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**CATHERINE ROSE ELLIS**  
**SEX WORK AND INGESTION IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY FRANCE**

**ABSTRACT:**

This thesis explores the significance of eating and drinking to sex work in mid- to late-eighteenth-century French literature and culture. It combines close reading of alimentary details with historicised and more recent theoretical approaches to food studies, establishing how ingestion was used, understood, and depicted in fictional, polemical, and documentary material relating to sex work. This thesis reveals that ingestion was no mere detail or incitement to pleasure in sex workers' lives. It was instead a fundamental part of sexual practice, a source of danger, and a literary symbol with which male writers could work through widespread concerns about female sexuality and the dangers of ingestion.

Chapter One provides an overview of ingestion's role in the eighteenth-century sex trade. Chapter Two explores mid-century police records on brothels and kept women to demonstrate how ingestion was not simply a matter of pleasure but was intimately linked to risk and vulnerability for clients, madams, and sex workers alike. Chapter Three considers ingestion's symbolic significance in four texts discussing sex work reform, beginning with the genre's English *Urtext*, Bernard Mandeville's *A Modest Defence of Publick Stews*, and ending with Rétif de la Bretonne's *Le Pornographe*. Chapter Four establishes how images of ingestion can reveal differences between apparently similar sex worker heroines, focusing on *Margot la ravaudeuse* and *Vénus en rut*. Chapter Five considers the role of ingestion in fostering sociability or division in two fictional collections of sex workers' letters: *Correspondance de Madame Gourdan* and *Correspondance d'Eulalie*. Chapter Six explores the gendered differences between the male and female consuming bodies, examining ingestion as pleasure in texts with gigolo heroes: *Ma Conversion*, *Le Petit-fils d'Hercule* and *L'Année galante*. Chapter Seven concludes the thesis by considering the sex worker as a victim of cannibalism in Rétif de la Bretonne's *L'Anti-Justine*.

# **Sex work and ingestion in eighteenth-century France**

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Thesis submitted for the degree of PhD  
School of Modern Languages and Cultures  
University of Durham  
2017

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## FOREWORD

### ‘SEX WORK’ – A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

When discussing individuals who sell sex, no word is neutral. As Markman Ellis and Ann Lewis highlight in their introduction to *Prostitution and Eighteenth-Century Culture*, ‘the language of prostitution is especially ideological: lexical choice is embedded in complicated sets of social and moral attitudes.’<sup>1</sup> Consequently, to make any lexical choice is to adopt or align oneself with an ethical or political position, intentionally or otherwise. Throughout this thesis, except in circumstances where culturally and temporally specific terms are required for clarity, the terms ‘sex work’, defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as ‘employment in the sex industry, *esp.* paid work providing sexual services’<sup>2</sup> and ‘sex worker’ are used.<sup>3</sup> Although this choice might appear willfully anachronistic, it nonetheless carries ideological and methodological weight. One must first note that the terms ‘sex work’ and ‘sex workers’, coined by activist Carol Leigh, implicitly recognise such people both as human beings and as individuals engaged in a legitimate and diverse form of labour worthy of the same rights and respect as any other.<sup>4</sup> Since few of the texts analysed in this thesis recognise their subjects either as complete human beings or as legitimate workers who deserve support, adopting Leigh’s term cannot help but be political: to describe the real and fictional women whose experiences are examined here as ‘sex workers’ is to recognise retrospectively, and without judgement, that those individuals working in the eighteenth-century sex trade and represented on the page were, above all, people striving to earn a living. Other terms such as ‘prostitute’ or ‘whore’ are certainly more accurate renderings of the eighteenth-century French terms found in the texts, and are still used by scholars to

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<sup>1</sup> Markman Ellis and Ann Lewis, ‘Introduction: Venal Bodies – Prostitutes and Eighteenth-Century Culture’, in *Prostitution and Eighteenth-Century Culture: Sex, Commerce and Morality*, ed. by Ann Lewis and Markman Ellis (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2012), pp. 1–16 (p. 8).

<sup>2</sup> ‘sex work, *n.*’ in ‘sex, *n.*1’, *OED Online*, <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/176989>> [accessed 17 November 2016].

<sup>3</sup> While Ellis and Lewis opt for ‘prostitution’, they highlight a number of key issues relating to lexical choice in the eighteenth and twenty-first centuries, particularly the stigma attached to sex work and sex workers, and the variety of practices involved in the eighteenth-century sex trade, which contribute to my own use of ‘sex work’ as the preferred term. See Ellis and Lewis, pp. 5–8.

<sup>4</sup> For a concise history of ‘sex work’ as a term, see Elena Jeffreys, ‘Sex Worker Politics and the Term ‘Sex Work’, *Research for Sex Work*, 14 (2015), pp. 1–5, <<http://www.nswp.org/sites/nswp.org/files/Sex%20Worker%20Politics%20and%20the%20Term%20E2%80%98Sex%20Work%20E2%80%99%20Research%20for%20Sex%20Work%2014%20-%20August%202015.pdf>> [accessed 7 April 2016]. See also Carol Leigh, ‘Inventing Sex Work’, in *Whores and Other Feminists*, ed. by Jill Nagle (New York: Routledge, 1997), pp. 225–231.

highlight the historical and literary specificity of their object of study.<sup>5</sup> It is nonetheless impossible to detach even the enduring and comparatively anodyne term ‘prostitute’ from centuries of derogatory usage. While the term ‘sex work’ is not without political problems of its own,<sup>6</sup> it has been chosen in an attempt to avoid stigmatising individuals who worked (and still work) in the sex trade out of choice or necessity.<sup>7</sup>

The decision to discuss ‘sex work’ is, moreover, pragmatic and historically minded. In their discussion of ‘prostitution’, Ann Lewis and Markman Ellis highlight how the word’s ‘precise meaning is hard to pin down in this period, whether in moral, legal, or practical terms’.<sup>8</sup> As is the case today, sex work in eighteenth-century France was extremely diverse. As David Coward puts it, ‘[b]etween the successful courtesan and the lowest of the *gouines* and *boucaneuses* was a social divide as great as that which separated a duke from a vagrant.’<sup>9</sup> This indistinct definition of what a ‘prostitute’ might be is borne out in eighteenth-century literary and sociological responses to sex work. In their attempts to codify the multiple forms of sex worker that they identified in Parisian society, writers fascinated by the sex trade – such as Rétif de la Bretonne and Louis-Sébastien Mercier – subdivided women who sold sexual services into hierarchies which

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<sup>5</sup> See, for instance, Kathryn Norberg, ‘The Libertine Whore: Prostitution in French Pornography from Margot to Juliette’, in *The Invention of Pornography: Obscenity and the Origins of Modernity*, ed. by Lynn Hunt (New York: Zone Books, 1993), pp. 225–252 (p. 227). For other examples of scholarship favouring the term ‘prostitute’, see for instance Laura J. Rosenthal’s *Infamous Commerce: Prostitution in Eighteenth-Century British Literature and Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), Nina Kushner, *Erotic Exchanges: The World of Elite Prostitution in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013), and Marion Pluskota, *Prostitution and Social Control in Eighteenth-Century Ports* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016).

<sup>6</sup> The Coalition Against Trafficking in Women, for instance, suggests that the term ‘sex work’ legitimizes violence against women and sexual inequality, and allows governments and businesses to exploit vulnerable woman in order to increase their tax revenue or profits. See Coalition Against Trafficking in Women, ‘Prostitution Is Not “Sex Work”’ [Leaflet], (2011) <<http://www.catwinternational.org/Content/Images/Article/254/attachment.pdf>> [accessed 9 November 2016].

<sup>7</sup> While the notion of ‘sex work’ is predicated on the idea of female choice, as opposed to forced labour and trafficking, the question of choosing one variety of labour over another out of desire rather than necessity is inevitably ambiguous when considering women working within a capitalist economy. Eighteenth-century women, just like women today, might have had no choice in whether they earned a living or not, but could potentially exercise choice by choosing sexual labour over any other kind. For the potential empowerment of the female sex worker in eighteenth-century France, see Nina Kushner’s article ‘The Business of Being Kept: Elite Prostitution as Work’, in *Women and Work in Eighteenth-Century France*, ed. by Daryl M. Hafter and Nina Kushner (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2015), pp. 52–76.

<sup>8</sup> Ellis and Lewis, p. 2.

<sup>9</sup> David Coward, ‘Eighteenth-Century Attitudes to Prostitution’, *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*, 189 (1980), 363–399 (p. 366).

both delineated and blurred social boundaries, as Ann Lewis has shown.<sup>10</sup> For Rétif and Mercier at least, sex work could be understood as an activity that crossed ‘class’ boundaries, in which hierarchies existed, but women rich and poor could sell their services within one broad and ambiguous sexual economy. The only enduring certainty when discussing ‘prostitution’, as Alexandre Parent-Duchâtelet highlights at the beginning of his 1836 historical and sociological study – the first of its kind – *De la Prostitution dans la ville de Paris*, is that ‘[I]es mots de prostituée et de prostitution [n’ont] pas dans l’esprit et le langage de tout le monde la même signification’.<sup>11</sup>

In light of these problems of codification and definition, ‘sex work’, a deliberately broad-ranging and nebulous term, might help us to consider the broad variety of individuals and practices depicted in the texts explored throughout this thesis, without leaving us as constricted or concerned by vocabulary and codification as these eighteenth-century authors. Moreover, the use of ‘sex work’ allows for the discussion not simply of women (or, less frequently, men) who sell their services, but all other parties involved in the industry: madams, clients, *entreteneurs*, those employed in domestic labour, and the forces of order that facilitated them. Finally, framing this practice as ‘sex work’ helps us to remember the role of transactional eroticism in the new and flourishing consumer society of eighteenth-century France (and, more specifically, Paris).<sup>12</sup> The sex worker is not just another woman fulfilling an unchanging role in ‘the world’s oldest profession’.

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<sup>10</sup> Ann Lewis offers an overview of types of sex workers, their contemporary labels, and the terminology used in recent scholarship on the eighteenth-century sex trade: Ann Lewis, ‘Classifying the Prostitute in Eighteenth-Century France’, in *Prostitution and Eighteenth-Century Culture*, ed. by Lewis and Ellis, pp. 17–32 (pp. 17–19). See also Ann Lewis, ‘Une tache ineffaçable? Restif’s Representation of the Prostitute in *Le Pornographe* and *La Paysanne pervertie*’, in *Le Corps et ses images dans l’Europe du dix-huitième siècle: The Body and its Images in Eighteenth-Century Europe*, ed. by Sabine Arnaud and Helge Jordheim (Paris: Champion, 2012), pp. 49–71. For Rétif’s typology of sex workers, see Nicolas-Edme Restif de la Bretonne, *Le Pornographe*, ed. by Béatrice Didier (Paris: Régine Deforges, 1977), pp. 174–179. For Mercier’s breakdown of sex worker ‘types’, see Chapter DXLII, ‘Matrones’ of Louis-Sébastien Mercier, *Tableau de Paris*, 8 vols (Amsterdam: [n.p.], [n. pub.], 1782–83), VII (1783), pp. 1–16 (pp. 6–9).

<sup>11</sup> Alexandre-Jean-Baptiste Parent-Duchâtelet, *De la Prostitution dans la ville de Paris: considérée sous le rapport de l’hygiène publique, de la morale et de l’administration; suivi d’un précis hygiénique, statistique et administratif sur la prostitution dans les principales villes de l’Europe*, 3rd edn, 2 vols (J-B. Baillière et fils: Paris, 1857), I, p. 20.

<sup>12</sup> ‘[I]t is clear that a consumer society existed by the mid-eighteenth century in Britain, France, the Low Countries, and parts of Germany and Italy’: Peter N. Stearns, *Consumerism in World History: The Global Transformation of Desire* (London: Routledge, 2015), p. 17. For more on the growth of consumerism, obsolescence and the increased accessibility of novelty and luxury across class lines in eighteenth-century Paris, see Daniel Roche, *Histoire des choses banales: naissance de la consommation dans les sociétés traditionnelles (XVII<sup>e</sup>-XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle)* (Paris: Fayard, 1997), and *Le Peuple de Paris: essai sur la culture populaire au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Fayard, 1998), 2nd ed, pp. 176–219. See also *Consumption and the World of Goods*, ed. by John Brewer and Roy Porter (London: Routledge, 1993).

She is an individual with greater or lesser agency in a new world order concerned with the buying and selling of pleasures.

## INTRODUCTION

For centuries, and across cultures and continents, the pleasures of the table have been inextricably linked to pleasures of the flesh. From Eve's consumption of the Forbidden Fruit, through years of aphrodisiac cooking, to the thousands of dinner-dates that take place worldwide, gustatory and erotic appetites have been connected for millennia.<sup>1</sup> So too have ingestion and sex work. In Ancient Rome, a man looking for a drink and an encounter with a woman would head to a tavern, where he could satisfy both of his desires.<sup>2</sup> Brothel visitors in sixteenth-century Japan would be provided with women and vast quantities of wine by the proprietors.<sup>3</sup> The hotel, hospitality and sex industries in late twentieth-century America were, and remain, similarly enmeshed with the sex trade.<sup>4</sup> And a visit to one of Stuttgart's so-called mega-brothels today would see a male visitor pay an entrance fee covering access to steam rooms, a breakfast buffet, a snack bar, and a restaurant, with the brothel marketed not simply as a place to buy a sex worker's services, but as a space catering for the modern man's desire for leisure and relaxation.<sup>5</sup> As W. Scott Haine has highlighted in his summary of the relationship between drinking and sex work, almost every society throughout human history has made some connection between the sexual transaction and the ingestive act, whether celebrating, facilitating, or legislating against the process.<sup>6</sup> Eighteenth-century France was no exception.

From the wealthiest and most fêted mistress, or *dame entretenue*, to the poorest streetwalker, eighteenth-century sex workers' lives were enmeshed with the alimentary world. They would sell food and drink, receive it as payment, be wooed with the promise of it, entertain or be entertained with it at supper parties, and suffer from excess or lack of it, depending upon their position in the social and professional hierarchy. They might

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<sup>1</sup> Francine Prose, *Gluttony: The Seven Deadly Sins* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 9–10.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas A. J. McGinn, *The Economy of Prostitution in the Roman World: A Study of Social History & the Brothel* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2007), pp. 15–22.

<sup>3</sup> Gary P. Leupp, *Interracial Intimacy in Japan: Western Men and Japanese Women, 1543–1900* (London; New York: Continuum, 2000), pp. 50–51.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Prus and Stylianoss Irini, *Hookers, Rounders, & Desk Clerks: The Social Organization of the Hotel Community* (Salem, Wisconsin: Sheffield Publishing Company, 1988).

<sup>5</sup> Nisha Lilia Diu, 'Welcome to Paradise', *Telegraph Online*, <<http://s.telegraph.co.uk/graphics/projects/welcome-to-paradise/>> [accessed 6 July 2016]. See also the price list for the Paradise brothel: <<http://www.the-paradise.de/infos/preise/>> [accessed 6 July 2016]. Beatriz Preciado has explored the broader development of similar modern bachelor and playboy spaces in *Pornotopia: An Essay on Playboy's Architecture and Biopolitics* (New York: Zone Books, 2014).

<sup>6</sup> W. Scott Haine, 'Alcohol and Drinking Establishments', in *Encyclopedia of Prostitution and Sex Work: A-N*, ed. by Melissa Hope Ditmore, 2 vols (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2006), I, pp. 16–19.

have been starving, and ensnared by pimps and madams, or perhaps have broken free once they had amassed sufficient wealth to be hostesses in their own right. With eighteenth-century writers often familiar with or directly immersed in the *demimonde* that provided the backdrop to their stories, sex workers and their meals were a regular feature in eighteenth-century writing. As Ann Lewis notes:

[t]he figure of the prostitute is common in the canonical literary texts of eighteenth-century France, as well as proliferating in a host of lesser-known sentimental, libertine and pornographic novels. In fact, it is difficult to think of any novels of the period (at least those written by men) that do not include them in some form or another. However, compared to the large field of criticism dealing with the prostitute in nineteenth-century French literature (or in the eighteenth-century English context), there is relatively little criticism relating to the French field.<sup>7</sup>

Consequently, within this general dearth of scholarship on sex work, almost no attention has been paid to the relationship between sex work and ingestion, despite the frequency with which these two practices were interlinked, both on and off the page, and their enduring and complementary symbolic, social, and material significance.

Moreover, throughout history, both food and sex workers have consistently been used as metaphors with which to depict or interrogate multiple facets of society. Ingestion is, as Vincent Jouve notes, ‘un vecteur de sens privilégié’ implicated in every domain of human study, whether scientific, political, historical, artistic or cultural.<sup>8</sup> In a similar vein, historian of sex work Timothy Gilfoyle has noted how ‘[b]ecause the “whore” was also a metaphor, commercial sex was transformed into a vehicle by which elites and middle classes articulated their social boundaries, problems, fears, agendas, and visions.’<sup>9</sup> Considering ingestion as a crucial part of the sexual transaction, a process symbolically analogous to sex work, and a preoccupation of eighteenth-century thinkers, this thesis explores the significance of the alimentary to sex work in the referential and textual worlds of mid- to late-eighteenth-century France. This period was not simply an era of pleasure-seeking libertines, elite brothels, a booming urban sex trade, and the recognition of syphilis as a fundamental challenge to public health. It was also a period that saw the birth and flourishing of a *nouvelle cuisine* that privileged the ideas of nature,

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<sup>7</sup> Lewis, ‘Classifying the Prostitute’, p. 17.

<sup>8</sup> Vincent Jouve, ‘Lire la nourriture’, in *Nourritures et écriture*, ed. by Marie-Hélène Cotoni, 2 vols (Nice: Université de Nice-Sophia Antipolis, 2000), II, pp. 13–28 (p. 18).

<sup>9</sup> Timothy J. Gilfoyle, ‘Prostitutes in History: From Parables of Pornography to Metaphors of Modernity’, *The American Historical Review*, 104.1 (1999), 117–141 (p. 138).

simplicity, and *terroir* over outmoded medieval spices or baroque extravagance, the arrival and democratisation of luxuries and stimulants such as chocolate, coffee, and liqueurs into fashionable society, the reign of champagne – immortalised in Voltaire’s *Le Mondain* (1736) – the emergence of the dining room and its modern trappings, cultural interest in vegetarianism (most notably by Voltaire and Rousseau), the birth of the restaurant, the proliferation of cookbooks, the rejection of Galenic medicine for chemical and mechanical understandings of the body and its digestive system, and the shift from Cartesian dualism to a focus on materialism and its implications for the consuming body. As Emma Spary puts it:

[t]hroughout the eighteenth century, digestion featured in discussions about the formation of individual character and conduct, and their relevance for the physical and moral condition of society as a whole. Digestion was thus a major area where medicine, philosophy, and theology intersected with the political praxis of daily life and the management of bodies.<sup>10</sup>

How then, in this food-obsessed culture, was the meal with the sex worker represented? And what were its symbolic implications for the individual and for society? How do the choice, use, and description of food and drink items in texts depicting sex work deepen our own understanding of the practice and how it was understood by contemporary writers? Are eating and drinking simply a background or stepping-stone to the sexual intrigue, or do they reveal significant ideas about gender, power, and bodies? How does the meal produce and reproduce interpretations of the sex worker, the client, and the state within the individual or cultural imaginary? In short, if ingestion is included within sex work texts both as a reflection of contemporary reality and of contemporary thought, what does food tell us about sex workers, writers, and their relationship to the society they inhabit? In exploring these questions, this thesis challenges existing assumptions about food and sex work, and their relationship to eighteenth-century readers and writers. It explores ingestion in a variety of text types, both fictional and non-fictional, in which sex work is a central theme. In so doing, this study expands our understanding of sex work in the referential world as an alimentary practice. It also nuances existing interpretations of well-known texts, and brings obscure, marginal texts to light to demonstrate their significance within eighteenth-century culture.

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<sup>10</sup> Emma Spary, *Eating the Enlightenment: Food and the Sciences in Paris* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2012), p. 21.

### *Structure of the thesis*

Chapter One combines disparate existing scholarship with new archival research to establish the significance of eating and drinking to sex work in the referential world. Chapters Two to Seven then examine the role of ingestion in fictional and non-fictional writings. With the exception of Chapter Two, which focuses on archival material, these texts fall loosely under the umbrella of libertine writing, through their explicit, ironic, or salacious depictions of sexed and sexual bodies, and their use of these bodies to represent and critique contemporary mores.<sup>11</sup> Chapter Two investigates the role of the meal in reports written by the Paris police and brothel madams which describe the lives and encounters of sex workers and their clients. These documents highlight the centrality of ingestion to the sexual transaction and reveal the brothel meal both as the ritual that underpinned the elite sex trade and as a destabilising force that placed diners, and sex workers in particular, in jeopardy. Chapter Three explores sex work and dining in the reformist and satirical imaginaries by analysing ingestion's significance to four texts discussing the regulation of the sex trade written between 1724 and 1769. It reveals the meal as a site of intense insecurity for male consumers who seek to reframe it as a mechanism of control. Turning to the world of novelised sex work, Chapter Four offers a detailed comparison of ingestion in two texts with sex worker narrators and heroines, Fougere de Monbron's *Margot la ravaudeuse* (1750) and the anonymous *Vénus en rut* (1771), to reveal how apparently similar and empowered women at the forefront of libertine narratives are, in fact, far from homogenous. Food is used to reveal Margot as a stable, cynical, yet nonetheless rebellious figure, while the heroine of *Vénus en rut* has a relationship to food that reveals her as an unsubversive object, complicit in her own consumption, and created to bolster male insecurity in the face of women and food's power to affect the body and mind. Chapter Five discusses the role of ingestion in two later epistolary works, the *Correspondance de Madame Gourdan* (1783) and *Correspondance d'Eulalie* (1785), to reveal how the table functions as a site of communality and fracture along class and gender lines, that leaves female sex workers isolated in an increasingly unstable world. Chapter Six explores a less common phenomenon within libertine texts, the male sex worker hero, and highlights the differences between male and female models of ingestion and digestion to reveal the

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<sup>11</sup> For a discussion of the breadth of what constitutes 'libertinage', see Thomas Wynn, 'Libertinage', in *The Cambridge History of French Literature*, ed. by William Burgwinkle, Nicholas Hammond and Emma Wilson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 412–419.

table as an imagined space of idealised male pleasure, no matter the male consumer's role within the socio-sexual economy. Chapter Seven explores the most extreme intersection of ingestion and sex work: an episode in Rétif de la Bretonne's 1798 novel, *L'Anti-Justine*, in which a sex worker is murdered and eaten. This final chapter demonstrates how, by the end of the century, the sex worker's relationship to ingestion is no longer simply associated with luxury, dangerous sociability and instability, but is also one in which she has become a symbolic, disposable and consumable good, ready to suffer an appalling fate in which she is at once a wretched woman, a foodstuff, and an incarnation of consumed pornographic literature. Written in a world excited and disturbed by sex and eating, the texts explored in this thesis show that ingestion is not, as scholars have hitherto routinely stated, a simple manifestation of or incitement to alimentary and sexual pleasures. It is instead a means of revealing real and fictional sex workers' vulnerability in the face of a male clientele, authorship and readership, who were in turn increasingly concerned by their own vulnerability in bed, at the table, and within French society.

The majority of texts explored in this thesis have been the object of little to no critical study. They have been chosen according to the significance of food within the text, as subsets of libertine writing dealing with different sex work-related themes (such as 'male sex workers' or 'brothel reform texts'), and according to the significance of sex work itself within the narrative. With the exception of Chapter Seven, all of the literary texts explored in this thesis take sex work as their main subject, motivation, or plot point. More canonical eighteenth-century literature depicting sex workers has already revealed a relationship between food and sex work, even if this relationship has not always been studied in depth. The Abbé Prevost's heroine Manon Lescaut tells her lover Des Grieux that fidelity is meaningless if one cannot afford to eat,<sup>12</sup> and betrays him at the dinner table.<sup>13</sup> In *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, Saint-Preux gives in to sexual temptation after a brothel

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<sup>12</sup> '[N]e vois-tu pas, ma pauvre chère âme, que dans l'état où nous sommes réduits, c'est une sottise que la fidélité? Crois-tu qu'on puisse être bien tendre lorsqu'on manque de pain? La faim me causerait quelque méprise fatale' (Antoine-François Prévost, *Histoire du Chevalier Des Grieux et de Manon Lescaut*, ed. by Jean Sgard (Paris: Flammarion, 2006), p. 100).

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67. Erich Auerbach discusses this in Chapter 16, 'The Interrupted Supper', of *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature, 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003) pp. 395–401. Pierre Saint-Amand has also explored Manon in relation to ingestion, examining Des Grieux's friend Tiberge's interpretation of Manon as a 'poison' in *The Libertine's Progress: Seduction in the Eighteenth-Century Novel* (London: University Press of New England, 1994), pp. 35–49.

dinner where he is duped into mixing his wine with more alcohol, rather than water,<sup>14</sup> and the Marquis de Sade's heroes and heroines, who count the libertine sex worker Juliette among their ranks, have attracted the bulk of critical attention on ingestion and libertine texts.<sup>15</sup> Ingestion is also linked to sex work in two key English novels: John Cleland's *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* and Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa*, both of which were influenced by and influential upon French libertine writing.<sup>16</sup> Fanny Hill has her first taste of sexual pleasure without emotional involvement after she is fed an aphrodisiac 'bridal posset', thus beginning her career as a 'woman of pleasure',<sup>17</sup> and Robert Lovelace only succeeds in raping Clarissa after she has had her tea and beer spiked by a brothel madam.<sup>18</sup> The relationship between food and sex work is evident in foundational eighteenth-century texts that have already elicited a wealth of criticism, even if that criticism has not focused too intently on consumption. Yet the texts explored in this thesis, for the most part marginalised or overlooked, have significant contributions to make to our understanding of eighteenth-century sex work, the intersections of sex work and food in the eighteenth-century French imaginary, and eighteenth-century libertine writing more broadly. Exploring food, sex work, and the wealth of neglected literature that negotiates these subjects enables us to deepen our understanding of sexual and alimentary commerce, bodies, power, and gender relations in both the eighteenth- and twenty-first-century cultural imaginaries.

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<sup>14</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Julie ou la nouvelle Héloïse*, in Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Bernard Gagnebin and M. Raymond, 5 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1959-1995), II (1961), pp. 1-793 (Seconde Partie, Lettre XXVI, pp. 294-297).

<sup>15</sup> This is discussed in detail in section (e.) of the Literature Review of this thesis, pp. 29-31.

<sup>16</sup> For Fanny Hill's international influence, see Lynn Hunt, 'Introduction', in *The Invention of Pornography*, ed. by Lynn Hunt, pp. 9-45 (p. 21). Édouard Langille highlights its influence on Fougeret de Monbron's *Margot la ravaudeuse* in the introduction to his English translation of the text. Édouard Langille, 'Introduction', in Louis Charles Fougeret de Monbron, *Margot la ravaudeuse*, ed. and trans. by Édouard Langille (Cambridge: Modern Humanities Research Association, 2015), pp. 1-12 (pp. 9-11). For Richardson's relationship to the French *roman libertin*, see Dominique Hölzle, *Le Roman libertin au XVIIIe siècle: une esthétique de la séduction* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2012).

<sup>17</sup> John Cleland, *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure: Fanny Hill* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth, 1993), p. 80. For an exploration of food in *Fanny Hill*, see Mary J. Gray, 'Food and the Female Body: Paralleling the Food Market and the Prostitution Market in John Cleland's *Fanny Hill*' (unpublished MA thesis, Emory University, 2014).

<sup>18</sup> Samuel Richardson, *Clarissa, or the History of a Young Lady*, ed. by Angus Ross (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), pp. 1005-1011. Clarissa describes how she was drugged in letter 314 to Anne Howe. Laura Rosenthal has explored Clarissa's rape in relation to sex work and sex workers in Chapter Five of *Infamous Commerce: 'Clarissa Among the Whores'*, pp. 129-153.

### *Contribution to scholarship*

This thesis is positioned at the nexus of three overlapping areas of research, making new contributions to each. Firstly, it contributes to the wider field of scholarship on food and drink in French literature.<sup>19</sup> More specifically, it contributes to knowledge about food and drink in eighteenth-century French writing, adding to existing research by critics such as Béatrice Fink, Noëlle Châtelet, Jean-Claude Bonnet, James W. Brown and Lise Andries, who have established eighteenth-century food and literature studies as worthy of attention with reference to cookbooks, novels, philosophical writing and the *Encyclopédie*.<sup>20</sup> This study of food and drink in eighteenth-century sex work helps to make the collective ground covered by these thematic studies more comprehensive, and enhance our broader appreciation of ingestion in eighteenth-century writing.

Secondly, this thesis complicates and enhances existing analyses of food and drink in eighteenth-century sexual culture and in what we might call ‘libertine’ literature. Although libertine and pornographic literature has been the object of growing and increasing scholarship since the 1980s, rehabilitated by key figures such as Robert Darnton, Catherine Cusset and Jean-Marie Goulemot, analyses of the meal in libertine and erotic texts have tended to be fleeting, and have focused on ideas of pleasure, excess, luxury, and the threat posed by women’s erotic appeal (as discussed in greater detail below).<sup>21</sup> By embracing a more in-depth approach to food in diverse forms of libertine writing, this thesis highlights how ingesta were used not simply to depict pleasure and its

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<sup>19</sup> For sixteenth-century literary eating, see Michel Jeanneret’s *Des Mets et des mots: des banquets et propos de table à la renaissance* (Paris: J. Corti, 1987) and Jean-François Revel, *Un Festin en paroles: histoire littéraire de la sensibilité gastronomique de l’antiquité à nos jours* (Paris: Pauvert, 1979).

<sup>20</sup> For Fink, see for instance, ‘The Banquet as Phenomenon or Structure in Selected Eighteenth-Century French Novels’, *Studies in Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*, 152 (1976), 729–40; ‘Les Mets et les mots de Suzanne’, in *Diderot: Digression and Dispersion: A Bicentennial Tribute*, ed. by Herbert Josephs and Jack Undank (Lexington, Kentucky: French Forum, 1984), pp. 98–105; ‘Enlightened Eating in Non-Fictional Context and the First Stirrings of *Ecriture Gourmande*’, *Dalhousie French Studies*, 11 (1986), 9–21; ‘Mise en cène: *Le Neveu de Rameau*’, *Romance Studies*, 7 (1989), 35–48; ‘Cènes civiques, repas révolutionnaires’, *The French Review*, 62.6 (1989), 957–966; ‘Savoirs et Saveurs’, *Lumen*, 19 (2000), 39–53, and *Les Liaisons savoureuses: réflexions et pratiques culinaires au XVIIIe siècle* (Saint-Etienne: Publications de l’Université de Saint-Etienne, 1995). For Bonnet, see *La Gourmandise et la faim: histoire et symbolique de l’aliment (1730–1830)* (Paris: Librairie générale française, 2015); For Brown see *Fictional Meals and their Function in the French Novel, 1789–1848* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1984). For Andries, see ‘Cuisine et littérature populaire’, *Dix-huitième siècle*, 15 (1983), 33–48.

<sup>21</sup> See, for instance, Robert Darnton, *The Literary Underground of the Old Regime* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1982), and *The Forbidden Best-Sellers of Pre-Revolutionary France* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1995); *Libertinage and Modernity*, ed. by Catherine Cusset (= *Yale French Studies*, 94 (1998)); Jean Marie Goulemot, *Ces Livres qu’on ne lit que d’une main: lecture et lecteurs de livres pornographiques au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Minerve, 1994).

dangers, but to play out complex issues of gender, power and bodily integrity, in a manner concealed by apparently trivial or mundane culinary details.

This thesis makes its third contribution by augmenting the scant existing research on the eighteenth-century sex trade and its literary representation noted by Ann Lewis. Using Érica-Marie Benabou's pathbreaking *La Prostitution et la police des mœurs* as its base, existing research has tended to focus on sex work as a historical, rather than literary phenomenon.<sup>22</sup> As such, few critical studies of eighteenth-century writing have foregrounded sex work and even fewer have explored the intersection of sex work and ingestion, save for several pages in Mathilde Cortey's study of sex worker memoir novels.<sup>23</sup> By exploring the role of ingestion in sex work in detail, in both the literary and material worlds, this thesis goes some way towards countering the lack of interest paid to sex work in eighteenth-century texts, further rehabilitating it as a subject worthy of increased scholarly attention. In contributing to these overlapping fields, this thesis demonstrates that existing analyses of sex work have overlooked the significant material and symbolic implications of ingestion in the literary and referential worlds. In line with the growing recognition of food and drink as valuable tools for literary and cultural analysis,<sup>24</sup> reading ingestion and sex work as complementary and mutually reinforcing themes provides us with valuable new ways of reading seemingly well-worn texts, as well as bringing the significance and subtleties of previously under-analysed texts to light.

## *Literature Review*

### *a. Food in French literature and culture*

This research is grounded in the belief that food in literature and culture is a valuable avenue of study that warrants closer attention in criticism pertaining to the eighteenth

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<sup>22</sup> Érica-Marie Benabou, *La Prostitution et la police des mœurs au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Perrin, 1987).

<sup>23</sup> Mathilde Cortey, *L'Invention de la courtisane au XVIIIe siècle: dans les romans-mémoires des 'filles du monde' de Madame Meheust à Sade (1732–1797)* (Paris: Editions Arguments, 2001), pp. 148–154.

<sup>24</sup> Food has been an object of intellectual interest for millennia, as part of medicine, religion, discussions of national identity, and as a symbol in art and literature, as discussed below. However, it has only received significant and consistent scholarly attention since the 1960s, acknowledged as significant to structuralist anthropology by such figures as Claude Lévi-Strauss, and been recognised as a valid field of study in its own right in the past twenty years or so. For more on this, see Ken Albala, 'Introduction', in *Routledge International Handbook of Food Studies*, ed. by Ken Albala (London: Routledge, 2014), pp. xv–xvi. A vast and interdisciplinary subject, there are few areas that 'food studies' does not cover. For an overview of food as it relates to literary study in particular, see Joan Fitzpatrick, 'Food and Literature: An Overview', in the same volume, pp. 122–135.

century and has valuable contributions to make to our understanding of literary sex work. While this might seem self-evident, more than fifty years after the publication of Claude Lévi-Strauss's *Le Cru et le cuit* and Roland Barthes' work on the semiotics of cuisine, the reification of 'Food Studies' as a discipline is still a relatively recent phenomenon.<sup>25</sup> This thesis contributes to, and is indebted to, the expansion of interest in food and French literature and culture evidenced, for example, by the publication of recent editions of *French Historical Studies* and *French Cultural Studies*, which demonstrate how food and its representation can be used in diverse ways to explore issues such as class, commerce and politics across the centuries.<sup>26</sup> This thesis also takes much of its inspiration and justification from recent work focusing on eighteenth-century ingestion and its representation. Beyond the analyses of food in libertine literature discussed and critiqued below, this thesis is positioned alongside works such as Olivier Assouly's study of food in Rousseau, and Frédéric Charbonneau's exploration of food in literature from the *ancien régime* to the Revolution.<sup>27</sup> Assouly's study is an in-depth exploration of Rousseau's relationship to the culinary world and his views on the biological, political, and philosophical implications of diet. This thesis begins from a similar starting-point, though exploring different texts, grounding close literary analysis in an understanding and respect of food's biological, cultural, and philosophical significance for writers and thinkers in eighteenth-century France, but with a greater focus on food and drink's symbolic and material effects and without exploring, as Assouly does, the implications of taste and appetite in depth. Charbonneau's *L'École de la gourmandise* offers a further demonstration of food's increasing recognition in eighteenth- (and seventeenth-) century studies, providing a sweeping overview of food's intersection with the written word in *ancien régime* texts, and the emergence of 'écriture gastronomique' in songs, recipes, novels, and medical and philosophical writings. Charbonneau establishes a solid basis from which further work on eighteenth-century literary eating can be explored, highlighting food's ambiguities and polyvalence, but with little interrogation of food in

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<sup>25</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Le Cru et le cuit* (Paris: Plon, 1964); Roland Barthes, 'Pour une psycho-sociologie de l'alimentation contemporaine', *Annales: Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations*, 16.5 (1961), 977–986; Barthes, 'La cuisine du sens', *Nouvel Observateur*, 10 December 1964, pp. 29–30.

<sup>26</sup> *Food and France: What Food Studies Can Teach Us About History*, ed. by Bertram M. Gordon and Erica J. Peters (= *French Historical Studies* 38.2, (2015)). Gordon and Peters's introduction (pp. 185–192) offers a brief overview of French food history and recent scholarly attention thereto. See also *Food and the French Empire*, ed. by Sylvie Durmelat (= *French Cultural Studies*, 26.2 (2015))

<sup>27</sup> Olivier Assouly, *Les Nourritures de Jean-Jacques Rousseau: cuisine, goût et appétit* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2016); Frédéric Charbonneau, *L'École de la gourmandise: de Louis XIV à la Révolution* (Paris: Éditions Desjonquères, 2008).

libertine culture beyond its role as an incitement to pleasure. This thesis is thus situated within, and elaborates upon, this recent burst of scholarly interest in food in French writing.

### ***b. Food in eighteenth-century sex work***

In historical as in literary studies, eighteenth-century sex work has received limited attention, and only been considered worthy of in-depth study in recent years, beginning in earnest with Benabou's encyclopaedic study of eighteenth-century sex work, *La Prostitution et la police des mœurs*. Its incursions into the legal, practical, and, to a lesser extent, literary manifestations of the sex trade have formed the basis of all subsequent scholarship. Combining cultural and historical study with literary analysis, this thesis is indebted to Benabou's work and legacy and is positioned within the growing field of scholarship on eighteenth-century sex work that has followed in her wake. Kathryn Norberg has offered a number of in-depth examinations of sex work in eighteenth-century history and literature.<sup>28</sup> Pamela Cheek has made invaluable contributions to our understanding of eighteenth-century brothels and of texts envisioning how to reform or further constrain women as objects of police surveillance.<sup>29</sup> The growing recognition of the historical and cultural significance of French (and broader European) sex work is borne out by the recent flurry of publications on the subject. Ann Lewis and Markman Ellis' edited collection of essays *Prostitution and Eighteenth-Century Culture* offers a wide insight into literary and non-literary depictions of sex work across Europe, highlighting its sexual, social, performative, and economic dimensions, with Ann Lewis' analysis of sex workers' classification and Kathryn Norberg's portrait of the police informer and brothel keeper Madame Dhosmont of particular significance for the French

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<sup>28</sup> See Norberg, 'The Libertine Whore'. See also Kathryn Norberg, 'Prostitutes', in *A History of Women in the West: Renaissance and Enlightenment Paradoxes*, ed. by N.Z. Davis and A. Farge (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press, 1993), pp. 458–474; 'From Courtesan to Prostitute: Mercenary Sex and Venereal Disease, 1730–1802', in *The Secret Malady: Venereal Disease in Eighteenth-Century Britain and France*, ed. by Linda Evi Merians (Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 1997), pp. 34–50; 'Goddesses of Taste: Courtesans and Their Furniture in Late-Eighteenth-Century Paris', in *Furnishing the Eighteenth Century: What Furniture Can Tell Us About the European and American Past*, ed. by Dena Goodman and Kathryn Norberg (New York: Routledge, 2007), pp. 97–114; 'In Her Own Words: An Eighteenth-Century Madam Tells Her Story', in *Prostitution and Eighteenth-Century Culture*, ed. by Lewis and Ellis, pp. 33–43; 'Prostitution', *The Routledge History of Sex and the Body, 1500 to the Present*, ed. by Sarah Toulalan and Kate Fisher (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), pp. 393–426.

<sup>29</sup> Pamela Cheek, 'Prostitutes of "Political Institution"', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 28.2 (1994–1995), 193–219; *Sexual Antipodes* (Stanford University Press: Stanford, California, 2003).

context.<sup>30</sup> Considering the elite sex trade of which Dhosmont was a part in greater detail, Nina Kushner's work offers insights into sex workers, madams and brothels from which Chapters One and Two take their lead.<sup>31</sup> Clyde Plumauzille's *Prostitution et révolution* investigates the practical and symbolic significance of sex work to revolutionary and republican society,<sup>32</sup> and Marion Pluskota's work explores the link between sex work and social control in eighteenth-century port towns.<sup>33</sup> Rather than seeking to reclaim and amplify the voices of previously overlooked real-life figures as Nina Kushner has, for instance, this thesis explores how sex workers are depicted, thereby focusing on women, but almost exclusively on women who have been abstracted through an assumed male (or, at least, broadly masculine) gaze. It is not just the authentic sex worker as explored by these historians that will be examined, but the imagined sex worker (or, rather, various male imaginaries' versions of sex workers) whose fictionalised forms offer us an insight into the desires, anxieties, and fantasies of an eighteenth-century male authorship and, by possible extension, readership.

As will be demonstrated in Chapter One, ingestion played a crucial role in the practice, cultural understanding, and representation of sex work. Yet while eating and drinking have featured consistently in scholarship on the sex trade, their significance has hardly been interrogated. When they have emerged, they have usually been mentioned in passing, without a comprehensive attempt to draw the forms and functions of ingesta within sex work together or analyse their significance. Benabou, for instance, devotes little attention to ingestion in archival sources (and none to its role in fiction), but highlights sex workers' roles in the food and drink industries<sup>34</sup> and briefly discusses the role of catering in brothels, with the meal as a site of male sociability.<sup>35</sup> Kushner offers the most in-depth discussion of food and drink in the sex trade, focusing on the *souper* as it is depicted in police archives.<sup>36</sup> When discussed by other scholars, the *souper* has typically been considered in relation to seduction more broadly, with unproblematic pleasure as the focus. In her study of food and drink in eighteenth-century France for

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<sup>30</sup> Ellis and Lewis' introduction to *Prostitution and Eighteenth-Century Culture* provides a comprehensive summary of scholarship on sex work up to and including its publication in 2012.

<sup>31</sup> See Kushner, *Erotic Exchanges* and *The Business of Being Kept*.

<sup>32</sup> Clyde Plumauzille, *Prostitution et révolution: les femmes publiques dans la cité républicaine (1789–1804)* (Ceyzérieu: Champ Vallon, 2016).

<sup>33</sup> See *Prostitution and Social Control*.

<sup>34</sup> Benabou, pp. 195-198, 200, 262, 289.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 218, 391.

<sup>36</sup> *Erotic Exchanges*, pp. 113–118.

instance, Barbara Ketcham Wheaton describes the significance of the Regency *souper*, the intimate meal that came to define eighteenth-century dining, to sex and eroticism as follows:

the alliance between food and love, or at least dalliance, was very strong throughout the eighteenth century. There was a lively interest in aphrodisiacs. Certainly the combination of luxury, intimacy, and the pleasures of the table is very powerful [...] The atmosphere of privacy, pleasure for all the senses, more or less acknowledged wickedness, and expectation were the real aphrodisiacs of the eighteenth-century seducer.<sup>37</sup>

For Kushner, the meal is similarly a site of sensual enjoyment, as well one of as professional advancement. Kushner is unique in emphasising the *souper* as a cornerstone of the eighteenth-century sex trade. Her interpretation of the meal focuses, if not on pleasure, then on the professional benefits of dining to madams and the women who worked for them and the skills required by madams to transform meals into sites at which they could amass social and economic capital.<sup>38</sup> This thesis dialogues with Kushner, demonstrating that the meal was not an unproblematic site at which capital could be gained and at which sex workers achieved independence and autonomy, but instead was a site of danger, where women and their clients were frequently mired in displeasure and instability.

### ***c. Food, drink, and literary sex work***

As Ann Lewis has highlighted more broadly, little attention has been paid to the representation of sex work and sex workers in eighteenth-century French literature in comparison with their nineteenth-century counterparts.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, with food studies still cutting its teeth as an academic discipline, there has been scant work devoted to the interplay between these two subjects, in spite of ingestion's significance to sex work, and the frequency with which these two subjects interlock in eighteenth-century writing.<sup>40</sup> Where food and drink appear in existing scholarship on the texts discussed in this thesis, the analysis is often brief and not framed by the notion of sex work *per se*. These analyses are discussed throughout the thesis, where they are applicable to individual

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<sup>37</sup> Barbara Ketcham Wheaton, *Savoring the Past: The French Kitchen and Table from 1300 to 1789* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983), pp. 157–159.

<sup>38</sup> *Erotic Exchanges*, p. 117.

<sup>39</sup> Lewis, 'Classifying the Prostitute', p. 17.

