists, is simply incompatible with a life of leisure. Ultimately, the greatest danger a propensity to genteel diversions poses to the tradesman lies in the fact that it demands time and attention that should be devoted to business.⁴⁴

While he resists the inclination to pursue an upper-class lifestyle, the tradesman must also regulate his thoughts, feelings, passions, and desires. He must, in other words, succeed where both Sally and Roxana fail. Defoe asserts that the tradesman must learn to control his emotions. Especially in his dealings with his customers, he "must have no flesh and blood about him, no passions, no resentment. He must never be angry; no, not so much as seem to be so" (1: 103). Additionally, the tradesman must limit the amount of time he devotes to religious and spiritual matters.⁴⁵ Defoe asserts that spiritual activities can absorb a tradesman's time to such a degree that they can disrupt or even ruin his trade, and in such cases what appears to be religious devotion actually becomes an evil, a temptation created by the devil "to urge us to a breach of what we ought to do" (1: 64). The result is that the tradesman begins to "confound religion and business," which "in the end may destroy both" (1: 64). During the hours when a tradesman should be in his shop attending to business, he should not be in church, prayer, or meditation, for such a man "may say his prayers so long and so unseasonably till he is undone" (1: 65). This, of course, is where Roxana fails, as she allows spiritual concerns to undermine her ability to manage her circumstances.

In *The Complete English Tradesman*, as in *Roxana*, Defoe repeatedly emphasizes the danger of allowing others to exercise too much influence over one's business. When the tradesman absents himself from his shop, whether physically or mentally, he necessarily depends on others to carry on his business for him, and such dependence can prove fatal.⁴⁶ According to Defoe, a capable servant—a servant like Amy—poses even more of a threat than a bad servant. A good servant, Defoe argues, can become so competent at carrying

on the trade in the master's absence that he will soon be taken for the master himself. When a tradesman allows a servant to gain mastery over his trade, the "blessing" (1: 179) of a good servant becomes a "blast" (1: 179) and "a curse to him" (1: 180).⁴⁷ Whether considering social diversions, emotional or spiritual distractions, or servants, Defoe comes back time and again to a single point, one previously explored within the pages of post-Bubble prostitute narratives: the importance of practicing a constant and unflagging oversight when driving a trade.

The tradesman, then, not only embodies the business savvy of the female sex worker, but also negotiates hazards similar to those she encounters. As notable as the connection to his post-Bubble literary predecessor is, however, it is a connection that the text attempts to obscure. This is because the tradesman's reputation, or credit, must remain pristine. According to Barr, Defoe's emphasis on reputation likens the tradesman to a sexually virtuous woman who is subject to ruin either through sexual indiscretion or malicious gossip.⁴⁸ I would argue that the tradesman functions not so much like a virgin who must maintain her good reputation, but like a reformed sex worker who attempts to hide, but can never fully escape, her unsavory history. The text's inability to conceal the tradesman's literary past is suggested by an anecdote Defoe includes in his manual in which a tradesman is nearly undone as a result of his romantic dealings. The tradesman, after publicly attaching himself to one woman, abruptly leaves her for another without revealing why: "[A]nd indeed, she afterwards discovered he had left her for the offer of another with a little more money" (1: 237). In an act of revenge, the jilted woman spreads a rumor that the tradesman has contracted "the Foul disease" as a result of his rakish behavior (1: 238). Defoe suggests that, though the tradesman "did very unworthily," his punishment nonetheless exceeds his crime (1: 237). What the text does not acknowledge—and in fact denies—is the appropriateness of the punishment. In leaving one woman for another who can offer him more money, the tradesman allows economics to guide him in affairs of "love." In doing so, he essentially prostitutes himself, selling himself to the higher bidder, a move characteristic of the heroines of eighteenth-century prostitute narratives. The jilted lover's revenge—accusing the tradesman of having the disease that, during the eighteenth century, was routinely associated with prostitutes—is fitting. The text's implicit association of the shopkeeper with the sex worker casts a shadow over the reputation of even the most complete tradesman.