<sup>40</sup> This is in marked contrast to scholarship on nineteenth-century sex work. For more on its relationship to drunkenness see, for instance, Jill Harsin, *Policing Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century Paris* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985). For sex work and dining, particularly in restaurants, see Lola González-Quijano, "'La chère et la chair': gastronomie et prostitution dans les grands restaurants des boulevards au XIXe siècle', *Genre, sexualité & société*, 10 (2013) <<https://gss.revues.org/2925>> [accessed 10 June 2016].

texts. Texts relating to eighteenth-century sex work as a literary phenomenon, in particular the work of Valerie van Cruyten-André, Kathryn Norberg, and Mathilde Cortey, are similarly discussed where relevant in each chapter. Mathilde Cortey is the only scholar to offer an extended discussion of ingestion, sex work, and their intersection. In her two-hundred-and-seventy-six-page study of sex worker memoir novels, *L'Invention de la courtisane au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Cortey devotes a mere six pages to 'Goûts aphrodisiaques', therein providing the most substantial contribution to the field to date.<sup>41</sup>

Cortey highlights how eating and drinking form a crucial part of the 'volupté' for which courtesans are reputed, with delicious dishes, drinks, and aphrodisiacs (whether explicitly pharmaceutical substances such as cantharides or stimulating foods and drinks such as chocolate and champagne) playing a vital role at her table and in her bed.<sup>42</sup> The foods and drinks served in these novels are, Cortey argues, explicitly fashionable, sensual, and 'révèlent des préoccupations moins diététiques que gourmandes'.<sup>43</sup> However, Cortey also highlights the ambivalence of these oral pleasures which the courtesan might deliberately administer or tamper with, rendering her a sort of 'fée-sorcière empoisonneuse' to her wealthy clients. Cortey claims that in choosing who benefits or suffers at the table, the courtesan wields an eroticised form of power akin to the social force of 'bon goût' and incarnates, in herself and in her relationship to her clients, the transition from aristocratic social dominance to the reign of social mobility, bourgeois manners, and restrained conformity.<sup>44</sup> The 'luxe' of the alimentary encounter with the courtesan is 'une imitation alourdie et souvent grotesque' of that depicted in Watteau's *fêtes galantes*, in which the morals of the wasteful, excessive, depraved aristocrat and the new moneyed classes seeking similarly elite luxuries are laid bare.<sup>45</sup> Cortey similarly emphasises the consistent focus on champagne, burgundy, and fashionable wines in memoir novels, and their polyvalent role in inciting or quashing eroticism, particularly when consumed by stereotypical national types such as drunken (and thus often impotent) German barons.<sup>46</sup> For Cortey, the intoxicating power of the courtesan means that man can choose wine or

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<sup>41</sup> Cortey, *L'Invention de la courtisane*, pp. 148–154.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 148–150.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 152.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 150.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 148.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 150.

women but cannot have both.<sup>47</sup> Finally, briefly discussing the connections between ingestion, excretion, money, and eroticism, Cortey also acknowledges the luxurious meal's ultimate transformation into waste and filth, and thus its power to symbolise economic and moral degradation. For Cortey, it is unclear whether this degradation represents an elite fear of industrial and economic change or an aristocratic disdain for the social climbers who profit from it.<sup>48</sup>

Cortey thus provides a valuable starting-point for any investigation of sex work and ingestion, gesturing towards the physical, social, and economic implications of mealtime scenes. Although touching on several important points, and highlighting ingestion's ambivalence, Cortey's analysis is too brief and general to provide more than a basic overview of the subject and does not account for the divergence in ingestion's meanings in different texts. Ingesta and mealtimes are polyvalent, varying both between texts within a given genre and within the confines of individual texts themselves, necessitating a more in-depth study that considers different texts individually as well as collectively under the umbrella of 'sex work' narratives. Although Cortey's focus on pleasure is a legitimate one, this thesis also seeks to unpick and challenge rather than reinforce these dominant analyses of the meal in sex work, and in libertine texts more generally. Moreover, while Cortey recognises that ingestion is a potentially ambivalent process and practice, particularly where its economic significance is concerned, she nonetheless overlooks several crucial points. Firstly, in her discussion of 'volupté', Cortey sets up a false opposition between sensuality and dietetics. While luxury foods might have been depicted (and, in reality, consumed) to invoke sensory responses and stir alimentary pleasure, this was not divorced from an understanding of the realm of nutrition. Ingesta's physiological effects upon individuals and their bodily peculiarities (alluded to by Cortey herself in her discussion of national types and the courtesan-heroine's 'physiologie du goût') were also of implicit and explicit importance. In light of the contemporary interest in cooking and nutrition, *gourmandise* and dietetic concerns cannot be considered separately. Similarly, in her discussion of food and drink's potential dangers, Cortey focuses exclusively on dangers to the client. Yet, as will be demonstrated, eating and drinking regularly posed dangers to women too, with mealtimes often undermining the sex worker's claims to independence, bodily autonomy, and control in the face of her

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 151.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., pp. 153–154.

clientele. Cortey's model of the woman who controls through feeding on the one hand, and the man who is fed on the other, unduly erases many of the important economic, sexual, and social dynamics at play in the transactional meal. Cortey also overlooks the role of ingestion in texts that depict male sex workers, explicitly disempowered women, or male imaginings of an idealised sex trade. Finally, as is the case with studies on food in libertine writing more generally, Sade is given a disproportionate amount of attention, yet eating and drinking in the literature of sex work are not limited to, and not represented by, the Sadean excesses, poisons, and aphrodisiacs that have dominated much discussion of eighteenth-century libertine eating and drinking to date.

#### *d. Libertine eating*

As well as problematising and nuancing Cortey's vision of ingestion in literary sex work, this thesis engages with scholarly interpretations of eating and drinking in wider libertine writing. The sex worker and the meal are regular elements in libertine texts, and many of the texts discussed in this thesis could be described as libertine. Consequently, this thesis dialogues with scholarship that has discussed ingestion and/or sex workers in libertine writing without necessarily foregrounding food or sex work as its primary objects of study. This scholarship, though more voluminous, is often reductive, clichéd, or exclusively focused on pleasurable male experience where ingestion is concerned. Given the age-old associations between alimentary and sexual pleasure, it is little wonder that the meal has most often been discussed as a means to an erotic end, as Henri Lafon demonstrates:

Le rapport le plus explicite entre nourriture et sexualité est un rapport de succession dans l'histoire : le repas n'est qu'un prélude, il précède l'acte sexuel proprement dit. C'est une séquence narrative fréquente dans le roman libertin : qu'il s'agisse de pornographie philosophique ou de récits plus « voilés », l'orgie débridée ou le souper galant associent plaisir de table et plaisir sexuel. Il est difficile de distinguer la succession de la causalité : le repas fait partie de tout ce qui « favorise » avec plus ou moins d'efficacité l'entreprise amoureuse et sa conclusion.<sup>49</sup>

This focus on sexual and gustatory pleasure as two separate, sequential activities, with food as a prelude and incitement to the (more important) matter of sex, has formed the

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<sup>49</sup> Henri Lafon, 'Du Thème alimentaire dans le roman', *Dix-Huitième Siècle*, 15 (1983), 169–186 (p. 176). Dolores Jimenez grants the libertine meal even less importance, suggesting that 'le repas, même s'il représente une étape obligatoire, n'est qu'un moyen (ou un prétexte) pour arriver à d'autres buts' : Jimenez, 'Espaces du repas intime dans le roman du XVIIIe siècle', in *Espaces domestiques et privés de l'hospitalité*, ed. by Alain Montandon (Clermont-Ferrand: Université Blaise Pascal, 2000), pp. 163–173, (p. 167).

basis of most analyses of libertine ingestion. Michel Delon devotes a chapter of his study on *Le Savoir-vivre libertin* to ‘Gastronomies libertines’, highlighting the role of the meal as representing sociability, sensuality, and economic luxury, with decadent male diners constantly plagued by the risk of excess.<sup>50</sup> Delon’s libertine meals are, for the most part, painted as the transformation of a ‘besoin matériel en un plaisir raffiné’, highly aestheticized and visually impressive, and forming a vital stage in the ‘gradation’ of libertine seduction.<sup>51</sup> Delon’s approach is reprised in the only full-length study of food and drink in libertine texts: Serge Safran’s *L’Amour gourmand*.<sup>52</sup> While Safran’s study helps to emphasise the meal’s importance in a breadth of texts, it does not go much further than to enumerate the frequency and uses of common aphrodisiac and restorative foods and drinks often used in libertine seduction, including chocolate, oysters, coffee, wines, and champagnes, and does little more than reinforce ingestion’s link to libertine pleasure, whether as an incitement to it or a restorative to follow it. Marine Ganofsky offers a similar analysis in her edited collection of texts depicting *soupers*, arguing that these libertine meals represent the hedonism, insouciance and wit of *ancien régime* society and inspire it off the page, emphasising the role of refined pleasure and the self-identified superiority of the aristocracy, before briefly highlighting the excessive meal’s role in depicting the decadence and ennui of elite society as the century progresses.<sup>53</sup> This focus on inspiring and representing pleasure, with a brief allusion to decadence and looming misery, follows the model of almost all discussion of libertine ingestion. Jean Marie Goulemot, along with Lafon, offers similar analyses, with both critics emphasising the role of the meal in seduction, spectacle, and the pursuit of sensual pleasure, as well as the significance of specific foodstuffs in augmenting the atmosphere of sensuality or highlighting comical or grotesque differences between consumers along national, gendered, or class lines.<sup>54</sup> Patrick Wald Lasowski highlights the comic potential of the burlesque meal in the sex worker’s stomping ground of the *petite maison* or *boudoir* but, like most critics, does not interrogate the darker side of libertine excess for the sex

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<sup>50</sup> Michel Delon, *Le Savoir-vivre libertin* (Paris: Hachette littératures, 2000), pp. 165–197.

<sup>51</sup> Delon, *Le Savoir-vivre libertin*, pp. 166, 191.

<sup>52</sup> Serge Safran, *L’Amour gourmand: libertinage gastronomique au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Éditions la Musardine, 2000).

<sup>53</sup> Marine Ganofsky, ‘Préface’, in *Petits soupers libertins*, ed. by Marine Ganofsky (Paris: Société française d’étude du dix-huitième siècle, 2016), pp. 11–39.

<sup>54</sup> Goulemot, p. 69; Lafon, ‘Du Thème alimentaire’, pp. 172–176.

workers who so often share the libertine's table.<sup>55</sup> It is Lafon's analysis, however brief, of the libertine foodstuff as a powerful object that disturbs the body from the inside out, that is the most insightful in recognising eating and drinking as processes that are intimately linked with problems of instability:

Du corps stable et transparent on passe au corps instable et sensible ; la nourriture peut le changer dans l'instant. Elle est l'extérieur qui pénètre et modifie, opposé à l'intérieur essentiel qui transparait sans pouvoir être altéré : le sang, la naissance.<sup>56</sup>

With the exception of this brief incursion into food and drink as transformative agents of risk, critics' prevailing focus on pleasure is limited and limiting, even when it is tempered by brief discussions of danger or extended analyses of exceptional Sadean banquets. This thesis takes Lafon's understanding of libertine ingestion as a potentially disturbing, troubling process, linked to the transformation of a complex and mutable body – and with it a potentially mutable identity – and applies this notion to sex work: a process and literary trope that is similarly connected to the transformation of individuals, their health, morality, and place in society via bodily ingress.

Since it is primarily male pleasure and potency that have been discussed with relation to ingestion, the reader's field of vision has typically been limited to texts that focus on aristocratic, male libertinage. Yet the focus on pleasure and preparative and restorative consumption outlined above is androcentric not only in its existing objects of study, but also in the underlying motives of those who study it. This is made clear in Safran's extended preface to *L'Amour gourmand*, in which he describes (nostalgically and at length) his own sensual experiences as a *soixant-huitard* and former self-avowed *libertin*:<sup>57</sup>

Pour ceux qui n'ont pas connu ces années-là, les années soixante-dix à quatre-vingt environ [...] il n'est peut-être pas inutile, par les temps qui courent et ne s'arrêtent que pour céder à la bêtise, la violence et la peur, de rappeler ce qui les a caractérisées: libération des mœurs, apparition de la pilule et conséquemment la liberté de copuler sans procréer, immense désir et volonté d'abolir toutes les

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<sup>55</sup> Patrick Wald Lasowski, 'Introduction', in *L'Espion libertin ou le calendrier du plaisir: histoires, adresses, tarifs et spécialités des courtisanes de Paris*, ed. by Patrick Wald Lasowski (Arles: P. Picquier, 2000), pp. 7–25 (p. 9).

<sup>56</sup> 'Du Thème alimentaire', pp. 180–181. Lafon reprises and somewhat expands upon these ideas in *Les Décors et les choses dans le roman français du dix-huitième siècle de Prévost à Sade* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1992), pp. 333–335.

<sup>57</sup> The introduction spans pp. 9–23.

contraintes physiques et morales, toutes les barrières sociales, d'aimer sans limites d'âge, de sexe ou de couleur [...] J'étais de la partie. J'allais en profiter.<sup>58</sup>

When the novels that he studies in the following pages repeatedly depict female suffering, or at best utilise female pleasure as little more than a tool to demonstrate male sexual prowess, Safran's use of his own past conquests as a point of critical departure foreshadows his lack of interest (or perhaps a certain pleasure) in the darker, more misogynistic side of the libertine table. A similar (though less personally informed) disregard for women consuming is shown in Michel Delon's discussion of libertine eating, which includes little consideration of female diners or the effects of eroticized ingestion upon their minds and bodies. When women are mentioned in Delon's analysis they are nameless and described in brief anecdotes simply as resistant objects of desire who are either won over by the aesthetics of the suppertime ritual or framed as alluring dining companions for the libertine seducer.<sup>59</sup> Indeed, the female consuming subject is broadly overlooked within the critical discourse on libertine eating highlighted above unless she is experiencing pleasure *en route* to the bedroom or dispensing poisons in the role of a dangerous *femme fatale*. In short, the sexism that pervades these texts lies not simply in what is said but in what is left unsaid; at the male critic's table, a place is rarely laid for the female diner. This short-sightedness is not unsurprising in light of the frequency with which female experience has been overlooked in broader critical discussions of libertine writing. In the foreword to his 2003 *Anthologie érotique*, for example, Maurice Lever describes how the collection presents an 'art d'aimer au féminin' that oscillates between 'la simple licence et la luxure, entre la légèreté libertine et l'imprécaction libertaire'.<sup>60</sup> This last is rather an understatement when this same anthology contains two fictionalised brothel correspondences (discussed in Chapter Five of this thesis) that depict women who are beaten, coerced into sex, and murdered. This blindness to female experience extends even to the most outlandish examples of libertine literature. Will McMorrán, for instance, discusses a particularly extreme case in his essay 'The Sound of Violence: Listening to Rape In Sade', highlighting how the most heinous acts of violence have often been glossed over or explained away in favour of purely philosophical or linguistic analyses that ignore the ethical challenges presented by

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<sup>58</sup> Safran, p. 13.

<sup>59</sup> Delon, *Le Savoir-vivre libertin*, pp. 170–174.

<sup>60</sup> Maurice Lever, 'Avertissement', in *Anthologie érotique: le XVIIIe siècle*, ed. by Maurice Lever (Paris: Robert Laffont, 2004), pp. 2–3.

violence against women in Sade's writing.<sup>61</sup> That fictional women might suffer is still, it seems, a radical thought.

While the fictional sex worker is also a product of male writers and male fantasy, she has remained largely absent from their critiques of the table. This thesis demonstrates that the meal in the sex work narrative is a darker and more complex force than a simple source or incitement to pleasure, complicating critical analyses of libertine ingestion to date. Given the performance of seduction and sociability inherent to sex work, food and drink often show up the separation between identity, body, and ingesta, rather than their coherence. Individuals do not necessarily consume that which symbolises what they already are, but what they wish to suggest they are, or what they will deliberately or inadvertently become. Whether dining with a client or being fed by a madam or brothel keeper, the sex worker is often, as will become clear, denied the capacity to make her own food choices and thus incapable of consistently consuming foods that conform to her own perception of her identity, nationhood, class, and character. Moreover, by demonstrating the complexity and variation in how ingestion functions in sex work texts, this thesis unravels the prevailing critical approach and reveals how it flattens consumption into one common set of narrative tropes in 'libertine' writing, rather than exploring the specificity of ingestion to a variety of libertine texts. In so doing, this analysis follows Stéphanie Genand's lead in recognising the impossibility of effectively discussing the libertine novel as one homogenous concept, rather than a diverse and heterogenous form influenced by shifts in culture and society.<sup>62</sup> The sex worker heroines discussed here operate within a different alimentary paradigm to the more commonly studied aristocratic libertine hero.

### ***e. Sade – the elephant in the room?***

When considering texts depicting sex and ingestion, it is difficult to avoid the Marquis de Sade. Juliette, his most notorious heroine, is commonly held up as the apotheosis of the

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<sup>61</sup> Will McMorran, 'The Sound of Violence: Listening to Rape in Sade', in *Representing Violence in France, 1760 – 1820*, ed. by Thomas Wynn (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2013) pp. 229–249 (pp. 229–232).

<sup>62</sup> Stéphanie Genand, *Le Libertinage et l'histoire: politique de la séduction à la fin de l'ancien régime* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2005). Genand argues that libertine novels are 'traversée de tensions historiques, signe que le passage du temps s'opère, au tourant des Lumières, jusque dans les boudoirs' (p. 13).

‘libertine whore’, as Kathryn Norberg has highlighted.<sup>63</sup> Moreover, where eating and drinking in eighteenth-century literature are concerned, much of the existing scholarship is entirely or substantially devoted to Sadean excess and gluttony. Following Barthes’ seminal *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*, which explored food signs in the Sadean meal as a means of establishing social caste, dividing and controlling bodies to better use them for vice,<sup>64</sup> scholarship on eighteenth-century libertine and pornographic eating has repeatedly focused on Sade’s significance to the detriment of other writers and texts, simultaneously and paradoxically highlighting Sadean exceptionality while implicitly holding up the Sadean meal as representative enough to receive the lion’s share of critical attention. Béatrice Bomel-Rainelli, for instance, suggests that beyond the Sadean orgy ‘dans les romans libertins, l’aliment occupe généralement une place triviale, insignifiante’<sup>65</sup> and, like Noëlle Châtelet, explores Sadean food as stimulants, restoratives, and mechanisms for turning the libertines’ victims into machines that will produce flesh and excrement for their consumption.<sup>66</sup> Ingestion facilitates ritualistic order, perversion, and controlled transgression in the libertine community. Béatrice Fink similarly sees Sadean food as a mechanism for the complete structuring of the libertine world,<sup>67</sup> Lucienne Frappier-Mazur’s anthropological perspective highlights how Sadean food, with its taboos and rituals, establishes and reinforces the identities and power balances of libertines and victims, isolating them from wider society, and explores Sadean topography as analogous to the digestive system,<sup>68</sup> and Marcel Hénaff explores the economic implications of Sadean excess, dealing with food as an expression of financial power and a model of industrial capitalism.<sup>69</sup> As demonstrated above, Mathilde Cortey’s analysis of food in sex work narratives also follows this focus on Sadean eating above all else.<sup>70</sup> Moreover, Sade’s alleged poisoning of a group of sex workers at Marseille with an excess of Spanish fly offers perhaps the most infamous and well-worn anecdote surrounding the

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<sup>63</sup> ‘The Libertine Whore’ pp. 245 ff.; Olivier Delers, ‘The Prostitute as Neo-Manager: Sade’s *Juliette* and the New Spirit of Capitalism’, in *Prostitution and Eighteenth-Century Culture*, ed. by Lewis and Ellis, pp. 127–139.

<sup>64</sup> Roland Barthes, *Sade, Fourier, Loyola* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1971).

<sup>65</sup> Béatrice Bomel-Rainelli, ‘Sade, ou l’alimentation générale’, *Dix-huitième siècle*, 15 (1983), 199–210 (p. 199).

<sup>66</sup> Noëlle Châtelet, ‘Le Libertin à table’, in *Sade: écrire la crise*, ed. by Michel Camus, Philippe Roger and Pierre Belfond (Paris: Belfond, 1983), pp. 67–83.

<sup>67</sup> Béatrice Fink, ‘Lecture alimentaire de l’utopie sadienne’, in *Sade: écrire la crise*, pp. 175–191.

<sup>68</sup> Lucienne Frappier-Mazur, *Sade et l’écriture de l’orgie: pouvoir et parodie dans l’Histoire de Juliette* (Paris: Nathan, 1991), pp. 187–190.

<sup>69</sup> Marcel Hénaff, *L’Invention du corps libertin* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1978).

<sup>70</sup> Cortey, *L’Invention de la courtisane*, pp. 148–154.

sex trade and eating in eighteenth-century France.<sup>71</sup> How, then, can this thesis avoid discussion of Sade in good faith?

To begin with the matter of food and drink, the visibility of ingestion in the Sadean text should not be allowed to cloud broader scholarly considerations of libertine eating and drinking, as has often been the case. Delon's chapter on 'Gastronomies libertines' in *Le Savoir-vivre libertin*, for instance, spans thirty-two pages, the majority of which address food and drink in Sade alone.<sup>72</sup> Yet if Sade offers us extreme libertine violence, it is illogical that the Sadean text should dominate or direct wider discussion of ingestion in other, less unconventional libertine texts. Considering the sex worker and thus the absence of *Juliette* within my corpus, I do not dispute Norberg's suggestion that *Juliette* offers an extreme form of the 'libertine whore'.<sup>73</sup> However, in light of the wealth of scholarship that heroine has already attracted, combined with the relative dearth of alimentary episodes in the text that illuminate her role specifically as a sex worker, her exclusion leaves room for more appropriate and less familiar candidates.<sup>74</sup> Moreover, upholding *Juliette* as the most significant end point of eighteenth-century representations of sex work plays into the mythology of Sade as the be-all and end-all of libertine writing. As Valérie van Crugten-André has demonstrated, libertine writing did not cease once Sade had put down his pen.<sup>75</sup> The sex worker's frequent appearance in the libertine or salacious novel should not be measured against a single, immortalised author for whom sex work was not a consistent focus. Where Sade does appear in this study, this is in relation to authorial rivalry with Rétif de la Bretonne, with a focus on Sadean violence that does not pay specific attention to Sadean sex work per se. By omitting *Juliette* from this study, I hope to allow lesser-known texts (and lesser-known heroines) the visibility that they deserve.

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<sup>71</sup> See Peter Cryle, *The Telling of the Act: Sexuality and Narrative in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century France* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2001), pp. 96–98.

<sup>72</sup> See pp. 165–197. Sade is discussed on pp. 175–197.

<sup>73</sup> 'The Libertine Whore', p. 245.

<sup>74</sup> Norberg highlights how Juliette rapidly transcends her original status as a sex worker within the text, emphasising further how her inclusion in this thesis is neither wholly necessary nor appropriate ('The Libertine Whore', p. 248).

<sup>75</sup> Valérie van Crugten-André, *Le Roman du libertinage 1782–1815: redécouverte et réhabilitation* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1997), pp. 105–107.

## *Methodology*

To best explore the significance of ingestion to writings on sex work, this thesis uses an interdisciplinary approach to unpack the (often fleeting) instances of eating and drinking, combining close reading with both a historicised understanding of each meal or food item's context and with more modern food theory identifying universal (or quasi-universal) properties of ingestion that transcend era or culture. This method follows Ronald Tobin's notion of 'gastrocriticism': the study of texts using a multi-disciplinary network of different perspectives on food and drink, encompassing sociology, cultural and economic history, medicine, dietetics, and literary criticism.<sup>76</sup> Applying the concept of gastrocriticism to a selection of Molière's plays, Tobin highlights how

mes recherches pratiques m'ont obligé à emprunter une voie d'approche différente pour chacune des autres pièces, ce qui ne fait que mettre davantage en évidence le caractère pluridisciplinaire de ma méthode. La gastrocritique n'est pas une grille fixe ; elle est plutôt, comme toute approche expérimentale, un réseau de techniques mis au service d'un concept.<sup>77</sup>

While this thesis does not adopt completely distinct theoretical frameworks for each group of texts, instead recognising that if, as E.N. Anderson has stated, '[f]oodways can only be understood holistically, with just about every aspect of human life taken into account', it is sometimes necessary to juggle multiple theoretical concepts when analysing a single moment of consumption, it nonetheless follows Tobin's fundamental principle.<sup>78</sup> The groups of texts discussed in each chapter share a relationship to ingestion that is underpinned by one or more key concepts within modern food studies, and that are also manifest in eighteenth-century medical, culinary, social, and philosophical thought. These are deployed to enhance our understanding of eighteenth-century French ingestion both as a culturally and temporally specific act which must be understood in its own context and as a process with clear and comparable cultural resonances for the modern reader interested in the dynamics of food, sex, and sex work. Deborah Lupton's assertion that '[f]ood and eating are central to our subjectivity, or sense of self, and our experience

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<sup>76</sup> Ronald Tobin, 'Qu'est-ce que la gastrocritique?', *XVIIe siècle*, 217 (2002), 621–630. I favour this approach over Beatrice Fink's slightly different term 'sitocriticism', described as '[a]ttempts at explicating, or even deciphering, literary texts by means of the food sign' ('Enlightened Eating', p. 10). Since Tobin's gastrocriticism offers a more cleanly defined methodology (or, given its breadth, methodologies) that encompasses not only the food sign itself, but the social and cultural processes that surround the act of ingestion, and accordingly takes its name from the word for 'stomach' – 'gaster' –, rather than food – 'sitos' –, I favour Tobin's 'gastro'-focused terminology.

<sup>77</sup> 'Qu'est-ce que la gastrocritique?', p. 628. See also *Tarte à la crème: Comedy and Gastronomy in Molière's Theater* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1990).

<sup>78</sup> E.N. Anderson, *Everyone Eats: Understanding Food and Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), p. 7.

of embodiment, or the ways in which we live in and through our bodies' is as true for the eighteenth-century writer and consumer (real or fictional) as it is for us today.<sup>79</sup>

When more recent theoretical work is discussed, its application is grounded in the culinary and medical context of eighteenth-century food history. Since, as Robert Appelbaum has noted, food in texts is a representation of a historically situated product of culture, it is crucial that this thesis is underpinned by a historicised understanding of the socio-economic, symbolic, and biological significance of eating in eighteenth-century France – a culture preoccupied with alimentary questions.<sup>80</sup> Chief among these are Emma Spary's *Eating the Enlightenment* and *Feeding France*, which explore the relationship between food production, consumption, and learned (principally scientific) discourse.<sup>81</sup> Alongside Spary, culinary historians such as Barbara Ketcham Wheaton, Susan Pinkard, Sean Takats, Piero Camporesi, and Jennifer J. Davis have examined the rituals and protocols of eighteenth-century meals and the development and symbolism of new forms of cuisine.<sup>82</sup> This project is also indebted to other works dealing with the intellectual, literary, and social significance of food and changing tastes in eighteenth-century culture, such as those by Frédéric Charbonneau, Jean-Claude Bonnet, and Michel Onfray.<sup>83</sup> Stephen Mennell's *All Manners of Food* also offers a helpful vision of eighteenth-century French social, cultural, and gastronomic change, pinpointing moments of culinary development, the emergence of key texts, and discussing the

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<sup>79</sup> Deborah Lupton, *Food, the Body and the Self* (London: SAGE, 1996), p. 1. Lupton offers a comprehensive overview of the multiple and wide-ranging theoretical approaches to ingestion on pp. 6–36.

<sup>80</sup> Robert Appelbaum, *Aguecheek's Beef, Belch's Hiccup and Other Gastronomic Interjections: Literature, Culture and Food among the Early Moderns* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), p. xii. See also Karin Becker and Olivier Leplâtre, who highlight how, in order to avoid anachronism when writing about food, one must first reconstitute the era in which the food is first written and understood in *Écritures du repas: fragments d'un discours gastronomique* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 2007), p. 8.

<sup>81</sup> *Eating the Enlightenment; Feeding France: New Sciences of Food, 1760-1815* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

<sup>82</sup> Wheaton; Susan Pinkard, *A Revolution in Taste: The Rise of French Cuisine, 1650-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Sean Takats, *The Expert Cook in Enlightenment France* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011); Piero Camporesi, *Exotic Brew: The Art of Living in the Age of Enlightenment* (Oxford; Cambridge, Massachusetts: Polity Press, 1994); Jennifer J. Davis, 'Masters of Disguise: French Cooks Between Art and Nature, 1651–1793', *Gastronomica: The Journal of Food and Culture*, 9 (2009), 36–49, and *Defining Culinary Authority: The Transformation of Cooking in France, 1650-1832* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2013). See also Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson, *Accounting for Taste: The Triumph of French Cuisine* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

<sup>83</sup> Charbonneau, *L'École de la gourmandise*; Bonnet, *La Gourmandise et la faim*; Michel Onfray, *La Raison gourmande: philosophie du goût* (Paris: B. Grasset, 1995), and *Le Ventre des philosophes: critique de la raison diététique* (Paris: Librairie générale française, 2005).

specificities of French cooking and dining in comparison to their English counterparts.<sup>84</sup> These texts provide the wider culinary historical background against which the mealtimes discussed in this thesis can be read and understood.

### ***Key concepts***

The key concepts upon which this mixed theoretical and historicised analysis rests are outlined below, demonstrating the complementarity of eighteenth- and twentieth/twenty-first-century approaches to ingestion. Ideas of incorporation and transformation, ingesta as powerful substances with ambivalent effects upon the body, and consumption as an act with significant socio-cultural, economic, and gendered implications are the foundation of this thesis. They are also the basis of how consumption has been understood by thinkers, doctors, and philosophers over the past three hundred years.

#### ***a. Incorporation, transformation and disruption***

Ingestion is simultaneously a mundane, quotidian process and one full of physical and philosophical risk. To consume anything is to allow another substance, both chemical and symbolic, to transgress the borders of one's own body and have it become part of oneself. As Claude Fischler highlights, ingestion is thus 'both banal and fraught with potentially irreversible consequences. To incorporate a food is, in both real and imaginary terms, to incorporate all or some of its properties: we become what we eat.'<sup>85</sup> While ingestion can open the consumer up to the possibility of taking the world into oneself and asserting joyful control over it, in the manner of the grotesque Rabelasian belly,<sup>86</sup> it also offers the possibility of exposing oneself to defilement and, by troubling corporeal boundaries, destabilising any notion of a clearly defined body and self, as Julia

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<sup>84</sup> Stephen Mennell, *All Manners of Food: Eating and Taste in England and France from the Middle Ages to the Present* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996).

<sup>85</sup> Claude Fischler, 'Food, Self and Identity', *Social Science Information*, 27 (1988), 277–292, (p. 281). Fischler's article offers a comprehensive and insightful overview of the many physical and philosophical functions that food plays in our sense of identity, self, and other.

<sup>86</sup> The Rabelasian body 'transgresses [...] its own limits: it swallows, rends the world apart, is enriched and grows at the world's expense. The encounter of man with the world, which takes place inside the open, biting, chewing mouth, is one of the most ancient and most important objects of human thought and history. Here man tastes the world, introduces it into his body, makes it part of himself [...] Man's encounter with the world in the act of eating is joyful, triumphant; he triumphs over the world, devours it without being devoured himself. The limits between man and the world are erased, to man's advantage' (Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. by Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), p. 281).

Kristeva argues in *Pouvoirs de l'horreur*.<sup>87</sup> As an external, natural substance entering the cultured, managed body, food has the power to threaten the 'corps propre', highlighting the vulnerability of the boundaries and systems we erect to differentiate between ourselves and the world around us and calling a simultaneously pleasurable and horrifying attention to the permeability and fleshiness of our bodies.<sup>88</sup> Food, then (much like the sex worker), has the potential to be abject, destabilising as it does identities, systems, and order and potentially exposing the body or even the wider community to defilement.<sup>89</sup> To consume is to disturb the notion of a fixed and stable subject.

Even if a foodstuff is not intrinsically dangerous, it still exerts a powerful force upon the consumer and the bodily processes of digestion and excretion over which she exercises only limited control. This carries significant symbolic implications. Claude Fischler argues that

not only does the eater incorporate the properties of food but, symmetrically, it can be said that the absorption of a food incorporates the eater into a culinary system and therefore into a group which practices it, unless it irremediably excludes him.<sup>90</sup>

Once a consumer knows that her body is altered by and constituted of what she has consumed, she cannot be sure, once a foodstuff has passed her lips, whether the greater agency lies on the part of the eater or the eaten. The banal act of eating throws into question whether we are truly consumers or are in some way consumed by what we put in our bodies.<sup>91</sup>

The problems posed by eating are not simply philosophical. The transformative effects of food and drink are chemical and biological and can result in bodily changes, injury or even death. Given the body's dependency on nourishment, as well as the dangers of overindulgence, ingestion is constantly linked to questions of supply, purity, disease,

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<sup>87</sup> '[T]oute nourriture est susceptible de souiller' (Julia Kristeva, *Pouvoirs de l'horreur: essai sur l'abjection* (Paris: Éditions de Seuil, 1980), p. 91).

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 90–91.

<sup>89</sup> As Kristeva tells us, 'Ce n'est donc pas l'absence de protété ou de santé qui rend abject, mais ce qui perturbe une identité, un système, un ordre. Ce qui ne respecte pas les limites, les places, les règles.' *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>90</sup> Fischler, 'Food, Self and Identity', pp. 281–282.

<sup>91</sup> For more on the question of food consuming the consumer, see Annemarie Mol, 'I Eat an Apple: On Theorizing Subjectivities', *Subjectivity*, 22 (2008), 28–37, (p. 30). For more on food as possessing agency and exerting power over the consumer, see Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2010), particularly Chapter Three: 'Edible Matter', pp. 39–50.

hunger, excess, poisoning, the unknown, self-regulation, and survival.<sup>92</sup> The act of ingestion thus forces us to confront the fragility of our existence. As Claude Fischler highlights in his ‘omnivore’s paradox’, humankind’s vulnerability when eating stems, in part, from our need for a varied diet to guarantee health and our resultant taste for variety; the greater the variety of foodstuffs required, the greater the number of potential risks to which one must expose oneself in order to survive.<sup>93</sup>

The eighteenth century was shaped by these same philosophical and physiological concerns, thanks to rapid advances in philosophy, medicine, and digestive science. French physicians and philosophers combined a vogue for Lockean scepticism about innate ideas with developments in digestive science, proposing that knowledge and ideas could be absorbed through food and drink.<sup>94</sup> Materialist philosophy and medical advances combined to break down the distinctions between body and mind, heightening fears that eating and digesting different foods and drinks could cause spiritual degradation or alterations in one’s character.<sup>95</sup> The world of cookery was transformed by these philosophical and physiological concerns thanks to the emergence of a new culinary style: *la nouvelle cuisine*. Coined by the cookbook writer Menon in 1742, *nouvelle cuisine* described an elegant form of cookery that was self-consciously distinct from classical or medieval styles.<sup>96</sup> With the advent of *nouvelle cuisine*, as Emma Spary notes,

[d]ishes became less substantial and more costly, and fewer spices and seasonings were used in their composition. Nouvelle cuisine was based around the extraction and concentration of alimentary essences, and the provocation of appetites by the masterly manipulation of flavors. Its skill was the skill of artful combination: in a good dish, none of the original ingredients should be readily identifiable, and no

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<sup>92</sup> David M. Kaplan, *Philosophy of Food* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), p. 5.

<sup>93</sup> Fischler, ‘Food, Self and Identity’, pp. 275–293. See also Fischler’s *L’Omnivore* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2010), pp. 61–80.

<sup>94</sup> Charbonneau, p. 28.

<sup>95</sup> For more on models of digestion in eighteenth-century France, see Laurence Brockliss and Colin Jones, *The Medical World of Early Modern France* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1997), pp. 26ff.; Gilles Barroux, *Philosophie, maladie, médecine au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2008); Antonio Clericuzio ‘Chemical and Mechanical Theories of Digestion in Early Modern Medicine’, *Studies in History and Philosophy of Biomedical Sciences*, 43 (2012), 329–337 (pp. 329–331); Elizabeth A. Williams, ‘Food and Feeling: ‘Digestive Force’ and the Nature of Morbidity in Vitalist Medicine’, in *Vital Matters: Eighteenth-Century Views of Conception, Life and Death* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), pp. 201–221, and ‘Sciences of Appetite in the Enlightenment, 1750–1800’, *Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences*, 43 (2012), 392–404; Anne C. Vila, *Enlightenment and Pathology: Sensibility in the Literature and Medicine of Eighteenth-Century France* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), p. 43.

<sup>96</sup> Pinkard, pp. 156–157. For a brief but comprehensive overview of *la nouvelle cuisine*, see pp. 156–165.

single flavour should predominate over others – in effect, good cooks produced an entirely new compound flavour, forming a harmoniously balanced whole.<sup>97</sup>

This new style offered diners a paradoxical mix of nature and artifice, combining voguish lightness and an apparent focus on simplification, cleanliness, and health on the one hand with fears of overstimulation and corruption or not knowing precisely *what* one was eating on the other.<sup>98</sup> Cookery was increasingly codified, with chefs and cookbook writers asserting themselves as artists, chemists, and doctors at the helm of a culinary revolution, capable of transforming diners' health and spirit.<sup>99</sup> Doctors and cooks such as Antoine Le Camus, Jourdan Le Cointe, and Louis Lémery wrote extensively on the capacity for foodstuffs to enhance or diminish one's morals, mind, and intelligence, as well as the health of one's body.<sup>100</sup> Le Cointe's text on 'cuisine de santé', for instance, explored the idea that the most vital knowledge was that of how foodstuffs are 'destinés à former notre constitution, à fortifier tous nos membres, à ranimer ces organes destinés à la perfection des sens, & à être les médiateurs des talents, de l'esprit, du génie.'<sup>101</sup> Writers such as the Abbé du Bos and Montesquieu proposed similar models for the adoption of national characteristics from food and the *terroir* in which it grew, and Rousseau and Diderot expressed concerns that a carnivorous diet could make refined humans bloodthirsty and animalistic.<sup>102</sup> Consequently, for the eighteenth-century consumer, foods, drinks, and the cooks who produced them elicited as much fear as excitement.

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<sup>97</sup> Spary, *Eating the Enlightenment*, pp. 196–197.

<sup>98</sup> Wheaton, p. 196. For more on coffee, liqueurs and stimulants, see Spary, *Eating the Enlightenment*, particularly Chapter 3 'The Place of Coffee' and Chapter 4 'Distilling Learning'.

<sup>99</sup> Sean Takats explores the increasing skill and fear of cooks in detail in *The Expert Cook in Enlightenment France*. See pp. 95–97 for an exploration of cooks and their relationship to *nouvelle cuisine*.

<sup>100</sup> Louis Lémery, *Traité des aliments* (Paris: J.B.Cusson and P. Witte, 1702); Antoine Le Camus, *Médecine de l'esprit*, 2nd edn (Paris: Ganeau, 1769); Jourdan Le Cointe, *La Cuisine de santé* (Paris: Briand, 1790).

<sup>101</sup> Le Cointe, p. 11.

<sup>102</sup> 'Une des preuves que le goût de la viande n'est pas naturel à l'homme, est l'indifférence que les enfans ont pour ce mets-là, & la préférence qu'ils donnent tous à des nourritures végétales, telles que le laitage, la pâtisserie, les fruits, etc. Il importe surtout de ne pas dénaturer ce goût primitif, & de ne point rendre les enfans carnassiers ; si ce n'est pour leur santé, c'est pour leur caractère ; car, de quelque manière qu'on explique l'expérience, il est certain que les grands mangeurs de viande sont en général cruels & féroces plus que les autres hommes [...] Tous les sauvages sont cruels ; & leurs mœurs ne les portent point à l'être : cette cruauté vient de leurs aliments. Ils vont à la guerre comme à la chasse, & traitent les hommes comme des ours. En Angleterre même les bouchers ne sont pas reçus en témoignage, non plus que les chirurgiens. Les scélérats s'endurcissent au meurtre en buvant du sang' (Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Émile ou de l'éducation*, in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Gagnebin and Raymond, IV (1969), pp. 239–868 (p. 411)). See also Denis Diderot, *Eléments de physiologie*, ed. by Paolo Quintili, (Paris: Champion, 2004), p. 230.

### ***b. Ambivalent ingesta***

During the *ancien régime*, food acted as a sort of *pharmakon*, as Frédéric Charbonneau has noted.<sup>103</sup> Almost all ingesta simultaneously occupied the role of poison, medicine, restorative, and transformative for the eighteenth-century body and mind, depending upon the opinion of the cook, consumer or doctor who encountered it, the quantity and quality that was consumed, the physiology of the person eating, and whether the food itself was tasted with an approach closer to restraint, *gourmandise* or gluttony.

Physicians in the latter part of the century for instance developed concerns over the increasing availability and democratisation of foods and drinks previously considered to be luxury items, such as coffee, tea, chocolate, and liqueurs, due to their potentially overstimulating and increasingly widespread effects.<sup>104</sup> However, on the new and expanding health-food market, these foods were also sold as nutritious supplements to one's diet.<sup>105</sup> Spices and seasonings occupied a similarly ambivalent position, simultaneously celebrated as beneficial to digestion and feared for their capacity to cause 'des fermentations extraordinaires, qui donnent à nos humeurs une fort grand acreté, & qui les corrompent en peu de temps.'<sup>106</sup> There were, indeed, few foodstuffs that were not at some point criticised as harmful. The extent of this ambivalence towards food and drink is well illustrated by the guidelines set out by Le Camus in his *Médecine de l'Esprit*. The ideal food was delicate, in order to create refined juices within the body, yet not so delicate and refined as to lead to gourmandise, excess, or the softening of the consumer.<sup>107</sup> Crude, unrefined foodstuffs were thought to cause thick humours and a heavy, unrefined spirit, yet simplicity and naturalness were thought capable of restoring man to his former state of uncorrupted virtue and strength.<sup>108</sup> Following nutritional advice, even that contained within the bounds of one volume, required a careful negotiation of dietary guidelines that seemed at best highly exacting, at worst highly contradictory.

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<sup>103</sup> Charbonneau, p. 35.

<sup>104</sup> See Spary, *Feeding France*: Chapter Four, 'Health Foods and the Medical Marketplace', pp. 125–166.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Lémery, unpaginated preface.

<sup>107</sup> Le Camus, p. 169.

<sup>108</sup> Le Camus, pp. 169–170.

### *c. Society and economics*

Ingestion's relationship to identity was and remains cultural as well as chemical. Modes of food production and consumption played a significant role in cultivating, representing, and reinforcing social groups and structures, defining who was included or excluded from them. As Peter Farb and George Armelagos put it, 'to know what, where, how, when, and with whom people eat is to know the character of their society[.]'<sup>109</sup> Particularly significant is the idea of group solidarity, wherein sharing meals is indicative of diners' equality and acceptance of common rules, at the same time as the meal exerts a potentially consuming force upon the diner, absorbing them into the community whose food they ingest.<sup>110</sup> These social implications of ingestion are inextricably linked to questions of economic power.<sup>111</sup> Sociability, belonging, and collective identity are thus fundamental to eighteenth-century French ingestion, particularly in light of the period's extreme socio-economic stratification and simultaneous increased anxiety about class mobility, the emergence of new public forms of drinking and dining created by the café and the restaurant, the increased diversity of fashionable new foods, and the incursion of previously elite culinary knowledge into bourgeois kitchens through the spread of the cookbook.<sup>112</sup>

Inside or outside the home, meals were also the key moments around which an individual or household's private and social life would be organised, and at which one would demonstrate one's wealth and refinement through new modes of consumption, such as the *souper*, which came to define eighteenth-century elite dining culture.<sup>113</sup> Thanks to the nocturnalization of urban life, a flourishing nighttime economy, and the expansion of

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<sup>109</sup> Peter Farb and Georges Armelagos, *Consuming Passions: The Anthropology of Eating* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1980), p. 205. This idea is fundamental to foundational socio-anthropological understandings of food and food culture. See for instance Lévi-Strauss, *Le Cru et le cuit* and Mary Douglas, 'Deciphering a Meal', *Daedalus*, 101 (1972), 61–81.

<sup>110</sup> For equality and solidarity, see Anderson, p. 6, and Carolyn Korsmeyer, *Making Sense of Taste: Food and Philosophy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), p. 200. For the diner as consumed, as above, see Fischler, 'Food, Self and Identity', pp. 281–282.

<sup>111</sup> See Jack Goody, *Cooking, Cuisine and Class: A Study in Comparative Sociology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Sidney Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (New York: Penguin Books, 1986).

<sup>112</sup> See Spary, *Eating the Enlightenment*, pp. 96–145; Markman Ellis, *The Coffee House: A Cultural History* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 2004); W. Scott Haine, *The World of the Paris Café: Sociability Among the French Working Class 1789-1914* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); Rebecca Spang, *The Invention of the Restaurant: Paris and Modern Gastronomic Culture* (Cambridge, Massachusetts; London: Harvard University Press, 2000); see also Wheaton, pp. 200–212.

<sup>113</sup> Antoine Lilti has observed that the meal played an important, though supple and changing, role in organising eighteenth-century life in *Le Monde des salons: sociabilité et mondanité à Paris au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Fayard, 2005), p. 226; Wheaton, p. 156.

street lighting over the course of the century, the meals that functioned as temporal markers slid later and later into the night, shaping the day's timetable (for the moneyed classes most of all) into one of late-night supper parties.<sup>114</sup> In contrast, putting food on the table remained a troublesome preoccupation for most of the population.<sup>115</sup> Ingestion was a key element of sociability and the performance of elite identity on the one hand, and a marker of limited means and an inevitable preoccupation with necessity on the other.

#### *d. Sex and gender*

Particularly relevant to this study is the relationship between ingestion, sex, and gender. As Carole M. Counihan has highlighted, 'feeding and eating are profoundly meaningful in all cultures and are deeply entwined with gender relations.'<sup>116</sup> Similarly, following Arlene Voski Avakian and Barbara Haber's lead, a significant part of this analysis is grounded in the idea that 'studying the relationship between women and food can help us to understand how women reproduce, resist, and rebel against gender constructions as they are practiced and contested in various sites, as well as illuminate the contexts in which these struggles are located.'<sup>117</sup> Ingestion was no less significant to ideas of gender in eighteenth-century France, in contrast to the dietary knowledge that circulated until the Renaissance, which recognised nutrition as broadly gender-neutral with the exceptions that women should eat more cold and moist food than men, in accordance with their naturally colder, moister humors, and tailor their diets when appropriate to aid conception.<sup>118</sup> With the mid- to late-eighteenth century witnessing a growing medical and ideological delineation between man and woman, the embodied pursuits of eating and digestion became increasingly, though often inconsistently, different for men and

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<sup>114</sup> Craig Koslofsky, *Evening's Empire: A History of the Night in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), particularly p. 233. For the effects of street lighting and nocturnalisation on Parisian women's lives see p. 194.

<sup>115</sup> Roche, *Histoire des choses banales*, pp. 239–240. See pp. 239–267 for a broad overview of food and diet in eighteenth-century France.

<sup>116</sup> Carole M. Counihan, *The Anthropology of Food and Body: Gender, Meaning, and Power* (New York, London: Routledge, 1999), p. 2.

<sup>117</sup> Arlene Voski Avakian and Barbara Haber, *From Betty Crocker to Feminist Food Studies: Critical Perspectives on Women and Food* (Amherst, Massachusetts: University of Massachusetts Press, 2005), p. viii. For more on food and its relationship to gender, see also Alice McLean, 'The Intersection of Gender and Food Studies', in *Routledge International Handbook of Food Studies*, ed. by Albala, pp. 250–264. Unlike much recent work on women and food, which focuses on woman's unrecognised labour and the significance of her role and identity as they relate to food production, this thesis is almost entirely concerned with consumption, with neither the sex workers nor the wealthy clients setting foot in the kitchen.

<sup>118</sup> Ken Albala, *Eating Right in the Renaissance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), p. 151.

women.<sup>119</sup> While little literature was produced that focused specifically on the female body,<sup>120</sup> food received significant attention as an ambivalent aspect of an increasingly ‘civilized’ society, wherein ingestion was one process that could ‘bolste[r] representations of male power while providing the conditions that undermined the physical basis for masculinity.’<sup>121</sup> While sturdy *embonpoint* and a cultivated *gourmandise* were markers of admirable, wealthy masculinity, obesity and gluttony were linked to impotence and disease, and fashionable delicacies such as coffee were linked to a rise in effeminacy and bodily weakness.<sup>122</sup> The table was a site at which masculine identities were always potentially vulnerable.

Where men were believed to be driven by higher cognitive processes and the vascular system, women were thought to be less intellectually developed, primarily defined by their sensitive nervous tissue, and thus disposed of greater digestive energy that would allow them to process sufficient food to feed themselves and their children, whether in the womb or through their milk.<sup>123</sup> Thanks to woman’s greater ‘sensibility’, she was supposedly more beholden to the functions of her digestive system and more vulnerable to hysterical illnesses caused by potent or luxurious substances such as coffee and chocolate.<sup>124</sup> Consequently, although women’s diets were still predominantly viewed in

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<sup>119</sup> While the emergence and acceptance of a distinct ‘two-sex model’ has been critiqued by, for instance, Helen King (see *The One Sex Body On Trial: The Classical and Early Modern Evidence* (London: Routledge, 2016) for an in-depth discussion on this) it is nonetheless difficult to dispute that increasing attentions were paid to sexual, bodily and psychic differences between men and women over the course of the century. See Londa L. Schiebinger, *The Mind Has No Sex?: Women in the Origins of Modern Science* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1989), Chapter 7, ‘More Than Skin Deep: The Scientific Search for Sexual Difference’, particularly pp. 189–191. See also Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1990); Ludmilla Jordanova, *Sexual Visions: Images of Gender in Science and Medicine Between the Eighteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989); and Lieselotte Steinbrügge, *The Moral Sex: Woman's Nature in the French Enlightenment*, trans. by Pamela E. Selwyn (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), which have provided much grounding for all subsequent work on the idea of sexual difference, and Michel Delon, ‘Le Prétex-te anatomique’, *Dix-huitième siècle*, 12 (1980), 35–48 for its specific focus on France.

<sup>120</sup> The first regimen specifically targeted at women was Jean Goulin’s *Le Médecin des dames*, produced in 1771, which was as concerned with the *toilette* as with diet, and discussed women in the third person, suggesting that dietary literature was still targeted at a male audience, rather than tailored so that women might work upon their own health. David Gentilcore, *Food and Health in Early Modern Europe: Diet, Medicine and Society, 1450-1800* (London; New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), p. 45.

<sup>121</sup> Christopher E. Forth, ‘Manhood Incorporated: Diet and the Embodiment of “Civilized” Masculinity’, *Men and Masculinities*, 11.5 (2009), 578–601 (p. 580).

<sup>122</sup> Georges Vigarello, *Les Métamorphoses du gras: histoire de l’obésité du Moyen Age au XXe siècle* (Paris: Seuil, 2010), pp. 138–141.

<sup>123</sup> Jean Charles Marguerite Guillaume de Grimaud, *Mémoire sur la nutrition* (Montpellier: Jean Martel Ainé, 1787), pp. 132, 185.

<sup>124</sup> Williams, ‘Food and Feeling’, pp. 215–216; Jordanova, *Sexual Visions*, pp. 27–28.

relation to their reproductive biology,<sup>125</sup> the late eighteenth century saw an increased interest in what might constitute an appropriate ‘female diet’, tailored to woman’s body and role in society. Roussel’s *Système physique et moral de la femme* (1775) suggested that women’s delicate characters and constitutions left them overwhelmed by hearty nourishment and that they were better served with light, delicate foodstuffs than heavy meats.<sup>126</sup> ‘Natural’ woman was not carnivorous but inclined towards fruits, vegetables, and dairy,<sup>127</sup> exemplified by Rousseau’s sweet-toothed, almost Pythagorean heroine Julie.<sup>128</sup> A vigorous appetite and a taste for meats, alcohols, coffee, and spices were no longer prized, as they had been in seventeenth-century women,<sup>129</sup> but were instead indicative of unhealthy, defective appetites that would lead to their destruction.<sup>130</sup> In their stead came a vogue for light or affectedly restrained eating for the ideal elite woman, who would take very little nourishment and treat food as ornament, rather than sustenance or bodily gratification.<sup>131</sup> The eighteenth-century distaste for women who favoured spices, large portions and supposedly unnatural foodstuffs was not linked solely to scepticism about culinary developments and the dangers of luxury; it was a profoundly gendered concern, and one that emerged frequently at the real or fictional sex worker’s table.

When considering the relationship between food and sex work, one must also highlight food’s relationship to sex, even if this association might appear self-evident. Eating,

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<sup>125</sup> In Lémery’s *Traité des aliments* (1702), for instance, numerous foods are described as useful for inducing menstrual periods, including orange zest (p. 53), cinnamon (p. 196), and capers (p. 96).

<sup>126</sup> ‘la quantité de nourriture nécessaire à chaque individu, est déterminée par la constitution, le tempérament, la force & le genre de vie de ce même individu [...] La nature, dans les personnes du sexe, ne doit demander qu’une quantité proportionnée à la foiblesse de leurs organes, & aux exercices peu fatigants dont elles s’occupent’ (Pierre Roussel, *Système physique et moral de la femme ou tableau philosophique de la constitution, de l’état organique, du tempérament, des mœurs et des fonctions propres au sexe* (Paris: Vincent, 1775), p. 122).

<sup>127</sup> Roussel, pp. 122–123.

<sup>128</sup> ‘Il n’y avait pas jusqu’au choix du régal qui ne contribuât à le rendre intéressant. Le laitage et le sucre sont un des goûts naturels du sexe, et comme le symbole de l’innocence et de la douceur qui font son plus aimable ornement. Les hommes, au contraire, recherchent en général les saveurs fortes et les liqueurs spiritueuses, aliments plus convenables à la vie active et laborieuse que la nature leur demande ; et quand ces divers goûts viennent à s’altérer et se confondre, c’est une marque presque infaillible du mélange désordonné des sexes [...] Julie elle-même pourrait me servir d’exemple ; car quoique sensuelle et gourmande dans ses repas, elle n’aime ni la viande, ni les ragoûts, ni le sel, et n’a jamais goûté de vin pur : d’excellents légumes, les œufs, la crème, les fruits, voilà sa nourriture ordinaire ; et, sans le poisson qu’elle aime aussi beaucoup, elle serait une véritable pythagoricienne’ (Rousseau (1961), pp. 452–453). For more on the role of food in *Julie ou la nouvelle Héloïse* see Spencer K. Wertz, ‘Taste and Food in Rousseau’s *Julie, or the New Héloïse*’, *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 47.3 (2013) 24–35.

<sup>129</sup> Camporesi, p. 101.

<sup>130</sup> Roussel, pp. 123–124.

<sup>131</sup> Camporesi, pp. 101–105.

drinking and sex are similarly intimate acts, in which the satisfaction of bodily appetites results from the transgression of bodily boundaries and from sensory stimulation. As Carolyn Korsmeyer notes, of all the senses '[t]aste requires perhaps the most intimate congress with the object of perception'.<sup>132</sup> Although driven by instinct, both eating and sex are heavily overdetermined and imbued with vast social significance.<sup>133</sup> Ideas of 'gourmandise' and 'gluttony', like 'desire' or 'lust', reflect society's attitudes to the relationship between necessity and pleasure, acceptable enjoyment and excess.<sup>134</sup> Eighteenth-century visions of the sexual consuming body were, as well as being related to sensuality, grounded in digestive science. Diet was fundamental to the body's sexual economy, with seminal fluid thought to derive from digested food and drink,<sup>135</sup> and malnutrition caused, within the Tissotian model, by excessive sexual expenditure.<sup>136</sup> The alimentary and the sexual were not two separate spheres that happened to coexist within the body, but rather two facets of one larger, interconnected system dependent upon the same digestive process.

By reading ingestion and sex work in tandem with more recent food theory and eighteenth-century understandings of food and drink, and their significance to the mind, body, and spirit on an individual and social level, it is possible to uncover their significance to these narratives for readers in the twenty-first century, to unpack the cultural context in which the texts were written, and to better understand their creation, publication, and readership in eighteenth-century France. Food and drink, so crucial to the contemporary cultural imaginary, are more than mere decoration or an added element of pleasure within erotic narratives: they encapsulate and illuminate the realities of the world that these texts depict and reveal the symbolic importance of ingestion to readers and writers of literary sex work. It is this real and symbolic significance of ingestion that this thesis explores.

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<sup>132</sup> Korsmeyer, p. 3.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>134</sup> Prose, p. 8.

<sup>135</sup> Unknown, 'Nutrition', in *Encyclopédie ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, ed. by Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d'Alembert, 17 vols (Paris: Briasson, David, Le Breton, Durand, 1751-66), XI (1765), pp. 286-290; Diderot (2004), p. 230.

<sup>136</sup> Samuel Auguste David Tissot, *L'Onanisme, dissertation sur les maladies produites par la masturbation, troisième édition* (Lausanne: Marc Chapuis, 1764), pp. 1-36.

### *e. Contemporary resonances*

As well as enhancing our understanding of eighteenth-century culture, the following study of the intersections between food, sex work, and the role of women is relevant today. Ingestion is still central to the cultural construction of sex, sex work, and sexually active women. Beyond the meals and drinks offered in self-styled elite brothels, bars and restaurants are important locations for escorts and clients, or for (appropriately named) sugar daddies and babies to carry out their transactions.<sup>137</sup> With rituals of wining and dining, the modern sex trade caters to clients' desire for 'companionship' – literally the sharing of bread.<sup>138</sup> Beyond explicitly transactional frameworks, a man buying a meal or drinks still forms a significant part of traditional, heteronormative dating culture, and it is not unusual for this to take on its own transactional tenor: that a man should be 'owed' romantic attention or sex in exchange for a cocktail or restaurant meal, for instance, is a myth that still shapes societal understandings of appropriate female behaviour, rape, and sexual assault.<sup>139</sup> Inside or outside the frames of professional transactions or consent, the table is a key point at which sexuality and power are negotiated. Sex is also linked to consumption deemed wise or foolish, acceptable or unacceptable. That women who get drunk are responsible for their own sexual assault is a still commonplace of our contemporary sexual culture, from the darkest comments by internet trolls to judges' comments when summing up rape cases.<sup>140</sup> Female consumption is inextricably linked to sexual mores, sexual vulnerability, and a woman's perceived intelligence and morality.

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<sup>137</sup> For contemporary insights into eating and drinking as a sex worker and sugar baby, see Karley Sciortino's *Vice* column, in which she interviews sex workers around the world on what and how they eat and drink during their work. Karley Sciortino, 'Munchies', *Vice*

<[https://munchies.vice.com/en\\_us/contributor/karley-sciortino](https://munchies.vice.com/en_us/contributor/karley-sciortino)> [accessed 25 May 2017].

<sup>138</sup> From the Latin 'cum' – with, and 'panis' – bread. See 'companion, n.1.', *OED Online*, <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/37402>> [accessed 1 June 2017].

<sup>139</sup> Camille Ward and Paula Lundberg-Love, 'Sexual Abuse of Women', in *"Intimate" Violence Against Women: When Spouses, Partners, or Lovers Attack*, ed. by Paula K. Lundberg-Love and Shelly L. Marmion (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2006), pp. 47–68 (p. 60); Stacy L. Mellicoat and Connie Estrada Ireland, *Women and Crime: The Essentials* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE, 2014), p. 75. For a more light-hearted but nonetheless egregious example of this dating commonplace, see the media coverage of the woman whose date asked for a contribution towards the cost of the drinks that he had bought for her when she revealed that she was not interested in pursuing a relationship. Telegraph Reporters, 'Designer Asked for Drinks Refund by Jilted Man After Trying to Let Him Down Gently Following Just One Date', *Telegraph Online*, 14 February 2017 <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/02/14/designer-receives-request-drinks-refund-jilted-man-trying-let/>> [accessed 7 June 2017].

<sup>140</sup> See, for instance, Lindsey Kushner QC's comments that '[g]irls are perfectly entitled to drink themselves into the ground but should be aware people who are potential defendants to rape gravitate towards girls who have been drinking (Sam Lister, 'Judge Accused Of 'Victim Blaming' For Saying Women Risk Rape by Getting Drunk', *Independent*, 11 March 2017 <<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/female-judge-rape-drunk-comments-northumbria-lindsey-kushner-manchester-a7624191.html>> [accessed 5 May 2017] (para. 10 of 13)).

At one remove (however slight) from the realm of sexual assault, the patriarchal societal gaze still concerns itself with women as consumables and with what women consume. Women, far more than men, are described using food metaphors, framing them as edibles, whether diminutive confectionery ('sweetie', 'honey', 'sugar'), desserts linked to sex and sex appeal ('cheesecake', 'tart'), foods past their best ('prune', 'mutton dressed as lamb'), foods used to exoticise and 'other' (black women's skin likened to 'chocolate' or 'coffee'; 'brown sugar', 'hot tamale'), or foods that fragment bodies into assemblages of edible sex characteristics ('melons', 'clams', and 'cherries' waiting to be popped). These alimentary images are also present in modern French, with women given diminutive food names such as 'poulette' or 'sucre d'orge', the female anatomy referred to as an 'abricot', 'pot de miel' or a 'moule', breasts as 'melons' or 'oeufs au plat', unattractive women described as 'boudins', and sex workers as 'morues'. We are, as Caitlin Hines has discussed, consistently conceptualised as consumable goods within a metaphorical, social construction of womanhood dependent upon male power, the absence of female agency, and woman's alienation from her own body.<sup>141</sup>

Edible women are, moreover, told that their 'sex appeal' depends upon their own restricted ingestion. Contemporary norms of conventional beauty, which prize either thinness or an extremely honed physique, are often only achievable through extreme dietary control. Global industries, steered by women as well as men, depend upon individual and social preoccupations with the female consuming body. To inhabit (or strive to inhabit) an acceptable body is often to expend significant emotional and physical energy on exercise, guilt, and denial. It is also to occupy and command less physical space. Diet is frequently linked to ideas of self-control and self-discipline, emotional stability or instability, acceptability or unacceptability. Food and drink, in both their preparation and consumption, serve as tools of conscious or unconscious oppression, just as much as they can become tools of liberation.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Caitlin Hines, 'Rebaking the Pie: The Woman as Dessert Metaphor', in *Reinventing Identities: The Gendered Self in Discourse*, ed. by M. Bucholtz, A.C. Liang and L.A. Sutton (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 145–162. See also Iraj Montashery, 'Construction of Gender through Metaphor and Metonymy', *Advances in English Linguistics*, 2.1 (2013), 105–109 (pp. 106–108). For the intersections between women and meat as consumable goods, see Carol J. Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory, Twentieth Anniversary Edition* (London: Continuum, 2010).

<sup>142</sup> For more on the circumscription and social repression of female appetites, see for instance Suzie Orbach, *Fat Is a Feminist Issue: The Anti-Diet Guide to Permanent Weight Loss* (New York: Paddington, 1978); Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used Against Women* (New York: W.

Alongside these intersections of the edible, the erotic, and the eroticised lies, of course, the ambivalent image of woman as a source of abundance and nourishment. The links between women, breastfeeding, and providing for a partner or family through alimentary labour tie women to the kitchen in an enduring cultural imaginary rooted in patriarchal social structures and biological determinism. This is not to say that woman *is* what or how she eats, or how she is conceptually eaten, but that she exists within a set of cultural constructs that associate women, and sex workers among them, with the alimentary realm. Food and drink remain tied to sex and sexuality in multiple complex, gendered, and often misogynistic ways, whether concealed or amplified by their gloss of sensual pleasure. In acknowledging these highly gendered implications of food and its representation, this thesis aims to recognise and complement Alice McLean's insight that

[i]n keeping with women's studies at large, feminist food studies has locked onto the domestic sphere as a conflicted site, one that simultaneously reproduces patriarchal values and, hence, the physical, intellectual, and ideological subordination of women *and* that serves as a space where women enjoy an amount of power and control far surpassing that which they exert over the public and political realms. Feminist food studies likewise focuses intently on the female body and the myriad ways in which its appetites are nourished or suppressed by cultural forces.<sup>143</sup>

While the sphere of food and sex work discussed in this thesis is not 'domestic', it nonetheless grapples with these same issues of patriarchy and the female body.

Yet despite its resonance with the modern world, this thesis does not seek to shoehorn contemporary feminism into eighteenth-century texts. The analyses that follow are, as has been discussed, framed more by historicised interpretations, close reading, and eighteenth- and twentieth-century food theory than by the application of extensive feminist criticism. Where this criticism is used, it is to illuminate issues that emerge organically from the texts themselves. However, the darkness, complexity, and misogyny that are revealed in food and its role in eighteenth-century sex work are frequently relevant to the modern reader and feminist, and these resonances should not be ignored. Moreover, I can no more claim to have detached myself from my own politics in writing this thesis than can the multiple male scholars who have, in a world that still offers them

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Morrow, 1991); Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

<sup>143</sup> McLean, p. 250.

consistent approbation at the table and in the bedroom, interpreted eighteenth-century libertine ingestion as another form of masculine erotic pleasure.

## CHAPTER ONE

### FOOD, DRINK, AND SEX WORK IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY FRANCE

The rituals, social implications, and physiological effects of ingestion were crucial to the eighteenth-century sex trade, with a woman's day-to-day existence and professional success dependent upon the satisfaction of gustatory as well as sexual appetites. Yet despite the inextricable link between food, drink, and transactional sex in eighteenth-century France, borne out by countless references to drinks, *dîners*, *soupers*, and the like in both the historical record and in contemporary fiction, little focused attention has been paid to the precise material relationship between the sex trade, ingestion, and the food and drink industries in eighteenth-century France, either in fictional or non-fictional sources. In order to fully understand the role of food and drink in depictions of the sex trade, and in light of the diversity of the sex trade, of eighteenth-century foods and drinks, and of the ritual and significance surrounding the meal then and now, we must first explore the meal itself. Only by turning first to the historical context and diversity of eighteenth-century sex work, and then to the diverse ways in which food and drink featured in and formed the sex trade, might we read variations on the mealtime scene within the complex context in which they were originally written and intended to be understood. The following overview of sex work (in its myriad forms) and its relationship to ingestion is the combined result of assimilated research by scholars focusing on sex work in the eighteenth-century and original research on the records of the *Bureau de la discipline des mœurs*, the police department responsible for overseeing and documenting the Paris sex trade in the mid-to-late eighteenth century under the supervision of two police inspectors, Jean-Baptiste Meusnier and his successor Louis Marais.<sup>1</sup> These records, explored further in Chapter Two, clearly demonstrate the symbolic and practical significance of ingestion and ingestive ritual to sex work, providing the context within which contemporary literary interest in food and sex work might be understood.

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<sup>1</sup> These records form the basis of much of Benabou's research and are at the heart of Nina Kushner's investigation of the elite sex trade in *Erotic Exchanges*.

### *Sex work in its eighteenth-century context*

To understand the complexities of eighteenth-century sex work and the range of responses that it elicited within French society, we must first turn to the legal and historical context from which it emerged.<sup>2</sup> Sanctioned and supported by municipal brothels across medieval Europe, sex work was accepted and recognised as a valid form of labour much like any other until the sixteenth century.<sup>3</sup> From 1500 onwards, however, a succession of laws criminalizing sex work spread across the continent, following a groundswell of repressive religious sentiment and an increasingly fervent response to the spread of syphilis.<sup>4</sup> France was no exception to this trend. Its city brothels were ordered to close in the 1530s, and sex work was outlawed completely by royal ordinance in 1560.<sup>5</sup> Yet although sex work was banned, the desire for sex and sex workers hardly diminished as a result. The repression of municipal brothels, combined with the emergence and spread of the elite courtesan who began her life in the Renaissance papal court, introduced a novel and complex hierarchy into European sex work.<sup>6</sup> Cut off from centralised regulation and official tolerance, the sex worker had no guarantee of her wellbeing or survival, but a lucky few could amass colossal wealth and independence. However, the lives of those further down the hierarchy became more precarious as time wore on. Almost one hundred and twenty years after the first repressive laws were introduced, state opposition to sex work was reinforced by another ordinance of 1684 which determined that '[l]es femmes d'une débauche et prostitution publique et scandaleuse, ou qui en prostituent les autres' were now to be viewed as criminals and imprisoned in Salpêtrière.<sup>7</sup> This repressive stance was nuanced by a further ordinance of 1713, which formalised the difference between 'public' and 'private' sex work, highlighting that real criminality lay in the public visibility of vice, not sexual labour itself, and meted out punishments accordingly.<sup>8</sup> A woman with numerous lovers and a scandalous reputation could be classified as a 'prostituée publique' and punished, while

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<sup>2</sup> The definitive work on the history of eighteenth-century sex work is, of course, Benabou's *La Prostitution et la police des mœurs*. This, and the texts cited below, form the basis of the following brief summary, provided to offer a brief and sweeping contextual insight, and provide the wider context against which the texts discussed in this thesis will be read.

<sup>3</sup> Magdy Badir, 'Législation et définition de la prostitution au dix-huitième siècle', *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*, 249 (1987), 447–466 (p. 447).

<sup>4</sup> Norberg, 'Prostitution', pp. 394–395.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 394–395.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 397–398.

<sup>7</sup> Badir, p. 449.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 452.

those who engaged in more covert forms of transactional sex work were increasingly spared for their discretion.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, by 1720 Parisian law-enforcers could arbitrarily and autocratically round up and incarcerate women suspected of public prostitution.<sup>10</sup> While women who plied their trade in public or emptied the pockets of respectable men might be condemned, those who ran well-kept brothels or served as elite mistresses were usually tolerated if they cooperated with the forces of law, often by allowing themselves to be objects and agents of police surveillance, as Nina Kushner has highlighted.<sup>11</sup> Many madams were tolerated in this way until well into the second half of the century. This collusion further precluded any clear-cut rules on what was, or was not, illegal and unacceptable sex work. The sex worker's position and ultimate fate were dependent upon the whims of her clients or *entreteneur* and the law-enforcers with whom she came into contact – in short, upon varied forms of male control.

Moreover, any consideration of eighteenth-century sex work and its role in an increasingly repressive society should also recognise its legal ambiguity. In eighteenth-century France, the Paris police had no official juridical definition of what the 'femme prostituée' was, or was not.<sup>12</sup> As Magdy Badir notes, nebulous definitions of sex work granted the police an increased access to many individuals' private lives:

Dès l'instant où les termes comme 'débauche', 'prostituée', 'scandale', 'public' acquièrent un sens large et vague, où l'on confond concubinage avec prostitution publique, la police peut se permettre de s'infiltrer abusivement dans le domaine de la vie privée.<sup>13</sup>

Beyond the language of policing, the broader concept of what constituted a sex worker was similarly vague. As Olwen Hufton highlights, the word 'prostitute' might mean

the girl who is wholly maintained in her own establishment by one man and who might be quite lavishly maintained at that [...], it comprehends the street walker, full or part-time, who might or might not be a home-based *grizette*, the woman in a bawdy house sharing her income with a *concierge* and ponce, the waitress in the *cabaret* willing to oblige the customers for a consideration, the camp-follower [...]. At the end of the line were the *véniennes*, many no longer able to ply their trade and left to rot in a *dépot*.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Norberg, 'Prostitutes', p. 401.

<sup>11</sup> Kushner, *Erotic Exchanges*, pp. 29–37, 100–106.

<sup>12</sup> Badir, p. 453.

<sup>13</sup> Badir, p. 451.

<sup>14</sup> Olwen Hufton, *The Poor of Eighteenth-Century France: 1750–1789* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), pp. 310–311. Given the contemporary focus on sex work, crime, and visibility, a woman branded a 'femme prostituée' might not have engaged in transactional sex at all, but merely been publicly known as promiscuous (Coward (1980), pp. 363–364).

Significantly, these categories were not fixed for life. The nebulous definition of what constituted sex work was matched by the extraordinary social mobility of which the sex worker was potentially capable. Women who had begun with nothing could, with skill and business acumen, climb the ranks to establish themselves in extraordinary luxury as influential kept mistresses. They could just as readily find themselves catapulted onto the streets, having fallen out of favour with the men who held their purse strings. As Vera Lee puts it, ‘social mobility was most possible, most rapid and most turbulent’ for sex workers in eighteenth-century France.<sup>15</sup>

To offer a brief overview of some of the forms of sex work common to eighteenth-century Paris, the primary location depicted in this thesis, we might begin with less wealthy women. Poorer sex workers operated freelance, as army camp followers, for instance, or as streetwalkers who plied their trade in all corners of the city, offering immediate and inexpensive transactions.<sup>16</sup> Alternatively, they might work as shop girls, particularly in the dressmaking industry, or serve in taverns, renting furnished rooms where they would live and entertain their clients, supplementing their meagre incomes with frequent or infrequent incursions into the sex trade.<sup>17</sup> The Palais-Royal, already synonymous with venality for decades, provided a key locus of democratised Parisian sex work in the latter part of the eighteenth century, alongside the well-established hotspots of Montmartre and the Portes Saint-Denis and Saint-Martin.<sup>18</sup> Sex workers could be found in public gardens, such as the Jardin du Luxembourg and the Tuileries, near barracks and docks, in marketplaces, taverns, and *guinguettes*, the cafes and alleyways surrounding the Théâtres de la Foire, and, in later decades, the growing numbers of cafés and restaurants, such as those on the Boulevard du Temple.<sup>19</sup> Paris was hardly short of places where women could ply their trade. As part of a more organised social and professional hierarchy, women gained wealth and notoriety by joining the theatre and finding patrons to supplement their income, or by placing their fates in the hands of brothel madams or intermediaries who would set them up with wealthy clients.<sup>20</sup> While many brothels came and went relatively quickly, a number of more

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<sup>15</sup> Vera Lee, *The Reign of Women in Eighteenth-Century France* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Schenkman, 1975), p. 42.

<sup>16</sup> Coward, ‘Eighteenth-Century Attitudes to Prostitution’, p. 365.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*; Lee, pp. 39–40.

<sup>18</sup> Patrick Wald Lasowski, *L’Amour au temps des libertins* (Paris: First Editions, 2011), p. 101.

<sup>19</sup> Lasowski, *L’Amour au temps des libertins*, pp. 101–103.

<sup>20</sup> Kushner, *Erotic Exchanges*. For sex work’s link to the theatre, see pp. 69–70, for madams as

luxurious establishments gained significant wealth and notoriety.<sup>21</sup> It was at these establishments, which will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Two, that men were entertained with food, drink, and sex while unwittingly being documented by the madams working as police informants.

A particularly lucrative step for women following any of these entries into the sex trade was to become *dames entretenues*, defined by Nina Kushner as ‘women who provided sexual and companionate services to men in exchange for full or partial maintenance.’<sup>22</sup> The *dame entretenue* was set apart from other sex workers by the contractual, regular, and thus more consistently professional nature of her work, and her resultant wealth and independence.<sup>23</sup> Kushner has demonstrated that the ‘business of being kept’ allowed women to establish wealthy households through sex work, arguing that becoming a mistress involved owning and selling one’s sexual labour to a social and financial elite, exercising agency and business acumen in negotiations about its market value, and the mutual fulfilment of professional expectations: for the *dame entretenue*, rendering her sexual services, for the *entreteneur*, dutifully providing his payment.<sup>24</sup> While being a kept woman or courtesan still revolved, at its heart, around buying and selling sex, a significant financial and cultural division existed between elite sex workers and women who plied their trade on the streets.<sup>25</sup>

Although her practice was tolerated, the *dame entretenue* was nonetheless an object of police surveillance, with reports written on her activities, partners, and professional trajectory.<sup>26</sup> Women without the safety afforded by wealth and status were subject to

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matchmakers, see pp. 118–123. See also Thomas Wynn on how sex worker-actresses provoked anxiety as a result of their public presence and shifting identities: ‘Prostitutes and Erotic Performances in Eighteenth-Century Paris’, in *Prostitution and Eighteenth-Century Culture*, ed. by Lewis and Ellis, pp. 87–98. Jan Clarke’s investigation of violence against actresses has shown, however, that joining the theatre was no guarantee of security, instead exposing them to potential cruelty from a wider pool of men (Jan Clarke, ‘Violence Against Actresses: Evidence from Campardon and Others’, *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*, 7 (2006), 161–178).

<sup>21</sup> Coward, ‘Eighteenth-Century Attitudes to Prostitution’, p. 366. The first comprehensive guide to these brothels, drawn from the Bastille archives of the *police des mœurs*, can be found in Gaston Capon, *Les Maisons closes au XVIIIe siècle: académies de filles et courtières d’amour, maisons clandestines, matrones, mères-abbesses, appareilleuses et proxénètes: rapports de police, documents secrets, notes personnelles des tenancières* (Paris: H. Daragon, 1903). For a comprehensive insight into elite brothels, see Kushner, *Erotic Exchanges*.

<sup>22</sup> Kushner, ‘The Business of Being Kept’, p. 52.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., pp. 67–69; Badir, p. 453.

<sup>25</sup> Lee, p. 39.

<sup>26</sup> Kushner, ‘The Business of Being Kept’, pp. 53–54.

police scrutiny that was greater still. An excessively ‘public’ woman ran a significant risk of being arrested. If she was suspected to have a venereal disease, she might be sent to Salpêtrière: the hospital better known for its foul conditions, starvation treatments and mercury ‘cures’ than any successful recovery from syphilis. As the century rolled on, the prototypical sex worker was increasingly transformed from a wealthy femme fatale to the pathologised, animalised, public health risk familiar to nineteenth-century France.<sup>27</sup> As Kathryn Norberg notes, ‘Between 1767 and 1790, the diseased streetwalker emerged from the background to stand beside the elegant courtesan’, shifting literary, social, and medical attention onto the lower-class sex worker and the threat she posed to public health.<sup>28</sup> By the time of the First Empire, an insistent medical discourse of sexual difference, uterine fury and syphilis had reduced the sex worker to a diseased, inhuman figure.<sup>29</sup>

In the later eighteenth century, the sex worker was not purely a symbol of disease, however, but an emblem of commerce. The Palais-Royal was transformed during the 1780s into a hub of recreational arcades where a sex worker, whether strolling around the other wares or displaying herself in a window, could be purchased along with other consumable goods.<sup>30</sup> Clyde Plumauzille has argued that in the period preceding and following the Revolution, the decline of *ancien régime* brothels, followed by the decriminalisation of sex work in 1791, created a new form of sexual marketplace.<sup>31</sup> The uncomplicated image of Revolutionaries as universal opponents of sex work and its links to *ancien régime* degeneracy is simplistic.<sup>32</sup> While the *cahiers de doléances* put forward in 1789 proposed eradicating the sex trade entirely, this was never dealt with in practice. Women were continually subjected to raids and health inspections, but the sheer scale of indigence combined with the belief that sex workers provided a necessary pressure-valve that could sustain the health of the family meant that sex work received only limited opposition and formed yet another part of the unofficial markets of Paris.

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<sup>27</sup> Norberg, ‘From Courtesan to Prostitute’, pp. 34–35.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 44–45.

<sup>30</sup> Clyde Plumauzille, ‘Le « Marché aux putains » : économies sexuelles et dynamiques spatiales du Palais-Royal dans le Paris révolutionnaire’, *Genre, sexualité & société*, 10 (2013), 10–15 <<http://gss.revues.org/2943>> [accessed 6<sup>th</sup> March 2016], (particularly para. 11 and paras. 48–49 for women attracting clients and appearing in shop windows). See also Lasowski, *L’Amour au temps des libertins*, p. 101.

<sup>31</sup> Plumauzille, *Prostitution et révolution*, pp. 1–2.

<sup>32</sup> Susan P. Conner, ‘Public Virtue and Public Women: Prostitution in Revolutionary Paris, 1793-1794’, *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 28.2 (1994), 221–240.

### ***Food and drink in the eighteenth-century sex trade***

This section offers an overview of existing work that recognises the connection between alimentary and sexual commerce, providing the backdrop against which a close examination of food and sex work can be read. Drawing primarily on research by Kathryn Norberg, Erica-Marie Benabou and Nina Kushner, this section assimilates and augments this work to illuminate the presence and importance of the alimentary to all levels of the eighteenth-century sex trade. Additional examples or anecdotes are provided from contemporary writing or records on brothels compiled by the police.

### ***Food, drink and poorer sex workers***

Beginning with the lowliest form of sex work in eighteenth-century Paris, we must first turn to the world of markets and bars. At the lower end of the sexual marketplace, women who sold their services were also regularly involved in selling foods and drinks, either directly to their clients as a part of the erotic transaction or simply on the wider Parisian market. Benabou demonstrates that, among the many professions in which women were engaged prior to and during their time in the sex trade, a significant number were involved in the food and drink industries. Sex workers sold sustenance at Paris markets, particularly at Les Halles<sup>33</sup> and, even if not selling goods themselves, used these markets to tout for business alongside the other traders.<sup>34</sup> The anonymous author of *L'Espion libertin*, a humorous catalogue of women, their addresses and services published in 1803, describes how the most 'infernal' brothel in Paris is populated by 'marchandes et poissardes de la halle' who, 'après avoir vendu des légumes pendant le jour, font un trafic, le soir, de leur chaire humaine' for a pittance.<sup>35</sup> Sex workers often lived above butchers' shops and abattoirs, or with *limonadiers*, *fruitiers* and *marchands de vin*. The owners of *cabarets* and *guinguettes* lodged women in their premises, acting as landlord and procurer for the women who were simultaneously their tenants and their workforce, with sex workers serving behind the bar as well as in their bedrooms. As Kathryn Norberg notes:

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<sup>33</sup> In her sample of records on women imprisoned for prostitution at the Saint-Martin jail (predominantly in the years 1765, 1766, 1770), Benabou has shown that approximately seven percent were linked to Les Halles and the food and drink trade. See Benabou, pp. 195–198, 200, 262, 289.

<sup>34</sup> Norberg, 'Prostitutes', p. 468. Arlette Farge has also noted the Paris police's focus on Les Halles for their arrests of sex workers and their clients: 'Prostitutes and women of ill-repute, pimps and soldiers' girls were also pursued [...] The district of Les Halles was admirably suited to their activity and the register is proof of the frequency of the raids made into places of prostitution' (Arlette Farge, *Fragile Lives* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993), p. 163).

<sup>35</sup> Anon., *L'Espion libertin*, in *L'Espion libertin*, ed. by Patrick Wald Lasowski, pp. 99–136 (p. 107).

Whether in England, France, or Germany, prostitutes solicited in cabarets, and any tavern serving girl was assumed to be for sale. Some bars had *cabinets*, small rooms for sex: others rented out rooms on the first floor for private parties. Since any “trick” began with the sharing of food and wine, the drink shop was an obvious site for venal love. Sometimes it was virtually the only spot.<sup>36</sup>

Although a closer examination of eating, drinking, and transactional sexual practices demonstrates that shared dining did more than ‘begin’ the transactional sexual encounter, Norberg’s comment on sex work at the lower end of the social scale nevertheless highlights a fundamental connection between sex work and ingestion. The relationship between eating and drinking establishments and the sex trade was so notorious that legal action was taken to try to counter it: an ordinance of November 8<sup>th</sup> 1780 explicitly forbade the owners of *brasseries*, *cabarets*, *cafés*, and *débites de boisson* from sheltering sex workers.<sup>37</sup> Even for women who dwelt elsewhere, the tavern was a popular location for picking up clients throughout the early modern period.<sup>38</sup> Its self-reinforcing reputation both as a centre of male sociability from which respectable women were usually excluded and as a site where men were likely to find the less respectable women they desired meant that the tavern was synonymous with eroticism.<sup>39</sup> Drinking and sex work were often intimate bedfellows.<sup>40</sup> As the century progressed, in light of the birth of the restaurant, the *cafés* and restaurants of the Parisian boulevards were also notoriously productive places to pick up clients, as Patrick Wald Lasowski has noted.<sup>41</sup> Sites at which food and drink were on offer were almost guaranteed to tacitly facilitate the sale of bodies and sexual services.

Moreover, food and drink were significant not merely for their role in creating and sustaining erotic markets but for their material effects on the body: a poorer sex worker would ply her trade not for extra pocket money, but to buy the nourishment she needed to survive. If, as Kushner highlights, most streetwalkers ‘tended to engage in prostitution only when they could not earn enough through licit means’, this must include the inability to afford food.<sup>42</sup> While the approximate number of sex workers active in eighteenth-century Paris varies from text to text, Mercier’s suggestion in his *Tableau de*

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<sup>36</sup> Norberg. ‘Prostitutes’, p. 468. See also A. Lynn Martin, *Alcohol, Sex, and Gender in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 67–70.

<sup>37</sup> See Harsin, pp. 32–33, 317n.

<sup>38</sup> Martin, p. 58.

<sup>39</sup> Martin, p. 66. See also Roche, *Le Peuple de Paris*, pp. 349–350.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> Lasowski, *L’Amour au temps des libertins*, p. 102.

<sup>42</sup> Kushner, *Erotic Exchanges*, pp. 3–4.

*Paris* that ‘si la prostitution venoit à cesser tout-à-coup, vingt mille filles périroient de misere, les travaux de ce sexe malheureux ne pouvant pas suffire ici à son entretien ni à sa nourriture’ is significant.<sup>43</sup> For the poorer sex worker living hand to mouth, a bout with a client would not simply be a matter of additional income, but of earning sufficient money not to starve.

### *Elite sex work*

#### *a. Brothel meals*

Moving higher in the ranks of both sex workers and clients, food and drink were significant to encounters arranged by and for women who worked in brothels, under the auspices of procuresses and madams. These meals could offer workers mere sustenance or luxury, depending upon their circumstances. Not unlike the rituals of luxurious consumption and staged seduction that frame much high-class escorting and mutual arrangements today, elite encounters with eighteenth-century sex workers were often accompanied by and mediated through shared dining. As Kushner has demonstrated, brothels offered lunches (*dîners*) between approximately one and three o’clock in the afternoon, and *soupers* at night, often after the evening’s theatrical entertainment had ended, giving clients the opportunity to dine with their chosen women if they so wished.<sup>44</sup> A visit early in the morning or following an overnight stay might similarly be rounded off with a breakfast before the client left.<sup>45</sup>

The significance of the mealtime is borne out strikingly by the consistent references to *soupers* and *dîners* found in brothel records. Madams’ reports, notably the weekly diaries written by the well-known brothel-keeper and police informer, Madame Dhosmont, which make up the lion’s share of the remaining brothel reports from the *police des mœurs*, make consistent and repeated reference to the meals taken there.<sup>46</sup> Noting that a client has ‘soupé’ or ‘soupé et couché’ provides a convenient shorthand for both the madam and the inspector reading the report, the sexual act clearly implicit. Yet since madams did not shy away from divulging clients’ sexual preferences in their reports,

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<sup>43</sup> ‘Des Filles Publiques’ in Mercier, III (1782), pp. 110–122, (pp. 119–120).

<sup>44</sup> Kushner, *Erotic Exchanges*, p. 110.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> Dhosmont’s detailed diaries, rewritten by police secretary Duval, make up the majority of the records in Paris, Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal (BA), Archives de la Bastille, MS 10253, ‘Administration du Lieutenant général de police: Rapports de maîtresses de maisons de débauche. Années 1749–1757’.

repeated references to men who have ‘soupper’ should not be read as euphemistic.<sup>47</sup> So vital was the meal to the night at the brothel that for a client not to dine was considered noteworthy enough for a madam to record: ‘Le 24. a 10. heures du soir M de Blagny accompagné de M. Moreau l’avocat du Roy et deux Mrs qui sont frères et je n’ai pu savoir leurs noms. Ils se sont en allés a minuit sans avoir souper.’<sup>48</sup>

It is important to note, moreover, that an absence of alimentary detail on the page does not necessarily result in an absence of understanding on the part of the reader. Given that the writers and readers of these records would have been well versed in the rituals of the Parisian sex trade, a brief reference to a *dîner* or *souper* would have conjured up significant associations. In his discussion of the meal in fiction, Vincent Jouve argues that

[p]our susciter l’illusion référentielle, le texte n’a pas besoin de s’attarder sur une description précise. [...] Si le repas se reconstruit malgré tout sans difficulté dans l’esprit du lecteur, c’est que son script est suffisamment connu<sup>49</sup>

The brief, allusive reference within the police report can similarly be interpreted as the result of madams’, sex workers’, and the police’s familiarity with the ‘script’ of the transactional supper. This familiarity is not the result of the meal’s insignificance, but of its foundational role in sex work. As such – somewhat counter-intuitively perhaps – this lack of detail can demonstrate, rather than disprove, the meal’s significance. If the *souper* and *dîner* are already understood, only exceptions to the recognised norm require further elaboration; other meals are simply the tacitly accepted bread and butter of transactional sexual encounters.

Although Kushner has acknowledged the role of the meal, her brief analysis nonetheless downplays its significance to the brothel visit. By loosely stating that ‘[d]epending on when they arrived and how long they stayed, customers sometimes supped or had other meals in the brothel with the prostitutes’, Kushner puts the cart before the horse.<sup>50</sup> It was not the case that one would only dine if one happened to appear at the appropriate time, but that one could go to the brothel aware that dining was an option and timetable one’s visit accordingly. This is made particularly clear in the texts describing Madame Pâris’

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<sup>47</sup> Kushner, *Erotic Exchanges*, pp. 110–111. Kushner highlights occasions in madams’ reports where customers’ penchants for flagellation, sodomy and oral sex are explicitly mentioned.

<sup>48</sup> BA, MS 10253, fol. 281<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>49</sup> Jouve, p. 17.

<sup>50</sup> Kushner, *Erotic Exchanges*, p. 110.

establishment, the Hôtel du Roule, at which prices were dictated not simply by the ‘class’ of woman one chose but by the time of day that the visit took place and the corresponding meal that would be served. The memorialist Barbier’s description of Pâris’ prices highlights the primacy of the meal: ‘On donne douze livres pour s’amuser dans la journée avec une de ces demoiselles, et vingt-quatre livres par tête d’homme pour y souper. Pour chacun son louis, on a bien à souper et une jolie fille.’<sup>51</sup> Similarly, in Book III of his *Histoire de ma vie*, Casanova recounts his first visit to the Hôtel du Roule in 1750. In Casanova’s account, each dalliance was framed and priced according to its concomitant meal. He describes his time in Pâris’ establishment as follows:

La maîtresse femme qui avait pris cet hôtel l’avait très bien meublé, et y tenait douze à quatorze filles choisies. Elle avait un bon cuisinier, des bons vins, des excellents lits, et elle faisait accueil à tous ceux qui allaient lui faire des visites [...] tous les plaisirs étaient taxés à un prix fixe, et pas cher. On payait six francs pour déjeuner avec une fille, douze francs pour y dîner, un louis pour souper, et coucher.<sup>52</sup>

The sexual encounter forms the core purpose of Casanova’s visit, but the pricing, timetable, and conceit around which the encounter is built are consistently and explicitly tied to the mealtime. Having arrived with a friend in time for a *dîner*, he chooses a woman and is then invited to take a stroll around the garden to pass the time while waiting for the meal to be prepared.<sup>53</sup> This walk, which proves unsurprisingly brief and inevitably leads the men to their chosen women’s bedrooms, is followed by a call to the table, after which the encounter is drawn to an abrupt close: ‘On nous appela à table où nous dinâmes assez bien, mais à peine le café pris, voilà la borgnesse, la montre à la main, qui rappelle les deux filles, en nous disant que notre partie était finie.’<sup>54</sup> The brothel meal is no mere detail; it provides the pricing and temporal framing device for the sexual encounter.

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<sup>51</sup> *Journal de Barbier*, ed. 1851, III, p. 122, cited in Capon, p. 41.

<sup>52</sup> Giacomo Casanova, *Histoire de ma vie*, ed. by Jean-Christophe Igalens and Érik Leborgne (Paris: Robert Laffont, 2013), p. 766. As Igalens and Leborgne have noted, one *louis* was worth twenty-four *livres*, or approximately two hundred and fifty euros in 2013. The fees Casanova states tally with those also given in Rochon de Chabannes and Moufle d’Angeville’s libertine text *Les Cannevas de La Pâris* (Marc-Antoine Jacques Rochon de Chabannes and Barthélémy François Joseph Moufle d’Angerville, *Les Cannevas de la Pâris ou mémoires pour servir à l’histoire de l’hôtel du Roule, publiés par un étranger, avec des notes critiques, historiques, nécessaires pour l’intelligence du texte à la Porte de Chaillot in Anthologie érotique: le XVIIIe siècle*, ed. by Maurice Lever (Paris: Robert Laffont, 2004), pp. 557–621 (p. 621)).

<sup>53</sup> Casanova, p. 768.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

La Pâris was not the only madam to offer meals at her brothel. However, as Érica-Marie Benabou has highlighted, she appears to have been the only madam to set a fixed tariff for her services.<sup>55</sup> As such, the extent of the emphasis placed on commensality at the Hôtel du Roule is not necessarily representative. Nonetheless, many elite Parisian brothels frequently offered *soupers* rather than mere *passes* with their girls. Along with sexual pleasure, gustatory luxury played a crucial role in the transactional and eroticised meal, raising its significance beyond that of a means to a purely sexual end. Madams without their own cooks would buy supplies in from *traiteurs* so as to host elegant suppers and thus ensure good business.<sup>56</sup> Alternatively, clients would use brothels as a base from which to host their own parties. In 1762, the Baron d'Angen held a *souper* at Madame Brissault's brothel that was so elaborate that it took his cook three days to prepare.<sup>57</sup> A report on another 'magnifique souper' attended by various nobles noted that 'la bonne chaire a été des plus delicates, les vins de toutes especes excellents; on sest mit a table a 10. heures et demi et on y est resté jusqu'à une heure du matin dans la plus grande gayetée'.<sup>58</sup> Dining was a significant preoccupation and expenditure for madams and clients alike.

The significance of the meal in its own right is further compounded by the value judgements placed upon the quality of what a brothel's kitchen had to offer. The meal could shape a madam's reputation and her capacity to attract and retain clients. In a report detailing an English nobleman's preference for Madame Gourdan's brothel over La Brissault's, Inspector Marais, then chief of the *police des mœurs*, notes that this opinion is far from universal, thanks to the inferior quality of the women and, crucially, the food:

comme on connait la Gourdan pour n'avoir dans son fonds de boutique que des échappées d'autres lieux de prostitution et qu'en payant chés elle deux ou trois louis par tête on est fort mal servi lorsqu'on veut y faire un souper, la recommandation de M. Fauske n'a point encore prévalu sur la réputation de Brissault[.]<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Benabou, p. 226.

<sup>56</sup> Benabou, p. 218.

<sup>57</sup> Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF), MS fonds français (MS f. fr) 11359, pp. 657–658. MSS f. fr. 11357–11360 make up the 'Rapports de police du commissaire Marais, adressés à M. de Sartine (1759–1777)'.  
<sup>58</sup> BnF, MS f. fr. 11360, p. 346.

<sup>59</sup> BnF, MS f. fr. 11359, pp. 261–262. In light of the common belief that the English were not blessed with discerning palates, the inclusion of Fauske's glowing opinion of the kitchens is most likely also included in his report to compound this stereotype.

In his appraisal of the services offered at Gourdan's brothel, Marais does not simply highlight the importance of eating and drinking to the competitive market but describes the food on offer in the same breath as the prostitutes themselves. That which is available in the dining room is presented as of equivalent importance to that found in the bedroom. Moreover, Marais himself was important not only as the chief of police to whom brothel madams answered, but also as something of a connoisseur of brothel dining. In a letter from Madame Dhosmont to Sartine, the *lieutenant général de Police*, she reveals that while Marais frequents Madame Miller's brothel, where 'il n'y mange pas mais il baise les filles lorsqu'il en trouve une de son goût', he chooses Madame Deshongrais' establishment for his *soupers*.<sup>60</sup> As a professional expert in the services that each brothel provided, it is perhaps unsurprising that he should use this knowledge to procure himself the best possible dinner and the best possible erotic encounter, taking each service individually at the brothel he thinks will serve him best. Given Marais' evident appetite for dining with working girls, it is little wonder that, in his descriptions of the prostitutes themselves, he describes attractive women as *friands morceaux*, and remarks upon one woman's embonpoint as 'fort apétisant', another's as 'tres ragoutant'.<sup>61</sup> For police as well as punters, sex work was an edible affair.