Conclusion

At the height of her prosperity, Roxana declares her intention of becoming a “Man-Woman” (171); in other words, she is a woman who intends to engage in stereotypically “masculine” economic activities. Her words suggest just how difficult it is to discuss the figure of the eighteenth-century female sex worker in terms of her gender. As Rosenthal argues, this figure is “never simply masculine or feminine,” for her negotiation of the sexual marketplace requires that she “first claim the masculine position of self-ownership” (*Infamous Commerce* 10). In the narratives I have explored, the figure of the female sex worker can certainly be read as a woman engaged in economic practices customarily identified as masculine. At the same time, however, this figure can be read as the embodiment of economic anxieties routinely associated with men’s participation in a potentially emasculating marketplace. Within these narratives—all of them apparently written by men, possibly with a predominantly male readership in mind—the female sex worker represents an endangered masculinity that, through diligence and oversight, strives for mastery within a precarious economic environment. The regulation of the prostitute’s body—whether by a madam or the prostitute herself—exemplifies the management and oversight associated with men’s safety and success within a volatile economy.

And yet, the “femaleness” of the female sex worker cannot be disregarded. The protagonists of prostitute narratives are literally represented as women, and eighteenth-century readers undoubtedly read them as such and associated them with “real” sex workers. The figure of the female sex worker was as influential as it was fascinating, and as *The Complete English Tradesman* demonstrates, that figure shaped representations of masculinity just as much as it was shaped by them. As Barr asserts, eighteenth-century configurations of masculinity—including that represented by Defoe’s tradesman—often incorporate qualities that the culture identified as feminine; meanwhile, as Gregg argues, though masculinity during the eighteenth century was defined in opposition to supposedly feminine qualities, the boundary between masculinity and femininity was more fluid than distinct.⁴⁹ Embodying many of the characteristics of the female sex worker, Defoe’s tradesman is as much a “Man-Woman” as Roxana and the other heroines of eighteenth-century prostitute narratives.

When the figure of the female sex worker and the figure of the tradesman are read in relation to one another, gender distinctions collapse, and it becomes impossible to identify either one as clearly masculine or feminine. Is the busi-

ness-savvy female sex worker a woman? Or is she a male-generated fantasy of masculine economic control? Is Defoe's seemingly virtuous tradesman a man? Or is he a female sex worker in disguise? One could arguably answer all of these questions in the affirmative. Though the prostitute narratives I discuss here function as male-authored representations of masculine experience, they also demonstrate—and in many ways celebrate—their dependence on one of the culture's most fascinating and powerful female figures, a figure that in turn cannot be completely separated from its origins in the lived experiences of actual female sex workers. By the same token, though Defoe's tradesman embodies the qualities of the female sex worker, most notably her ability to "mind the shop," he serves, in the end, as a masculine ideal, but a masculine ideal that cannot escape its "feminine" literary past.

NOTES

1. The South Sea Company was a joint-stock corporation founded by Robert Harley, a Tory Statesman who served as Queen Anne's First Lord of the Treasury from 1711–1714, and designed by John Blunt, a leader in the organization of state lotteries. Created in 1711 through an act of Parliament, the company promised to pay off England's national debt, which had increased significantly as a result of war with Spain. In exchange, Parliament agreed to give the company sole trading rights with Spain's South American colonies once England and Spain established a treaty to end the war. Functioning in the meantime on credit, the company successfully secured shareholders and increased the value of its stock; however, the Treaty of Utrecht, which ended the war in 1713, extended only limited trading privileges to England and, by association, the South Sea Company. When war between England and Spain broke out once again in 1718, the company lost its trading privileges altogether. The South Sea managers, none of whom had any experience in trade, were undeterred by their lack of access to the South American colonies, as the company had come to function largely as a screen behind which they could engage in manipulative and corrupt financial practices. These practices backfired, however, and after a selling frenzy that was driven to a great extent by the company's propaganda, the South Sea Bubble collapsed in 1720, ruining thousands of investors. For detailed accounts of the South Sea Bubble, see Carswell and Dale.