Beyond the meal's role in providing pleasure for police and clients, it also allowed sex workers to meet. Nina Kushner has argued that the brothel *souper* was a 'core of sociability in the demimonde', at which madams and prostitutes could network, and thus cultivate and increase their social and sexual capital.<sup>62</sup> The *souper* provided an occasion to entice new girls, to advertise to new clients, and to introduce girls into the demimondaine society where they could make their name.<sup>63</sup> Kushner also notes how new recruits were provided not merely with opportunities to meet potential *entreteneurs*, but to meet established, experienced, successful women: the *souper* served as a means of acculturation which helped to sustain both individuals and the elite prostitution industry as a whole.<sup>64</sup> Kushner's positive vision of the *souper* as a site of feminine agency and professional success is borne out neatly in a report from January 1761, in which Inspector Marais describes how a young woman, abandoned by her previous *entreteneur*

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<sup>60</sup> BA, MS 10253, fol. 19<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>61</sup> BnF, MS f. fr. 11358, p. 89; BnF, MS f. fr. 11360, p. 219, 382, 631.

<sup>62</sup> Kushner, *Erotic Exchanges*, p. 97.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 115–116.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

after bearing him a child, has now been taken as a mistress by a German baron, guaranteeing her professional and financial wellbeing. To have managed this, Marais suggests that she must have been presented

dans la société des élégantes, c'est adire, aux soupers [...] ainsy il ne faut plus s'étonner si ces sortes de soupers sont tant recherchés, car outre la bonne chaire qui ny est pas épargnée, un joly home est toujours sure dy trouver un agréable amusement, et un financier une coquette toute preste a le débarrasser de son superflus.<sup>65</sup>

Kushner has shown that madams could similarly benefit from the increase in publicity and reputation that such occasions facilitated, the resultant expansion of their clientele, and the possibility of making new connections with sex workers who might require their services.<sup>66</sup> The madam, whose role was not simply to provide women, but to provide a sensual dining experience complete with food, service, an elegant setting, and charming company at the table, was marked out by her supper parties as a shrewd businesswoman, skilful event-planner, and canny networker.<sup>67</sup> A report by Dhosmont recounts how two well-connected customers, the Marquis de Fimarcon and M. de Curis, *Intendant des Menus-plaisirs*, invite her to a *souper* for which she has provided three women.<sup>68</sup> There, she meets the Duc de Richelieu, drinks a toast to their mutual health, cementing their bond through a recognised ingestive ritual, and is promised new and valuable additions to her network of clients.<sup>69</sup> The *souper* could facilitate and shore up sexual and business transactions: breaking bread together provided the backdrop against which a large amount of the brothel's business and pleasure could be carried out. However, as Chapter Two demonstrates, not every meal was a recipe for professional and personal satisfaction.

While the precise dishes served at brothel *soupers* and *dîners* receive limited attention within the official records, somewhat more detailed information is offered on the subject of drinks. A *souper* was incomplete without ratafias, liqueurs, champagnes, and copious bottles of wine. Three nobles out dining together are said to have consumed nine bottles

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<sup>65</sup> BnF, MS f. fr. 11358, pp. 348–349.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Kushner, *Erotic Exchanges*, p. 117.

<sup>68</sup> BA, MS 10253, fol. 159<sup>r</sup>–159<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>69</sup> For more on the significance of shared drinking in the eighteenth century, see Matthieu Lecoutre, *Ivresse et ivrognerie dans la France moderne* (Rennes; Tours: PU Rennes, 2011), p. 231, and Thomas Edward Brennan, *Public Drinking and Popular Culture in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1988), p. 220.

of champagne between them, before returning to La Dhosmont's brothel at midnight.<sup>70</sup> Bringing one's own drinks to the brothel itself was not uncommon, with the cost of wine that would otherwise have been consumed deducted from one's bill after a brothel souper.<sup>71</sup> When a M. de St Blanc and three friends dined with four hired women at a *traiteur* for five *livres* a head, for instance, rather than paying for drinks, twelve bottles of wine were brought from his own cellar.<sup>72</sup> That suppers should be accompanied by wines and liqueurs is hardly surprising, yet the inventory taken of Madame Gourdan's home following her death is nevertheless striking in its wealth of alcohol. The cellar at Deux-Portes-Saint-Sauveur contained six hundred bottles of Burgundy, forty-two of Bordeaux, and seventy of sparkling and still Champagne.<sup>73</sup> Reports of the drinks served at *soupers* held by the Comte de Watteville at his *petite maison* on the Rue de la Rochefoucauld provide a similarly glowing testament to his wealth; his encounters were accompanied by Bordeaux, Burgundy, *vin paillé*, Graves, Rota and Champagne.<sup>74</sup> The brothel meal was consistently and abundantly fuelled with drink.

### ***b. Outside the brothel***

Beyond the brothel itself, erotic and ingestive transactions also took place in and around the city. Where poorer women would solicit in markets or taverns, sex workers higher up the food chain targeted wealthy men at the theatre, whether they were on or off the stage, often in the hope of a *tête-à-tête* over a late supper that would lead either to a single sexual encounter or the cultivation of a longer, more profitable arrangement as a *dame entretenue*.<sup>75</sup> If the meal was not provided by the client at a boulevard *traiteur*, it might be taken in the sex worker's own apartment if she had amassed sufficient wealth to act as a hostess.<sup>76</sup> With these apartments came kitchens and, a relatively new development within the household, purpose-built dining rooms.<sup>77</sup> In her study of courtesans and their furniture, Kathryn Norberg has demonstrated the significance of the table to the sex

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<sup>70</sup> BA, MS 10253, fol. 118<sup>f</sup>.

<sup>71</sup> BA, MS 10253, fol. 357<sup>v</sup>. 'Ils ont donné chacun 12# a l'exception de Croiset a qui j'ay remis 9# parce qu'il avoit envoyé chercher chés luy 6. Bouteilles de vin.'

<sup>72</sup> BA, MS 10253, fol. 87<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>73</sup> Benabou, p. 250.

<sup>74</sup> Montmartre, Archives Nationales, Z 2453 'Scellés et inventaires', cited in Capon, pp. 78–79.

<sup>75</sup> Nina Kushner has highlighted how the Parisian demimonde closely overlapped with two communities in particular: the royal court and the theatre. Kushner, *Erotic Exchanges*, p. 4. Kushner succinctly defines *dames entretenues* as 'women who provided sexual and companionate services to men of the elite in exchange for full or partial maintenance.' Kushner, 'The Business of Being Kept', p. 52.

<sup>76</sup> Norberg, 'Goddesses of Taste', pp. 102–105.

<sup>77</sup> On the novelty of the dining room, see also Roy Strong, *Feast: A History of Grand Eating* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2002), pp. 242–244.

worker in charming and entertaining her clients: ‘like the *salle de compagnie* or salon, the dining room grew in importance over the course of the eighteenth century [...] but few placed as much importance on this space as the courtesan did.’<sup>78</sup> It was the dining room that allowed the elite sex worker to host her own supper parties, allowing her to fraternise with a current *entreteneur*, entertain her patrons and their friends, or charm new clients.<sup>79</sup> This dining room would be furnished and stocked using the money or goods (including furniture, silverware, and provisions) that she received as payment from her patrons, creating an eroticised, opulent space that would further contribute to and enhance her future earnings, or simply allow her to live in luxury.<sup>80</sup> Some contracts drawn up between sex workers and their *entreteneurs* also covered women’s living expenses, with grocers’, butchers’, wine, and fuel bills included in their compensation.<sup>81</sup> A description in the brothel records of La Dlle Aubin’s good fortune notes how she is given a kitchen complete with *batterie de cuisine* from the respected coppersmith, Vidal Chaudronnier, rue des Boucheries.<sup>82</sup> Mademoiselle Boucher’s kitchen contains ‘plus de batterie qu’il ne faudroit pour manger 25000.[I] de rente’.<sup>83</sup> And Mlle Daubrien, kept by the Archbishop of Cambrai, was reportedly provided with a chef and a set of silver tableware.<sup>84</sup> Given the importance of the sensual meal not only in the running of the brothel, but in fulfilling one’s duties as a kept mistress, it is unsurprising that kitchens and kitchenware should receive relatively thorough treatment in the reports produced by madams. By including details of what lay behind kitchen doors and was laid upon tables, the authors of these documents demonstrate a clear preoccupation with the role played by

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<sup>78</sup> Norberg, ‘Goddesses of Taste’, p. 103. See also Kathryn Norberg, ‘Salon as Stage: Actress/Courtesans and their Homes in Late Eighteenth-Century Paris’, in *Architectural Space in Eighteenth-Century Europe: Constructing Identities and Interiors*, ed. by Meredith Martin (Farnham, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010), pp. 105–128 (pp.110–111).

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Nina Kushner and Kathryn Norberg have noted that some women – often those seeking occasional additions to their household income or a supplement to the money received from a less-generous *entreteneur* – specialised in attending *petits soupers* and balls, at which the *souper* often formed part of the prostitute’s official or unofficial payment. Kushner, *Erotic Exchanges*, p. 113; Norberg, ‘Prostitutes’, p. 469.

<sup>81</sup> Kushner, *Erotic Exchanges*, p. 134.

<sup>82</sup> BA, MS 10243, fol. 8<sup>r</sup>. This cookware is of notable provenance. Vidal, a maker of quality goods, was elected as one of the four *Jurés* of the community of *chaudronniers-didandiers* in 1757, responsible for overseeing the affairs of the 132 *Maîtres Chaudronniers* in Paris that year (Anon., *Almanach des corps des marchands et des communautés des arts et métiers de la ville & faubourgs de Paris* (Paris: Chez Duchesne, Libraire, 1757), p. 70).

<sup>83</sup> BA, MS 10253, fol. 269<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>84</sup> BA, MS 10243, fol. 16<sup>r</sup>. Silver and porcelain, material reserved for elegant dinner services often used at *soupers*, were notable luxuries and, in the case of porcelain, a relative novelty. See Pinkard, p. 92, and Florent Quellier, *La Table des français: une histoire culturelle, XVe-début XIXe siècle* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2007), p. 95. Gifts of silver tableware are also mentioned in, for instance, BnF, MS f. fr. 11358, p. 795, and BnF, MS f. fr. 11360, pp. 228–229, 419.

cooks and servants, kitchens and dining rooms, further highlighting the significance of dining – and its practicalities – for kept women.

Similarly, access to luxurious dishes could prove the deciding factor in a woman accepting a man's offer, whether for a simple dinner or a long-term arrangement. In a report from February 1771, Marais notes that La Dlle Danguy, although still together with her lover, is said to have taken on a naval captain explicitly 'pour fonder sa cuisine'.<sup>85</sup> When approached by M. Nouët, Conseiller at the Palais Royal, La Dlle Sarron accepts his invitation to dine only after he has agreed to provide her with generous quantities of ice cream.<sup>86</sup> And a young woman named Vans is reported to have found a very profitable match, with much of the focus within the record placed upon the luxurious improvements to her diet:

elle en a tiré considerablement d'argent et en tire encore, s'est emparé de tout ce qui lui concerne. Ses Domestiques entrent et sortent par sa volonté, le M.e d'hotel et le cuisinier ne font occuper qu'à luy fournir tout ce qu'il y a de plus rare et de plus délicat, et chaque jour on apporte de l'hôtel du Marquis tout ce qu'il faut pour la vie.<sup>87</sup>

For kept women, food was a matter of necessity on the one hand, and of luxury on the other.

Alternatively, meals could be held in a client's apartments or at a *petite maison*, a house in one of the villages surrounding Paris devoted to the pursuit of pleasure away from the prying eyes of the city.<sup>88</sup> These suppers, usually shared by a party of two to four men and an equal or smaller number of women, formed part of what Nina Kushner describes as a brothel's "outcall" services', in which madams sent sex workers out to parties or to an encounter in a locale owned or chosen for the occasion by the client,<sup>89</sup> where women would eat with, entertain, and have sex with their hosts. Synonymous with libertine sexuality and licentious behaviour, these *soupers* were a point of particular interest for Inspector Marais, who from 1760 onwards devoted specific sections of his *Anecdotes Galantes* to recording the details of *soupers* held by important nobles in their *petites*

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<sup>85</sup> BnF, MS f. fr. 11360, p. 508.

<sup>86</sup> BnF, MS f. fr. 11358, p. 759.

<sup>87</sup> BA, MS 10251, fol. 248<sup>v</sup>; For similar accounts, see, for instance, BnF, MS f. fr. 11360, pp. 320, 366, 406.

<sup>88</sup> Kushner, *Erotic Exchanges*, p. 115.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 97, p. 113. For Kushner's broader discussion of outcall services and *soupers* see pp. 113–118.

*maisons*, noting where and when they were held, and which aristocrats, brothel workers, and kept women made up the guest lists.<sup>90</sup>

If a client desired a more affectedly low-key affair, he might instead opt for a picnic, with refreshments brought in his carriage from an elegant Parisian *traiteur*, or slum it at a *guinguette*, where the lowest and highest elements of the *demimonde* could collide over flagons of wine.<sup>91</sup> One police report notes how a Monsieur de Valancé, a friend, and two girls were reported to have picnicked in the Parc de Mendon and were left enchanted by a tavern in which they were served wine by the pint in iron and tin flagons, and where wooden benches served as their beds.<sup>92</sup> Although such stories do not appear frequently within the records, these moments of deliberate focus upon the pleasure and contents of the meal serve to highlight dining not simply as a pretext or formality, but as a site of self-conscious sensory enjoyment and role-play.

### ***Conclusion***

It is thus evident that the meal served not merely as a pretext or addition to the transactional sexual encounter, but occupied a crucial role within it. Were brothel or *petite maison* dining little more than a formality or, as Kushner would have it, ‘an important prelude to sexual activity’, an elaborate or aestheticised approach involving outings might appear somewhat excessive.<sup>93</sup> It is clear that eating and drinking provided much of the financial, spatial, temporal, erotic, and economic framework for sex work. Alimentary matters shaped the sexual marketplace, its functioning, and how it was understood at every level of society. Discussion of sex workers and dining in fictional and non-fictional literary texts must therefore serve as more than additional moments of pleasure and symbolism, with the alimentary act a cipher grounded in layers of representative meaning: they are also grounded in an omnipresent and highly significant material reality, as the following chapters will demonstrate.

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<sup>90</sup> These stories make up the *Anecdotes Galantes* found in, BnF, MSS f. fr. 11357–11360.

<sup>91</sup> Mme Dhosmont describes clients who take her women not only to fine suppers in *petites maisons*, but also to *vide-bouteilles* and *guinguettes*, e.g. BA, MS 10253, fols. 377<sup>r</sup>, 400<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>92</sup> BnF, MS f. fr. 11358, p. 675.

<sup>93</sup> Kushner, *Erotic Exchanges*, p. 167.

## CHAPTER TWO

### DANGEROUS CONSUMPTION: THE RISKS OF INGESTION IN PARISIAN BROTHELS

As we have seen, eighteenth-century sex workers and their clients were never far from the dining table. Conviviality underpinned erotic transactions at all levels of the trade, framing the encounter and providing sources of pleasure and professional advancement. Yet the rewards offered by this culture of shared dining could be countered by significant risk. This chapter explores this notion of risk as it emerges in a sample of records amassed by the police department monitoring the sex trade in eighteenth-century Paris. Developing and critiquing Kushner's assessment of the *souper* as a crucial moment of *demimonde* sociability and professional development, a close analysis of ingestion in these records reveals that the business benefits of the *souper* were, in many instances, tempered by the financial, social, and bodily dangers inherent to dining for sex workers, clients, madams, and the police force. The meal emerges, in line with contemporary and more recent physiological and theoretical thought, as a complex site at which identities, balances of power, and personal and professional success and failure were negotiated. This chapter demonstrates how consumption could be fundamental to a woman's induction into the sex trade, her economic status and survival, and how food and drink underpinned numerous gendered and professional tussles in which clients, police, madams, and sex workers were exposed to significant financial, social and physical dangers. As with any other act of ingestion and incorporation, the symbolic and literal crossing of bodily borders, and the social implications of sharing the meal, could expose diners to pain as well as pleasure.

This analysis is drawn from archival documents created under the auspices of the two inspectors of the *police des mœurs*: Jean-Baptiste Meusnier, and his successor Louis Marais:<sup>1</sup> the records of the *Bureau de la discipline des mœurs*. Initially held at the Bastille and now held at the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, these records include reports on the Parisian sexual marketplace. This chapter draws on a selection of the 'Notes, rapports et papiers de l'inspecteur de police Meusnier, chargé de la partie des mœurs', which

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<sup>1</sup> Where Meusnier worked well with the madams whose reports he gathered, relations between Marais and the sexual underworld were far less positive. For more on the relationship between Meusnier, Marais, and their informants, see Kushner, *Erotic Exchanges*, pp. 42–43.

nonetheless contain records written by Marais, covering the dates 1749–1757 (BA, MSS 10248, 10251, 10252, 10253). These documents focus on reports depicting Parisian sex work and sex workers, with BA, MS 10253 (the focus of much of my attention) offering reports compiled by brothel madams themselves. These are joined by the ‘Rapports de police du commissaire Marais, adressés à M. de Sartine’, documenting the sexual and social lives of the Parisian elite from 1759 to 1777 (BnF, MSS f. fr. 11357-11360). This chapter does not claim to offer a comprehensive vision of the meals that took place in elite brothels or in *petites maisons*. As highlighted in Chapter One, since many meals described in these documents pass without comment, conforming to Vincent Jouve’s notion of the implied and recognised ‘script’ of the meal,<sup>2</sup> and thus assumedly to that of a broadly unproblematic time at table, those that prompt more detailed reports might well be assumed to be exceptional in some way, rather than representative.<sup>3</sup> Yet a significant number of unpleasant meals receive detailed attention, suggesting that displeasure and danger were far from alien to the brothel dining room. The risks that emerge from the brothel documents are varied, highlighting the meal’s potentially negative impact upon anyone who consumed, provided, or paid for it. However, many of these risks stem from one key aspect of the meal: its symbolic yet artificial role as a gesture and confirmation of solidarity, as part of the ‘performance’ of sex work.<sup>4</sup> The practice of sharing or offering food has been recognised as a gesture of communion and solidarity throughout millennia of human culture.<sup>5</sup> But if, as Carolyn Korsmeyer claims, ‘those who choose to eat together tacitly recognize their fellow eaters as saliently equal’, what of those who pay another to dine with them, or are paid to dine?<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Jouve, p. 17.

<sup>3</sup> The lack of alimentary detail also shores up the claim (expressed by Pamela Cheek) that the records kept by the *police des mœurs* were not gathered simply to charm ‘l’ennuieuse oisiveté de Louis XV, & la licensieuse curiosité de ses maîtresses’, and to be read as his breakfast-time entertainment, as was suggested by the eighteenth-century rumour mill (Anon., *La Bastille dévoilée ou recueil de pièces authentiques pour servir à son histoire*, 3rd edn (Paris: Desenne, 1789–90), p. 152, quoted in Cheek, ‘Prostitutes of “Political Institution”’, p. 214, n. 7). If, as memorialists such as Barbier claimed, the King’s appetite for women was matched only by his appetite for food, one might expect reports containing accounts of multiple *soupers* and written for his titillation to at least hint at menus of culinary delights. Louis Nicolardot describes the King’s prodigious appetite as follows: ‘Louis XV mangeait à étonner, dit Barbier; quoique son estomac fût fort élastique, il le forçait assez pour que ses indigestions fussent très-fréquentes. Il était obligé de se purger presque tous les mois, Il s’adonna de bonne heure au vin de Champagne; il mit à la mode les pâtés froids aux mauviettes. La table était la seule occupation sérieuse de sa vie’ (Louis Nicolardot, *Histoire de la table: curiosités gastronomiques de tous les temps et de tous les pays* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1868), pp. 388–390).

<sup>4</sup> This focus on performance is taken from Ellis and Lewis, pp. 3–4.

<sup>5</sup> See Frédéric Lange, *Manger ou les jeux et les creux du plat* (Paris: Seuil, 1975), p. 71.

<sup>6</sup> Korsmeyer, p. 200.

By focusing on a sample of police records, of which the majority are taken from one informant, Madame Dhosmont, whose extensive notes detailed events both within her brothel and at the balls and supper parties to which she sent her workers, this chapter illuminates the subversive or dangerous potential of shared dining within elite Parisian sex work.<sup>7</sup> When the exchange of valuable commodities and money across social boundaries is at stake, what appears as a gesture of solidarity is instead tinged with artifice and the potential for manipulation, violence, loss of control, and disputes over behaviour and money. The brothel meal, a purchasable performance of sociability and seduction, nonetheless lulled those involved into a false sense of security, or left them fraught with anxiety. By exploring these themes, this chapter not only nuances the existing critical narratives surrounding the brothel meal, expanding our understanding of its history, but also, by elaborating our understanding of ingestion in the referential world, complexifies the context against which ingestion in fictionalised sex work, as is discussed in Chapters Two to Six, can be read.

### *Initiation and economics*

Turning first to the theme of young women's entries into sex work, the brothel records contain several mentions of a girl's first steps in the trade being brought about or accompanied by ingestion. Like Eve's first bite of the apple, it is appetite that leads girls inexorably to sins of the flesh, though without necessarily contributing to their wisdom and knowledge. A sixteen-year-old, Marguerite Girard, is sent by her parents to Paris to find employment, and is instead lured into sex work with 'pompons et bonbons' designed to turn her attentions to 'la coqueterie et à la friandise', two qualities said to be crucial to establishing a young woman's taste for venality.<sup>8</sup> A fourteen-year-old named Bourcelles is similarly drawn into sex work through her taste for confectionery, and paid three *livres* pocket money a week by her first keeper so that she can buy 'friandises'.<sup>9</sup> The eighteenth-century associations between femininity and sweetness (as opposed to masculinity and salty, meat flavours), highlighted by Henri Lafon,<sup>10</sup> are simultaneously emblematic of virtuous femininity, and a taste for pleasure, luxury, and *gourmandise*. These paradoxical associations between having a sweet tooth and innocence as well as sensuality are made clear in the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française* of 1694, which

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<sup>7</sup> As highlighted in Chapter One, Dhosmont's brothel set much store by its meals.

<sup>8</sup> BA, MS 10251, fol. 218<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> BnF, MS f. fr. 11358, p.9.

<sup>10</sup> Lafon, 'Du Thème alimentaire', pp. 171–172.

offers, among its examples of the use of *friandise*, the following contribution: ‘*Aimer les friandises. donner des friandises à des enfants. On dit fig. & bass. qu' Une femme a le nez tourné à la friandise, pour dire, qu'Elle a l' air coquet & esveillé.*’<sup>11</sup>

Similarly, in both instances within these records, the young woman’s involvement in sex work is described as the result of liking confectionery,<sup>12</sup> highlighted within her story to illustrate both the corruption of her childlike innocence and a flirtatious sensuality which leaves her ripe for cultivation within the *demimonde*. In the hands of a sexually voracious male, madam or pimp, innocent sweets that can begin a girl’s entry into the sex trade become, as Inspector Marais puts it, ‘le poison qui lui etoit présenté par des mains habiles en qui elle avoit tant de confiance.’<sup>13</sup> Danger does not emerge only from what one consumes, but the context in which this consumption happens and the intent with which potentially dangerous foods are deployed. For Marais, at least, the tactical use of foods to corrupt young people poses a palpable risk. Using the metaphor of poison and gesturing towards the madam or pimp’s capacity to control an individual’s fate through her body, Marais taps into contemporary concerns over both the inherent risks of ingestion, and of the power that one who feeds another might wield.<sup>14</sup> Of course, not everyone becomes or remains a sex worker through manipulation of their tastebuds. One woman whose client suggests that he can bed her for a ‘point de champagne’, for instance, reportedly refuses to enter his bed until she is given a cheque for one thousand *livres*.<sup>15</sup> Nonetheless, the moment of ingestion is recognised and framed as one at which a young woman’s appetite or hunger can leave her vulnerable to manipulation.

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<sup>11</sup> ‘Friandise’, *Dictionnaire de l’Académie française*, 2 vols (Paris: Coignard, 1694), I, p. 493. Save for the modernisation of spellings, these examples remain broadly unchanged in editions up to 1835.

<sup>12</sup> Even if the eighteenth century saw nothing like the association between childhood and sweets that developed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, with chocolates and confectionery designed as a food for elite adults, children’s natural inclination towards sweet foods is a recognized social and scientific commonplace: ‘Children naturally prefer high levels of sugar and are motivated to eat sweet things’ (Ashley Gearhardt, ‘Addiction’, in *The Oxford Companion to Sugar and Sweets*, ed. by Darra Goldstein (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 1–4 (p. 3)).

<sup>13</sup> BA, MS 10251, fol. 218<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>14</sup> These concerns about manipulability, highlighted in the introduction, are explored in greater depth by Emma Spary and, with reference to the cook in particular, Sean Takats. See, for instance, Spary, *Feeding France*; Takats, *The Expert Cook* and Takats, ‘A Perfect Body of Knowledge: Taste and Digestion in Eighteenth-Century France’, in *Le Corps et ses images dans l’Europe du dix-huitième siècle*, ed. by Sabine Arnaud and Helge Jordheim (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2012), pp. 295–312. See also Catriona Seth and Caroline Warman, ‘Preface’, in the same volume, pp. 7–18 (p. 14).

<sup>15</sup> BnF, MS f. fr. 11358, p. 354.

Using meals as an economic incentive was not limited to sex workers' initiations into the trade. For many women, eating and drinking with a client was a matter of fulfilling financial and nutritional needs.<sup>16</sup> While the giving of food and other material goods as payment was a common practice across various trades in the eighteenth century, in the brothel it could become a form of alimentary bondage.<sup>17</sup> The *souper* might be part of a sex worker's payment, or at least provide the motivation for her work. This strategy is highlighted in Rochon de Chabannes and Moufle D'Angeville's libertine fiction *Les Cannevas de la Pâris*, where the fifth of the madam's 'Règlements' states that she should keep women hungry so that they will work harder and remain in their madam's thrall: 'On la nourrira mal par maxime d'État : elle en aura plus de soin à se ménager d'un souper.'<sup>18</sup> This was not pure fiction. This system endured throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as highlighted by Parent-Duchâtelet, who notes how, even if a sex worker is charmed and retained with luxurious edibles, '[c]'est uniquement pour la nourriture et le vêtement qu'elles s'exposent à contracter les maladies les plus graves'.<sup>19</sup>

The sharing of meals also carried important symbolic significance, wherein the provision of adequate nourishment demonstrated respect for the civility and social codes of sex work: the chosen woman was treated, and behaved, like a dining partner rather than simply a body to utilise for sexual gratification and was compensated appropriately. In *ancien régime* sex work, as in millennia of human civilization, the shared meal symbolised, if only as a self-conscious artifice, the diners' mutual recognition of and respect for one another. Consequently, clients who skimped on meals not only viewed them as an inconvenient expense, denying women nourishment and compensation for their labour, but also denied them professional respect. While the majority of customers seem to have been content to pay, often described as having 'bien payé' or even 'très bien payé' for their sex and *souper*, others concocted schemes to avoid budgeting for food, leaving women hungry and underpaid. One viscount who regularly bought a sex worker's services for a six-*livre* base rate with added expenses for meals attempted to cut

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<sup>16</sup> This was the case for rich and poor women. See for instance BA, MS 10252, 'Rapports sur les mœurs et anecdotes galantes', fol. 81<sup>r</sup>, Mme Montbrun describes a woman, Mlle Montfor, kept by a *capitaine de dragons* on a salary of 200 *livres* per month, who also attends soupers both for Montbrun and other madams to supplement her income.

<sup>17</sup> Meals as payment were not limited to sex workers, elite or otherwise. As Kushner has highlighted, complex modes of pay, including money, board and lodging, raw materials and finished products were common in the eighteenth century. 'The Business of Being Kept', pp. 61–63.

<sup>18</sup> Rochon de Chabannes and Moufle d'Angerville, p. 618.

<sup>19</sup> Parent-Duchâtelet, I, pp. 436–437.

costs by seeing her in the morning at around six or seven o'clock for breakfast and providing little more than a cup of coffee for her refreshment, rather than a lunch or supper which would demand greater financial outlay.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, Madame Dhosmont recounts how one of her workers complains that she is consistently short-changed by a client who skimps on meals: 'il la faisoit diner souvent avec peu de chose. Dernierement la totalité de leur repas consistoit en deux morceaux de petit salé'.<sup>21</sup> Describing him to Dhosmont as 'pas de grande utilité', the young woman highlights the importance of the meal as a form of unofficial payment. A client who will not offer a decent spread disadvantages the worker whose services he buys. Beholden to the whims of the client and what he chose to serve, the sex worker's stomach was never guaranteed to be full, putting her economic and physical wellbeing at risk.

Madams could also suffer from this alimentary scheming and lack of generosity. While she ran a business for profit, her clients were also keen to manipulate the situation for their own gain. Given its cost, the shared meal was at the centre of an economic tussle between madam and diner. One client, apparently displeased by the cost of his one-*louis* dinner at the brothel, lavishly compliments Madame Dhosmont on the *honnêteté* of her establishment in an attempt, she suspects, to charm her and

pour tirer bon marché de son souper. Car il a grondé M. le Comte de s'être engagés a son aveu a donner un Louis par tête. Il n'a fait que sembler de souper et s'en est allé seul a 11. heures.<sup>22</sup>

Law-enforcers were not above using similar tactics. In a letter of complaint to Inspector Sartine, Madame Dhosmont bemoans the fact that Marais himself tries to use his position of power and influence to procure sexual and gustatory pleasure at a discount when visiting brothels on his rounds:

M. Marais mange quelquefois chez M. de Deshongrais rue du coq [...] Il va aussi chez Madame Miller et il n'y mange pas, mais il baise les filles lorsqu'il en trouve une de son goût aussi bien que M. son commis qui est d'une jolie figure ils ne doivent tous deux que trente six sols, il y a apparence que l'état de l'un et la beauté de l'autre doivent les dispenser de bien payer.<sup>23</sup>

The meal was thus a site of contested payments, negotiations, and regular attempts to undermine the financial and bodily integrity of sex workers and madams alike.

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<sup>20</sup> BA, MS 10253, fol. 120<sup>r</sup>–120<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., fol. 194<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., fol. 174<sup>r</sup>–174<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., fol. 19<sup>r</sup>.

The economic power dynamics of the meal were not, however, balanced solely in the male client's favour. If a man wanted to sustain a relationship with a mistress possessed of independent means, to skimp on meals was to risk losing her. Tired of an *entreteneur* who would come to visit her to eat the occasional chicken and otherwise, as Marais puts it, simply nourished her with 'esperance', one woman trades in her arrangement for a more generous one, with a man prepared to offer the more concrete benefit of twenty-five *louis* per month and thus, one can assume, greater financial and dietary security.<sup>24</sup> While Marais' mixing of alimentary metaphor and reality appears light-hearted and witty, it nonetheless highlights that he recognises the significance of meals to the sex worker's survival, and her need or desire to maximise what she earns and how she is fed at the table. Even when she exercises some control over her diet, this is still a response to male reluctance to pay and feed her appropriately.

### ***Vulnerable men***

As well as potentially stymieing their financial hold over the women whose services they required, clients risked their own wealth and self-control at the table. Nobody, in the exchange of food and drink, money, and sexual services, could be guaranteed constant financial, bodily, or cognitive control. This loss of control might occur as a result of apparent homosocial bonds cultivated by a shared meal and the joint pursuit of sexual experience, such as the episode described in a report by Madame de Montigny, when a Monsieur de Monfort encourages a group of men he has met at a supper to go to Montigny's brothel, chivvies them out for breakfast the next morning, and then disappears after pocketing one of their watches.<sup>25</sup> Alternatively, with the brothel already a site of police surveillance, the meal provided ample opportunity for madams and sex workers to manipulate men with alcohol so as to loosen their tongues and extract information.<sup>26</sup> One madam's comment on a meeting with a disappointingly sober chancellor suggests that ingesta were strategically and repeatedly deployed not to enhance his pleasure, but to strip him of money and information: 'quand il n'a pas un peu de vin dans la tête il est plus discret et plus menager mais plus il a bû et plus il parle et

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<sup>24</sup> BnF, MS f. fr. 11359, p.303.

<sup>25</sup> BA, MS 10253, fol. 7<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>26</sup> Kathryn Norberg discusses how Dhosmont reports clients who criticise the king, sing slanderous songs, and who should, as a result of their profession as ministers, not be in the brothel at all, arguing that Dhosmont's interest in reporting such matters lay in her own fear of arrest. Norberg, 'In Her Own Words', p. 40.

est genereux.’<sup>27</sup> The meal thus gave the madam the potential to gain power, while divesting others of their own. Moreover, the apparent pacts of solidarity created by shared consumption formed another significant part of the madam’s access to power. In a meeting with the Duc de Richelieu, Madame Dhosmont drinks a toast to the duke’s health in a gesture that, as Matthieu Lecoutre has described, was recognised as productive of solidarity and pact formation.<sup>28</sup> However, her loyalty (or apparent illusion of loyalty) to the police who support her goes further than the symbolism of an alimentary pact, as evidenced by her reporting of the event.<sup>29</sup> In each case, the assumed mutual respect and conviviality linked to shared consumption in the sexual transaction serves not to bolster relationships, but primarily to emphasise divisions between the consumers, obscuring any clear distinction between authentic solidarity and a pure performance. The apparent friendliness of a shared meal conceals and facilitates a direct betrayal of trust.

If the meal at the brothel was a means of extending police surveillance across Paris, it also offered a site at which the police themselves were watched. Dhosmont reports that she takes a meal with a poorly disguised local police inspector, inviting him to eat and to stay at her brothel until midnight not only to return the generosity of a previous supper that he has paid for, but also ‘pour pouvoir causer plus longtemps,’ so that she can provide more details on him in her report.<sup>30</sup> By including this episode, Dhosmont makes clear that she uses the meal as a site of surveillance both *for* and *of* the police force, locating herself and her table at the centre of police hierarchy, and emphasising her power in the face of authorities who think themselves safe from her gaze. Similarly, by reporting to the chief of police that Inspector Marais has been taking advantage of his position to get cheap brothel meals (discussed in Chapter One), Dhosmont enacts a form of revenge for his refusal to respect the conventions of the brothel *souper*, and his causing upset among her workers.<sup>31</sup> Consequently, the meal is revealed as a point of

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<sup>27</sup> BA, MS 10253, fol. 331<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>28</sup> Lecoutre, p. 231.

<sup>29</sup> BA, MS 10253, fol. 159<sup>r</sup>–159<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>30</sup> BA, MS 10253, fol. 132<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>31</sup> Kushner, *Erotic Exchanges*, p. 42. Kushner has shown how this anecdote illustrates how Dhosmont objects to Marais’ lack of respect for the traditions and conventions of the demimonde. Dhosmont complains that Marais’ behaviour ‘fait un mauvais effet, car les filles en parlent desavantageusement’ (BA, MS 10253, fol. 19<sup>r</sup>).

contention in police-sex worker relations, and a site at which the force itself is left open to critique and deception from the *demimonde*, as well as support.

Turning now to the madam's economic control of the table, the brothel records also highlight her ability as a hostess to subtly and effectively exert power over her clients by choosing what to serve and what to charge. When confronted by clients whom she would otherwise prefer not to accommodate, the madam is provided with an opportunity to exact an alimentary and economic punishment upon them. She not only reports on their behaviour to the police, but also limits their access to sensory pleasure while making them pay for the privilege. She thus exerts a triple form of control through the meal: over clients' stomachs, pockets, and privacy. When asked to cater for two libertine clergymen for example, Dhosmont, who claims that 'au fond je ne puis pas souffrir les personnes qui manquent a leur Religion' but that financial necessity led her to admit them, reports that she charged them steeply at three *louis d'or* for a deliberately meagre meal: a leg of lamb, a potato salad, cheese and biscuits.<sup>32</sup> This paltry repast is a clear sign of the madam's distaste (or, at least, desire and ability to display her distaste) for her clientele, while also guaranteeing her clients a disappointing time. Moreover, in comparison to her usually cursory descriptions of meals, it is notable that Dhosmont includes significant detail about this particular dinner. In light of her claim that she only admitted these clergymen because she needed the money, we might read her detailed menu not just as a form of gloating over her alimentary and financial control of others, but as a possible means of self-preservation in the eyes of her police contacts after hosting clients whose custom she might not wish to be seen encouraging. Dhosmont's food choices allow her to deflect criticism and to depict herself as a principled figure prepared to enact vigilante justice at the table, while nevertheless fulfilling her obligations both as a hospitable brothel madam and a useful spy. The meal thus reveals itself, once again, to be a site of risk for the client and the madam, resulting in power struggles where financial, social, and sensual satisfaction were far from guaranteed.

### ***Vulnerable women***

It was not the clients who were placed at the greatest risk through the physical or social effects of ingestion, however, but the sex workers themselves. When dining at the brothel

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<sup>32</sup> BA, MS 10253, fol. 215<sup>v</sup>.

or *petite maison*, women were often expected to drink as part of the sensual, convivial atmosphere, sometimes consuming large quantities, singing ribald songs, and indulging in orgies, yet were also required to retain their feminine allure. The performance of sociability necessitated the admission of potentially transformative or dangerous alcoholic substances into the sex worker's body in order to ensure the client's pleasure, yet this pleasure was also contingent upon the sex worker resisting these potential dangers or transformations. Rituals of consumption were therefore crucial to the sex worker's professional success, but could lead to significant professional losses if mismanaged. Marais' *Anecdotes Galantes* depict a significant number of *soupers* punctuated by drunken encounters that do not result in increased social capital, but chaos, food fights, and vomiting at the table.<sup>33</sup> In one instance, a young woman named Staimberg has her tongue loosened by an excess of drink and her behaviour at a *souper* serves as a profound antiaphrodisiac for a wealthy client who has taken a lucrative interest in her:

ils apointerent une partie de souper chez elle pour le lendemain, la Staimberg en fut introduite des le meme fois, l'accepta et se prepara a recevoir avec decence et dans toute sa magnificence le Marquis, elle est parfaitement bien meublée et encore nipée ; le souper fut servi delicatement, le Marquis en fut enchante ainsi que de la parure et des agrements qu'y fait donner la Staimberg mais elle soutint mal son personnage dans la fin du repas ou elle se trouva prise de vin, exces assez ordinaire chez elle et a sa nation elle y departa et tint des propos d'indecons sur un ami du Marquis qu'il s'en degouta et se retira fort peu satisfait<sup>34</sup>

Although the brothel table was expected to be a site of indecent chatter, by insulting the Marquis' friend Staimberg shows up the artifice of shared dining and its pretence of intimate conviviality and reinforces – or at least underscores – the stronger bonds of authentic male friendship that exist beyond the brothel. Moreover, by overindulging, Staimberg jeopardises her professional and financial success by making visible the artifice upon which her professional success is grounded, in accordance with the contemporary belief that drunkenness betrayed one's authentic nature.<sup>35</sup> The elegant clothes, conversation, and delicate dishes that set the scene and excite her partner all form part of a staged, elite 'personnage' that dissolves when she is drunk and thus no longer in control of her own self-presentation. Moreover, this contrast between reality

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<sup>33</sup> See, for instance, BnF, MS f. fr. 11357, pp. 49–50, which describes a supper party that descends into a fistfight.

<sup>34</sup> BA, MS 10252, fol. 210<sup>r</sup>–210<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>35</sup> Lecoutre, pp. 114–115.

and artifice is enhanced by the (highly stereotyped) observation that her drunkenness is habitual and the result of a German heritage that cannot be hidden by her elegant trappings.<sup>36</sup> Although sex work had long been associated with representation and trickery, the mismanaged dinner party made visible the fragility of its refined veneer with catastrophic consequences.<sup>37</sup>

The madam, as well as the client, could suffer for her undisciplined consumption. Dhosmont, who gained both Inspector Meusnier's and the Lieutenant Général de Police, Nicolas René Berryer's favour, and eventually held informal audiences with the latter, overindulged and jeopardised her position on at least one occasion.<sup>38</sup> In a letter from October 1750, Dhosmont begs Berryer's forgiveness, describing how she had misbehaved at their last meeting, by failing to show him adequate respect and speaking excessively, loudly, and out of turn.<sup>39</sup> Dhosmont claims that it was 'un ver de vaing de champagne' consumed at a supper she had attended before her meeting with the Lieutenant that had loosened her tongue,<sup>40</sup> and tells him she only recognised her fault 'peu de tamps après lavoir comis' – presumably after having sobered up.<sup>41</sup> Her pleas that Berryer look upon her as her 'per indulgan' following her misdemeanours further reinforce how mismanaged consumption had the power to firmly reinstate the divisions in status that might otherwise seem to dissolve through professional cooperation. A madam's involvement in the police hierarchy could be destabilised by ingestion and acts of hospitality far more rapidly than it was gained.

The greatest threat to the sex worker came not, however, from her own ingestive excess, but the threat to her safety, wealth, and person posed by drunken clients. Since those customers who did not consume food and drink on site would often appear following supper elsewhere or a night of carousing, the risk of undisciplined and drunken behaviour was significant. Moreover, the food, drink, tableware, and staff required to host suppers necessitated a substantial financial outlay and thus a greater financial risk were the client

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<sup>36</sup> The stereotype of the crude, drunken German was an enduring one from the Renaissance onwards. See Jean Mondot, 'Allemagne et Saint-Empire', in *Dictionnaire européen des Lumières*, ed. by Michel Delon (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1997), pp. 58–61 (p. 60).

<sup>37</sup> Cheek, 'Prostitutes of "Political Institution"', p. 199.

<sup>38</sup> Capon, p. 55.

<sup>39</sup> BA, MS 10253, fol. 107<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>40</sup> She describes the champagne as 'lauteur dece que je trops parlé sanfer a tansion' [sic].

<sup>41</sup> BA, MS 10253, fol. 107<sup>v</sup>.

not to pay. Although, as Kushner has highlighted, one of the crucial demands made upon any customer attending a brothel was that they behave decently (i.e. soberly), and avoid causing unnecessary noise or trouble, the police records on brothels and *petites maisons* depict a number of scenes of overindulgence and their catastrophic results.<sup>42</sup> While some occurrences were relatively harmless, such as the libertine antics of a group of young musketeers at a ball who pull condoms from their pockets, fill them with water, and stuff them into a half-eaten pâté, drunken behaviour and the consumption or destruction of food posed considerable problems for the madam.<sup>43</sup>

Sometimes this threat could be mitigated, as shown in a report describing a client who regularly drinks to excess and agrees to pay twelve *livres* and the cost of his drinks half an hour before his time is up, so that the madam can be sure he will not consume more than he can afford, or leave without paying.<sup>44</sup> However, not all clients were so accommodating. The Marquis de Breteuil, named in a list of ‘Tapageurs’, is said to cause violent chaos whenever he visits Madame Fleurance, beating her workers and causing such trouble that she is compelled to give him women, food, and drink without receiving a *sol* in exchange.<sup>45</sup> Other guests defraud madams more sedately, taking a *souper* then slipping away without paying.<sup>46</sup> In one particularly gruesome account, Madame Dhosmont describes seven drunken men who demand a *déjeuner*, enter her brothel by force and ransack it for valuables, wine and women:

ils ont jetté des pierres et se sont fait ouvrir la porte de ma maison, quand ils ont été entrés, ils ont demandé à déjeuner et des filles, ont fouillé partout et n’ayant trouvé dans une armoire que du Ratafia, ils l’ont bu entr’eux et après m’ont obligée de leur donner a manger sans quoi ils casseroient tout, il y en avoit deux ou trois de la même bande qui avoit coupé le lit, dont un me disoit vous devez savoir ce que nous sçavons faire, ainsi arrangé vous la dessus, en disant cela ils ont cassé la bouteille qu’ils avoient vidée et les gobelets, m’ont demandé beaucoup d’artichauds, une salade et 3. bouteilles de vin ce que j’ai été contrainte de faire, ensuite ont voulu absolument des filles, j’ai envoyé chercher la même Dangeville ; bref, après avoir mis la maison sens dessus dessous, avoir bien fait enrager Mlle Dangeville, et avoir déjeûné, ils s’en sont allés sans rien donner et j’ay encore payé la fille pour eux.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Kushner, *Erotic Exchanges*, p. 112.

<sup>43</sup> BA, MS 10252, fol. 262<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>44</sup> BA, MS 10253, fol. 174<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>45</sup> BA, MS 10248, unpaginated, undated sheet signed by Mme Fleurance.

<sup>46</sup> BA, MS 10253, fol. 355<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>47</sup> BA, MS 10253, fol. 175<sup>v</sup>.

The risks of this *souper* to the sex worker and madam are serious and numerous. Forced to accommodate the intruders for her own safety, Dhosmont is reduced to the status of a servant rather than a powerful hostess. Her stolen ratafia, smashed wine glasses, and broken tableware are not only symbols of the breakdown of mealtime civility, they are a very real destruction of her wealth.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, the detail with which the peculiar meal for which she receives no payment is described might suggest a preoccupation not with the particularities of the ingredients, but frustration at the additional financial burden and fuss caused by having to send out her cook to buy the artichokes her guests demand. This is compounded when Dhosmont reveals that the meal is, moreover, a ruse to allow the intruders time to try to steal her silver:

Je ne puis que les soupçonner de chercher a voler attendu qu'ils avoient été faire perquisition en cet endroit avant que la fille fut sortie et avoient ou apercevoir des couverts d'argent, que c'est pour cela qu'ils avoient obligé la fille d'aller chercher des artichauds puisque dans le moment de l'absence ils tâchent d'en ouvrir la porte ce doivent être des voleurs qui auroient pris sans doute mes couverts.<sup>49</sup>

Much like the *traiteurs* of eighteenth-century Paris, who often built relationships with their customers based on trust that they would settle their bills and not steal the tableware, the madam who served meals to her guests was forced to place the same degree of confidence in her clients.<sup>50</sup> With the tabletop transformed into a battleground, Dhosmont defends herself in the only way she can: by serving her food on tin plates, and diverting the intruders' attention to just one of her workers, mitigating the damage to her establishment as a whole.<sup>51</sup> Chillingly, the destruction wreaked upon the dinner table receives far more attention in Dhosmont's account than the effects of this episode on the unfortunate sex worker, Dangeville. While the abused sex worker can easily be paid off, the loss of one's tableware and the violation of the civilised meal are seemingly far greater sufferings in the madam's eyes. Offering *soupers* may have allowed madams and sex workers to gain economic and social capital, but only at potentially significant risk to their purses and their physical wellbeing.

## *Conclusion*

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<sup>48</sup> At a similar dinner hosted by Madame Montbrun, she complains that a group of unknown visitors make a lot of noise and break her wine glasses BA, MS 10253, fol. 83<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>49</sup> BA, MS 10253, fol. 176<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>50</sup> Spang, p. 31.

<sup>51</sup> BA, MS 10253, fol. 176<sup>r</sup>.

By examining these episodes of ingestion more closely, it becomes clear that the social rituals and physical processes of dining within the sexual transaction did not only facilitate sexual and professional successes, but could also undermine or disturb the agents involved in this transaction. Where Nina Kushner interprets the *souper* as an important event at which social and sexual capital could be gained, such an assessment overlooks those occasions at which the mealtime rituals that should have underpinned madams' and sex workers' success and clients' pleasure away from prying eyes, but instead became moments at which the refined, sensual ritual was broken down. Far from the *petits soupers* that Marine Ganofksy explores as part of an eighteenth-century cultural imaginary that views intimate meals as 'un élément central des plaisirs nocturnes parisiens et de l'élan hédoniste, insouciant, qui inspire toute une société à la recherche de vertige et de rires,' the realities of the brothel supper left all parties open to danger, manipulation, and misery.<sup>52</sup> For the sex worker, the meal was not always a celebration and confirmation of her power. It could instead be a tactic used to lure her into the trade. The meal did not always provide financial and nutritive rewards but allowed the client to bypass his responsibilities. Compelled to consume as part of her work, the sex worker could easily lose the status she had carefully developed after one moment of overindulgence. Worse still, she might be forced to service unruly clients or *tapageurs* whose drunkenness put her body at risk. For the client, the meal was not just an occasion to revel in gustatory and erotic pleasure, but one at which he could fall prey to crooks taking advantage of him, sex workers and madams loosening his tongue with alcohol, or the alimentary punishments of a disgruntled madam with a firm hand on her kitchen. The police themselves, convinced of their entitlement to the pleasures of the *souper*, might also have their mealtime antics recorded. The madam, responsible either for the entire meal or merely for female additions to the guest list, could also find herself let down by wine-loosened lips, or suffering financial losses when confronted by violent men. Shared dining, while often pleasurable and productive, was a fundamental ritual of the elite sex trade that could nevertheless expose its most fundamental dangers.

Moreover, if the brothel archives can be read as a representation, however limited, of the realities of dining and its relationship to the sex trade in eighteenth-century Paris, foregrounding the voices of madams and the forces of order, they offer us a useful

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<sup>52</sup> Ganofsky, p. 11.

window into contemporary practices which might inform our readings of other, more literary texts. Having identified the serious and hitherto underappreciated problems of eating and drinking in the real-life mid-century Parisian sex trade, the following chapters explore how eating and drinking were understood and represented in a variety of texts, including plans for brothel reform and fictions depicting brothel life, independent libertine sex workers, and male toyboys and gigolos. Chapter Three, which discusses plans for sex work reform in the mid-eighteenth century, explores male authorial responses to the alimentary side of the sex trade. If the brothel's status as an object of police surveillance underlines its significance as a potentially dangerous site in the eyes of the ruling classes, its emergence in plans, whether satirical or earnest, for brothel reform suggests that this concern was not limited to people who oversaw the world of criminality and the *demimonde*, but extended to the men who observed it and, most likely, partook of it. Retaining a focus on brothel dining as a dangerous activity and expanding its scope to the alimentary metaphor and the role of eating and drinking in the wider French sex trade, the following chapter investigates how the men who imagined an ideal sexual economy understood, represented, and utilised food for the imagined benefit and erotic pleasure of the nation.

## CHAPTER THREE

### INGESTION AND THE REFORMED SEX TRADE

As we have seen, the sex worker's lot at the table was not necessarily a happy one. Nor, to a lesser extent, was the client's. Depending upon one's perspective, a sex worker's ability to amass any form of power or capital through the meal was either a positive force that allowed her greater financial independence and ensured her survival, or a demonstration of excessive and threatening agency. Since the real-life sex trade and the food and drink within it were thought significant enough to warrant police surveillance, it is little wonder that these subjects also attracted attention from eighteenth-century writers and thinkers. As Bénabou has shown, priests, jurists, philosophers, chroniclers, writers, and law enforcers were fixated upon the growing influence and visibility of sex work in French society and spilled significant ink putting forth their views on the sex trade and its effects.<sup>1</sup> In light of the meal's significance to the sex trade, this chapter interrogates the role of ingestion in one specific type of these texts: plans for a regulated and reformed sex industry.

Eighteenth-century male writers envisioned a variety of plans – both satirical and earnest – for reformed and nationally controlled sex work, in response to its perceived effects upon public order, decency, and the family unit, the spread of venereal disease, male fear of increasing female economic power, and national concerns over depopulation. These plans put forth proposals for better managing the sex trade, rather than abolishing it, so that men might be able to satisfy their erotic appetites in ways that were beneficial, or at least not harmful, to society. This chapter explores ingestion's role in four such plans produced in the early to mid-eighteenth century: Bernard Mandeville's *A Modest Defence of Publick Stews* (1724);<sup>2</sup> Jean-Pierre Moët's *Code de Cythère ou lit de justice d'amour* (1746);<sup>3</sup> Turmeau de la Morandière's *Représentations à monsieur le lieutenant général de Police de Paris sur les courtisanes à la mode et les demoiselles du Bon Ton*

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<sup>1</sup> Benabou offers an overview of these varied responses to sex work in Chapter Nine of *La Prostitution et la police des mœurs*, pp. 431–481, and utopian systems for sex work reform in Chapter Ten, pp. 482–499.

<sup>2</sup> Bernard Mandeville, *A Modest Defence of Publick Stews; or, An Essay Upon Whoring, as it is Now Practis'd in these Kingdoms* (London: A. Moore, 1724).

<sup>3</sup> Jean-Pierre Moët, *Code de Cythère ou lit de justice d'amour* (Erotopolis: Chez le Dieu Harpocrates, à l'Enseigne de la Nuit, L'An du Monde 7746).

(1760);<sup>4</sup> and Rétif de la Bretonne's *Le Pornographe* (1769).<sup>5</sup> Each uses literal and/or metaphorical images of food and ingestion to discuss and propose a remedy for the problems of unregulated sex work. Discussing each text in turn, this chapter identifies their alimentary moments and explores their significance in relation to the power dynamics of sex and gender, social hierarchy, bodily health, and economics with which sex work is entangled. This reveals how the meal, a foundation of transactional sex, was also significant to these authors' understanding of the risks and potential benefits of sex work in a healthy, patriarchal society. Paralleling the different categories of sex workers identified by eighteenth-century authors (such as Rétif himself in *Le Pornographe*) discussed by Ann Lewis, meals become another way to codify, understand, and manage the sex worker, revealing male writers' desire to restrict and undermine women's social and sexual mobility inside as well as out.<sup>6</sup>

This chapter begins with an analysis of the only English text within this thesis, Bernard Mandeville's *A Modest Defence of Publick Stews*, which sparked the first serious literary and intellectual interest in sex work reform in eighteenth-century Europe, and from which many French writings (including those explored in this chapter) took their inspiration. This is followed by a brief examination of the influential French translation of the *Modest Defence: Vénus la populaire*. I explore Mandeville's use of ambivalent alimentary images to justify the consumption of the female body, erasing female sexual autonomy and portraying the sex worker as an abject lump of meat, while also condemning the male consumer whose carnal appetites divest him of his reason and humanity. Moving across the Channel to the French works inspired by Mandeville, I note how Jean-Pierre Moët's *Code de Cythère* adopts Mandeville's vision of ingestion and sexual satisfaction as analogous desires and needs, transforming the sex worker into a gourmet delicacy whose allure is guaranteed by male control of her own consumption. I then analyse the trope of woman as voracious consumer in Turmeau de la Morandière's *Réprésentations à monsieur le lieutenant général de Police de Paris sur les courtisanes à la mode et les demoiselles du Bon Ton* and the reframing of eating and drinking to critique women's supposedly excessive financial power. I conclude by examining *Le*

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<sup>4</sup> Denis-Laurian Turmeau de la Morandière, *Réprésentations à Monsieur le Lieutenant Général de Police de Paris sur les courtisanes à la mode & les demoiselles du bon ton* (Paris: De l'Imprimerie d'une Société de Gens Ruinés par les Femmes, 1760).

<sup>5</sup> Rétif de la Bretonne, *Le Pornographe*.

<sup>6</sup> Lewis, 'Classifying the Prostitute', pp. 17–32.

*Pornographe*, the definitive transformation of the brothel meal into a site of alimentary mastery. By examining this selection of texts, all of which emphasize the significance of ingestion in the cultural imaginary of sex work, I reveal how consumption could be imagined to highlight and resolve (whether in jest or in earnest) cultural commonplaces surrounding sex work and the dangers of female sexual and economic power.

In considering these texts, my concern does not lie in unpacking whether each author's depiction of sex work and food aligns with their beliefs (if they can be known) about the socio-sexual order, and I do not seek to establish the precise intentions of the authors in question. Each of the texts discussed below is, to a greater or lesser extent, ambiguous, with plans for sex work reform often seeming to hurtle between the realms of satire, defence, and diatribe within just a few pages. Indeed, the idea of bureaucratized and state-mandated sex work is so self-consciously extreme and multifaceted that it cannot help but contain layers of potentially contradictory meaning when given literary form. Writing that takes an extreme position on any controversial topic is no more a guarantee of its author's fervent belief than of their cynicism – even the briefest glance at the Daily Mail demonstrates how indistinct the boundaries between sincerity and parody can become when contentious subjects are discussed with inflammatory rhetoric. Yet we need not know precisely to what extent an author believes sex work and sex workers are good or bad (and therefore whether he believes in what he is writing or of what he wishes to convince his readership) in order to explore how he uses alimentary images to grapple with the simultaneous excitement, fear, and revulsion that sex work elicited amongst the eighteenth-century public. That said, each of the texts discussed below contains a variation on the same fundamental ambiguity. Each writer clearly relishes his extended imagining of womanhood constrained for male sexual pleasure. He frames his argument within a discourse of dangerous female power that belies a profound social and bodily anxiety in the face of woman's self-possession. Each text is written for a male audience that can sympathise with these same social and sexual concerns. Yet these authors nonetheless harbour occasional glimmers of sympathy, however misdirected, with those same women they seemingly long to dominate.

This analysis expands and nuances existing studies of each individual text, highlighted in greater detail below, and Érica-Marie Benabou and Mathilde Cortey's broader overviews of texts depicting brothel regulation, all of which overlook the significance of the meal to

imagined sex work reform.<sup>7</sup> As will be demonstrated, the meal is not simply a detail or site of pleasure, but explored as a site of anxiety that must, in the sexual utopia, be harnessed to reassert control over the female body under the guise of a discourse on health, morals, and economics. The following analyses hinge upon two central ideas: firstly, the consumption of food, and particularly meat, as a display and confirmation of economic and masculine power, and secondly, large-scale dietary regulation and collective eating as a manifestation of ‘techniques diverses et nombreuses pour obtenir l’assujettissement des corps et le contrôle des populations’, as identified by Michel Foucault: that is to say, an exercise in biopower.<sup>8</sup>

### ***Money and masculinity***

Turning first of all to the relationship between eating and economic power, this chapter focuses heavily on what and how clients and sex workers consume in these plans for sex work reform to demonstrate how ingesta are repeatedly linked to the perceived dangers of woman’s financial autonomy and of her carnivorous, and thus masculine or animalistic, appetites. In the reform texts that follow, the sex worker’s hearty consumption of food, particularly meat, is evoked metaphorically and literally to demonstrate her excessive and unfeminine power. Depicting and rewriting the meal allows men to reclaim space at the head of the table and to consume the women who have usurped them. Ingestion was and remains symbolic of social and economic power when marked by abundance, elite foodstuffs, and the refined exercise of appetite (or deliberate rejection of good manners).<sup>9</sup> To consume what and how one wished meant to be able to afford luxurious and copious foods, and perhaps to be able to consume them with little concern for others’ needs.<sup>10</sup> The consumption of meat in particular – an expensive form of nourishment that was scarce outside Paris but that played a significant role in the markets and diets of wealthy, elite consumers<sup>11</sup> – was particularly associated with wealth in eighteenth-century Paris.

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<sup>7</sup> Benabou, pp. 482–499; Cortey, *L’Invention de la courtisane*, pp. 41–49.

<sup>8</sup> Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité: la volonté de savoir* (Paris, Gallimard: 1976), p. 184.

<sup>9</sup> Jeremy MacClancy, *Consuming Culture* (London: Chapman, 1992), pp. 113–121.

<sup>10</sup> The overarching tenet of food studies examining politics and economics is, as Carole M. Counihan and Penny Van Esterik summarise, ‘that food commodification is deeply implicated in perpetuating inequalities of gender, race, and class’ (Counihan and Van Esterik, ‘Why Food? Why Culture? Why Now? Introduction to the Third Edition’, in *Food and Culture: A Reader*, ed. by Carole Counihan and Penny Van Esterik, 3rd edn (New York: Routledge 2008), pp. 1–15 (p. 8)).

<sup>11</sup> Sydney Watts, *Meat Matters: Butchers, Politics, and Market Culture in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2006), p. 8.

Beyond its financial signification, a carnivorous diet was, and remains today, a particularly potent symbol of the hierarchy between genders, classes, and species. In the animal kingdom, meat eating marks the dividing lines between predator and prey, demonstrating one creature's superiority over another. For humans, eating – that is to say rearing, hunting, slaughtering, preparing, and finally consuming – animals has, for centuries, demonstrated and reinforced distinctions between mankind on the one hand, and the animal kingdom on the other. As Nick Fiddes highlights, meat-eating has long been understood and validated as an expression of power:

Belief in human dominion does not merely legitimate meat eating – the reverse is also true: meat reinforces that presumption. Killing, cooking, and eating another animal's flesh provides perhaps the ultimate authentication of human superiority over the rest of nature, with the spilling of their blood a vibrant motif. Thus, for individuals and societies to whom environmental control is an important value meat consumption is typically a key symbol. Meat has long stood for Man's proverbial 'muscle' over the natural world.<sup>12</sup>

It is thus little wonder that meat was deployed as a key symbol in plans for the exercise of man's 'muscle' over the ideal sex trade, as we shall see.

Moreover, by divorcing our treatment of animals from that of humans, man's appetite leads us to what Derrida describes as 'la mort donnée comme dénégation du meurtre.'<sup>13</sup> We can legitimise death if a creature's life is not sufficiently important to raise moral concerns. For Derrida, man's removal of animals from the moral and ethical realm is at the core of the 'carno-phallogocentrisme' on which Western culture is built.<sup>14</sup> Expanding his notion of phallogocentrism to include human-animal relations and meat eating, Derrida asks

dans nos contrées, qui aurait quelque chance de devenir un chef d'État, et d'accéder ainsi "à la tête", en se déclarant publiquement, et donc exemplairement, végétarien? Le chef doit être mangeur de chair (en vue d'être d'ailleurs lui-même "symboliquement" [...] mangé).<sup>15</sup>

Power, as Derrida sees it, is dependent upon one's position in a masculine sacrificial economy, in which the symbolic value of meat is crucial. Authority is carnivorousness, lest one should become prey. Expanding on Derrida's vision to encompass women more

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<sup>12</sup> Nick Fiddes, *Meat, a Natural Symbol* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 64.

<sup>13</sup> Jacques Derrida, "Il faut bien manger", ou le calcul du sujet', in *Points de suspension. Entretien*, ed. by Elisabeth Weber (Paris: Galilée, 1992), pp. 269–301 (p. 278).

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 294.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 295.

explicitly, Carol J. Adams offers a feminist critique of meat eating, wherein the hyper-masculinised consumption of animal flesh is inextricably linked to the subjugation of women. For Adams, meat-eating and women's oppression are both dependent upon the notion of the 'absent referent': the individual being whose existence is deliberately ignored in order to validate its objectification, fragmentation, and consumption for another's pleasure.<sup>16</sup> This elision of meat eating, power, and the subjugation of women is central to male writers' imaginings of sex work reform.

Eighteenth-century France adopted a broadly similar view of meat and its signification. Early Modern industrial development led to a concomitant increase in meat eating, with the large-scale exploitation of nature, and thus animals, justified as part of human supremacy within the Great Chain of Being.<sup>17</sup> This was complemented by economic growth, increasing industrialists' and workers' disposable income, which was often spent on the addition of meat to their diets.<sup>18</sup> Despite the growth of vegetarian sentiment over the course of the century,<sup>19</sup> satisfying one's carnivorous appetite remained symbolic of human, and economic, supremacy. Moreover, eighteenth-century meat eating was linked to masculinity. With women thought to favour sweet or vegetarian foods, and meat believed to confer animalistic and bloodthirsty tendencies upon the consumer, a carnivorous diet was far from feminine, as highlighted in the introduction to this thesis. Enduring cultural associations between sex workers, their taste for or resemblance to meat, and the resultant erosion of their femininity and humanity are spelled out clearly in Mercier's description of 'Boucheries' in his *Tableau de Paris*, where he recounts how butchers' shops – which had been found alongside brothels for centuries – are surrounded by

de viles prostituées, assises sur des bornes en plein midi, [qui] affichent publiquement leur débauche. Elle n'est pas attrayante: ces femelles mouchetées, fardées, objets monstrueux & dégoûtants, toujours massives & épaisses, ont le regard plus dur que celui des taureaux ; & ce sont des beautés agréables à ces hommes de sang, qui vont chercher la volupté dans les bras de ces Pasiphaé.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Adams, pp. 66–67.

<sup>17</sup> Fiddes, pp. 53–54.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> For more on seventeenth- and eighteenth-century vegetarianism, see Colin Spencer, *The Heretic's Feast: A History of Vegetarianism* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1995), pp. 201–251, and Tristram Stuart, *The Bloodless Revolution: A Cultural History of Vegetarianism from 1600 to Modern Times* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2008), pp. 131–162, 194–214.

<sup>20</sup> Mercier, I (1782), p. 125.

The sex worker is spatially associated with butchery, compared to a bull in her physique and manner, said to appeal to men whose lives are spent killing and dismembering animals, and is likened to a woman condemned to desire sex with a beast and to produce monstrous offspring as a result. Meat, sex workers, and animal, bloody violence are intimately connected.

Stepping back from the specifics of meat, we might turn to a further feminist critique from Susan Bordo who, addressing fears of female ingestion, describes how

[m]ythological, artistic, polemical, and scientific discourses from many cultures and eras certainly suggest the symbolic potency of female hunger as a cultural metaphor for unleashed female power and desire [...] female hunger as sexuality is represented by Western culture in misogynist images permeated with terror and loathing rather than affection or admiration.<sup>21</sup>

The consuming woman has, for centuries, been a threatening figure. Significantly, as will be shown, this conflation of appetite and sexual voracity was common to representations of sex workers in eighteenth-century France, as it had been in wider European culture. As Frédérique Fouassier demonstrates in her work on English Renaissance drama, for instance, the reality of the starving sex worker was often erased in favour of a vision of gluttonous womanhood, transformed into an object of fear and ridicule as a result of her sexual and ingestive excess, and who consumed and was consumed by her clients in a metaphorical, cannibalistic power struggle.<sup>22</sup> The woman as a voracious predator was a touchstone for critics of sex work in eighteenth-century France.<sup>23</sup>

### ***Managing bodies***

Ingestion in the ideal brothel is also significant for its use as a large-scale regulatory force, in accordance with Foucault's notion of the birth of biopower, wherein society is no longer controlled through fear of the juridical power of a sovereign monarch, but through processes that ensure the subjection and management of bodies.<sup>24</sup> The ideal

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<sup>21</sup> Bordo, pp. 116–117.

<sup>22</sup> Frédérique Fouassier, “I have a punk after supper, as good as a roasted apple” – The Cannibal Relationship of Prostitutes and their Clients on the English Renaissance Stage’, in *Hunger on the Stage*, ed. by Elisabeth Angel-Perez, Alexandra Poulain (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008), pp. 30–44.

<sup>23</sup> Benabou, pp. 448, 453.

<sup>24</sup> Foucault describes the birth of ‘l’ère d’un « bio-pouvoir »’ as marked by the ‘[d]éveloppement rapide au cours de l’âge classique des disciplines diverses – écoles, collèges, casernes, ateliers; apparition aussi, dans le champ des pratiques politiques et des observations économiques, des problèmes de natalité, de longévité, de santé publique, d’habitat, de migration’ (Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité*, p. 184). James Steintrager discusses the applicability of ‘biopower’ to the trope of the ideal brothel plan in *The Autonomy of*

brothel, a fundamentally biopolitical institution, is designed with the management of sexual bodies, the production of a healthy population, and the removal of female agency in mind. As Paul Preciado notes, '[w]hat is at stake in the state brothel is the dispossession of women from their sex-work force, from their possibility to circulate within space and use their bodily organs and fluids freely.'<sup>25</sup> Plans for sex work reform discuss how to regulate women from the inside out not solely through the manipulation of the reproductive, sexual body, however, but through dietary control. This idea was not unique to sex work. Eighteenth-century eating and drinking were already explicitly tied to notions of individual and public health, and the moral fibre of the nation.<sup>26</sup> Dietary control was, moreover, bound up in a growing interest in the relationship between food science and economics in an increasingly disciplinary society concerned with resolving problems of subsistence.<sup>27</sup> As the century wore on, the economic principles behind the large-scale collective regimens found in hospitals or ships, for instance, gained increasing traction in plans for nourishing the poor.<sup>28</sup> As Emma Spary notes: 'Economic eating was [...] not only a fashionable lifestyle choice within a culture of consumption, it was simultaneously a political practice, entailing the government of eating by others, especially social inferiors.'<sup>29</sup> Thus, when sex workers are removed from individual dining tables in private apartments, and transplanted into imagined brothels in which they eat together, their meals must be interpreted within this contemporary interest in dining as a potentially regulatory and subjugatory practice.

### ***A Modest Defence of Publick Stews (1724)***

To best understand the multiple texts depicting sex work reform that emerged in eighteenth-century France, we must first turn to England. Bernard Mandeville's 1724 apologia for state-sanctioned sex work, *A Modest Defence of Publick Stews: or, an essay*

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*Pleasure: Libertines, License, and Sexual Revolution* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), pp. 110–112. While Steintrager highlights some important ways in which the ideal brothel plans discussed here are not completely applicable to the Foucauldian model of biopower and, in particular, Bentham's idea of the panopticon, the basic principle of public health, policy, and administrative, disciplinary structures is fundamental to eighteenth-century ideas of brothel reform, even if they are often couched within a monarchical social setting.

<sup>25</sup> Paul B. Preciado, 'Restif de la Bretonne's State Brothel: Sperm, Sovereignty, and Debt in the Eighteenth-Century Utopian Construction of Europe' <[http://www.documenta14.de/en/south/45\\_restif\\_de\\_la\\_bretonne\\_s\\_state\\_brothel\\_sperm\\_sovereignty\\_and\\_debt\\_in\\_the\\_eighteenth\\_century\\_utopian\\_construction\\_of\\_europe](http://www.documenta14.de/en/south/45_restif_de_la_bretonne_s_state_brothel_sperm_sovereignty_and_debt_in_the_eighteenth_century_utopian_construction_of_europe)> [accessed July 28<sup>th</sup> 2017].

<sup>26</sup> Spary, *Eating the Enlightenment*, p. 4.

<sup>27</sup> Spary, *Feeding France*, p. 31.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 31–32.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

*upon whoring as it is now practis'd in these kingdoms*, provided the urtext for many French satires of sex work and visions of utopian brothels.<sup>30</sup> Written in the guise of a certain ‘layman’ by the name of ‘Phil-porney’ (literally, ‘lover of prostitutes’), the *Modest Defence* revives classical and medieval arguments for establishing public brothels to improve society’s physical and moral health and modernises them for a newly capitalist age.<sup>31</sup> Although Mandeville’s text maintains that mercenary sex is sinful, it is nonetheless framed as the lesser of two evils when compared to the damage inflicted upon the bodies of so-called ‘honest’ women and the family unit if men have no outlet for their sexual desire. Achieving a remarkable notoriety, Mandeville’s text ran to eight English editions over the course of the century<sup>32</sup> and provided, as Faramerz Dabhoiwala highlights, ‘the starting-point for all further eighteenth-century discussions on the topic’.<sup>33</sup> Importantly, these discussions were not limited to Mandeville’s side of the Channel. First translated as *Vénus la populaire* in 1727, the *Modest Defence* ran to four further French editions between 1751 and 1800.<sup>34</sup> Beyond these re-editions, literary interest in sex work reform gained greater traction amongst French writers than their English counterparts. Inspiring only one direct English imitation, Mandeville’s vision of publicly licensed brothels was reprised in numerous French texts, both ironic and sincere, following its translation.

The ideas put forward in the *Modest Defence* are an expansion of those first presented in Mandeville’s 1714 book *The Fable of the Bees*. In its central poem, ‘The Grumbling Hive’, and its accompanying explanatory remarks, Mandeville develops the idea that private vices and selfish desires can result in public benefit if they are managed appropriately.<sup>35</sup> In an attempt to rid an increasingly commercial society of its veneer of

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<sup>30</sup> In her examination of texts discussing sex work reform, Benabou notes that at least fourteen French plans for public brothels emerged from eighteenth-century presses, most notably Rétif de la Bretonne’s *Le Pornographe*.

<sup>31</sup> Alistaire Tallent notes that sex workers were seen as a necessary evil in Ancient Rome, and that later figures such as Thomas Aquinas argued in favour of sex work, comparing it to the sewer in a palace, without which the building would fill with pollution (Alistaire Tallent, ‘Defying Domesticity: Prostitute-heroines of Eighteenth-Century French Memoir Novels and the Public Sphere’, (unpublished PhD thesis, Vanderbilt University, 2005), pp. 44–45). For more on medieval toleration and subsequent repression see, for instance, Norberg, ‘Prostitution’, pp. 393–395.

<sup>32</sup> Cheek, *Sexual Antipodes*, p. 104.

<sup>33</sup> Faramerz Dabhoiwala, *The Origins of Sex: A History of the First Sexual Revolution* (London: Penguin, 2012), pp. 112–113.

<sup>34</sup> Cheek, *Sexual Antipodes*, p. 104.

<sup>35</sup> For more on the *Fable of the Bees* as a precursor to the *Modest Defence*, see Irwin Primer, ‘Introduction’, in Bernard Mandeville’s “*A Modest Defence of Publick Stews*”: *Prostitution and Its*

propriety and instead expose its moral ambivalence, the *Fable* argues that the greatest prosperity and material comfort derives from the economic results of vice, not virtue. There can be no clear distinction between morality and immorality in the world of urban commerce; for Mandeville, business is business. Although he focuses only briefly on sex work in ‘Remark H’ of the *Fable*, Mandeville combines his broader thesis on morals and economics with claims that the sex trade is also of benefit to virtuous women, and thus to society more broadly. Critiquing reform societies that aim to eradicate brothels and sex work completely, the *Fable* proposes that this is impossible and, moreover, dangerous, since forcibly repressing man’s sexual impulse will cause more harm than good.<sup>36</sup> Mandeville’s suggestion is not grounded in a belief that men and women have radically different sex drives, but rather that men’s desire is not impeded, unlike women’s, by social conditioning that teaches them their social value is determined by their chastity.<sup>37</sup> By supporting the sex trade, one can thus safeguard respectable women, families, and the moral fibre of the nation from the potential ills of unchecked male desire: the spread of venereal disease, social decay, sexual violence, the loss of feminine virtue, and artificial, though socially beneficial, gender roles. The principles of the *Fable of the Bees* are modified and elaborated in *A Modest Defence of Publick Stews*, in which Mandeville sets out a complex and humorous plan for the creation of state-approved public brothels. Focusing on the dangers of sex work to the nation’s health as well as on the nature of capitalism, the *Modest Defence* proposes the creation of a social order in which women who have already lost their virtue might be employed in state-managed sexual service and cultivated as outlets for male desire. They should, in return, have access to healthcare and the ability to raise children, thus diminishing the dangers of venereal disease, abortion and depopulation. The sincerity of the plans laid out in the *Modest Defence* is difficult to determine. As Hector Monro observes of Mandeville’s writing more broadly:

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*Discontents in Early Georgian England*, ed. by Irwin Primer (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 1–25, particularly pp. 4–12.

<sup>36</sup> ‘Who would imagine, that Virtuous Women, unknowingly, should be instrumental in promoting the Advantage of Prostitutes? Or (what still seems the greater Paradox) that Incontinence should be made serviceable to the Preservation of Chastity? and yet nothing more is true. [...] I am far from encouraging Vice, and think it would be an unspeakable Felicity to a State, if the Sin of Uncleanness could be utterly Banish’d from it; but I am afraid it is impossible: The Passions of some People are too violent to be curb’d by any Law or Precept; and it is Wisdom in all Governments to bear with lesser Inconveniences to prevent greater. If Courtezans and Strumpets were to be prosecuted with as much Rigour as some silly People would have it, what Locks or Bars would be sufficient to preserve the Honour of our Wives and Daughters?’ (Bernard Mandeville, *The Fable of the Bees*, ed. by Benjamin Kaye, 2 vols (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1924), I, pp. 95–96).

<sup>37</sup> For more on this, see Bruce Elmslie, ‘Publick Stews and the genesis of public economics’, *Oxford Economic Papers*, 68.1 (2016), 1–15, (p. 3). According to Elmslie’s analysis, Mandeville recognises, but seemingly approves of, this disparity.

Mandeville is not an obscure writer, but it has nevertheless been found possible to interpret him in two diametrically opposed ways. On one view, he is a pious Christian, an ascetic, and an unusually austere moralist, who finds corruption even in apparently laudable or at least innocent activities. On the other, he is at best an easy-going man of the world, at worst a profligate, a cynic, a scoffer at all virtue and religion[.]<sup>38</sup>

This ambiguity is particularly potent in the *Modest Defence*. Where Pamela Cheek suggests that the text's 'eroticization of juridical language' and 'privileging of male sexual desire as a force to be channeled and satisfied rather than repressed and eradicated' demonstrates its clearly misogynist motives,<sup>39</sup> Irwin Primer has emphasised the literary complexity of the work, suggesting that its irreverent and satirical tone, its numerous paradoxes and contradictions, and its knowing rhetorical construction should encourage the reader not to judge the text on the proposal alone, but as an exercise in irony (if a problematic one) and an attempt to illuminate the plight of London sex workers, rather than condemn and instrumentalise them.<sup>40</sup> A close interrogation of the role of ingestion within the text, however, suggests that both interpretations might be correct. Images of eating and drinking underscore the text's patriarchal, eroticised vision of a sexual utopia at the same time as highlighting the moral ambivalence of the sex worker and her clients alike.

In presenting his case for state-sanctioned sex work, Mandeville's narrator Phil-porney repeatedly likens sexual desire and the sexual act to eating. Sexual desire is at once an ambivalent bodily drive that must be tempered and managed like hunger, a foodstuff that can both bore and stimulate the palate, and crucially – in the case of men at least – a practice that should be allowed to flourish so that social benefit and a quasi-alimentary sexual pleasure can be derived from it. Mandeville's plan is framed by food from the beginning, resting on classical allusions and a vague equivalence between the sexual and alimentary economies on which bodily health is dependent. He begins his argument with reference to Plato's vision of the penis as a hungry animal that must be fed (p. iii), followed by a reference to Diogenes' wish that his hunger could be sated as easily by rubbing his belly as his desire can be sated through masturbation (pp. vi–vii). Heading off

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<sup>38</sup> Hector Monro, *The Ambivalence of Bernard Mandeville* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), p. 1.

<sup>39</sup> Cheek, *Sexual Antipodes*, p. 105.

<sup>40</sup> Primer, pp. 1–25.

any suggestion that monogamy might keep male sexuality in check, marriage is described as ‘just such a Cure for Lewdness, as a Surfeit is for Gluttony; it gives a Man’s Fancy a Distaste to the particular Dish, but leaves his Palate as Luxurious as ever’ (p. ix). More refined, libertine appetites are also marked out by this desire for variety, framed once again by alimentary discourse: ‘what we want in Constitution, we make up in the Nicety of our Palates ; as a squeamish Stomach requires the greatest Variety of Dishes: And some of our Youth are grown up such perfect *Epicures* in Venery, that they can relish nothing but *Virgins*’ (p. 62). Similarly, Phil-porney argues that where a man’s sex drive is concerned ‘the *Quid* is not in their power, but the *Quomodo* is. A Man must Eat, but he may be directed how to Eat’ (p. 61).<sup>41</sup> Phil-porney’s implication that, for men, sex is as vital as eating to the body’s healthy functioning appears to frame it as an uncontrollable necessity and thus inherently defensible, even if it is often beholden to the whims of individual taste. This is, of course, an obviously false analogy: while the human race might not survive for long in a world populated only by celibates, sex is hardly as crucial to survival as food and drink. Yet by equating these two processes, Phil-porney sets up one of his basic arguments for the introduction of public brothels: male sexual release, like feeding, is a basic material need that cannot be repressed, as well as being a matter of sexual and alimentary taste.

If the male sex drive cannot be repressed, Phil-porney nonetheless argues that it can be tolerated and moulded. As highlighted above, eighteenth-century ingestion was already thought capable of profoundly altering the consumer. If a man’s diet could be changed, so could his personality, and the society in which he lived.<sup>42</sup> Phil-porney’s claim that one’s alimentary and, by extension, sexual habits can be shaped by external social forces taps into contemporary shifts in manners and their relationship to man’s perceived proximity to refinement or animalism. This forms part of the social transformation that took place from the late-Middle Ages onwards, identified by Norbert Elias as the ‘civilizing process’, in which Western society began self-consciously to define itself as superior both to its own history and to contemporary non-Western ways of life, due to its supposed advancements in beliefs, technology, and manners – among which table

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<sup>41</sup> Mandeville similarly compares sexuality to a horse whose path cannot be turned by vigorous handling, but by a gentle tug on the reins, and how the course of a large river can be altered, but a small stream will inevitably go the way it wants to.

<sup>42</sup> Spary, *Eating the Enlightenment*, p. 18.

manners played an important role.<sup>43</sup> By comparing sex to eating, the *Modest Defence* marshalls burgeoning scientific and social debate on eating and drinking to justify the potential management of bodies and their social and psychic transformation through sex work, while simultaneously highlighting the manipulability and vulnerability of those same bodies. Outside the brothel, the clients engaged in Mandeville's imagined sex trade are subjected to a gentle form of alimentary biopower, in the form of metaphorical dietary guidelines and thus a proto-discourse on public health. Their 'consumption' is to be managed for both individual and national interest.

If the client is a consumer, his female counterpart is, in turn, framed as a consumable, leaving Mandeville's 'publick stew' more redolent of a casserole than the bathhouse from which it takes its name. Mandeville's justification of state sex work depends upon the reduction of women to edible flesh. This reduction is indebted to classical models of sex as consumption, evidenced by his nods to Plato and Diogenes, but it is more than a reprise of a simplistic and well-worn metaphor. If, as Irwin Primer has demonstrated, Mandeville's allusion to Plato's description of the penis as a hungry animal is not taken directly from Plato's text itself but from an excerpt of Montaigne's essay 'Sur des vers de Virgile' (III:5), it is notable that Mandeville alters this to remove all references to female desire or agency.<sup>44</sup> Montaigne quotes Plato as follows:

Les Dieux, dit Platon, nous ont fourni d'un membre inobedient et tyrannique : qui, comme un animal furieux, entreprend par la violence de son appetit, sousmettre tout à soy. De mesmes aux femmes le leur, comme un animal glouton et avide, auquel si on refuse aliments en sa saison, il forcene impatient de delay ; et soufflant sa rage en leurs corps, empesche les conduits, arreste la respiration, causant mille sortes de maux : jusques à ce qu'ayant humé le fruit de la soif commune, il en ayt largement arrousé et ensemencé le fond de leur matrice.<sup>45</sup>

While Montaigne confers more agency on the female than does Plato, who sees insemination as the combined result of male lust and the female desire to bear children –

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<sup>43</sup> Norbert Elias, *The Civilising Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations*, ed. by Eric Dunning, Johan Goudsblom and Stephen Mennell, trans. by Edmund Jephcott, revised edn (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994). For the evolution of table manners, see pp. 72–109.

<sup>44</sup> Primer, p. 45 n. 60.

<sup>45</sup> Michel de Montaigne, *Les Essais*, ed. by Jean Balsamo, Michel Magnien and Catherine Magnien-Simonin (Paris: Gallimard, 2007), p. 902. John Florio's English translation of the *Essays* is faithful to Montaigne's original wording, describing woman's 'greedy, devouring, and rebellious creature' whose hunger can only be sated by consuming male seed (Michel de Montaigne, *The Essayes of Micheal Lord of Montaigne with an Introduction by A.R. Waller, M.A.*, trans. by John Florio, 3 vols (London: Dent, 1910), III, p. 84).

‘the Eros of one and the Desire of the other bring the pair together’<sup>46</sup> – Mandeville’s rendering erases Montaigne’s central section depicting female sexuality. There is no room in his narrator’s model of sexuality for a desirous feminine ‘animal glouton et avide’:

*Plato, on the same Subject, has these words; The Gods, says he, have given us one disobedient and unruly Member which, like a greedy and ravenous Animal that wants Food, grows wild and furious, till having imbib’d the Fruit of the common Thirst, he has plentifully besprinkled and bedewed the Bottom of the Womb [sic] (p. iii).*

Citing and adapting Montaigne for his own purpose, Phil-porney restricts appetite and consumption to male consumers; the ‘common Thirst’ is now common only to men. Woman – or, at least, sexual pleasure with her – is reduced to a consumable and appealing ‘Fruit’, recalling the common metaphor of woman as fertile land destined for insemination.<sup>47</sup> Mandeville’s vision of heterosexual relations thus equates sexual agency with ingestion and with masculinity, erasing woman’s appetite lest she express excessive sexual agency; woman is reduced to her passive procreative duties. Mandeville uses ingestive metaphor to underline a perceived fundamental difference between the larger categories of man and woman, rather than just the sex worker and the client.

When Phil-porney argues that man might be ‘directed how to eat’, arguing that sleeping with sex workers is the lesser of two evils when compared to the defilement of virtuous women, it is striking that he wishes to direct his male consumers to a less than pleasant food source. The sex worker, far from fruity and wholesome like the woman described above, is reduced to a lump of rotting meat. In spite of his claim that the text’s irreverent tone might make it more digestible, since ‘a dry Argument has occasion for the larding of Gaiety to make it the better relish and go down’, the sex worker is no more delectable for it (p. xiv). Fallen women are described as ‘Drains and Sluices’ (p. ii), a garden ‘bog-house’ (p. xi), ideal for channelling corruption away from polite society, and, most strikingly, spoiled carcasses in a butchers’ shop:

If Reason fails to Convince, let us profit by Example : Observe the Policy of a Modern Butcher, persecuted with a Swarm of Carnivorous Flies ; when all his

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<sup>46</sup> Plato, *Timaeus*, ed. and trans. by John Warrington (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1965), p. 136.

<sup>47</sup> The image of women as plant-like endures from Aristotelian biology, wherein women are thought more likely to have a predominance of a vegetative, rather than an animal, soul, tied to their reproductive roles as mothers, and instrumental purpose as companions to their husbands. This idea is brought to its fullest fruition post-Mandeville in the nineteenth century by Hegel, who likens ‘placid’ women to plants, arguing that they are less evolved than animals and man. For more on Hegel, and women as plants and plant-eaters more broadly, see Adams, p. 37.

Engines and Fly-flaps have prov'd ineffectual to defend his Stall against the Greedy Assiduity of those Carnal Insects, he very Judiciously cuts off a Fragment, already blown, which serves to hang up for a Cure; and thus, by Sacrificing a Small Part, already Tainted, and not worth Keeping, he wisely secures the Safety of the Rest (pp. xi–xii).<sup>48</sup>

Significantly, while the sex worker is spoiled, Mandeville's vision reduces all women to butchered meat. The eater-eaten relationship again exceeds the sexual marketplace to encompass all heterosexual relations, framing both sex work and sex difference within the two hierarchies that defined wealthy industrial society elaborated above: the superiority of the human over the non-human and the superiority of the economic agent over what he could buy, sell, and consume.

This is, moreover, not the only occasion on which women are compared specifically to butchers' wares. In describing the multiple virgins that a young man might 'relish' as a result of his sexual tastes and desire to avoid venereal disease, Mandeville notes how this does not equate to a vast sexual capacity:

we ought not to judge of these Men's Abilities by the Number of Women they debauch, no more than we should measure the Goodness of a certain curious Gentleman's Appetite by his bespeaking several Dozen of young Pigeons, when he only regal'd upon the Rumps (pp. 62–63).

And continuing the trend of woman as consumable meat, towards the close of his argument Mandeville suggests that the government need not concern itself with the sinful implications of supporting public brothels, but only with mitigating their risk as follows: 'Fornication is, no doubt, a direct Breach of a Gospel-Precept, and is therefore a Sin; but this Sin, barely as such, concerns the *Government* no more than the Eating of Black-puddings, equally prohibited in same Text' (p. 70). Sexual taboo is reduced to the status of an alimentary taboo, framed as faintly ludicrous through reference to its erasure from Christian practice and once more places the sex worker on a par with produce created from a slaughtered animal. In constructing his hierarchy, Mandeville consistently makes use of what Carol Adams would later theorise as the 'absent referent': the live animal that is erased from the language of eating and gastronomy, thereby allowing man to consume a living being without thinking of it as such.<sup>49</sup> However, rather than transmuting an animal into 'a metaphor for someone else's existence or fate', thereby

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<sup>48</sup> Pamela Cheek recognises in Mandeville's comparison of sex workers with rotting flesh the same 'extremist pragmatism' that Jonathan Swift would later use for the cannibalism of Irish children in his *Modest Proposal*. Cheek, *Sexual Antipodes*, p. 105.

<sup>49</sup> Adams, pp. 66–67.

legitimizing the human-centred hierarchy that Adams identifies in meat-eating societies, Phil-porney transmutes the sex worker's (and, more broadly, the woman's) flesh into an animal's, in order to legitimate a hierarchy that privileges male appetite above woman's personhood.<sup>50</sup>

This eater-eaten dynamic is complexified, however, if we consider the role assigned to men within Phil-porney's analogy. Despite Phil-porney's grim appraisal of the female body in his butchers' window analogy, consumers of women are also briefly critiqued and denied human status, even if they retain their agency. If they are not over-civilised *gourmands*, male clients are likened to a 'greedy', 'carnal' 'swarm' of flies that persecute the metaphorical butcher-state, and force him to sacrifice part of his wares to guard the rest from unreasonable appetitive destruction. Even if the butcher retains control through his cunning use of a lure, tallying with Fiddes' assertion that the killing of another animal for meat appears to legitimate human (and thus, in this instance, male and political) dominion, this dominion is only partial.<sup>51</sup> In a degraded version of Montaigne and Plato's hungry animal, the male sexual body, recognised as merely following natural impulses in the rest of the text, here becomes an insect that is almost as repulsive as the 'blown' sex worker herself. The flies' hunger is the product not of rational self-control and the conscious navigation of independent subjectivity and economic nous, but of a mindless bodily drive. It is no longer one part of the male that is reduced to an animal, as with Plato's allusion to the hungry penis, but the whole of his person. Phil-porney's relation of eater to eaten is destructive and instinctive, wherein the client is not a rational diner, but a parasite.

Beyond this alimentary vision of the female body and the sexual act, Phil-porney also argues that state-sponsored brothels are of benefit to men, since the effects of visiting a sex worker are, if expensive, at least less detrimental than the effects of drinking. Again conflating the consumption of women with the consumption of dangerous ingesta, Phil-porney suggests that in visiting a brothel

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<sup>50</sup> Adams, p. 67. Adams explains the functioning of the absent referent as follows: 'The interaction between physical oppression and the dependence on metaphors that rely on the absent referent indicates that we distance ourselves from whatever is different by equating it with something we have already objectified' Adams, p. 69.

<sup>51</sup> Fiddes, p. 64.

The Damage he does to himself, is either with regard to his Health, or the Expence of Money, and may be consider'd under the same View as Drinking, with this considerable Advantage, that it restores us to that cool Exercise of our Reason, which Drinking tends to deprive us of (pp. xi-xii).

Discussing the French translation of these lines, Mathilde Cortey highlights how this analogy again dehumanises the sex worker, likening her to a consumable good, and giving the client an excuse for his actions when intoxicated by a woman's charms.<sup>52</sup> Cortey is only half right. It is not the sex worker's power as a 'vin d'ivresse' that validates the utility of the brothel, but the supposed mind-clearing benefits of access to sex. However, although Phil-porney highlights alcohol consumption as dangerous in order to render sex work more socially appealing in comparison, he nonetheless privileges the pleasures of alcohol for the client during the brothel visit. He suggests that:

For the encouragement of [...] *Matrons*, each House must be allow'd a certain Quantity of all sorts of Liquor, Custom and Excise free; by which Means they will be enabled to accommodate Gentlemen handsomely, without that Imposition so frequently met with in such Houses (p. 13).

Phil-porney's vision of state-sanctioned sex work thus attempts to play ambivalent metaphorical and literal, sexual and alimentary pleasures off against one another, in order to maximise male enjoyment. It depends both upon the benefits of sex work as a workable alternative to the dangers of drinking and the allure of alcohol as an encouragement for men to use sex workers rather than pursue virtuous women. By criticising and encouraging the use of drink in these two ways, Phil-porney demonstrates how, even fully recognisant of the male client's ambivalent position, his real priority is maximising male enjoyment of sex and the sex trade.

### ***Mandeville's Gallic Descendants***

If translation involves not only the manipulation of language but the transposition of one set of cultural traditions onto another,<sup>53</sup> translating the *Modest Defence* into *Vénus la populaire* saw Mandeville's text shift into a new context in which, as has been established, ingestion was highly symbolically and materially significant to the sex trade.<sup>54</sup> While *Vénus la populaire* is, for the most part, faithful to the original, Mandeville's image of flies on meat changes significantly when rendered in French, in a

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<sup>52</sup> Cortey, *L'Invention de la courtisane*, p. 42.

<sup>53</sup> See Gideon Toury, 'The Nature and Role of Norms in Translation', in *The Translation Studies Reader*, ed. by Lawrence Venuti, 2nd ed (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 205–218 (p. 207).

<sup>54</sup> Mathilde Cortey offers a more in-depth analysis of *Vénus la populaire* in *L'Invention de la courtisane*, pp. 41–43.

manner that shapes (or at least foreshadows) subsequent French writings on the subject. Where Mandeville's original turn of phrase shows up the ambiguous position of the male client, with the flies described as a 'greedy' 'carnal' 'swarm', the French translation calls upon the reader simply to '[i]mitez ceux qui laissent en proie aux mouches un petit morceau de viande, qu'elles ont déjà gâté, & qui les empêchent par cet artifice de s'attacher à la chair fraîche'.<sup>55</sup> Where women are still viscerally compared to spoiled or fresh meat, the male flies are simply 'mouches', with none of Mandeville's inflammatory description. While any comparison to flies is hardly flattering, the French reader and his sexual appetites are described with a greater sympathy and tolerance than in Mandeville's original.