2. For extended readings of *The Complete English Tradesman*, see Dijkstra; Sherman, "Commercial Paper, Commercial Fiction," "Servants and Semiotics," and, most significantly, *Finance and Fictionality* 91–128; Barr; and Gregg 20–27. Critics who refer briefly to *The Complete English Tradesman* in readings of Defoe's fiction include Kibbie, Westfall, and Gabbard. Kibbie refers to Defoe's assertion regarding the self-generating properties of money in her reading of the association between capitalism and images of female biological reproduction in *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana* (1024); Westfall explains that *The Complete English Tradesman* and *Roxana* share a rhetoric that denounces luxury and promotes charity (484); and Gabbard refers to Defoe's emphasis on bookkeeping in *The Complete English Tradesman* in his discussion of Roxana's financial illiteracy (239).

3. See Meier 20.

4. See Mulcaire 1031.

5. Though I adhere to the common assumption that the authors of the three prostitute narratives I discuss here are male, I am also aware that the question of attribution for at least two of the texts—*Mrs. Wisebourn* and *Roxana*—renders this assumption somewhat uncertain. Though he constructs a definitively masculine narrative persona, little is known about the author who refers to himself as “Anodyne Tanner.” Meanwhile, Defoe’s authorship of *Roxana* has proved a subject of debate among several scholars, most notably Furbank and Owens, Marshall, Griffin, and Vareschi.

6. See, for example, Jones 139 and Rosenthal, “Introduction” xii.

7. See in particular Gallagher, Jones, and Perry. Brown and Nussbaum also touch on the figure of the prostitute as part of their larger discussions.

8. See Rosenthal, *Infamous Commerce* 7–15.

9. See Sherman, *Finance and Fictionality* 92–93.

10. See Barr 155.

11. See Gregg 15.

12. See Barr 156–57 and Gregg 15.

13. See Barr 158 and Gregg 3.

14. See Barr 153–54 and Gregg 1–37.

15. See McDowell 29.

16. See Hill 85–86.

17. See Hill 247 and Hunt 126, 133–34.

18. See Hunt 140, 146.

19. Defoe suggests that women were particularly vulnerable if they married poorly or if their fathers and husbands refused to educate them regarding sound financial practices and the operations of family businesses. He explores this vulnerability in *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana*, both of which explicitly advise women regarding their survival within an uncertain economy. Meanwhile, in *The Complete English Tradesman*, he instructs tradesmen to include their wives in all aspects of the family business so that they can carry on in the event of their husbands’ deaths or imprisonment. See the section entitled “Of the Tradesman letting his Wife be acquainted with his Business” (1: 348–68).

20. For biographical accounts of Mrs. Wisebourn (usually spelled “Wisebourne”), see Cruickshank 48–50, 104–09 and Howson 44–45.

21. The *scire facias* is a judicial writ that, during the eighteenth century, could be used to annul a corporation’s charter. See Harris 76 and Dale 136.

22. See Dale 40–42.

23. Rosenthal discusses Mandeville’s ideas regarding prostitution in some depth, ultimately relying upon the economic philosophy he sets forth in *The Fable of The Bees: or, Private Vices, Publick Benefits* (1714) to construct her understanding of the prostitute’s identity as it was configured in the eighteenth century. As Rosenthal notes, though Mandeville seeks to eliminate public prostitution in *A Modest Defence*, he offers a fairly sympathetic representation of the independent prostitute in *The Fable of The Bees* (*Infamous Commerce* 57–69). In *The Fable of the Bees*, Mandeville asserts that private vices—particularly those associated with luxury, consumption, greed, and accumulation—are actually moral goods that benefit the nation by stimulating business and trade. The prostitute contributes to the public good largely as a consumer, particularly as a consumer of clothing items (1: 88).

24. See Rosenthal, *Infamous Commerce* 65.

25. See Rosenthal’s brief introduction to Walker’s narrative in *Nightwalkers: Prostitute Narratives from the Eighteenth Century*.

26. In her reading of this scene, Rosenthal notes that coins take the place of semen, constituting an act of prostitution in which no sexual contact occurs. Not sex, but the flow of money, is eroticized (*Infamous Commerce* 102).

27. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's "The Reason's that Induced Dr. S to Write a Poem Called the Lady's Dressing Room" (1734) includes a similar scene. "The Doctor," or the character Montagu associates with Jonathan Swift, attempts to woo a prostitute with his looks, wit, and rhyme; the prostitute, of course, simply wants money in exchange for her services. The joke in both cases is on the deluded men who, unlike the more savvy prostitutes, believe that prostitutes can be courted with anything but money.

28. See Sherman, *Finance and Fictionality* 1–6.

29. Though the text leaves some room for doubt regarding the fate of the heroine's daughter, it strongly suggests what Roxana herself concludes—that Amy has murdered Susan.

30. See Novak 465 and Dijkstra 69–91.

31. Hume summarizes readings prior to 1970 that view Defoe's ending as defective, while Molesworth identifies numerous readings between 1970 and 1985 that revise and complicate this understanding (506n1). With the exception of Dijkstra, critics since 1985 are less concerned with the conclusion's artistry, or lack thereof, and more concerned with exploring its possible meanings.

32. Hume believes Roxana falls because she initially refuses an "honorable marriage" to the Dutch merchant "in order to continue her whoring" (478–79). Meanwhile, Kibbie asserts that Roxana is punished for living a barren existence upon the interest generated by her wealth (1028). Westfall attributes Roxana's failure to the emphasis she places upon wealth and social standing during her "fortunate" life (495). Healey associates Roxana's fall with poor business practices and with the moral lapse that occurs when she dons her Turkish habit in order to artificially inflate her value (506). Finally, Gabbard asserts that Roxana suffers from financial and spiritual illiteracy throughout the novel, which both dooms her and undermines her narrative voice (248).

33. See Dijkstra 71–82.

34. According to Sherman, Roxana's story unravels because Susan, who represents the post-Bubble reader, refuses to accept uncertainty or indeterminacy, insisting instead upon truth and accountability, which Roxana refuses to provide (*Finance and Fictionality* 159).

35. Rosenthal argues that because Roxana cannot cut these emotional ties, she fails to achieve the necessary Mandevillian split between her external self and her internal desires (*Infamous Commerce* 76).

36. Healey agrees that Roxana diligently oversees her business, oversight that she characterizes as a form of spatial surveillance, or the "manipulation and control of space through observation" (494). Meanwhile, in contrast to those critics who read Roxana's accumulation of wealth as a sign of her business acumen, Gabbard identifies her as a financially illiterate and inept bookkeeper (238).

37. The stirrings of Roxana's conscience are discussed by both Westfall and Conway. According to Westfall, "Roxana's torment is appropriate to her state of spiritual deterioration" (486). However, as Conway notes, Roxana's inner musings ultimately prove unproductive: "Roxana experiences a feeling of vertigo when she confronts her conscience and her encounters appear as a series of repeated woundings, none of which deals the fatal blow that might empty the ego of its pride" (222).

38. See Conway 13 and Healey 503.

39. See Dijkstra 18 and Gregg 19.

40. See Dijkstra 18–19.
41. See Dijkstra 70–71, 80–82.
42. See Barr 161–62.
43. Defoe does not suggest the tradesman should never leave his shop. In fact, he asserts that regular interactions—social as well as professional—with other tradesmen are essential (1: 50). But these interactions—though they may often happen outside the shop—still fall within the purview of “minding the shop,” for it is through such interactions that the tradesman learns the countless bits of information he will need not only to promote his business, but to protect it—and himself—during uncertain times.
44. See in particular the sections entitled “Other Reasons for the tradesman’s Disasters; and first of innocent Diversions” (1: 117–32) and “Of Extravagant and Expensive Living; another Step to a Tradesman’s disaster” (1: 133–53).
45. See also Dijkstra 11.
46. See also Dijkstra 28.
47. Defoe is also concerned about partners who exercise too much control over the tradesman’s business. See the section entitled “On the Tradesman’s entering into Partnership in Trade, and the many dangers attending it” (1: 258–74).
48. See Barr 161–62.
49. See Barr 155 and Gregg 3.

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