Since *Vénus la populaire* ran to multiple editions in translation, it is reasonable to assume that the French rendering of the text, with its variations from the original, would have exerted as much influence upon Gallic sex work reform texts as the English version, if not more. If so, this may account for why subsequent plans contain little to no critique of male consumers of female bodies, ignored as they are in *Vénus la populaire*. From Moët's *Code de Cythère* (1746) onwards, images of ingestive pleasure and edible women are used to work through a variety of concerns about sex work and powerful femininity, in which the mealtime is addressed as a site of female power that must be criticised and repurposed to reinforce male pleasure and authority. The sex worker is not simply a piece of meat, consumed by a pleasure-seeking, ambivalent male animal. She is a luxurious edible commodity, a dangerous poison, a ravening consumer, or one in a sea of homogenous consuming bodies that should be regulated via the mealtime.

### *Code de Cythère ou lit de justice d'amour* (1746)<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Phil-porney, *Vénus la populaire ou apologie des maisons de joye* (London: Chez A. Moore, 1727) pp. xi–xii.

<sup>56</sup> The date and attribution of the *Code* are uncertain. The text was published anonymously, and the date and place of publication are given as follows: 'à Erotopolis, Chez le Dieu Harpocrates, à l'Enseigne de la Nuit, L'An du Monde 7746'. I have chosen to follow James Steintrager's date of 1746. As Steintrager has noted, 'Most authorities give the original date of publication as 1746. An exception is Benabou, who, following Rétif's early biographer J. Rives Childs, gives 1776 as the date of publication (p. 495). Because

Like the *Modest Defence*, Jean-Pierre Moët's *Code de Cythère* seeks to establish order at the heart of a regulated, tolerated sex industry, directly copying and, in some instances, amplifying sections from *Vénus la populaire*. Moët, like Mandeville, imagines a brothel that guarantees public health, the raising of children into a productive workforce, a remedy to the depopulation crisis,<sup>57</sup> and better social order, while augmenting the *Modest Defence*'s critique of sex workers with a light-hearted voluptuousness. Less pointedly satirical than the *Modest Defence*, the *Code*'s focus rests on pleasure and titillation.<sup>58</sup> This is made particularly clear in Moët's expansions of Mandeville's alimentary allusions. Focusing heavily on food and drink within the preface, the *Code de Cythère* transplants Phil-porney's ideas of public sex work into national and industry-specific contexts in which the kitchen and dining room were growing ever more significant.

By the middle of the century, as we have seen, the rituals and public understanding of sex work were framed by dining practices, and developments in cooking and nutritional science were bringing nascent gastronomy to a wider audience. If the *Code* was indeed published in 1746, as is suspected, its appearance would have coincided with one of the most influential and widely bought cookery books of the eighteenth century: Menon's *La*

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the libelous material [in the text] focuses on the physicians Dibon and Astruc, both of whom died prior to 1776 and whose works on venereal disease were published much closer to 1746, the earlier date appears more logical' (James Steintrager, 'What Happened to the Porn in Pornography? Rétif, regulating prostitution, and the history of dirty books', *Symposium* (2006), 189–204, (p. 191, n. 8)). Pamela Cheek also overlooks the *Code*'s likely publication in 1746 and offers the date of 1760 for the publication of *Représentations à Monsieur le lieutenant général de Police...* as that of 'the first French plan for tolerated brothels'. Cheek (2003), p. 105. Jean-Pierre Moët, to whom the text is usually attributed, authored several libertine texts around the same period. Patrick Wald Lasowski names Moët as the author of *La Félicité mise à la portée des hommes* (1742) and the editor of the 1757 edition of Churier's *L'Académie des dames*, in which he discusses which texts are appropriate for courtesans to read. Patrick Wald Lasowski, 'Préface' in *Romanciers libertins du XVIIIe siècle*, ed. by Patrick Wald Lasowski, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 2000), I, pp. ix–lx (p. xxxvi). I follow Steintrager's claim, and the broad consensus that Moët is the likely author.

<sup>57</sup> In France, the inaccurate perception of a falling population was a significant preoccupation throughout the century, beginning in earnest with the publication of Montesquieu's *Lettres persanes* in 1721 and crystallised in *De l'Esprit des lois* in 1748. This idea led to literary, economic and philosophical outpourings, an increased support for the traditional model of the patriarchal family, and the introduction of pro-natalist government policy. With national pride and power thought to be linked to a high birthrate, rejection of large families or family life and the use of birth control were problems (or symptoms of problems) that needed addressing for the public good. For more on the French preoccupation with population, see Carol Blum, *Strength in Numbers: Population, Reproduction, and Power in Eighteenth-Century France* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), and Leslie Tuttle, *Conceiving the Old Regime: Pronatalism and the Politics of Reproduction in Early Modern France* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 151–178.

<sup>58</sup> James Steintrager describes the text as having an 'obscene ambiance' (Steintrager, 'What Happened to the Porn in Pornography?', p. 191). In spite of Benabou's probable mis-dating of the text, and her resultant comparison of its content with *Le Pornographe*, her observations that the *Code de Cythère* is written 'sur le mode fantaisiste et plaisant', and that 'le fond du projet reste sérieux, mais il est davantage consacré à la description de la maison de plaisir, il appréhende moins le problème de la prostitution comme un tout, il est moins absolu' are insightful (Benabou, pp. 495–496).

*Cuisinière bourgeoise*, which brought culinary know-how to a vast and newly emergent group: middle-class female homemakers.<sup>59</sup> When suggesting how to reform sex work, then, Moët released his ideas into a nation newly enthused by their kitchens and their tables, and increasingly associating the culinary world with womanhood. The *Code*'s gastronomic focus is demonstrated through Moët's amplification of Phil-porney's claim that sex in marriage resembles tiring of repeatedly consuming one singular dish, while never losing your appetite for a more varied diet (p. xiv). Moët quotes *Vénus la populaire* almost verbatim on this:

Il en est de ses plaisirs comme d'un excès de table. Mange-t-on trop d'une chose, le dégoût suit la satiété; on ne peut plus souffrir ce plat : mais le palais n'en est pas moins friand d'autres mets. (*Vénus la populaire*, p. x)

N'en est-il pas des plaisirs du mariage, comme d'un excès de table? Mange-t-on trop d'une chose, le dégoût suit la satiété; on ne peut plus souffrir ce ragoût : mais le Palais en est-il moins friand d'autres mets? Non, sans doute (*Code de Cythère*, p. xiv).

Yet Moët's preface expands this image far beyond the marital realm. Immediately preceding the repeat of Mandeville's critique of marriage, Moët states that any erotic encounter, however satisfying, is no match for a palate that craves novelty:

Les Amans du jour meurent de faim, quand ils sont 24 heures dans l'espérance ; ils buttent au solide. On aime, comme on soupe; le repas est friand & délicieux ; les convives bien choisis ; rien ne manque à la bonne chère : on sort de table très content ; on conte le lendemain avec plaisir l'ordre & le nombre des services, l'excellence du Cuisinier ; on n'oublie ni l'élégance somptueuse des sur-tous & du dessert, ni la bonté du vin de *Tokai* : mais peut-être ne soupera-t-on pas une seconde fois de l'Hyver dans la même maison (pp. viii–ix).

The sexual act is not simply a matter of consuming for survival, but of deliberate *gourmandise* and of publicly related social and gastronomic pleasures. Moët's references to expensive Hungarian wine and *surtouts* – large table decorations of porcelain or silver used, as Jaucourt tells us, to hold fruit 'sur la table des gens riches' – firmly locate libertine sensuality within the realms of gastronomy and luxury that developed in the mid-eighteenth century.<sup>60</sup> The diner is, moreover, a social animal, whose enjoyment is not drawn only from what he consumes but also from the company and setting of the meal and, crucially, the social performance of describing his alimentary exploits after the event in a growing world of gourmets.

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<sup>59</sup> According to Alain Girard (as cited by Beatrice Fink), at least twenty-five editions of *La Cuisinière bourgeoise* were printed between 1746 and 1789 (Fink, 'Enlightened Eating in Non-Fictional Context', p. 11, n. 9–10).

<sup>60</sup> Louis de Jaucourt, 'Surtout (*Orfevrerie*)', in *Encyclopédie*, xv (1765), p. 697.

This image is echoed in Moët's description of the sexually inconstant man not as gluttonous, but as a refined and classically heroic gourmet, taking his inspiration from Achilles who, by taking multiple sexual partners, enhanced his pleasure just like the diner who takes a different drink with every course: 'il jouoit ses plaisirs à crois & pile entr'eux & elle, comme dans nos repas nous faisons succéder le *Champagne* au *Bourgogne*, & les *Liqueurs* au *Champagne*' (p. xxxi). He pays equal homage to Bacchus by drinking both 'vin de *Beaune*' and 'vin d'*Espagne*' (p. xiv). Moreover, by reprising Mandeville's claim that sex workers are as pleasurable and less dangerous than intoxicating drinks (p. xxxvii), Moët firmly inscribes sex work within the realm of gustatory pleasure. The reader's vision of sexual inconstancy is refracted through the fashionable and appealing language of the gastronome, whose intimate bodily pleasures are made public through a blossoming and aspirational culinary discourse on variety and luxury.

By framing ingestion and the pursuit of sex in such tempting terms, Moët transforms sex and, by implication, the sex worker into a tantalising delicacy. This is not to say that she is never presented as a repulsive figure in the *Code de Cythère*, with women likened to vipers, wrecked ships, and volcanoes at various points throughout the text, but rather that the alimentary realm is left untouched by the potential unpleasantness of sex work. The only danger to man posed by ingestion in the entire text is not caused by the sex worker at all, but the figure of the unfaithful wife. Alluding to the goblet in *Orlando Furioso* that can tell the drinker if his wife is deceiving him, and that ruins the life of one unfortunate man who confirms his wife's fidelity only to lose her when she hears that he has tricked and tested her, Moët warns his readers against the potential dangers that can befall anyone married to a libertine woman:

Epoux capricieux, Epoux injustes, vous vous attirez sur la tête des trésors de colère [sic] : le glaive vengeur est prêt à vous frapper ; vous touchez au moment fatal ; le coup est parti. Fuyez dorénavant toutes les Coupes, quand vous voudrez boire, crainte de trouver sous votre main, la funeste Coupe *du Chevalier de l'Arioste* (pp. xv-xvi).<sup>61</sup>

Warning that a libertine wife is a thousand times more dangerous than a debauched sex worker, Moët's quest for pleasure leaves only marriage vulnerable where eroticised

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<sup>61</sup> Ludovico Ariosto, *Orlando Furioso*, ed. by Cesare Segre (Milan: A. Mondadori, 1976), Canto 43, 1–46, pp. 1100–1111.

ingestion is concerned. Dining and the sex worker, then, are combined exclusively for the client and (male) reader's enjoyment.

More striking than Moët's associations between sex and eating, however, is his adoption of eating and drinking within the brothel's regulatory framework and his practical introduction of the meal as one of the processes, along with regulations on dress, hygiene, and education, that can perfect the sex industry and its workers. With the *Modest Defence* overlooking, as Irwin Primer notes, practical questions about how, what, and by whom the state-approved sex worker would be fed, Moët's *Code de Cythère* surpasses its English forbear, offering a plan for the state sex worker's subsistence within one of four pleasure houses across the capital.<sup>62</sup> Moët proposes not only that men might feed pleasurably on women, but that women should also be adequately fed and watered themselves, budgeting carefully for servants, four chefs (thus ensuring one trained professional per brothel), thirty-six *aides de cuisine*, and a variety of foodstuffs with which to nourish the entire workforce (pp. 79-80). Sex workers of questionable health are to be looked after by a group of elderly women, for whom Moët's requirement is that 'elles sçachent faire un potage & cuire à propos le rôti', and are supplied with 'emulsions, ptisannes rafraîchissantes, eau de poulet, [...] saignées, médecines douces, &c' (p. 61). For all its more unpleasant ideological implications, the idea that sex workers should have their health guaranteed through sufficient nutriment was in stark contrast to the conditions that women endured in their prisons-cum-hospitals throughout the eighteenth century. Parent-Duchâtelet reports that in 1720, patients at Bicêtre who had venereal disease were deprived of most of the meat ration allotted to them by the prison's administrators, only receiving around a pound a week, with the rest of their ration made up of cheese and butter and were offered the same soup as was given to patients who were not sick. By 1787, exhausted patients were given no soup, people with impaired digestion were not fed with light or good quality food, and patients waiting for treatment were fed on bread containing husks of grain, cheese, and rancid butter while the staff denied the patients the food to which they were entitled.<sup>63</sup> For Moët, writing at a time when sex workers were consistently malnourished, feeding them well was a radical divergence from standard practice.

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<sup>62</sup> Primer, p. 22.

<sup>63</sup> Parent-Duchâtelet, II, pp. 11-16.

Yet these plans are not grounded solely in compassion. Moët's healthy sex worker is not a patient but part of a workforce and, when she falls ill, she is treated as an invalid who must be granted a steady diet in exchange for her body and her freedom, in order to maintain her allure and earning capacity. For Moët's sex worker, food and health, and thus earning capacity, come at the price of professional liberty. She is, moreover, not fed solely to guarantee her capacity to work. In Moët's projected budget, ingesta are used to create and sustain aesthetic divisions between different classes of sex workers in the name of providing women fit for a range of budgets.<sup>64</sup> The sex worker's body is nutritionally manipulated in order to shore up social stratification within and without the walls of the brothel. Of the highest class of women, each allotted 900 *livres* for their sustenance per quarter, the narrator writes: 'notre intention étant que lesdites Privilégiées soient bien nourries, & que rien ne soit épargné pour leur donner des mets nouveaux & choisis dans chaque saison de l'année' (p. 77). Women lower down the pecking order are allotted smaller budgets for their food and drink, and correspondingly have no prescribed access to the choicest foodstuffs:

Pour les 400 Filles, qui composent les 10 premières Classes de chaque maison, à raison de 800 liv. de pension par chacune payable de quartier en quartier ; ce qui fait de fon pr année 320000 liv. [...]

Pour les 400 Privilégiées des 10 secondes Classes à raison de 600 liv. pour chacune 240000. [...]

Pour les 400 Privilégiées qui composeront les dix dernières Classes, à raison de 500 liv. 200000 liv. (pp. 77–78).

Of Moët's projected total budget of 1,840,000 *livres* per year for all of the sex workers' bed and board, 1,080,000 of this is designated for women of the highest rank. Moët collectively sustains his workers' bodies, while simultaneously dividing and ruling them via their stomachs, ensuring that they internalise, assimilate, and are shaped by social and economic difference after they have been judged on age and aesthetics by a male arbiter. When one considers that ill sex workers' victuals are paid for with money from women who died in the brothel's service (p. 62) and perpetuate the health and looks of those who come after, woman's subjugation to male desire through the alimentary realm becomes clearer still. In reserving the best food for the best women and the best women for the wealthiest clients, the *Code* uses food to regulate society through its effects upon the body – in short, through the exemplary exertion of alimentary biopower.

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<sup>64</sup> This is in line with the recognised associations between diet and social distinctions such as class and gender, and the potential internalisation of these distinctions through diet. See Alan Beardsworth and Teresa Keil, *Sociology on the Menu: An Invitation to the Study of Food and Society* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 52–55.

While the sex worker is sustained in body but disempowered as a consequence, the *Code de Cythère* nevertheless offers a degree of agency, however limited, to the madam. The ideal brothel is not administrated by the state, but overseen by it, so as to prevent France from dirtying her hands by performing as a pimp. As such, Moët's plan allows the madam the chance to make a small profit from her endeavours at the table:

S'il arrive qu'il soit demandé la collation ou quelques rafraîchissemens; nous permettons à la Mere Directrice de les servir, & de se faire payer de ce qu'elle pensera lui être dû. Voulons bien qu'elle demande un peu plus cher [...] (p. 45).

Yet what Moët gives with one hand he takes back with the other. His apparent support of madams is immediately followed by a critique of their unregulated profiteering at the table and calls for limits of their power to set prices and their erasure from the erotic supper scene when the client wishes to dine and experience pleasure:

[...] mais défendons expressément qu'elles trompent sur la valeur des choses & principalement sur le vin, où ordinairement elles se donnent vaste carrière d'exercer leurs concussions. La collation servie, la Mere Directrice se retirera, pour laisser le galant en possession de l'objet de ses desirs (pp. 45–46).

A circumscribed segment of the female population is thus allowed to retain a modicum of their financial control. Yet rather than establishing much in the way of a professional hierarchy, this sop to madams serves primarily to highlight Moët's dream of the almost total erasure of female power, making the brothel a regulated space that panders entirely to an unproblematic, authoritative male client. Given the table's significance to the economics and power dynamics of the brothel, dining plays a crucial role in the brothel plans' wider erasure of the charismatic madam, as identified by Pamela Cheek.<sup>65</sup> Published in the midst of the eighteenth-century's boom in luxury food production, with the first signs of democratised access to such goods beginning to blur established hierarchy at the table and at a time at which female sex workers could, as we have seen, gain significant wealth and autonomy, Moët's *Code de Cythère* reinforces multiple social and gendered stratifications, under the guise of benevolently offering his workers a good meal, and his clients a product for every price point.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Cheek, *Sexual Antipodes*, p. 107.

<sup>66</sup> Spary, *Eating the Enlightenment*, p. 163. For a broader examination of the spread of luxury and lower-quality 'luxury' goods beyond the world of food see Cissie Fairchild, 'The Production and Marketing of Populuxe Goods in Eighteenth-Century Paris', in *Consumption and the World of Goods*, ed. by Brewer and Porter, pp. 228–248.

***Réprésentations à monsieur le lieutenant général de Police de Paris sur les courtisanes à la mode et les demoiselles du Bon Ton (1760)***

Turmeau de la Morandière's treatise, *Réprésentations à monsieur le lieutenant général de Police* aims to 'donner le portrait de ce vice dans toutes ses proportions' (p. vii) in the form of an extended letter to the Lieutenant Général, Inspector Sartine. Without proposing specific plans for reform, the author criticises Paris' tolerance of the open and ubiquitous sex trade, particularly its readiness to accept sex workers' power to increase their wealth and status, decrying its damaging effects on society's moral, physical, and economic wellbeing.<sup>67</sup> In contrast to Mandeville's ambiguous alimentary metaphors and Moët's seemingly light-hearted and sensual approach to the table, however, Turmeau de la Morandière's text explicitly describes how ingestion has been used to push female sexual and economic power beyond reasonable limits. By accumulating wealth and consuming luxury goods, sex workers have corrupted and financially ruined a society now crippled by debt and loose morals. The dining table is one of the main sites at which the rapacious female can use her sexual and financial wiles and over which male control must be re-established. Written at the dawn of a decade that, together with the 1770s, saw a dramatic upturn in the repression and institutionalisation of sex work, Turmeau de la Morandière's vision of the table is rooted in a broader societal focus on reining in the sex worker and her power.<sup>68</sup> Turmeau at no point presents sex workers as consumables in his *Réprésentations*, instead rendering them purely as dangerous consumers of food and men. Under the spell of an alluring woman, the mealtime provides the crucial moment at which men lose control of themselves and of their wallets. The sex worker is said to use the supper party (with little focus on the sexual conquest) as the point at which she claims her victims: 'Elle se donne alors aux petits soupers, & il se trouve toujours là quelque sot Provincial qui y est pris' (p. 80).

Describing the moral decadence synonymous with the brothel mealtime, second only to that of the Opéra, Turmeau writes:

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<sup>67</sup> The *Réprésentations*, like Mandeville's *Modest Defence*, is not necessarily as condemnatory as it first appears. Pamela Cheek notes that the text was followed by a *Réponse à l'auteur des Réprésentations à Monsieur le Lieutenant général de police de Paris sur les courtisanes à la mode et les demoiselles du bon ton, par une demoiselle du bon ton*, offering a defence of sex work through the voice of a sex worker (Cheek, *Sexual Antipodes*, p. 105). The following analysis focuses exclusively on the original *Réprésentations* and their alimentary metaphors.

<sup>68</sup> Cheek, *Sexual Antipodes*, p. 105.

Les petites [sic] soupers seuls peuvent d'abord donner une idée générale du libertinage qui régné dans cette Ville [...] Ces petits soupers ne forment point un tableau grossier de la débauche qui régné dans les mauvais lieux. Ceux qui les composent font entrer au contraire du goût, de la délicatesse, dans les choses même les plus sales. C'est à proprement parler la quintessence du crime, & la crème de la prostitution. Que de petits vices n'y mêle-t'on pas dans un seul vice! Que de sensualités ne fait-on pas entrer dans une seule sensualité! On peut dire que c'est le tableau parlant du libertinage du siècle : le chef-d'oeuvre de la débauche moderne (pp. 10–11).

The speaker's concern that the *petit souper* can play host to other vices suggests a growing concern about dining with sex workers in the French public imaginary, reflected in the *police des mœurs*' specific interest in *soupers* in the *Anecdotes Galantes*. It is not the sexual act per se that is disturbing, but the eroticised meal at which refined or debauched pleasures are combined and their immoral effects amplified. Moreover, sexual and alimentary excess is not the most troubling aspect of the meal. More worrying are the social and financial implications of commensality in an unstable economic climate. The speaker places particular emphasis on the elite status of these *soupers*, highlighting how they are made up of 'hommes galants d'une classe, & de Courtisanes d'un certain ordre' (pp. 10–11). The *souper*, emblematic of private, elite sociability and wealth,<sup>69</sup> is corrupted by the social mixing and moral degradation that the sex worker brings to the table. With breaking bread together symbolic of unity rather than division, Turmeau's focus on the diners' statuses and crimes reveals anxiety about the potential implications of blurring social boundaries, even within the self-conscious artifice of the erotic transaction, tapping into wider anxieties manifest in police surveillance and fiction about the sex worker's capacity for social mobility.<sup>70</sup>

Turmeau's vision of dining with the sex worker is tightly bound up with the idea of uncontrollable financial downfall, with the first shared meals in a new liaison setting the male client up for a descent into outlandish expense at his beloved's request:

L'entrétien d'une Courtisane forme aujourd'hui une espèce d'enchaînement circulaire de parties de plaisir, qui occupe entièrement un homme & une femme qui vivent ensemble. [...] Aujourd'hui c'est un déjeuner au Bois de Boulogne, demain c'est une collation à Vincennes, le jour suivant il est question d'un souper en Ville, & le surlendemain d'un diner à la Campagne. Quelque tems après c'est un Voyage à Chantilli, puis c'est une promenade à Marli. Le mois de Septembre

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<sup>69</sup> Wheaton, pp. 194–195; Strong, pp. 211–213.

<sup>70</sup> Here, it is worth recalling Korsmeyer's assertion that sharing a meal is a tacit recognition of equality (Korsmeyer, p. 200).

approche, on quitte la Ville [...] Voilà ce qui distrait, & ce qui enchaîne [...] (pp. 171–172).

Just as the meal, once beyond the boundaries of the mouth, can effect irrevocable changes upon the body, the shared mealtime with the sex worker effects an irrevocable control on the male client's time and money. In addition to the outlay of wealth implied by elegant locations such as the Bois de Boulogne, Vincennes, and, in particular, Marly, references to the vague and expansive mealtime locations of the 'Ville' and the 'Campagne' further illuminate the sex worker's access to and domination of varied social and geographical spaces. For men to dine with sex workers is to lose their social and spatial control of the world after a bewitching at the table.

While the choice of menus for these dangerous meals is not discussed, Turmeau's social-climbing courtesan gains significant social and financial power by fashioning her own kitchen and dining room. Bemoaning the sex worker's profligacy, Turmeau highlights her table as a site of incomprehensible expense: 'Qui peut nombrer la dépense de leur table, celle de leur domestique, de leurs livrées de leurs spectacles, de leurs parties de campagne!' (pp. 64–65). He describes purportedly genuine contracts in which women demand, for instance, 'un Maître d'Hôtel, un Cuisinier, un aide de cuisine & trois Marmitons' (p. 37), or 'Quatre Chauderons, une Marmite, trois Poëllons, un tourne broche, & six Lichefrites' (pp. 42–43). As Kathryn Norberg has demonstrated, the acquisition of furniture and domestic finery was a key stage in the courtesan's progression in the social hierarchy.<sup>71</sup> A further clause sees a sex worker demand of her *entreteneur* that 'Il m'entretiendra une table à six couverts, & il me sera permis d'y admettre qui je voudrai' (p. 38). By accumulating edible or culinary wealth with which to feed herself and others, and to stock her luxury apartment, the sex worker adopts the lifestyle of a wealthy consumer and hostess. As Antoine Lilti reminds us, shared dining played a significant part in salon culture.<sup>72</sup> The table had a crucial role in the sex worker's evolution into a member of the elite, with sufficient economic and social capital to advance in society, cultivating and controlling a semi-public circle of which she was at the heart. Consumption, for Turmeau, destabilises any possibility of the empowered male's control of a sex worker within the social order: it is too liable to lead to social mobility.

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<sup>71</sup> Norberg, 'Goddesses of Taste', pp. 97–114 (particularly p.98). See also Chapter One of this thesis.

<sup>72</sup> Lilti, p. 226.

Of all the dangers that Turmeau sees in the sex worker's table, it is expense on provisions that most captures his attention. Specifying the particular 'Munitions de bouche' requested by sex workers who desire their payment in meat, Turmeau reports that one woman requests: '300 Chapons, 200 Canards, 80 Poulardes, 60 Pigeons 50 Dindonneaux (sans compter le Monsieur) 40 Perdreaux, 30 Cailles, 20 Bécasses, 10 Levreaux 5 Lapins, 4 Plouviere, 3 Bequefigues, 2 Aloüetes & 1 Ortolan' (pp. 43–44). Another, maintained by a *patissier*, levies her payment from him not in land and jewels, but in contractually specified pates:

La qualité, quantité, ainsi que la longueur, largeur, & profondeur des pâtés, fut dénommée. Il fut réglé dans la capitulation, qu'il lui donneroit trois cens pâtés par an ; sçavoir 60 pâtés de Sanglier, 50 de Veau, 40 de Lièvre, 30 de Becasse, 20 de Canards, 10 de Jambon, & ainsi du reste, jusqu'à la concurrence de la somme des Pâtés expliquée entre les parties contractantes (pp. 44–45).

Turmeau's depiction of these carnal (in both senses of the term) contracts is mocking and unsettling. The constant accumulation moves the sex worker's demands into the realm of the grotesque, with her demands for food suggesting an appetitive, greedy immaturity. Yet where her misappropriation of the language of contract and commerce might make her a comic, rather than wily or threatening figure, Turmeau's suggestion that these demands are indicative of the sex worker having 'étudié pendant longtems les matières œconomiques' (p. 41) is not so absurd as it might first appear. By combining her devouring mouth with an awareness, if not a mastery, of business, Turmeau betrays his fear of liberated, masculinised women exerting a strategic economic power over men. The violence of her consumption carried in the word 'munitions' is also telling, hinting towards a form of gendered and economic warfare through alimentary expense. If the sex worker's demands seem laughable at first, they nonetheless demonstrate a devouring professionalism sufficient to eat her client out of house and home.

Turmeau's lists of meats carry a further symbolic value, inverting Mandeville's vision of the edible sex worker and the eating client. If, as Joan Landes has highlighted, the ideal (Habermasian) public sphere is intentionally masculine,<sup>73</sup> and if, as Alistaire Tallent notes, sex workers have often been viewed as neither wholly male nor female since Antiquity, combining a woman's body with a man's sexual appetite and access to the

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<sup>73</sup> Joan Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), p. 7.

public sphere,<sup>74</sup> it is little wonder that the sex worker shown to dominate that sphere should consume the most manly food of all: meat. The voracious sex worker does not favour sweet, feminine foods, but flesh, encroaching upon male dietary space. The inclusion of the *entreteneur*, described, as we have seen, as a ‘turkey’, within her list of meats emphasises this inversion of the food chain. The client is now the animalised party and is consumed as a result of his foolishness in submitting to the sex worker’s demands. Consequently, the carnivorous, semi-cannibalistic sex worker is a far more dangerous figure than Mandeville’s rotting butchers’ meat, or Moët’s gourmet delicacy; she is a masculinised, wealthy, and empowered flesh-eater. Turmeau’s argument for regulation, while never explicitly pinned upon alimentary concerns nor suggesting deliberate alimentary reform in the style of Moët, nevertheless presents the erotically and economically empowered woman as a menace, whose great dangers lie in her approach to her stomach. Without proposing an explicit model for sex work reform as such, Turmeau’s reformist text explores the perceived dangers of what can happen when disruptive female forces are allowed access to the social, financial, and bodily manipulation offered by and demonstrated through the dinner table.

### ***Le Pornographe (1769)***<sup>75</sup>

Rétif de la Bretonne’s sentimental novel and proposal for sex work reform *Le Pornographe* offers the most famous contribution to the catalogue of eighteenth-century reform texts. In *Le Pornographe*, Rétif couches a vision of state-managed sex work and its potential to cure the moral and physical ills of the nation within a sentimental epistolary narrative valorising romantic and familial love. Rétif’s reformer-hero D’Alzan, a libertine keen to absolve himself of his moral failings, devises a plan to clean up the sex trade while extracting maximum utility from the practice in a series of letters to his friend Monsieur de Tianges, with whose virtuous sister, Adélaïde, D’Alzan is in love. While writing his *pornonomie*, the set of rules by which the brothel should be run, D’Alzan completes his own process of moral reform and succeeds in marrying his beloved despite

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<sup>74</sup> Tallent, p. 44.

<sup>75</sup> The text’s full title is *Le Pornographe ou idées d’un honnête homme sur un projet de règlement pour les prostituées Propre à prévenir les malheurs qu’occasionne le publicisme des femmes: avec des notes historiques justificatives*.

the attempts of his former mistress to smear his name. The ideal brothel is no longer the preserve of satirical and scathing texts but has entered the realm of sentimental fiction.<sup>76</sup>

Among his many recommendations for rethinking the sex trade in order to eradicate venereal disease and to reduce the sex worker to a neatly categorised and restricted tool of the state ready to repopulate the nation and reinstate the supremacy of the family unit, Rétif presents his reader with a re-imagining of food in the brothel not dissimilar to Moët's, but stripped of levity and gourmandise.<sup>77</sup> Once again, sex work reform is introduced through the language of appetite:

Les lois de la société, la décence, la pudeur, et surtout la parure, en aiguissant les désirs, sont devenues le principe secret de la prostitution moderne : ainsi l'on verra des intempérans & des sensuels, tant que les mets délicats & les liqueurs fines châtouilleront agréablement un palais friand : c'est donc à nos loix, non pas à détruire cet état vil, il sera tant qu'elles existeront; mais à en diminuer l'inconvénient & les dangers, physiques d'abord, & par contrecoup, les moraux (p. 45).

Rather than stimulating the reader or client's palate further, however, the Rétivian meal becomes an earnest exercise devoted to maximising public benefit, stripping women of power and individuality, and preventing anarchy.<sup>78</sup> A focus on ingestion in *Le Pornographe* thus offers an alimentary extension and nuance of Beatriz Preciado's otherwise comprehensive analysis of Rétif's brothel (or *Parthénion*) as crucial to 'the invention of modern notions of private and public space, of discipline, pleasure, and surveillance, as well as the establishment of modern biopolitical relationships between gender, sexuality and space.'<sup>79</sup> Critiques of female ingestive behaviour within the text form a vital part of *Le Pornographe*'s ambitions not simply as an attack on the scourge

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<sup>76</sup> *Le Pornographe* has received greater attention than most ideal brothel texts, in part due to its status as the namesake of pornography. As Steintrager points out, this has often led to the text being briefly referenced and subsequently overlooked in histories of pornography, thanks to its seemingly unpornographic content ('What Happened to the Porn in Pornography?', pp. 189–190). For more on *Le Pornographe*'s genesis and its content beyond the culinary see, for instance, Béatrice Didier, 'Préface', in Restif de la Bretonne, *Le Pornographe*, ed. by Béatrice Didier (Paris: Régine Deforges, 1977), pp. 7–23; Annie le Brun, 'Préface: un inconcevable labyrinthe', in Restif de la Bretonne, *Œuvres érotiques*, L'Enfer de la Bibliothèque Nationale (Paris: Fayard, 1985), pp. 27–46; Benabou, pp. 482–490; Amy S. Wyngaard, *Bad Books: Rétif de la Bretonne, Sexuality, and Pornography* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2013), pp. 47–76.

<sup>77</sup> For more on the connection between sex work and venereal disease as it was understood in the eighteenth century, see Norberg, 'From Courtesan to Prostitute', pp. 34–50.

<sup>78</sup> As D'Alzan notes, 'un établissement sans règle tombe dans une espèce d'anarchie qui détruit l'utilité qu'on se propose d'en tirer' (*Le Pornographe*, p. 127).

<sup>79</sup> Beatriz Preciado, 'Gender, Sexuality, and the Biopolitics of Architecture: From the Secret Museum to Playboy' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Princeton University, 2013), p. 229, published later as *Pornotopia*, as cited above.

of venereal disease but, as Pamela Cheek has argued of ideal brothel plans more broadly, as a forceful attack on ‘women’s participation in public life concerned with the control of unruly female sexuality.’<sup>80</sup> For Rétif, as for his forebears, this unruliness is manifested in and must be controlled through the table. By administrating meals, a crucial site of power negotiations, risk, and intersubjective struggles, Rétif neutralises the sex worker’s potential to exploit male vulnerability and manage her own wealth, body, and identity.

Since the health of Rétif’s sex workers is crucial to preserving the health of France, D’Alzan proposes that they be given regular, good quality meals. In a similar manner to Moët’s *Code*, nutrition in *Le Pornographe* guarantees the regulated sex worker a decent standard of living, promising her three square meals a day. D’Alzan affirms the importance of good quality bed and board in his notes on Article Twenty-nine of the plan:

*Table et autres arrangements, soins, lits et linge.*

Tout cela serait nécessaire et devrait être exécuté à la lettre. Le conseil de l’Administration ne pourra s’en écarter (p. 128).

Displaying an apparent compassion for sex workers, D’Alzan also highlights the relationship between clandestine sex work and hunger in a more sympathetic reprisal of Mandeville’s vision of sex workers consumed by dissolute libertines.<sup>81</sup> He critiques those men who ‘[se] font un ragoût’ of the *Fille de moyenne vertu* who, engaging in sex work seasonally to make up for a shortfall in her wages, ‘dévore ses larmes [...] qui se réduit au comble de l’humiliation, pour avoir du pain à la vérité’ (p. 175), and seeks to protect her from the ‘louves affamées’ who control unregulated brothels (p. 169). Safe within the *Parthénion*, the sex worker need no longer allow herself to be violently cannibalised by men or madams to put food on her table. As Cécile Righeschi-Caldwell has noted, the establishment of the *Parthénion* recognises and seeks to guard against the dangers that would usually be posed by working as a sex worker.<sup>82</sup> However, to suggest that these dietary reforms contribute to an increased concern for her as a human being overlooks the primary function of the meal: to shift the control exercised over women from the

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<sup>80</sup> Cheek, *Sexual Antipodes*, p. 105.

<sup>81</sup> Kushner, *Erotic Exchanges*, p. 60.

<sup>82</sup> Cécile Isabelle Righeschi-Caldwell, ‘Figures controversées: Rétif de la Bretonne (1734–1806) et la Femme’ (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Oklahoma, Graduate College, 2006), p. 127. In her preface to the 1977 edition of *Le Pornographe*, Béatrice Didier similarly argues that Rétif grants his worker a decent standard of living yet does not recognise her as a functionary whose life and purpose is controlled by her moralising male creator (Didier, p. 23).

libertine and the unscrupulous madam to the state, cementing ingestion as a regulatory practice from which no sex worker is free.

Instead of sensual gratification and the risk of debauchery, the table must be defined by order. Mealtimes underpin the brothel's rigid daily timetable, with breakfast taken immediately upon waking at nine o'clock, lunch served from one until two o'clock, with a *collation* five hours later (pp. 89–90). Through the *collation*, a meal mainly composed of sweet dishes, brothel food offers the sex worker a consumable manifestation of what she should be in this new, alcohol-fuelled, *souper*-free world: light, sweet, and feminine, removed from the drink and flesh with which she might grow in power or control her clients.<sup>83</sup> Although the *collation* could be an opulent meal, it also denoted the light meal that took the place of the supper on fast days: 'repas léger qu'on fait au lieu du souper, particulièrement les jours de jeûne [...] *On ne soupe point en Carême, on ne fait que collation.*'<sup>84</sup> This connection between the new brothel meal and restraint is highlighted further in Rétif's instruction that the table should be 'servie sans profusion, mais avec une sorte de délicatesse', explicitly highlighting the *Parthénion*'s focus on temperance and the denial of excess (p. 93). The *souper* synonymous with disorder, sensuality, and all-night indulgence is primly swapped for a light meal and a retreat to bed at a sensible hour. The meal with the sex worker is sanitised, stripped of its potential for men to lose control at the table, or for women to indulge in economic or sensory extravagance.

The dining space is further transformed into a site of internal hierarchy and surveillance, in which every corridor, and thus every group of women, is once more divided, ruled, and priced according to the value accorded them by male sexual desire. Like Moët, Rétif plans for different '[b]illets, suivant le degré de jeunesse et de beauté', with each woman's corridor decreed by her age, and the side of the corridor her room sits on determined by her beauty (p. 84). Each corridor comes with its own 'Réfectoire commun' (p. 91), with a separate table reserved for those in positions of authority: the *Gouvernantes* and *Maîtresses d'Exercices* (p. 104).<sup>85</sup> The sex worker is therefore not only visible to her guardians while dining, she is also separated from them and presented with a constant vision of distinct male power, embodied in male-appointed senior female

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<sup>83</sup> Edmond Neirinck and Jean-Pierre Poulain, *Histoire de la cuisine et des cuisiniers, techniques culinaires et pratiques de table en France, du Moyen-Âge à nos jours* (Cachan: Jacques Lanore, 2000), p. 45.

<sup>84</sup> 'Collation' in *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française*, 4th edn, 2 vols (Paris: Brunet, 1762), I, p. 330.

<sup>85</sup> Rétif also refers to the *Maîtresses* earning the right to sit at the 'table des Gouvernantes'.

figures, that she assimilates along with her food. Her status is confirmed by how she eats, with one of her most fundamental survival and leisure activities overseen by forces of order.

Unlike Moët's plans for the sex workers' varied diets, however, D'Alzan's diners are all given the same nourishment, irrespective of their appearance. The aesthetically stratified eater with her class-appropriate diet is transformed into one among an imagined seventeen thousand indistinct 'bouches' throughout the country, with no difference highlighted between classes, and variation coming only in the form of a punishing diet of bread and water and a year's imprisonment for women who have committed 'un grand crime', such as having an abortion (p. 80).<sup>86</sup> With each body's alimentary needs accounted for in his projections, D'Alzan's brothel meals are not concerned with ingredients and their effects upon beauty, but instead become de-eroticised economies of scale:

La nourriture des Filles, Gouvernantes et Maîtresses pour les Arts (par jour) à un livre, 17 000 personnes (par an) ..... 6 241 500 l [...] l'Entretien ordinaire est supposé aussi haut qu'il peut aller dans des maisons où la multitude des bouches diminuera nécessairement la dépense de chaque individu' (p. 157).

Entirely funded by the brothel's self-sufficient economy, the meal is the product not of the individual exchange of sexual labour for sustenance or luxury, depending upon one's status, but the result and support of a collective workforce. Unlike the women satirised by Turmeau de la Morandière, for Rétif's sex workers the acquisition of power and subjectivity through deliberate alimentary choice is no longer possible. Consequently, Rétif wrests the sex worker of any opportunity to accumulate individual wealth and luxury, whether through food or the trappings that surround it, of the opportunity to exert control over time, space, and sociality, and the ability to control herself from the inside out by choosing what crosses the frontiers of her body. While unsuspecting young women might no longer be consumed or fall prey to the honeyed lips and poisoned words of the *maquerelle*, what they consume merely secures their position of dependency

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<sup>86</sup> David Coward has commented upon Rétif's impressive detail in matters economic in his plans for reform, both in *Le Pornographe* and in *Le Mimographe*. David Coward, *The Philosophy of Restif La Bretonne* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1991), p. 123.

within a different disempowering structure.<sup>87</sup> The Rétivian brothel meal transforms the subversive and undisciplined meal with the sex worker into a site of surveillance, regulation, public health, and the economical management of bodies.<sup>88</sup>

Only in one instance is the sex worker granted freedom from the communal table: when an ‘amant’ chooses to dine with her in private and agrees to cover the cost of the meal (p. 91). The tête-à-tête is no longer the bedrock of the transactional sexual encounter, but an optional supplement. While the intimate meal might seem to restore some of her lost identity – she is specifically chosen for the privilege, after all – this transaction nonetheless takes place beyond the sex worker’s control or exercise of agency. It is the client who settles the balance with the brothel, the money never touching his dining partner’s hands. It is he who initiates the process, and he who dictates the length of the encounter (unlike Moët’s *soupers* which are limited to three hours before an *entreteneur* must leave)<sup>89</sup> with no room for independent alimentary choice or the acquisition of wealth and status. Rétif’s *Parthénions* thus allow for a potentially risk-free version of the unreformed suppertime experience for the male, divesting the meal of its capacity to empower the female diner and contributing little to her alimentary individuation. Admittedly, D’Alzan’s sex workers are not entirely robbed of choice when in the brothel. They are, for instance, granted permission to reject a client whom they find repulsive. Yet given the recognised transformative power of ingesta, the effects of this lack of control over their diet are nonetheless fundamental to their bodies, minds, and identities.

The meal is further regulated through the removal of alcohol and its capacity to incite sensuality and rob men of reason and control. No drink is mentioned in Rétif’s plans for the table. Inebriated men, as was the case for Moët, are not granted access to the women, and though they are secured within the brothel until they are sober, they are judged no further for their indiscretions.<sup>90</sup> The erasure of drunken excess from the brothel is a crucial aspect of Rétif’s plan for an improved socio-sexual order. In his classification of

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<sup>87</sup> ‘Elle les aborde en tapinois, elle leur parle, elle les retient: le miel est sur ses lèvres, le poison dans ses discours’, p. 42.

<sup>88</sup> The panopticism of Rétif’s ideal brothel has previously been noted, though without a focus on dining. Amy Wyngaard, for instance, has described D’Alzan’s plans for reform as ‘a model Foucauldian project’. Wyngaard (2013), p. 55.

<sup>89</sup> Moët, p. 45.

<sup>90</sup> ‘Ceux qui se présenteront pris de vin, soient gardés dans la maison jusqu’à ce que leur ivresse soit dissipée : alors on leur accordera ce qu’ils demanderont, soit une fille, soit leur sortie’ (p. 95).

the various sex worker ‘types’ working in France, Rétif also highlights how the poorest and most unappealing women, the *boucaneuses* and *barboteuses*, are ‘crapuleuses’ (pp. 177–178). Given the dangers inherent to the boozy encounter with the sex worker depicted in the police reports discussed in Chapter Two, or poorer women’s reliance upon alcohol, removing drink from the mix might seem to contribute to women’s wellbeing. Yet Rétif’s critique of drinking and its effects is nonetheless gendered, and once again proposes an increased control of female behaviour under the guise of hygiene. The worst effects of drink upon women, he claims, are not related to health and wellbeing but to erotics and economics: a drunken woman is unattractive and will attract a lower class of client than her more disciplined counterparts, suggesting that improved ingestive hygiene is a matter of catering to male desires and earning greater funds for the institution, rather than a woman’s wellbeing:

des filles qui vivront avec régularité, et seront toujours propres, attireront plutôt l’espèce d’hommes pour qui je destine les *Surannées*, que ces malheureuses, sales, ivrognesses, corrompues avec lesquelles ils s’arrêtent (p. 123).

The significance of this moral and alimentary control of women and, more broadly, society, is not simply limited to the brothel. D’Alzan’s vision of ingestive discipline and propriety is blurred beyond the four walls into the family home. In addition to its basic role as a site of sexual release, the brothel is transformed into a family space in which children may be conceived and educated as part of a programme to counter depopulation. Consequently, it is little surprise that the meal described in the most detail, and that serves as a model for the brothel’s functioning, is a family scene of peaceful, Greuzian domesticity. Recounting a meal taken with his uncle, his best friend’s wife, and the woman he loves, D’Alzan writes of his profound contentment at the table: ‘Jamais partie bruyante ne m’a satisfait comme ce souper tranquille, sérieux même, chez un vieillard respectable, au milieu d’une famille sensée. La joie a brillé quelquefois, mais c’était le rire de la raison’ (p.139). This scene, emblematic of Rétif’s domestic ideal, is the antithesis of the sensual supper in the unregulated brothel, and the meal to which the reader is encouraged to aspire.

In contrast, it is ingestive indiscipline within the family that causes it to fracture. Describing how the public visibility of sex workers has led husbands to treat their wives with disdain and to expect compliance with their debauched desires, D’Alzan describes an encounter with a young woman married to an inebriate libertine (pp. 187–188). This

husband, who transgresses the rules of familial intimacy by bringing a sex worker home to dine at the table alongside his wife, drinks heavily and then has sex with his guest while forcing his wife to take part. Infidelity and the fractured family unit are presented as the product of ‘ivrognerie’, while the corruption of the family meal by the dangerous outside element of the sex worker renders the husband’s sexual transgression even greater. The unregulated sex worker, when allowed out of the brothel and into the family home, is both an intruder and a guest at the table, occupying an ambivalent and disturbing position that fractures the marital bond.

While his primary critique is directed at the husband, D’Alzan’s anecdote nonetheless establishes a clear and critical parallel between drink and the unregulated sex worker, wherein both poison the male, the meal, and thus the family unit. This vision of the sex worker as poisonous, rather than the victim of unscrupulous consumers, is made most explicit in D’Alzan’s fear of sex workers’ visibility and their public debauch: ‘nos enfants, souvent témoins de ces horreurs, avalent le poison : il fermente, il se développe avec l’âge, et cette vue dangereuse les conduit à leur perte, malgré les soins d’un père et d’une mère vigilants’ (p. 65).<sup>91</sup> While the poison D’Alzan fears the most is that of venereal disease, the metaphor of the sex worker whose moral poison is consumed through the child’s eyes renders the woman wholly at fault for the damage caused by the consumption of her image. It is not the consumer who should be condemned, but the consumed.

Under the guise of saving women from consumption and destruction, then, Rétif’s *Le Pornographe* offers a vision of sex work in which women are fed, clothed and watered, but what they gain in stability they lose in empowerment both at and through the dining table. While ensuring the sex worker’s health, Rétif’s text simultaneously undermines the table as a site of feminine control, transforming the individual courtesan into one among a sea of faces in a state-funded canteen. Both male and female ingestive bodies, just as much as sexual bodies, have the potential to disturb the status quo. However, by comprehensively administrating the table, a crucial site of power negotiations, risk, and

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<sup>91</sup> The image of the sex worker as a poisonous substance is an enduring one in plans for sex work reform. Parent-Duchâtelet describes sex work, its threat to public health, and the possibility of its reform through improved healthcare as analogous to a Paris cabaret that is making poisonous wine that the public still wish to drink. If the public has the taste for the wine, he argues, surely they should praise the man who knows how to remove the poison but keep the wine (Parent-Duchâtelet, II, pp. 611–612).

intersubjective struggles, Rétif neutralises the sex worker's capacity to exploit the male consumer's vulnerability and become his equal, capable of managing her own wealth, body, and identity. In the *Parthénion*, the sex worker's consuming body is harnessed purely to serve the masculinist hegemony.

### ***Conclusion***

When redesigning the sex trade to fulfil their own ideas of perfected pleasure, sexual gratification, and social improvement, male authors consistently refer to metaphorical or literal images of consumption. Controlling the sex worker depends upon transforming her into a consumable good, altering her diet, or changing the rituals and practices to which she has recourse at the table to bring her under control. In order to undermine female autonomy, man seeks to control the sex worker's earning potential, self-possession, and even her health and wellbeing – all aspects of the sex worker's life which are played out at the table. With ingestion so linked to financial power, self-fashioning, and social identity, the reduction of woman to a consumable good, an anonymous mouth to feed, and the object of imposed dietary restrictions reveals a clear awareness of food and drink's significance, and an insecurity among male writers at the prospect of women determining the fates of their own bodies and diets. Male control of the sex trade is only possible with the help of this transformation of woman from an independent to a controlled consumer, or to a consumed body made available on an industrial scale. Sex workers' professional and cultural association with ingestion and its capacity to disturb the boundaries of gender and class is used to vilify women who sell their sexual services and to help justify and conceptualise their oppression and repression in a way that entertains the intended male reader. In the extreme vision of controlled female bodies that is the plan for regulated sex work, depicting and rewriting the meal allows male authors to reclaim their space at the head of the table and to consume the women who have usurped them. The sex worker is recast as a titillating and manageable fantasy for the reader as much as for her imagined client. Yet with the real and imagined brothel table highlighted as key sites of risk and male anxiety and power struggles, the following chapter turns to fictions of sex work in which female sex worker protagonists, given voice by the male imaginary, explore their own ambiguous relationship to the table.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### EATING AND DRINKING IN THE SEX WORK MEMOIR NOVEL:

#### *MARGOT LA RAVAUDEUSE* (1750) AND *VENUS EN RUT* (1771)

Having explored the significance of ingestion to the real-life encounter with the elite prostitute, and in plans for mid-century sex work reform, this thesis now turns to perhaps the most iconic form of the sex worker in eighteenth-century libertine writing: the fictional first-person memoir. This chapter investigates the role of ingestion in two such novels, *Margot la ravaudeuse* by Foucheret de Monbron (1750),<sup>1</sup> and the anonymous *Vénus en rut* (1771),<sup>2</sup> a little-studied text that uses *Margot* for much of its inspiration. On the surface, *Margot* and *Vénus* appear very similar, with both texts depicting apparently empowered, cynical women who use their sexual wiles to manipulate and critique *ancien régime* society, and who achieve wealth and autonomy as a result of their sexual labour. However, a focus on the two heroines' relationships to ingestion, and the depiction of the meals they share with their respective acquaintances and clients, reveals that the similarity between *Margot* and *Vénus en rut*'s heroine Rosine is, in fact, illusory.

Existing scholarship on narratives of sex work and female libertinage has often orbited around one key idea: whether the sex worker is, on the one hand, an empowered heroine who disturbs masculine and economic hierarchies, on the other, a titillating and disempowered product of male fantasy, or whether and to what extent she is a combination of the two. In short, should the female sex worker, and the narratives of power surrounding her, be considered progressive, transgressive, or regressive? Scholars such as Kathryn Norberg have favoured the interpretation of the so-called 'libertine whore', who is

independent, sensual, sensible and skilled. She is healthy and possessed of a very healthy – that is, normal – sexual appetite. She is a businesswoman and artist who provides “varied” sex for men who can afford it. She is a courtesan who lives in luxury and abides by “philosophy,” usually materialist philosophy. Intelligent, independent, proud and reasonable, she is *not* diseased or monstrous; she is not humiliated or victimized either by life or by her clients. She may have come from

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<sup>1</sup> Louis Charles Foucheret de Monbron, *Margot la ravaudeuse*, in *Romanciers libertins du XVIIIe siècle*, ed. by Lasowski, I, pp. 801–863.

<sup>2</sup> Anon., *Vénus en rut ou vie d'une célèbre libertine* (Interlaken: William Tell, 1771).

working-class roots, but she overcomes them through her education and intelligence. An *arriviste*, she can scoff at social distinctions and hoodwink the rich and powerful.<sup>3</sup>

Establishing herself as an independent and ultimately wealthy businesswoman, the sex worker blurs the boundaries between the private and public spheres, entering into and manipulating the ‘man’s world’ of commerce by using her body, offering private pleasures in a public or semi-public market.<sup>4</sup> In so doing, as Mathilde Cortey has argued, she is symbolic of a potentially dangerous female power that threatens the patriarchal and economic hierarchies on which society is built.<sup>5</sup> However, she is not a standard-bearer for female empowerment, focusing instead on her own personal exceptionality, rather than the fates of women or sex workers more broadly, and is professionally compliant with men’s wishes.<sup>6</sup> Markman Ellis and Ann Lewis confirm this idea further, claiming that ‘libertine literature was not liberationist’, but instead, in contrast to Norberg’s claim, depicted sex workers as irretrievable and monstrous bodies to be used by men.<sup>7</sup> Robert Darnton puts forth a similar interpretation, undermining the sex worker’s radical and threatening potential, arguing that these female characters represent pure male fantasy and ‘perpetuate the myth of the female voluptuary who accepts her subjection in order to give full rein to her lasciviousness’.<sup>8</sup> While these interpretations might contradict one another, they are all, to some degree, accurate. The sex worker heroine is a fundamentally paradoxical figure – if, indeed, she can be said to exist as a singular literary figure at all. Comparing *Margot la ravaudeuse* and *Vénus en rut* through their depictions of consumption highlights the variation that exists both between seemingly similar heroines, and within individual texts, in their relationship to power, pleasure, and danger.

Through exploring and comparing the representation of ingestion in these two seemingly complementary novels, it becomes clear that the meal is used to serve one of two broad agendas. It can serve as a way for sex workers to observe, pillory and manipulate others, and thus demonstrate their own understanding and control both of themselves and of

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<sup>3</sup> Norberg, ‘The Libertine Whore’, p. 227.

<sup>4</sup> On sex workers blurring the lines between the private and the public spheres, see Lynn Hunt, *Eroticism and the Body Politic* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1991), p. 5; for an in-depth discussion of this topic, see Tallent.

<sup>5</sup> Cortey, *L’Invention de la courtisane*, pp. 44–45.

<sup>6</sup> Norberg, ‘The Libertine Whore’, p. 230.

<sup>7</sup> Ellis and Lewis, p. 9.

<sup>8</sup> Robert Darnton, ‘Sex for Thought’, *New York Review of Books*, 22 December 1994, 65–74 (p. 67).

wider society on an economic, physiological, and philosophical level. Or it can be used to pillory the sex worker herself, by bolstering male power, undermining feminine agency, and maintaining the gendered and socio-economic status quo. To explore these ideas, this chapter draws upon Kathryn Norberg's claim that the figure of the sex worker offers us a valuable insight into society's attitudes towards social and political hierarchies, and women's social and sexual autonomy.<sup>9</sup> It then uses this claim to query Norberg's own appraisal of *Margot* as an independent 'libertine whore' and to shed light on the virtually unexamined *Vénus en rut* by applying this idea to specific scenes of ingestion in both texts. In so doing, it reveals differences between *Margot* and *Vénus* that are not clearly visible at first glance. It reveals how meals are deliberately deployed to represent different ideals of gendered and social power in the sexual marketplace and offer, in the seemingly anodyne depiction of sensual pleasure, a barometer of each text's (and, perhaps, author's) relationship to female power and the social hierarchy. This comparison helps to undermine claims that *Vénus en rut* resembles *Margot la ravaudeuse*, as Robert Darnton has suggested, or that Rosine surpasses Margot, prefiguring the ultimate rational libertine heroine, Juliette, as Jean-Pierre Dubost argues.<sup>10</sup> Rather than forming part of a narrative of progression and amplification, in which the sex worker heroine becomes increasingly voluptuous and fantastical, but nonetheless with powerful and subversive potential, this chapter reveals how the table exposes this subversive power as illusory, and reveals the problems in viewing the libertine sex worker heroine as an empowered and knowledge-seeking figure. She might instead be better understood as an iteration of patriarchal fantasy and control.

### ***Margot la ravaudeuse* (1750)**

Alongside Boyer d'Argens' *Thérèse Philosophe* (1748), *Margot la ravaudeuse* is one of the key mid-century texts depicting female libertinage and sex work.<sup>11</sup> From humble beginnings as a *ravaudeuse* (a stocking-darner), Margot uses her sexual wiles to gain riches and renown. After a first initiation into the world of sexual transactions in a Paris

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<sup>9</sup> Norberg, 'The Libertine Whore', pp. 225–226.

<sup>10</sup> Jean-Pierre Dubost, 'Libertinage and Rationality: From the "Will to Knowledge" to Libertine Textuality', *Yale French Studies*, 94 (1998), 52–78 (p. 67); Jean-Pierre Dubost, 'Préface: Une Rémarquable carrière', in *Œuvres anonymes du XVIIIe siècle*, ed. by Michel Camus, L'Enfer de la Bibliothèque Nationale, 4 vols (Paris: Fayard, 1985–1987), IV (1987), pp. 101–106 (p. 104); Darnton, 'Sex for Thought', p. 68.

<sup>11</sup> Fougeret de Monbron was arrested and imprisoned for producing the text in 1748, before it was published; see Patrick Wald Lasowski, 'Fougeret de Monbron' in *Romanciers libertins du XVIIIe siècle*, ed. by Lasowski, I, pp. 1243–1254 (p. 1250).

brothel, Margot goes through a series of increasingly wealthy and grotesque *entreteneurs*, critiquing them one after the other while consuming their wealth, before eventually retiring to the suburbs. Despite its significance, *Margot* has tended to play second fiddle to the better-known *Thérèse Philosophe*, which has garnered significant critical attention.<sup>12</sup> *Margot* has been the object of comparatively little in-depth scholarship, beyond Arnaldo Pizzorusso's examination of 'Situations and Environment in *Margot la Ravaudeuse*', Patrick Wald Lasowski's 'Notice' on the text in the 2000 Pléiade edition, and a brief introduction offered by Edouard Langille in his 2015 translation of the text.<sup>13</sup> It has usually been considered as one among many libertine and pornographic novels, and/or novels depicting sex workers.<sup>14</sup> *Margot* has, however, appeared consistently and justifiably in existing work on ingestion in libertine texts. Food and mealtimes punctuate Margot's narrative, marking the significant events in her career, and introduce the reader to her array of *entreteneurs* at the table. Her alimentary encounters expose the burlesque and grotesque elements of *ancien régime* society and present the reader with contrasting views of wealth and poverty, honesty and hypocrisy, control and chaos that set Margot apart from those by whom she is surrounded during her financial and social ascent. In *L'Amour gourmand*, Serge Safran examines several episodes in *Margot*, focusing specifically on the arousing and stimulating substances that the heroine serves.<sup>15</sup> The drunken clients who sit at Margot's table have also come under scrutiny by Mathilde Cortey, who has focused upon their role as satires of national types within a libertine 'physiologie du goût'.<sup>16</sup> The fat, uncouth, and wealthy clients with whom Margot associates have also been examined as incarnations of social injustice and greed.<sup>17</sup> Yet there has, as yet, been no single sustained analysis of ingestion's

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<sup>12</sup> *Thérèse* has been analysed by, among others, Paul J. Young, *Seducing the Eighteenth-Century French Reader: Reading, Writing, and the Question of Pleasure* (Aldershot, England; Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate, 2008), pp. 31–43; Catherine Cusset, *No Tomorrow: The Ethics of Pleasure in the French Enlightenment* (Charlottesville; London: University Press of Virginia, 1999), pp. 89–115; Michel Delon, 'De *Thérèse philosophe* à *La Philosophie dans le boudoir*, la place de la philosophie', *Roma Zeitschrift für Literaturgeschichte / Cahiers d'histoires des littératures romanes*, 7 (1983), 76–88; Natania Meeker, *Voluptuous Philosophy: Literary Materialism in the French Enlightenment* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), pp. 126–154.

<sup>13</sup> Arnaldo Pizzorusso, 'Situation and Environment in *Margot la Ravaudeuse*', *Yale French Studies*, 40 (1968), 142–155; Patrick Wald Lasowski, 'Margot la ravaudeuse: Notice', in *Romanciers libertins du XVIIIe siècle*, ed. by Lasowski, I, pp.1257–1265; Langille, pp. 11–12.

<sup>14</sup> This is the approach taken by Cortey and Norberg. On the conflation of the libertine and the sex worker, see Anne Richardot's observation that 'where women are concerned, the female libertine is almost invariably synonymous with 'prostitute' (*Femmes et libertinage au XVIIIe siècle ou les caprices de Cythère* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2003), p. 10).

<sup>15</sup> See Safran, for instance, p. 33 for his discussion of chocolate; p. 75 for coffee; p. 161 for liqueur.

<sup>16</sup> Cortey, *L'Invention de la courtisane*, p. 151.

<sup>17</sup> See Lafon, 'Du Thème alimentaire', p. 174.

significance to *Margot* either as a text in its own right, or as part of a broader range of texts with sex worker heroines. By reprising and appraising the existing work on this novel, at the same time as offering new analyses of meals and ingestion in the text, this analysis seeks to answer several key questions. What is the significance of ingestion in *Margot la ravaudeuse*? How do food and drink help to differentiate Margot from the other characters she encounters during her career, and to what end? And how, in light of Margot's relationship to ingestion, can and should we understand the apparently similar *Vénus en rut*? Focusing on the presence and implications of excess within the novel, considering Michel Delon's claim that 'les textes des Lumières permettent déjà de suivre l'affirmation de la cuisine comme faste et sociabilité, comme sensualité, voire sexualité, avec le risque toujours menaçant de l'excès', this study of *Margot* uses the table to examine how excess is not simply a risk, but a constant reality that frames our understanding of the heroine, and of the clients and companions by whom she is surrounded.

### ***Margot's consumption***

A skilled and successful sex worker, Margot reaches the top of her economic and professional hierarchy over the course of her story, achieving this through a pragmatic and rational approach to business. Consequently, her approach to ingestion is focused through a similar economic prism, with consumption framed by strategy rather than abandonment to pleasure and excess. The meal in *Margot* is not the libertine 'abondance, ostentation, surenchère' discussed by Delon,<sup>18</sup> but a material need that highlights her financial instability, or a practical means of acquiring or consuming wealth that belongs to others. Margot's understanding of food through money is visible at the very start of her narrative, before her career in the sex trade, when she is working for a mother who demands a daily 'compte exact de [s]on gain' (p. 804). With her youth framed by accounting, Margot interprets the food that accompanies her sexual encounters in monetary terms long before she has begun a career sharing tables and beds with clients. Describing how she loses her virginity to a young ostler in a dingy cabaret, Margot recounts the accompanying meal as an itemised bill: 'Notre festin répondait au mieux à la simplicité du sanctuaire. Une pinte de vin à huit sols, pour deux de fromage, et autant de

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<sup>18</sup> Delon, *Le Savoir-vivre libertin*, p. 169.

pain; le tout, bien calculé, montait à la somme de douze' (p. 805). Margot's focus on money over sensuality is visible from this very first mealtime scene.

However, her understanding of the relationship between pleasure, food, and wealth is nuanced: this meal is no less enjoyable for its cheapness, said to rival the luxuries provided for for 'un louis par tête chez Duparc', a renowned *traiteur* (p. 805).<sup>19</sup> Although economic matters frame her understanding of the world and the sensual delight to be found within it, she does not suggest a direct correlation between expense and enjoyment. This first meal is far from luxurious, but elicits greater authentic pleasure than any other described in the text. Although Arnaldo Pizzorusso has suggested that the 'terse realism' and poverty of this scene emphasise Margot's position at the bottom of the social hierarchy, with the squalid locale serving to 'corrupt a nature which, moreover, was asking to be corrupted', the tavern is, in fact, a site of unpretentious enjoyment of simple food and loving bodies: as Margot tells us, 'J'adorais Pierrot, Pierrot m'adorait' (p. 806).<sup>20</sup> Surrounded by walls covered in cartoons scrawled by 'd'aimables débauchés en belle humeur', eating her food '[de] grand cœur', and avowing that '[I]es mets les plus grossiers, assaisonnés par l'amour, sont toujours délicieux' (p. 805), Margot's first and simplest meal does not corrupt, but provides a counterpoint to the supposedly luxurious and refined dinners that will define her life as a sex worker. Starting her narrated sexual and alimentary life with bread and cheese, Margot reveals she is untouched by two of the key dangers of food highlighted in eighteenth-century culinary and moral discourse: its ability to intoxicate the senses and undermine rational, detached thought, and the potentially misleading influence of expensive luxuries over simple pleasures. While Margot soon becomes wealthy enough not to count out her pennies to buy a simple meal, her first paltry repast anticipates a cynicism about consumption and luxury that only grows over time.

Once her career has begun in earnest, Margot's economic understanding of food and drink allows her to use the meal to squeeze money out of her clients. Eventually becoming rich enough to host at her own table, Margot deploys strategic ingesta and dining rites to lower her companions' inhibitions and thus increase their generosity,

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<sup>19</sup> For more on Duparc, see p. 805 n. 6. For more on *traiteurs*, see Mennell, pp. 138–139.

<sup>20</sup> Pizzorusso, p. 144.

while never succumbing to the food and drink she consumes. When drinking with an English *entreteneur*, for instance,

[i]l n'était question que de décrier mes compatriotes, de boire au roi George, et de donner à tous les diables le pape et le prétendant. Moyennant ce petit trait de complaisance, j'avais la liberté de lui vider toutes ses poches (p. 850).

As Matthieu Lecoutre argues, toasting formed a significant part of solidarity and pact formation at the eighteenth-century table.<sup>21</sup> Enacting a double manipulation on her drinking partner, profiting from his patriotism and intoxicating him with the implicit trust inherent to drinking ritual as well with as the contents of his glass, Margot strategically uses the toast to gain greater wealth. As well as alcohol, Margot uses other foods and drinks with noted physiological effects and, crucially, social connotations as part of her economic strategy. After flirting with a German baron during a *souper*, for instance, Margot invites him to her apartment for chocolate the next morning as part of a ruse to encourage him to buy jewels for her. Upon his arrival, Margot has her maidservant prepare the drink:

« Allons, Lisette, dépêchons, qu'on fasse le chocolat : et souvenez-vous surtout que je ne l'aime pas léger. »

Mes ordres furent exécutés dans la minute. Tandis que nous régaliions notre odorat et notre palais du parfum agréable de ce liquide mousseux, on vint m'avertir que mon joaillier demandait à me parler (p. 838).

The baron, excited by this episode, settles Margot's jeweller's bill immediately. Mathilde Cortey has highlighted the 'volupté éminemment sexuelle' of this explicitly rich drink, emphasising the seminal allusions of the frothy liquid that lingers on the palate, and suggesting that it serves less as a drink than a 'philtre d'amour'.<sup>22</sup> Yet Cortey's understanding of the drink exclusively as a sexual metaphor ignores the economic motives behind Margot's choice of drink, known for its ambivalent aphrodisiac, intoxicating qualities.<sup>23</sup> Serge Safran, alternatively, recognises the chocolate as 'une arme, non seulement de séduction mais de corruption. Cette fois vénale, quasi maléfique', without explicitly highlighting its economic implications.<sup>24</sup> Yet Margot's motivation is not to corrupt her drinking partner, exercising any great moral evil, but merely to charm him into paying for some jewels. Manipulating her drinking partner

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<sup>21</sup> Lecoutre, p. 231.

<sup>22</sup> Cortey, *L'Invention de la courtisane*, p. 149.

<sup>23</sup> Emma Spary notes that by the mid-eighteenth century, foods like chocolate were simultaneously considered dangerous and luxurious on the one hand, and marketed as health foods on the other, as well as becoming the object of concerns over adulteration. Spary, *Feeding France*, pp. 140–153. See also Safran, pp. 25–26.

<sup>24</sup> Safran, p. 33.

with this luxurious substance for a specific economic end, Margot demonstrates a cool, strategic understanding of how food and drink are not simply a way to augment sensual or sexual pleasure, or to poison the world in which she moves, but are useful tools for financial gain.

Beyond her use of ingesta to acquire wealth, Margot conceptualises money as food, using the metaphorical discourse of consumption to frame her professional ambitions and relationship to her clients. Describing a *député de clergé* whose revenue she is determined to acquire, Margot states ‘ je consentis à le recevoir, bien résolue de lui manger jusqu’à son dernier rabat le plus tôt qu’il me serait possible’ (p. 847). Blurring the lines between the consumption of food, human bodies, and money, Margot demonstrates a quasi-cannibalistic desire for wealth, with her economic appetites rendering her a devouring and threatening force, ready to consume and overpower the men she encounters. Moreover, when dealing with the *député*, the act of ingestion relates not only to augmenting her wealth or measuring her social progress, but to the literal and metaphorical exaction of socio-economic redress. Since the *député*’s role is to ‘s’engraisser inhumainement de notre propre substance, et de rire a nos dépens’ (ibid), Margot consumes him both to increase her own capital and to enact political and economic vigilante justice upon an already cannibalistic figure. Using the image of consumption to describe her tactics, Margot adapts and supersedes the cannibalism on which socio-economic inequality is founded, subverting the hierarchies of *ancien régime* society.

Despite her manipulation of the table for financial reward, Margot expresses contempt for people who depend upon others’ patronage for a hot meal. It is not poorer sex workers whom she disdains, however, but starving hacks. Margot describes dinners held in her apartments for her *fermier général*, at which six or eight places are laid each night for artists and writers who, ‘pour l’intérêt de leur ventre, prodiguaient en esclaves leur encens mercenaire à mon Crésus’, and how great writers are ‘mis en pièces et déchirés à belles dents’ (pp. 853–854) during dinnertime chatter. Anticipating Diderot in his *Encyclopédie* article on ‘Prostitution’ seventeen years later, which suggests that starving

writers are the true ‘prostitutes’ of society,<sup>25</sup> Margot expresses disdain for her dining companions’ lack of artistic taste, their poverty as expressed through their hunger, and the crude animalism with which they tear great art to pieces in order to flatter their own egos. Alistaire Tallent has highlighted that this scene elevates Margot to the level of the *salonnière* and establishes her home as part of the public sphere, demonstrating how she, unlike her guests, has successfully transcended the boundaries of class and space.<sup>26</sup> Yet the situation is not quite so clear-cut. Taking into consideration the boundaries of ingestive ritual and obligation, we should note that these meals take place in Margot’s own dining room, yet she exercises little control over the guest list. Her authority over the table is contingent, and she must sustain a performance of elite sociability even when hosting in her own home. However, Margot is still in a position of greater economic power, encountering none of the obstacles to consuming the fruits of her labour faced by her poorer guests. At the height of her success, Margot still endures unpleasant company at the table, but continues to hold herself at one remove from a society that she critiques, wherever she might find herself in the pecking order.

### ***Margot’s unchanging body***

Margot’s cool acquisition of wealth is complemented by the relationship between her rationality and intellect on the one hand and the mental and bodily effects (or lack thereof) of what she consumes on the other. Over the course of the eighteenth-century, writers increasingly subscribed to the belief that body and mind could be affected by ingesta.<sup>27</sup> Thus, if it is true that one becomes what one consumes, this should pose a risk to the sex worker at the table, who must internalise the diet her client brings with him when entertaining. Recalling Claude Fischler’s notion that when consuming food one is also to be consumed by it, absorbed into the culture and society whose views and beliefs are upheld at the table, one might expect the sex worker to become assimilated into the

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<sup>25</sup> ‘On a étendu l’acception de ces mots prostituer & prostitution, à ces critiques, tels que nous en avons tant aujourd’hui, & à la tête desquels on peut placer l’odieux personnage que M. de Voltaire a joué sous le nom de Wasp dans sa comédie de l’Ecoissaise ; & l’on a dit de ces écrivains qu’ils prostituoient leurs plumes à l’argent, à la faveur, au mensonge, à l’envie, & aux vices les plus indignes d’un homme bien né. Tandis que la Littérature étoit abandonnée à ces fléaux, la Philosophie d’un autre côté étoit diffamée par une troupe de petits brigands sans connoissance, sans esprit & sans moeurs, qui se prostituoient de leur côté à des hommes qui n’étoient pas fâchés qu’on décriât dans l’esprit de la nation ceux qui pouvoient l’éclairer sur leur méchanceté & leur petitesse’ (Denis Diderot, ‘Prostituer, Prostitution (*Grammaire*)’, in *Encyclopédie*, XIII (1765), p. 502).

<sup>26</sup> Tallent, p. 123. For more on the *salonnière* transcending the bounds of class and traditional learned culture, see Landes, pp. 24–28.

<sup>27</sup> See pp. 37–46 of this thesis.

society whose food she eats.<sup>28</sup> Margot, however, remains broadly impervious to, and highly judgemental of, what she consumes, maintaining a clear duality between a permeable body that is penetrated by multiple foods and men on the one hand, and a solid, unchanging core on the other. Margot's ingestion forms part of her performance as a sex worker, maintaining a distinction between her exterior and interior personae. In the *Avis à une Demoiselle du monde* – a set of rules compiled from advice she receives from her procurers at the Opéra – Margot describes the how a successful sex worker 'n'ait point de caractère à elle, mais qu'elle étudie avec soin celui de son Amant, & sache s'en revêtir comme si c'était le sien propre' (p. 834). This is no less pertinent, though no more pleasant, when discussing her obligations at the table:

qu'y a-t-il de plus insupportable que d'être obligée d'essayer les caprices du premier venu ; que de sourire à un faquin que nous méprisons dans l'âme [...] en un mot, d'être éternellement couvertes du masque de l'artifice et de la dissimulation, de rire, de chanter, de boire, de nous livrer à toute sorte d'excès et de débauche, le plus souvent à contre-cœur et avec une répugnance extrême? (p. 811) [my emphasis].

By adopting her *entreteneurs'* diets and performing the role of a contented dinner guest while still retaining critical distance, Margot adopts an effective, if uncomfortable, alimentary disguise. Rejecting any transformation through the meal, but convincingly performing the role of the consumer and debauchee, Margot establishes the table as a site at which she can benefit economically, but only at the expense of sensory pleasure: 'Je ne me serais pas volontiers habituée à tant de crapule et de saloperie, si je n'y avais pas trouvé un avantage considérable' (pp. 849–850). The shared meal is thus emblematic of the paradoxically contemptible and admirable state of the sex worker identified by Annie Rivara. She mocks (and profits from) her clients while, at the same time, accepting her subjection to them, in this case by simultaneously condemning and incorporating their food and drink.<sup>29</sup>

### *Sex as food*

Beyond its economic and performative significance, food is also meaningful to Margot's understanding of sex, framing her erotic experiences within alimentary discourse. In amongst her discussion of money and performance at the table, Margot makes several metaphorical allusions to sex as a foodstuff on which she survives, eliding the shared

<sup>28</sup> Fischler, 'Food, Self and Identity', pp. 280–282.

<sup>29</sup> Annie Rivara, 'Malheur à celle qui rit', *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France*, 5 (2000), 1297–1310 (p. 1302).

significance of money, sexual congress, and food to her business. Measuring her sexual capacity with a metaphor of consumption, Margot describes how an early encounter with thirty drunken musketeers at Madame Florence's brothel pushes her beyond the limits of professional tolerance, leaving her 'si gorgée de plaisirs que j'en eus une espèce d'indigestion' (p. 818). Although she abandons the brothel after this episode, she nonetheless conceives of her experience in terms of pleasure, seemingly conforming, as Kathryn Norberg has highlighted, to 'the rapist's fantasy of the victim who "wanted it" all along.'<sup>30</sup> However, focusing too heavily on the notion of 'plaisirs' rather than indigestion overlooks the significance of the alimentary within this episode. She suffers this fate only because the soldiers are 'las de sacrifier au nourrisson de Silène', and the only other woman in the house has just taken a 'tisane réfrigérative' that puts her out of action (p. 818).<sup>31</sup> She endures sexual excess purely as a result of others' mismanaged or ill-timed consumption. Moreover, while she enjoys this sexual experience up to a point, she nonetheless suffers when forced into gluttony, rejecting sexual excess just as she rejects ingestive excess. Thus, rather than conforming to the cliché of the appetitive, gluttonous whore, capable of consuming multiple men without any bodily repercussions, Margot tolerates, enjoys, but ultimately suffers from this excess of erotic and ingestive pleasure. Leaving Madame Florence's in response to this 'rude épreuve' (p. 818), she explicitly distances herself from the world of sensual overload that will come to define and undermine those around her.

This connection between sex, food, and excess reappears at the close of the book, when the pleasures of simplicity, and the physical and mental toll of excess are expounded by a medical professional who, after numerous respected doctors have failed to cure Margot of an unknown illness (pp. 860–861), diagnoses her with a form of spiritual indigestion, not unlike that which she identifies following her episode with the musketeers. Her sickness is ascribed to a

dégoût de l'esprit, causé par l'abus d'une vie trop délicieuse. Les plaisirs sont à l'âme ce que la bonne chère est à l'estomac. Les mets les plus exquis nous deviennent insipides par habitude: ils nous rebutent à la fin, et nous les digérons plus. L'excès de la jouissance vous a, pour ainsi dire, blasé le cœur et engourdi le sentiment (p. 861).

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<sup>30</sup> Norberg, 'The Libertine Whore', p. 231.

<sup>31</sup> Silenus is Dionysus' companion and tutor, associated with drunkenness and often depicted as an intoxicated old man.

On this recommendation of a quiet life, exercise, and a healthy, hearty diet, Margot makes a full recovery. While the sex worker's redemption at the end of her story is a commonplace of libertine writing, offered as a false moral that pretends to justify a titillating narrative and, in this case, allows for a final dig at doctors as inept quacks, the alimentary overtones of this episode are significant. Margot's polysemous 'cœur', bored and unexciteable, hints towards her stomach as well as her heart. After a story that condemns excess, celebrates simple pleasures untouched by *ancien régime* hyper-refinement and critiques the tables and bodies of the elites, it is little wonder that Margot's entry into suburban, comfortable retirement comes with a final jibe at ill-managed consumption.

The image of sex as food also emerges when Margot describes her taste for physical, rather than emotional, love:

S'entête qui voudra de belle passion et de tendresse platonique, je ne me repais point de vapeurs: les sentiments épurés et alambiqués de l'amour sont des mets qui ne conviennent pas à ma constitution; il me faut des nourritures plus fortes (p. 857).

Preferring the earthy solidity of sex to insubstantial sentiment, Margot uses scientific and culinary language to reveal an outmoded taste for something more baroque than the fashionable, refined vapours produced literally by recent developments in alimentary chemistry, and metaphorically by the trend for witty badinage. Unlike the genteel mid-eighteenth century women expected to favour delicacy and restraint, Margot's tastes are closer to those of the hearty, seventeenth-century women, identified by Piero Camporesi, who were admired for healthy appetites that would, to eighteenth-century eyes, appear uncouth or potentially masculine.<sup>32</sup> Again, rather than purely limit her to the role of the hungry nymphomaniac who subsists on sex, this conflation of sex and food helps to nuance our understanding of Margot as a self-aware consumer. The reader, conscious of the deliberate restraint and artifice that defines most of Margot's meals, is granted deeper insight into her real character and her own self-knowledge when she reveals her authentic appetites. At heart, she rejects the eighteenth century's growing taste for excessive refinement and embraces scientific understanding of chemistry and diet to set out her own form of sexual dietetics. Margot's awareness of diet is not limited to her

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<sup>32</sup> Camporesi, pp. 101–103. See also the introduction to this thesis discussing 'Food, sex and gender'.

manipulation of others for her own benefit but is also manifest in her insight into her own body and identity, and its relationship to contemporary science.

### *Eating animals*

Where Margot's ingestion demonstrates her self-knowledge, control, and business acumen, the other characters who share her table demonstrate no such composure.

Human dining ought to be emblematic of civilisation. Robin Cox tells us that

[a]ll animals eat, but we are the only animal that cooks. So cooking becomes more than a necessity, it is the symbol of our humanity, what marks us off from the rest of nature. And because eating is almost always a group event [...] food becomes a focus of symbolic activity about sociality and our place in our society.<sup>33</sup>

For Margot's dining companions, however, eating and drinking consistently undermine this claim to humanity. In clear opposition to Michel Delon's vision of the libertine *souper* as the moment at which 'la répétition animale est sublimée en une création de l'être humain lui-même', the supposedly refined suppers to which Margot is party often reduce the diners to an animal state, with excessive food and drink giving rise to violence, unbridled sexuality, and bodily functions.<sup>34</sup> Her companions consistently fail to balance sociability and commensality with civil or even human behaviour. If, as Spary writes, '[i]t was virtually axiomatic in eighteenth-century medical writings that the relationship between the consuming body and its food was a primary cause of both corporeal and moral disease', Margot's clients demonstrate just that through what and how they consume.<sup>35</sup> Heavy, unrefined, over-seasoned, and copious foods feature regularly on their tables, stirring up or emblematising their physical and moral degeneracy. This is also true for alcohol. A crucial yet ambivalent part of eighteenth-century sociability (as it remains today),<sup>36</sup> alcohol was considered important to bonding and festivity when consumed in moderation, but liable to reveal or incite 'des appétits grossiers & des passions brutales' when taken to excess.<sup>37</sup> Whether it caused a 'dérangement [...] du corps & de l'esprit' of the senses to create an 'état contre nature' or

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<sup>33</sup> Robin Cox, 'Food and Eating: An Anthropological Perspective', *Social Issues Research Centre*, <<http://www.sirc.org/publik/foxfood.pdf>> [accessed 21<sup>st</sup> August 2016], p. 1. See also Joanna Bourke, *What It Means to Be Human: Reflections from 1791 to the Present* (London: Virago Press, 2011), p. 275.

<sup>34</sup> Delon, *Le Savoir-vivre libertin*, p. 166.

<sup>35</sup> Spary, *Eating the Enlightenment*, p. 37; Williams, 'Sciences of Appetite in the Enlightenment', p. 394.

<sup>36</sup> For the ambivalence of eighteenth-century drinking, see Brennan, p. 187, pp. 226–227.

<sup>37</sup> Ménuret de Chambaud, 'Yvresse (*Médecine*)', in *Encyclopédie*, xvii (1757), pp. 679–683 (p. 680). For a discussion of the suppression of heavy drinking from the refined table as a result of the growing 'civilisation des mœurs' and desire for 'honnêteté' see Lecoutre, pp. 101–106.

exposed the natural truth behind the drinker's closed, civilized exterior was unclear,<sup>38</sup> but its paradoxical ability to reduce humans to animals as well as playing a role in the rituals of civilized refinement was evident. Moreover, when compared with the effects of new and fashionable stimulants such as coffee, thought to facilitate mental agility, alcohol was increasingly linked to a decline in reason, or even madness.<sup>39</sup> This vision of alcohol revealing unreason when taken to excess, and thus separating the intelligent heroine from her oafish companions, is writ large in *Margot la ravaudeuse*.

As Matthieu Lecoutre has demonstrated, drinking was often associated with animalism, and Church Fathers drew parallels between drunken men and beasts in order to highlight the sinfulness of alcohol consumption.<sup>40</sup> The *philosophes* continued and secularised this tradition by linking drunkenness and gluttony to an animalistic lack of reason.<sup>41</sup> Margot's experiences are no different. Whether at the table with other sex workers, clients or other lascivious individuals, the meal is a perennial site of animalism. A food fight in a brothel at the start of Margot's career begins when one drunken woman plants her fist on another's 'mufle' (p. 809), an act followed by the destruction of elegant dishes, glasses and crockery, leaving 'les plats, les ragouts & les sauces [...] éparpillées par terre' (p. 809). With any cooked dish emblematic of the transformation of the basic animal need for nourishment into a human ritual,<sup>42</sup> their destruction and shift from the table to the ground visibly undoes this civilising process. The effects of ingesta on one's appearance and behaviour are similarly animalising: Madame Thomas, a gargantuan maid who briefly offers Margot shelter, has a body that is as meaty as her diet. She is described as 'chargée de viande' and 'surchargée de cuisine' (p. 823) and becomes a sexually voracious animal when fired up with drink. She responds to her lover like a cat on heat when she has drunk two thirds of a bottle of ratafia, a drink renowned for its aphrodisiac qualities:<sup>43</sup> 'les yeux lui rouloient dans la tête comme ceux d'une chatte en chaleur, qui appète le matou' (p. 827). Figures who adopt lives of gluttony and bad taste are similarly animalised. A heavy set 'milourd' whom Margot takes as an *entreteneur* walks 'comme

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<sup>38</sup> Ménuret de Chambaud, p. 679.

<sup>39</sup> Lecoutre, pp. 110–112.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 115–120.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> For dining practices and the shared meal as representative of culture and society, see for instance Claude Lévi-Strauss, 'The Culinary Triangle', trans. by Peter Brooks, in *Food and Culture: A Reader*, ed. by Caroline Counihan and Penny Van Esterik, 1st edn (New York: Routledge, 1997), pp. 28–35; Douglas, pp. 61–81.

<sup>43</sup> Safran, pp. 160–161.

un canard', and belches 'comme un pourceau' after stuffing himself at dinner (p. 849). With his favourite dinner a 'pièce de porc avec une marmelade de pommes', and a taste for 'feuilles de chou vertes, telles qu'on les donne aux bêtes de basse-cour' (ibid), the porcine Englishman demonstrates that he truly *is* what he eats. Margot's suggestion that 'On sera, peut-être, surpris que je n'aie jamais eu sous mes loix que des animaux indécrottables' (p. 849) strikes to the heart of those with whom she has been dining. Yet while Margot's clients are the most absurd figures in the text, animalism is demonstrably not the preserve of men or nobles. No stratum of society is untouched by bestial appetites or behaviour, leaving Margot as the only truly human exception. While there are variations within this animal kingdom, with the male beast defined by his passive, lumbering body, and the female animal by her active, violent, and sexually aggressive nature, the meal creates a clear polarity between the civilised, philosophical heroine on the one hand and her bestial companions' society on the other.

The 'animals' that Margot encounters are not only the products of their own ingestive choice but of the exertion of Margot's own alimentary control, which allows her to shape her companions from the inside out. Unlike Margot, whose body and core remain unchanged by food, the virile lackeys she keeps as sexual servants, compensating for her wealthy clients' impotence, are the product of the diet she selects for them. Playing on the contemporary medical association between the well-nourished and the sexually potent body,<sup>44</sup> Margot tells the reader that her young men are 'proprement entretenus, et nourris comme des poulets à l'épINETTE', and have no concerns other than to produce 'bon chyle [the most refined part of food, crucial to the creation of semen] et ce qui s'ensuit' (p. 857). Arnaldo Pizzorusso suggests that, by forming these young men with *victum et vestitium*, Margot grants herself access to total pleasure, allowing her to escape the servitude of her profession and regain her autonomy.<sup>45</sup> Margot's explicit animalisation through this use of food makes this autonomy greater still. As the hand that strategically feeds, Margot is again confirmed as the human set amongst a flock of animals, well versed in manipulative dietetics, and the sole agent impervious to food's potentially transformative properties. Yet this empowerment comes at a price. It is only by self-consciously replicating the system that sees her as a consumable good, ready for male appetites, that she can exert her own desired control over men less powerful than her.

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<sup>44</sup> See, for instance, Diderot, *Eléments de physiologie*, p. 230.

<sup>45</sup> Pizzorusso, p. 150.

Unlike her lackeys or her clients, however, Margot is the only character who retains absolute control of herself and others at the table, while not descending into animality herself. Margot may reproduce a system that promotes inequality, but nonetheless in the most resolutely human way.

### ***Stripping away distinction***

Moving the notion of animalism to one side, ingestion also has the capacity to strip individuals of their humanity by reducing them to bare, exposed flesh, undifferentiated by markers of refinement and social stratification. This is most clearly depicted when characters undress under the influence of alcohol. Clothing, like refined dining, is symbolic of human civilisation, and serves as an immediate signifier of wealth and station.<sup>46</sup> Its removal, therefore, erases any potential to signify status. When Madame Thomas offers herself to her lover, he throws her skirt and chemise over her shoulders, ‘et découvrit un *duplicata* de fesses’ (p. 827). During the brothel food fight, Margot sees the workers’ elegant clothes ripped to shreds: ‘Mouchoirs de cou, escoffions, manchettes, tout en une minute est en lambeaux’, leaving them ‘montrant scandaleusement leur grosse et menue marchandise’ (pp. 809–810). In a caricature of the motif of the female toilette ‘en désordre’ that punctuates rococo art, these women’s bodies are ‘uncovered’ or ‘displayed’, revealing the artifice of their dignified, refined appearances, therein rendering them indistinguishable, eroticised flesh.<sup>47</sup> Discussing the food fight, Mathilde Cortey has suggested that this alcohol-fuelled meal exposes the potential unpleasantness hiding behind a veneer of feminine charm and highlights the obscenity of the body as a marketable good.<sup>48</sup> Yet Margot’s body, soon to be equally marketable, is restrained rather than obscene, with the heroine having taken ‘la précaution de détremper les vivres’ (p. 809). Beyond its titillating value, it is the obscenity not of the marketable body that underpins this scene, but rather the undisciplined ingesting body and the resultant literal and metaphorical stripping of its civilized exterior.

Beyond the removal of clothing, food choices and the destruction of the table also reveal the consumers’ inner nature, going deeper than exposed flesh. So symbolic is food that,

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<sup>46</sup> ‘Les prises de position objectivement et subjectivement esthétiques que sont par exemple la cosmétique corporelle, le vêtement ou la décoration domestique constituent autant d’occasions d’éprouver ou d’affirmer la position occupée dans l’espace social comme rang à tenir ou distance à maintenir’ (Pierre Bourdieu, *La Distinction : critique sociale du jugement* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1979), p. 61).

<sup>47</sup> For the motif of the disordered toilette, see Auerbach, pp. 398–399.

<sup>48</sup> Cortey, *L’Invention de la courtisane*, p. 125.

whether it matches or contrasts with the consumer's outer performance, it is consistently representative of what the diner is or will become after eating. For Margot's companions, these alimentary choices reveal natures that are undisciplined, unreasonable or coarse, despite their apparent veneer of civility. A canon who houses Margot in exchange for sexual labour until he is crushed by a falling church is not only lustful, but also a glutton: 'C'était un enjôleur de filles qui leur promettait plus de beurre que de pain [...] Il avait aussi le défaut d'être un peu sujet à son ventre: il s'enivrait fréquemment' (p. 825). Her German baron is a drunkard (pp. 838–840), and her English *entreteneur* displays his innate lack of taste, embodying a comprehensive and absurd list of national stereotypes:

Il me fit observer un genre de vie bien étrange pendant que j'eus l'honneur d'être à ses appointements. Nous ne mangions les trois quarts du temps que des tranches de boeuf grillées, des côtelettes de mouton, du veau rôti nageant dans une sauce au beurre, avec des feuilles de choux vertes, telles qu'on les donne aux bêtes de basse-cour. Quelquefois (et c'était son plat favori), une pièce de porc avec une marmelade de pommes. Il n'était pas d'un goût plus délicat pour sa boisson. Le bourgogne et les meilleurs vins de France lui faisaient mal au coeur. Il lui fallait de cette ripopée qui pique et gratte le gosier, dont les crocheteurs s'enivrent. On pense bien que le punch ni les pipes n'étaient pas oubliées; car un véritable Anglais ne croirait pas avoir dîné sans cela (p. 849).

Sex workers other than Margot are similarly marked out by their diets, consuming rich foods associated with excess and corruption. Madame Florence's brothel table is weighed down by a 'potage', various 'plats', 'ragoûts' and 'sauces', and an abundance of wine (p. 809). To the eighteenth-century culinary and social critic, a meal containing ragouts and sauces was, as Jean-Christophe Abramovici has shown, emblematic of wearied, over-stimulated tastes, luxury, and excess: 'Bien avant que l'*hygiène* ne devienne l'une des obsessions de la fin des Lumières, un préjugé occidental associe le *sain* à l'aliment "naturel" (préparé cru ou bouilli), sauces et épices à un luxe amoral et dangereux.'<sup>49</sup>

With *ragoût* used to describe any dish to bring back the appetite, it became figuratively associated with anything that excited desire.<sup>50</sup> Moreover, the combinations of flavours and spices required to make complex dishes such as sauces or ragouts were associated, as Jennifer Davis notes, with luxury, extravagance and, crucially, disguise – a disguise that, for these women, slips once the ragout has fallen to the floor.<sup>51</sup> As highlighted in Chapter One's discussion of the real-life destruction of the brothel meal, the smashing of crockery

<sup>49</sup> Jean-Christophe Abramovici, 'Ragoûts', in *Le XVIIIe Siècle: histoire, mémoire et rêve: mélanges offerts à Jean Goulemot*, ed. by Didier Masseur (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2006), pp. 253–267 (p. 255).

<sup>50</sup> Patrick Wald Lasowski, 'Ragoût' in *Dictionnaire libertin: la langue du plaisir au siècle des Lumières*, ed. by Patrick Wald Lasowski (Paris: Gallimard, 2011), pp. 418–419.

<sup>51</sup> Davis, 'Masters of Disguise', pp. 37–38. For more on ragouts, see Pinkard, p. 191.

and spilling of food demonstrates a literal breakdown of civilisation. Coding sex work through spilled ragouts or Englishmen through beef, punch, and pipes, represents contemporary culinary thought, in which ingesta and socio-sexual mores were intertwined.

Excess also exposes the unrefined body by provoking its functions in the consumer, releasing the material, inner workings of the anatomy into a polite and supposedly sanitised society: as Norbert Elias has highlighted, a crucial part of the ‘civilizing process’ was the gradual removal of bodily functions from the social space.<sup>52</sup> After a night of heavy drinking, Margot’s English *entreteneur* belches and dozes off to sleep, snoring, and is rendered grotesque as well as impotent by his gluttony (p. 849). In a more extreme case, following a similar night of drinking, Margot’s amorous ‘glouton’ of a German baron visits her hoping for a night of passion, but instead stumbles into her apartment, gives himself a nosebleed by falling flat on his face, and then projectile vomits into her mouth (p. 840). The contrast between Margot and her baron highlights the difference between the refined, French Margot, and the cliché of the uncivilised German inebriate.<sup>53</sup> He is reduced to a display of bodily fluids, impotently filling Margot with his bile in a grotesque parody of ejaculation. Margot is, understandably, sick in turn – ‘il suffit de savoir que je vomis presque jusqu’au sang’ (p. 840) – and turfs the German out with a hail of abuse before repeatedly washing, perfuming, and gargling to remove all traces of sickness from her body. However, while both figures vomit, Margot’s sickness does more than display that she also possesses a similarly earthy material body; it demonstrates her instinctive revulsion at the transgression of norms of bodily restraint. She does not revel in the unrestrained body, but vigorously washes and perfumes herself until no trace remains of the physical smell and taste of sick, and thus of the German’s presence within her. Even when potentially defiled by another’s ingestive excess, Margot rapidly restores civilized order upon her body.

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<sup>52</sup> Elias, pp. 109–121.

<sup>53</sup> Mathilde Cortey describes this scene as part of ‘[l]e type récurrent, dans nos romans, du baron allemand ivre mort [...] le montre toujours comme un dindon de la farce et confine à la caricature.’ *L’Invention de la courtisane*, p. 151. The English also come in for a substantial amount of mockery, as hinted at below in the toasting scene. Almost twenty years later, this vision of Germanic appetites would still hold water in medical literature, with Le Camus describing how one’s identity was not shaped by one’s consumption but shaped by it: ‘Les Allemands toujours voraces & toujours insatiables, craignent de mourir de faim, s’ils ne se remplissent de viandes, & appréhendent de mourir de soif, s’ils ne boivent à la Grecque [sic]. C’est cette maniere de vivre qui donne à la plupart des peuples du nord cette rudesse dans leurs moeurs, & cet engourdissement dans leur esprit’ (Le Camus, p. 161).

Margot's clients' bodies are abstracted even further from rationality in her descriptions of their appearances. While the eighteenth century did not always view masculine heft negatively, associating bodily gravity with social gravity as Georges Vigarello has highlighted,<sup>54</sup> the bodies depicted in *Margot* display no such imposing dignity. Associated with oafishness for centuries before, obesity in the eighteenth century was still emblematic of insensibility, impotence, and the unproductive accumulation of wealth. One of Margot's first clients, a wealthy *sous-fermier* who barks orders at her while she manually stimulates him for two *louis d'or*, is reduced to a series of obese, isolated body parts: 'un large et triple menton, un ventre en poire, soutenu sur deux grosses jambes arqués' (p. 816).<sup>55</sup> Her heavy-set Englishman is a 'milourd' and is not a complete human but an enormous 'gros orteil' (p. 849). Far from granting these characters power or dignity, Margot's emphasis on bulk highlights only their absurdity, underlining her admirable physical restraint in comparison.

Exposed bodies and bodily fluids also demonstrate the role of ingestive excess in removing social distinctions on the grounds of class or wealth. In spite of their varied alimentary choices, backgrounds, and social statuses, Margot's companions manifest the effects of excess in the same basic way. From Pierrot, the ostler who is 'gueux, joueur & ivrogne' and the sex workers in Madame Florence's brothel, to the barons and noblemen who overindulge and rapidly descend from friskiness into a drunken stupor, the effects of copious alcohol recognise no class distinctions, rendering it a great social leveller. With Margot (and the sex worker heroine more generally) significant for her ability to transcend social hierarchy at the table through carefully managed consumption, it is significant that ill-managed ingestion should also disturb social distinctions, erasing hierarchy to reveal the grotesque nature behind a supposedly refined society. The table, as has been demonstrated, provides a perfect, and unjustly neglected, arena at which this social destabilising takes place.

### ***Vénus en rut (1771)***

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<sup>54</sup> Vigarello, pp. 138–141.

<sup>55</sup> The obese, gluttonous tax farmer was a commonplace of eighteenth-century writing, his fatness emblematic of his greedy accumulation and abuse of wealth. See Lafon, 'Du Thème alimentaire', p. 174; Spary, *Feeding France*, p. 107.

The anonymous *Vénus en rut*, published in two volumes in 1771, reprises many of the themes found in *Margot la ravaudeuse*. As well as following the traditional narrative arc of the fictional sex worker, with the heroine, Rosine, progressing from humble origins as the child of libidinous parents to a position of power and wealth after a life spent charming different men, *Vénus en rut* contains deliberate nods to and amplifications of Margot's story. However, the reason, self-knowledge, and social critique that Margot demonstrates at the table are far from amplified. Where *Margot's* meals explode hierarchies and critique the hypocrisy and injustice of the *ancien régime*, a close examination of the table in *Vénus en rut* proves it to be anything but disruptive. It is through a close analysis of eating and drinking, a potentially disturbing process that features regularly in both its literal and metaphorical senses in *Vénus*, that the traditionalist values of the text and its desire to neutralise and domesticate the sex worker become most clearly apparent.

To date, little scholarly attention has been paid to *Vénus en rut*, despite reasonably frequent allusions to the text in broader analyses of fictions of prostitution, fictional libertine life stories, and the (specifically female) libertine pursuit of knowledge. Jean-Pierre Dubost briefly mentions *Vénus* as one anonymous life story among many in his discussion of libertine narratives as depictions of 'the progress of awareness and the discovery of truth', and expands upon this in his preface to the Fayard edition of the text.<sup>56</sup> Dubost reads *Vénus en rut* as a forerunner of the Sadean text, positing the heroine (to whom he incorrectly refers as 'Rosalie') as a prefiguration of the logical and tactical Juliette, rather than a woman who conforms to a model of stereotypically feminine passion and emotion.<sup>57</sup> For Dubost, Rosine is a model of female sovereignty: she is empowered, politically minded, wealthy, and capable of overturning libertine gender relations to establish her supremacy.<sup>58</sup> If this is correct, considered in line with the trend remarked upon by Patrick Wald Lasowski that satire adopted a far cruder and more violent tone from the 1770s onwards, one might expect *Vénus en rut* to make an even more vicious attack on her clientele than that found in *Margot*.<sup>59</sup> However, while Rosine encounters and satirises men on her travels through society, they experience nothing like the wrath that Margot's clients receive when she recounts their exploits at the table.

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<sup>56</sup> Dubost, 'Libertinage and Rationality', p. 67 n. 24, and 'Préface: une remarquable carrière', pp. 101–106.

<sup>57</sup> Dubost, 'Préface', p. 104.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., pp. 104–105.

<sup>59</sup> Lasowski, 'Introduction', p. 16.

Mathilde Cortey, by way of contrast, recognises in *Vénus en rut* a translation of the collective imaginary's fear that male sexual pleasure is invariably coupled with destruction or death, combined with the threat of consumption by the female, and so instead transforms her into a woman whose pleasure comes only from a penis that she nourishes and cares for to ensure its full functioning.<sup>60</sup> While Rosine might seem to assert her power through the repeated sexual act, Cortey argues that her apparent rebirth through phallic intervention – a process written by a male author – serves to bolster a fragile masculine sexuality, while undermining the potentially dangerous and devouring female. The following analysis develops Cortey's interpretation, focusing in greater detail on the alimentary, physiological, and symbolic implications of Rosine's erotic diet, to demonstrate how *Vénus en rut* undermines Margot's power at the table and neutralises the rational sex worker's social and sexual autonomy. When examined through the lens of ingestion, *Vénus en rut* reveals a sex worker transformed into an unthreatening emblem of femininity, who valorises gendered and social difference. Rosine poses little danger to, and offers comparatively little critique of, the numerous men she encounters at the table. However absurd her clients may be, the meal is a site at which they are more restrained than the appetitive Rosine and can consistently experience refined pleasure. They are cared for and nourished by a sex worker who conceives of herself both as nourished by heterosexual intercourse, adopting a soft, stereotypically womanly role, and as a nourishing foodstuff for men to consume. The narration of her relationship to eating, ingestion, and digestion conforms instead to Nancy Miller's idea of 'pseudo-feminocentrism', a literary strategy by male authors to 'translate masculine self-affirmation.'<sup>61</sup> As a sex worker, Rosine appears to reject feminine domesticity, blurring the boundaries between the broadly masculine public sphere and the feminine private sphere. Yet her nurturing approach to feeding aligns her instead with the caring, feeding, and self-sacrificial role of the feminine and the mother, perhaps best emblematised by the vogue for breastfeeding inspired by Rousseau's *Émile* following its publication in 1762. Moreover, the 1760s and 1770s were marked by an increasing interest in the regulation and repression of sex work, with a view to harnessing

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<sup>60</sup> Mathilde Cortey, 'Les « Invalides de Cythère » : une fausse remise en cause de la toute-puissance du mâle dans les romans-mémoires de courtisanes du XVIIIe siècle' in *Le Mâle en France 1715-1830: représentations de la masculinité*, ed. by Katherine Astbury and Marie-Emmanuelle Plagnol-Diéval (Peter Lang: Bern, 2004), pp. 137–150 (p. 146).

<sup>61</sup> Nancy K. Miller, *French Dressing: Women, Men, and Ancien Régime Fiction* (New York; London: Routledge, 1995), p. 96.

sex workers for increased male pleasure and social and public health,<sup>62</sup> as explored in the previous chapter, and a growing interest in medicalised sexual difference and ‘nymphomania’. Published only two years after Rétif’s *Pornographe* and in the same year as Bienville’s *La Nymphomanie*, *Vénus en rut* is, where food is concerned, a reactionary response to *Margot la ravaudeuse* in an era increasingly disturbed by female sexuality and agency.<sup>63</sup>

### *Cannibalising Margot*

If *Vénus en rut* opposes Margot’s cynicism at the table, while appearing to equal or surpass it, it is little wonder that Fougeret de Monbron’s text is evoked and undermined in all but name in an episode framed by a supper, hidden in plain sight in the middle of the novel. Before this episode takes place, Rosine begins her narrative by telling the reader that her story is unique, and borrows nothing from similar literature of the period:

un indifférent dirait qu’après l’Académie des Dames, Thérèse, la Religieuse, et le fameux Portier, on sait tout; j’espère prouver le contraire; je n’emprunterai rien de ces ouvrages, je peindrai ce que j’ai vu, fait, senti; je ne veux de modèle que moi. (p. 6)

This claim to absolute authenticity and originality offers an ironic recollection, for the modern reader at least, of Rousseau’s own emphasis on his personal uniqueness and the uniqueness of his literary project at the beginning of his *Confessions*:<sup>64</sup>

Je forme une entreprise qui n’eut jamais d’exemple, et dont l’exécution n’aura point d’imitateur. Je veux montrer à mes semblables un homme dans toute la vérité de la nature; et cet homme, ce sera moi. Moi seul.<sup>65</sup>

Rousseau, the creator of unabashed autobiography and leading proponent of the traditional femininity and gender difference to which the image of the libertine sex worker is diametrically opposed, might not have produced pornographic narratives in the vein of *Vénus en rut*, yet much of Rosine’s relationship to food highlights her semi-Rousseauian, caring, maternal, and anti-intellectual qualities, as will be demonstrated

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<sup>62</sup> Cheek, *Sexual Antipodes*, p. 105.

<sup>63</sup> Rétif de la Bretonne’s *Le Pornographe* was first published in 1769, J.D.T. de Bienville’s *La Nymphomanie* in 1771.

<sup>64</sup> The *Confessions* were written between 1759/60 and 1770, but not published until 1782, five years after Rousseau’s death. They were, however, read aloud to select groups of influential Parisians on several occasions before publication between December 1770 and May 1771. See Leopold Damrosch, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Restless Genius* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2005), pp. 474–476. Given the anonymity of *Vénus en rut*, and the invisibility of the *Confessions* to most readers before Rousseau’s death, there is little to prove this similarity is more than an intriguing coincidence.

<sup>65</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Les Confessions*, in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Gagebin and Raymond, I (1959), pp. 1–656 (p. 5).

below. The bestselling *Margot la ravaudeuse*, on the other hand, is notable for its absence from her list. While Rosine's claim to authenticity is clearly false to any reader familiar with the typical narrative of the fictional sex worker's biography identified by Kathryn Norberg,<sup>66</sup> the self-conscious inaccuracy of this claim, combined with Margot's omission from texts from which *Vénus en rut* does not borrow, in fact highlights the connection between the two novels: *Vénus* is a feminised, idealised, and direct response to *Margot*.

*Vénus'* alimentary rebuttal of *Margot* takes place when Rosine meets a clear incarnation of Margot's father, shares a meal with him, sleeps with him, and leaves him so exhausted following their bout that he suggests inviting one of his friends into her bed to take his place. That this conquest is a direct reference to *Margot* is indisputable: like Margot's father, he is a soldier of humble origins who, following his exploits, has taken the name Tranche-Montagne (p. 135). When outlining her parentage, Margot similarly describes how she is the child of 'un honnête soldat aux Gardes' of the same name.<sup>67</sup> Introduced to dinner as a long-lost cousin by Fanchette, Rosine's maid and confidante, Tranche-Montagne immediately piques the heroine's interest. Once they have shared a meal of a 'poularde', a fattened chicken and an antiquated term for a love note,<sup>68</sup> Tranche-Montagne is stirred by what he has eaten, and they retire to bed: 'je voulus qu'il mangeât avec moi [...] la bonne chère excita le tempérament de mons la Grenade, le mien était en jeu; on dessert' (pp. 135–136). After their first bout, Rosine uses ingesta to stir him once again: '[Tranche-Montagne] put, mais mollement; et il fut, quoi? boire un coup' (p. 137). In an attempt to quench her insatiable desire, Tranche-Montagne calls upon his friend Bellepointe, who is a 'brave garçon dans les combats, au lit et à la table' (ibid), to replace him until he has regained his strength from a little more refreshment, having been 'bien abreuvé' by Fanchette (p. 138).

In many respects, this episode conforms to the stereotype of the sexually insatiable woman and to the typical form and function of the meal in the libertine text undermined in *Margot*. A luxurious and nourishing meat dish stirs the passions of the diners, which is

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<sup>66</sup> Norberg, 'The Libertine Whore', pp. 229–230.

<sup>67</sup> *Margot la ravaudeuse*, pp. 803–804.

<sup>68</sup> 'POULARDE, jeune poule engraisée. [...] = Fig. style fam. Billet de galanterie. Il vieillit et l'on ne le dit guère plus' (*Dictionnaire critique de la langue française*, ed. by Jean-François Féraud, 3 vols (Marseille: Mossy, 1787–88), III (1788), p. 224).

followed first by sex and then by restorative drinks. Sexual potency is the product of, and emblematised by, a capacity for hearty and luxurious eating. But Rosine's dinner with Tranche-Montagne does more than conform to this model of sexual and alimentary pleasure, particularly when considered alongside her claim to uniqueness. By dining with and sexually exhausting Margot's father, Rosine confirms the meal as a site of her own erotic power and influence, and uses this to outdo Margot's progenitor and, by metaphorical extension, Margot's literal and literary creator. Rosine takes the table, one of Margot's most significant sites of reason and subversiveness, and makes it a site of her own dominance. This meal thus displays, in microcosm, the alimentary objectives of *Vénus en rut*: the rejection and erasure of Margot's use of the alimentary, instead harnessing eating to reinforce the sexual and – as will be demonstrated – political status quo. *Vénus en rut*'s relationship to *Margot la ravaudeuse* is not one of inspiration and amplification so much as destructive literary cannibalism.

### ***Rosine's erotic consumption***

Like Margot, Rosine suggests that sex is crucial to her subsistence, and in so doing highlights her unique constitution. Yet unlike Margot, whose allusion to young, potent lackeys as her preferred 'nourritures plus fortes' comes late in her narrative when she is powerful enough to control her own erotic diet (p. 857), Rosine frames her story as one of appetitive dependency from the moment of her sexual awakening. Where Margot compares food to sex on a purely metaphorical level, Rosine ascribes her desire to a physiological anomaly that will shape her erotic life: she believes her body is refreshed, nourished, and developed by sex, not only by food:

Malgré mes travaux nocturnes, je sentais un vide pendant le jour. J'étais une petite pelote de graisse, et je craignais de maigrir faute d'un aliment si nécessaire, car les dieux m'ont accordé un rare privilège: plus j'ai sacrifié à l'amour, ou, sans périphrase, à mes plaisirs, plus ma santé est devenue robuste, et plus mon corps a pris de développement (p. 19).

Admittedly, Rosine does not live on sex alone; she experiences hunger after vigorous encounters and eats on several occasions within the text. After sleeping with three different men in the same morning, for instance, Rosine describes how

[i]l fallait aussi me mettre à table; tu te persuades que j'y officiai bien ; après ma douce matinée, ayant passé sous trois amateurs, et peut-être, pour ma part sacrifié plus de trente fois, dans sept attaques, il fallait un peu de relâche, pour mieux recommencer (p. 42).

She also ascribes the energy with which she services another pair of clients to her consuming ‘[q]uelques verres de Monte Fiascone et des biscuits à la vanille’ (p. 152).<sup>69</sup> Yet in spite of these meals, it is Rosine’s sex-nourished body that defines her encounters in the rest of the text, marking a clear development of Margot’s passing reference to sex as hearty food, compared to the ‘vapours’ of romantic love. Yet Rosine’s feelings of hunger and her fear of growing thin without sex do not identify her as an autonomous, sovereign precursor to Juliette (as she is interpreted by Dubost), but as a woman dependent on male sexuality for her growth and survival.<sup>70</sup> Although she describes her ability to feed on sex as ‘un rare privilège’, Rosine’s wellbeing is thus contingent upon male intervention within her body. Moreover, by making her sexual encounters ingestive encounters, *Vénus en rut* ensures Rosine’s satisfaction is transient, and repeated encounters are a necessity. If Rosine’s health, development, and existence are dependent upon heterosexual intercourse, and if, as Ludmilla Jordanova has suggested in relation to health and selfhood in eighteenth-century popular medical texts, ‘to be healthy was to have a competent, coherent identity’, Rosine can maintain her health, and thus her identity, only through sexual consumption, with a dependency upon male potency that is validated with every ‘meal’.<sup>71</sup> *Vénus*’ heroine is thus, from the very first, closer to Mathilde Cortey’s vision of the idealised sex worker as a ‘site of pure pleasure’ than the rational and cynical Margot.<sup>72</sup> Moreover, since she is nourished by sex, Rosine is freed from the very real physiological demands of hunger and survival that shaped the majority of sex workers’ lives, further confirming her as a disempowered figure of male fantasy. Rosine functions in a similar manner to the consuming black bodies that Valérie Loichot has identified as tropes of nineteenth- and twentieth-century colonialist literature and pseudoscience, supposedly marked by a simultaneously ravenous and thus uncivilised hunger on the one hand, and the capacity to subsist on little to no nutriment on the other, therein justifying their being kept in a state of indigence, deprivation, and continual

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<sup>69</sup> Montefiascone is an Italian white wine, linked to the apocryphal story of *Est! Est!! Est!!!*, the name given to the region in the tenth or twelfth century, supposedly when a bishop, en route to visit the Pope, sent a scout ahead of him to sample the wines on offer, and to write ‘Est’ on the door of inns where it was particularly good (‘Montefiascone’, in *Encyclopédie des vins et des alcools*, ed. by Alexis Lichine, with William Fifield, Jonathan Bartlett and Jane Stockwood, trans. by Yves Malartic (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1972), p. 419). Montefiascone is described by Jaucourt as ‘remarquable par ses bons vins muscats’ (Jaucourt, ‘Fiasconé ou Monte Fiasconé (*Géog.*)’, in *Encyclopédie*, vi (1756), p. 661).

<sup>70</sup> Dubost, ‘Préface: une remarquable carrière’, p. 104.

<sup>71</sup> Ludmilla Jordanova, ‘The Popularization of Medicine: Tissot on Onanism’, *Textual Practice*, 1.1, (1987), 68–79 (p. 69).

<sup>72</sup> Cortey, *L’Invention de la courtisane*, p. 147.

forced labour by a white oppressor.<sup>73</sup> When sex and ingestion are conflated in *Vénus en rut*, a similar vision of the idealised and acceptably oppressed sex worker emerges. Denied full identification with civilised society by an excessive hunger that contrasts with the restrained appetites approved by mid- to late-eighteenth-century French society, Rosine is also removed from the physical and economic realities of sex work, becomes beholden to and grateful for the sexual male body, and has no need to worry about putting food on the table.

Rosine's unusual bodily economy is, moreover, not the product of pure imagination; it is an inversion of contemporary medical, sexual and nutritional science. The conflation of the digestive and reproductive systems formed a crucial part of eighteenth-century hygiene, proving particularly important to Tissot's treatise on the dangers of masturbation.<sup>74</sup> According to Tissot, excessive sexual expenditure left the body malnourished, depriving it of its most essential humour, seminal fluid, which was thought to be made up of the most refined parts of digested foods and crucial to the continued efficacy of the digestive process.<sup>75</sup> Without enough sexual fluids, the body would be left unable to digest effectively and thus become trapped in a spiral of disturbed appetite, poor digestion, malnutrition, and wasting diseases.<sup>76</sup> The spectre of Tissot looms large over Rosine's narrative: she states that the tightness of her vagina can be ascribed to her never having masturbated, being familiar neither with '*l'Onanisme, ni ses secours trompeurs*' (p. 14). This reference helps frame the reader's understanding of Rosine's nutritional economy within the context of Tissot's ideas, as well as alluding to the notorious use of Tissot's writing as a masturbatory aid.<sup>77</sup> However, when Rosine has sex, she defies Tissot's theory to experience a purely productive expenditure: '*plus j'ai sacrifié à l'amour [...] plus mon corps a pris de développement*' (p. 19). Rosine's developing utopian body inverts the Tissotian image of the interdependent nutritive and digestive economy to validate her dependency upon male sexual intervention. Any

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<sup>73</sup> Valérie Loichot, *The Tropics Bite Back: Culinary Coups in Caribbean Literature* (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), pp. xvi–xvii.

<sup>74</sup> Tissot, pp. 192–209.

<sup>75</sup> Tissot, pp. 16–19.

<sup>76</sup> Hence Margot's concern that her lackeys are fed well to produce sufficient chyle.

<sup>77</sup> With *L'Onanisme* an eighteenth-century best seller, this would likely have been a recognisable allusion for *Vénus*' readership. As Thomas Laqueur notes: '[i]n sheer number of editions alone, *L'Onanisme* ranks high among eighteenth-century best-sellers. There were at least 35 editions in French, 61 in all languages, not including 6 editions and 4 translations of the shorter Latin version' (Thomas W. Laqueur, *Solitary Sex: A Cultural History of Masturbation* (New York: Zone Books, 2003), p. 39).

possibility of autonomous sexual empowerment, wherein a dangerous, devouring woman consumes and destroys her sexual partners for her own advancement, is thus neutralised.

Disempowering appetites and uncontrollable sexual hunger are repeatedly associated throughout *Vénus en rut*, framing Rosine's own self-image and the words in which she couches her narrative. In contrast to Norberg's vision of the 'libertine whore', Rosine is closer to the 'mad bacchant[e], driven by an unquenchable thirst for sex' to which Norberg's heroines are opposed.<sup>78</sup> She describes arousal as 'une soif qui ne put s'apaiser que par des libations abondantes' (p. 16), valorising ejaculate as a form of refreshment. Chapter Three is entitled 'L'Affamée' in honour of the title she bestows upon herself to describe her insatiability when sleeping with clergymen and noblemen: 'Après vingt-quatre heures de calme nous partîmes pour Lyon; et le nom d'affamée que je m'étais donné, en plaisantant, a valu à ce chapitre l'honneur de l'avoir en tête' (p. 97).<sup>79</sup> In advance of an encounter with an amorous doctor, Rosine describes how 'il m'offrait ses secours dans un moment où j'étais affamée; j'avais été réduite à une abstinence forcée de trente heures; juge combien il me devenait nécessaire?' (p. 60). That thirty hours without intercourse should leave her 'famished' serves to highlight her vigorous sexual appetite, yet this hunger is significantly more comical than it is threatening. As Carolyn Korsmeyer argues, the excessive gustatory appetite is typically the preserve of the gross or comic; Rosine's appetite is no exception.<sup>80</sup>

Moreover, Rosine is not the only character to frame her sexuality through the language of ingestion: she is repeatedly described as 'affamée' by her lovers. A young Italian *abbé*, Succarino, responds to Rosine's desire for vaginal sex after anal intercourse as follows: 'Ah! vous êtes affamée, mais par bonheur ze suis zeune' (p. 88). A reference to hunger becomes a term of endearment and highlights not Rosine's exhausting libido, but Succarino's ability to satisfy her, even if he is a comic figure himself. Another lover, the comte de Belaire reprises this epithet to reinforce his own potency: 'Il connaissait mes

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<sup>78</sup> Norberg, 'The Libertine Whore', p. 235.

<sup>79</sup> The titles given to each chapter of *Vénus en rut* depict a move from bodily innocence, to sexual awakening, to increasing unreason, rather than reason. The chapter titles are, in order, 'L'Étroite', 'La Curieuse', 'L'Affamée', 'L'Enragé', 'Le Diable au corps', 'La Foutromanèse'. This explicit recognition of her hungering body thus marks a turning point from her sexual (and, perhaps, intellectual) curiosity, in which both body and mind are at work, to a state in which her sexual body and appetites are clearly depicted as exerting significant or total power over her intellectual faculties and capacity for reason.

<sup>80</sup> Korsmeyer, p. 177.

exploits d'Avignon, il savait mon surnom d'affamée, et à chaque coup, il ne manquait pas de dire à celui qu'il appelait le plus joli conin du monde:

- Voilà pour toi petit affamé' (p. 104).

Here, it is specifically the vagina, an unthreatening and diminutive 'petit conin', rather than the woman to whom it belongs, that is 'affamé', resembling a small, hungry animal more than the embodiment of ravening femininity. Moreover, when Rosine's desires are finally recognised as threatening by other men and are framed with alimentary discourse, this threat is short-lived. Towards the height of her success, Rosine is the object of discussion for a duke who spies her at the theatre and states that he would rather not become entangled with her since 'elle m'avalerait comme une fraise' (p. 168). However, this comment is made by a man with whom Rosine has no intimate association and is followed shortly after by her flight from Paris, since she can no longer find lovers as a result of her notoriety. Her professional success is immediately limited by popular opinion of her excessive power, and the mere threat of devouring sexuality is enough to undermine her professional and economic success, far from the trope of the hungry womb and the *vagina dentata* with which sexually self-possessed women, and particularly sex workers, were associated.<sup>81</sup>

Her taste in men and their bodies is similarly removed from the world of vampirism or cannibalism, as well as actively rejecting images of extreme potency. She uses the image of the edible man to ridicule that most explicit symbol of masculinity: the large phallus. When Rosine discusses her taste in male members, she dismisses penises of fourteen or fifteen inches with the claim that 'cette taille est bonne pour un cervelas de Lyon, ou un saucisson d'Arles, je n'en veux point' (p. 60) – seven inches, she tells us, is quite enough. She might feed on sex, but has no interest in extraordinarily large erections or in edible men, neutralising any threat of consumption (and castration), therein allaying, rather than provoking, male sexual or social anxiety. Coding sex and female sexuality through ingestion – or the lack thereof – highlights and undermines the nightmare image of devouring female erotic power.

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<sup>81</sup> For more on the image of the devouring prostitute, see Morgane Guillemet, 'De la Représentation au mythe: l'ambiguïté féminine dans le roman libertin du XVIIIe siècle' (unpublished PhD thesis, Université Rennes 2; Université Européenne de Bretagne, 2009), p. 227). For similar iconic images of devouring prostitutes on the English Renaissance stage see Fouassier, 'The Cannibal Relationship of Prostitutes and their Clients'.

Rosine's sexual appetite also highlights her lack of identification with other sex workers; her digestive anomaly erases any potential for sisterhood. Her unique body, upholstered with 'un embonpoint qui annonçait la plus constante santé' (p. 9), differentiates her from others in her trade, who remain vulnerable to the mundane realities of starvation, the implicit possibility of sickness and death, and thus to Rosine's scorn. Upon seeing streetwalkers in Marseille, Rosine observes how '[c]es impures subalternes [...] ont deux bouches à nourrir' (p. 143), blurring the lines between alimentary and sexual consumption, and she is similarly scathing when describing women who ply their trade at the Palais-Royal:

Là, deux cents fillettes à tout prix, étalent publiquement leurs charmes, ou plutôt présentent leurs faméliques appas à qui les désire, et même à ceux qui ne s'en soucient point : une douce violence assure leur souper, quelques-unes font assez bien (p. 160).

This focus on scrawny bodies shows disdain, rather than sympathy, for the hunger experienced by the majority of sex workers. Her use of the phrase 'douce violence' recalls Dom Juan's paean to infidelity (intentionally or otherwise), aligning her more closely to the male libertine nobleman for whom women are irresistible and disposable than other women who share her trade.<sup>82</sup> While the sex worker heroine, like Margot, is often marked out by her individualism, as Cortey and Guillemet have discussed,<sup>83</sup> Rosine's focus on the ugliness of the hungry woman aligns her more with a potential male client than a sex worker aware of her own financial precarity, in stark contrast to Margot. Experiencing little hunger herself, Rosine is a constant object of erotic appeal, and the incarnation of a particularly conventional male fantasy: the sex worker whose flesh does not reveal the realities of social inequality on which the sex trade was, for the most part, built.

When Rosine consumes real food rather than purely sexual sustenance, she is, like Margot, beholden to her clients' desires at the table. She exercises little to no ingestive agency. Yet unlike Margot, she finds her meals pleasurable and sensual, objects to

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<sup>82</sup> 'DOM JUAN Pour moi, la beauté me ravit partout où je la trouve, et je cède facilement à cette douce violence dont elle nous entraîne' (Molière, *Le Festin de Pierre (Dom Juan)*, I. 2, ed. by Joan DeJean (Geneva: Droz, 1999)). With *Dom Juan* censored almost as soon as it opened in 1664, not performed for another 200 years and left to fade into irrelevance, and *Vénus en rut*'s authorship unknown, this similarity may be pure, if happy, coincidence. For more on *Dom Juan*, its censorship and revival, see David Whitton, 'Dom Juan the Directors' Play', in *The Cambridge Companion to Molière*, ed. by David Bradby and Andrew Calder (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 201–213.

<sup>83</sup> Cortey, *L'Invention de la courtisane*, p. 243; Guillemet, 'De la Représentation au mythe', p. 442.

nothing she is given on the grounds of taste, and willingly defers to her clients' ritualistic control to maximise their mutual enjoyment. In so doing, Rosine's mealtimes are framed by the opposite dynamic to Margot's: her dining partners impose erotic order, rather than grotesque chaos, upon the proceedings. In an orgy organised by the abbé Succarino, for instance, Rosine is ritually 'sacrifiée' on a pyramid of mattresses, in a ceremony augmented by candles, perfumes, and a delicious *ambigu*.<sup>84</sup> As Rosine remarks, 'Succarino savait régler ses orgies' (p. 93). Ingestion forms part of a carefully orchestrated and timetabled pursuit of pleasure, driven by male desire and authority:

Ces premières lances rompues, on me passa un déshabillé; nous bûmes, nous mangeâmes, nous chantâmes; et le même ordre de choses recommença une heure après, intervalle qu'on avait réglé entre chaque acte, pour occuper la nuit entière (p. 94).

When taking similar suppers with other men, Rosine's descriptions of the meal conform to this vision of refinement and regulation: 'rien de décisif avant le dîner; c'était la règle' (p. 121); 'Nous fûmes à table aussi fous qu'on doit l'être, et après le dessert, aussi fous qu'on peut l'être' (p. 178). Focused on cultivation and restraint, *Vénus en rut* offers a vision of the meal with the sex worker in which space, time, and foodstuffs are managed by clients with appealing aesthetic sensibilities, and who, like Michel Delon's libertine *gourmands*, are committed to the aestheticised gradation of pleasure.<sup>85</sup>

The male diner's wishes are similarly flattered at the end of Rosine's career when she is at her most powerful as a madam whose *soupers* are in demand all over Paris: 'je donnai des soupers délicieux; j'eus la crème des libertins de Paris. Il fallait avoir fait ses preuves pour être admis à mon lycée voluptueux : bientôt ma réputation s'étendit' (pp. 180-181). Even when acting as hostess, with the 'cream' of Paris' libertines eager to join her, Rosine does not control the table or consume her guests, but rather allows her male clients to dictate the tone of the meal, and use foods, drinks, and women exclusively for their own pleasure. Although Rosine exerts potential alimentary influence over Paris' libertines, the male client is still king:

Enflammé par de brûlants désirs, il renvoie son carrosse, soupe en poste, à chaque verre de champagne, il veut que la petite lui fasse raison, il prétend que Bacchus est maître des cérémonies chez la Cythérée, il la caresse, et tout à coup, se levant de table, il prend un flambeau d'une main, sa Joséphine de l'autre, et se sauve comme un Romain enlevant une Sabine (p. 185).

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<sup>84</sup> 'AMBIGU, s. m. Repas où l'on sert tout à la fois la viande et le fruit, et qui tient de la collation et du souper' (Féraud, *Dictionnaire critique de la langue française*, (1787), I, p. 95).

<sup>85</sup> Delon, *Le Savoir-vivre libertin*, p. 191.

Cementing her subordination to, and sexual appreciation of, her clients, Rosine spies on this encounter, masturbates, and then brings the couple a hearty breakfast which they all share. This episode, depicted as unproblematically pleasurable, further evidences the consistency with which Rosine approaches the meal as a site at which male enjoyment and dominance should be cultivated, even when she is nominally in control.

***Rosine's companions: feeding and being fed***

Rosine's apparent capacity to subsist on sex alone is unique within *Vénus en rut*. Her partners require restoratives to enhance or refresh their performance, with the result that luxurious consumption is constantly important to her work. Aware that she is exceptional and that, where her lovers are concerned, 'on ne vit pas d'amour', Rosine offers them tempting and effective 'restaurants' such as chocolate to help their tired bodies (p. 36). In contrast to *Margot la ravaudeuse*, in which almost every drink or meal is the product of undisciplined male choice and with results coloured by grotesque excess and unreason, *Vénus en rut* highlights only the masculine pleasure and potency to be drawn from eroticised ingestion where a desiring and benevolent woman does the feeding.

The meals that Rosine offers are consistently associated with luxury and health. She offers her partners such dishes as a 'bon consommé, un chapon au gros sel, un perdreau rouge, des œufs au jus', washed down with a bottle of Chambertin, a particularly high-quality Burgundy (p. 44). In addition to its visible economic signification, with each of these dishes or drinks a valuable luxury, what appears on Rosine's table has explicitly eroticised dietary properties. *Consommés*, rich stocks, capons and partridges were notable for their nourishing, restorative powers, making them the perfect dishes to compensate for sexual expenditure.<sup>86</sup> Eggs, combined with the bouillon of which their *jus* would be made, were also recommended as a nourishing

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<sup>86</sup> *Consommé* is noted for its strength and succulence, both vital qualities in a restorative meal. See, for instance, 'Consommé' in *Dictionnaire de l'Académie françoise* (1694), I, p. 237, and (1762), I, p. 376. The *Encyclopédie* notes that meat is boiled for a long time, so that all of the 'sucs' contained in the meat are transferred to the *bouillon* (Diderot, 'Consommé (*Cuisine*)', in *Encyclopédie*, IV (1754), p. 49). See also Tissot, p. 167. For more on the hyper-succulent properties of *bouillon*, see Spary, *Feeding France*, p. 110. Partridge is also noted for its succulent benefits (Tissot, p. 196), and capons, while they might at first suggest emasculation, were also lauded for their highly succulent, easily digestible and nourishing meat, perfect for convalescents (Gabriel François Venel, 'Chapon (*Diète, Matière médicale*)', in *Encyclopédie*, III (1753), p. 182).

remedy for sexual exhaustion.<sup>87</sup> Burgundy and other ‘vins moëlleux’ were lauded by doctors, Tissot included, for their health-giving potential.<sup>88</sup> Moreover, Rosine offers gentle aphrodisiacs as well as restoratives, providing drinks with ‘des qualités connues des sectateurs de Vénus’ (pp. 41–42), such as coffee and liqueurs made by the ‘veuve Amphoux’, a woman famed for developing and manufacturing popular and exotic spiced liqueurs which had become associated with democratized sensuality and luxury by the 1770s.<sup>89</sup> Chocolate, vanilla biscuits, and preserved sweet fruits are similarly deployed to add to this air of sensuality (p. 47). Crucially, unlike the mind- and body-altering excesses of luxury depicted in *Margot*, these stimulating substances are never consumed in quantities great enough to incapacitate the consumer or to effect potentially harmful or debilitating physical change. For the male diner, ingestion and sex are connected through the mutual reinforcement of desire and pleasure.

While the restorative or aphrodisiac foodstuff might suggest male inadequacy when combined with Rosine’s insatiable sexual appetite, becoming a crutch upon which the male body depends in order to perform, the meal in *Vénus en rut* demonstrates female, rather than male, weakness. Rosine’s reliance upon virility places her in a subordinate position, wherein her sexual appetite is so voracious that she must frequently cater to and nourish her lovers to achieve satisfaction. Rather than conform to Norberg’s vision of the sex worker as a woman who ultimately restores virility to use men for her own pleasure, thus placing her in a position of control, even if she poses no threat with it,<sup>90</sup> *Vénus en rut* is closer to Cortey’s vision of the eighteenth-century sex worker novel, wherein the frustration of female desire undermines female dominance and bolsters fragile masculine sexuality. Depictions of men who are impotent, exhausted, or cannot satisfy female sexual appetites also depict, by extension, women deprived of the pleasure they desire, entirely beholden to the caprice or exhaustion of the male body.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> *Œufs au jus* are composed of poached eggs coated with a sauce of seasoned veal stock (François Massialot, *Le Nouveau cuisinier royal et bourgeois* (Paris: Claude Prudhomme, 1734), p. 468).

<sup>88</sup> Tissot, p. 215. Burgundy was also associated with luxury and was a favourite of the French aristocracy, becoming particularly popular under Louis XIV. See ‘Bourgogne’ in Lichine, pp. 173–182 (p. 174). See also Strong, p. 225.

<sup>89</sup> For more on Madeleine Amphoux-Chasse-Vent, see Médéric Louis Élie Moreau de Saint-Méry, (M.S-M), ‘Amphoux-Chasse-Vent’, in *Biographie universelle, ancienne et moderne, supplément A-AZ*, ed. by Joseph Fr. Michaud and Louis Gabriel Michaud, 85 vols (Paris: Michaud, 1811-1862), LVI (1834), pp. 275–276. For more on liqueurs and their role in debates over the capacity to exert power over bodies, pleasure and reason, see Spary, *Eating the Enlightenment*, pp. 150 ff.; for their democratization, see p. 180.

<sup>90</sup> Norberg, ‘The Libertine Whore’, p. 233.

<sup>91</sup> Cortey, ‘Les « Invalides de Cythère »’, p. 145.

[l]a toute puissance du phallus est encore plus clairement figurée quand la courtisane est présentée non en victime mais en thérapeute des défaillances masculines [...] il ne s'agit donc pas de prendre le dessus, mais au contraire de mieux se soumettre à sa soumission.<sup>92</sup>

Although Rosine gets the sexual satisfaction she desires, she nonetheless has to repeatedly seek more encounters for that purpose, for which she must feed up and wait for her companions in order that they can perform to the standard she requires. While not frustrated as such, she is nonetheless beholden to the vagaries and temporality of the male sexual and consuming body. The contrast between the excited Rosine, who must feed her male companions and then wait for the foods to take effect, and lovers who are fed, restored, and can then initiate the sexual act is a repeated theme within the text: 'Tapefort dévorait; il lui tardait de recommencer; j'étais en train' (pp. 111–112); 'la bonne chère excita le tempérament de mons la Grenade, le mien était on jeu' (p. 136). When Fanchette's cousin and his friend have sex with Rosine one after the other, as we have seen, Fanchette plies the men with refreshments so that they will be able to perform as required: 'Pendant que cet acteur s'épuise, Tranche-Montagne, bien abreuvé par la cousine, avait repris de forces' (p. 138). In *Vénus en rut*, the sovereignty of the phallus that Cortey observes as a broader theme within fictions of sex work is clearly demonstrated through the use of food and drink. Her only option, when faced with impotence that would deprive her of the pleasure and sustenance on which she depends, is to make sure her sexual partners are well fed and wait for this food to take action.

Only once does Rosine feed a lover with explicitly aphrodisiac substances in an attempt to manipulate his body and exert a potentially threatening form of power over him. When seducing her young jockey, Honoré, Rosine gives him an overwhelming cocktail of aphrodisiacs: 'je bus de la crème de rose, j'en fis prendre au néophyte amoureux; je lui donnai des diablo de Naples, dont il ne connaissait pas la force, et je me déshabillai devant lui' (p. 71). However, even when wielding aphrodisiacs, Rosine remains a tender and benevolent force. Although Jean-Pierre Dubost claims (without substantive evidence) that Sade may have been inspired by this episode to feed sweets laced with Spanish fly to the sex workers in Marseille and interprets Rosine as a forerunner to Sade's poisoner enchantresses,<sup>93</sup> Rosine demonstrates no such cruelty at all. She ultimately nurtures, rather than experiments upon, her young lover. When Honoré ends

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., p. 146.

<sup>93</sup> Dubost, 'Préface: une remarquable carrière', p. 105.

up overstimulated and sleepless, ‘martyre d’une érection presque continuelle’ (p. 76), Rosine admits that his condition ‘[l]’inquiétait’ and inspires sufficient ‘pitié’ in her that she allows him to penetrate her again while feigning sleep (ibid). Even when doping a young man, Rosine’s approach to ingestion is far from Sadean violence or the vogue, discussed by Pierre Saint-Amand, for stories depicting philters that represent fear of poisons, parasitism, and the incorporation of others into the self.<sup>94</sup> There is no threat to Honoré’s mind or body beyond his sexual overexcitement. Moreover, this aphrodisiac is stripped of its political potential: the sole instance of ingestive manipulation is directed at a potent young man, rather than the ageing, buffoonish nobles pilloried by Margot. While such characters do feature in *Vénus*, none are overpowered by pharmaceuticals, nor do they depend on them to perform. Rosine does not resort to aphrodisiacs, for instance, when coaxing an erection out of the flaccid penis of an aging clergyman, instead relying on her skill and manual dexterity alone (p. 155). In contrast to Peter Cryle’s analysis of aphrodisiacs in Nerciat’s *Le Diable au Corps*, in which he argues that ‘aphrodisiacs provide the supplement needed by many of the male characters to fill the gap between female endurance and male stamina, between desire as a kind of general competence, and pleasure as concrete performance’,<sup>95</sup> even the oldest of Rosine’s clients can get by without chemical help. The gap between male and female sexual capacity is not depicted as a weakness to be medicated, but an occasion for Rosine to work, pleasuring the male body. The scant aphrodisiacs in *Vénus en rut* thus demonstrate neither the subversion of the established social order and its power dynamics, nor the weakness and chemical dependency of a decaying wealthier class. They are simply titillating parts of Rosine’s uncontroversial narrative.

Rosine’s role as a provider of nourishment for her clients is most explicit in her description of her body, which frames her as an object to be consumed. Rosine defines herself as a ‘petite pelote de graisse’ (p. 49), in a gesture that Robert Darnton argues is included to highlight her conformity to contemporary beauty standards, with chubbiness considered conventionally alluring to the eighteenth-century eye.<sup>96</sup> Her ‘dos gras et d’un contour heureux’ (p. 49) and even her ‘jolie motte [...] relevée, grassette, potelée’ (p. 58) are interpreted simply as part of her physical charm. While reasonable, this assessment

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<sup>94</sup> Saint-Amand, pp. 12–13.

<sup>95</sup> Cryle, *The Telling of The Act*, p. 104.

<sup>96</sup> Darnton, ‘Sex for Thought’, pp. 71–72.

overlooks the text's focus on consumption and fat as an explicitly appetising quality. The term 'petite pelote de graisse' is not original to *Vénus en rut*, but redolent of contemporary descriptions of small, edible birds, such as ortolans. The *Dictionnaire de l'Académie Française* describes how 'On dit, d'Un petit oiseau extrêmement gras, comme sont ordinairement les Hortolans & les Becafignes, que *Ce n'est qu'un peloton de graisse.*'<sup>97</sup> If, as Patrick Wald Lasowski notes, Margot is another name for the magpie, 'l'oiseau qui jase, volontiers querelleur',<sup>98</sup> Rosine's resemblance to the ortolan places her in direct opposition to Margot. Describing herself in the same language as a tiny, edible bird, Rosine's subtle self-identification is not that of a vocal, argumentative creature with an eye for shiny luxuries, but of a little, pleasurable consumable. This similarity to the ortolan is not only significant for its vision of Rosine as an edible woman destined for hungry men. It also concerns food as a symbol of wealth and status. Ortolans were considered luxuries, indigestible by peasants and destined only for consumption by wealthy elites; the *Encyclopédie*, in its discussion of ortolans, highlights how 'les manoeuvres & les paysans ne sauroient s'en accommoder.'<sup>99</sup> In likening herself to such a bird, Rosine identifies not only with edibility, but also with social stratification and difference; she believes that she is not just tasty, but a luxury good.

Even when Rosine's sexual partners are not so elite as her avian self-image might suggest, she is still content to take on the role of a consumable within an alimentary and social hierarchy. Following an encounter with a wealthy count, his valet comes to pay the bill on the condition that he might 'prendre les restes du dessert qu'il a laissées, et que vous me donnerez vite quelques minutes; c'est mon droit incontestable' (p. 105). For the nobleman's valet, Rosine is of equal significance to, and to be dealt with in the same breath as, the leftovers from a supper. Rosine's response to this proposed act of consumption again reaffirms the established (and physically incarnated) social hierarchies of the *ancien régime*; she puts up little resistance to the valet's demands. Robert Darnton has suggested that, in light of her claim that three bouts with the valet equal eight with the count (p. 107), Rosine exhibits a proto-revolutionary streak, demonstrating that 'all men are equal, once you get them into bed [...] but the lower

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<sup>97</sup> 'Peloton', *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française* (1694), II, p. 210. Venel similarly reprises this in his article 'Ortolan, (Diète & Cuis.)', *Encyclopédie*, XI (1765), p. 675.

<sup>98</sup> Lasowski, 'Margot la ravaudeuse: Notice', p. 1264.

<sup>99</sup> Venel, 'Ortolan (Diète & Cuisine)', in *Encyclopédie*, XI (1765), p. 675.

classes always outdo the upper'.<sup>100</sup> However, she is content to take on the role of the consumable who incarnates social stratification within a gendered, economic, and nutritional hierarchy and accept her place in a food chain that allows the valet his own sexual pleasure.

In light of her self-identification with food, destined for male pleasure and freed from the bounds of physical dependency upon sustenance, it is little wonder that Rosine places little significance upon money. Although she praises the skilled 'femmes galantes' who are able to 'sucrer leurs amants, mieux que le plus adroit vampire' (p. 144), Rosine has no such preoccupations. On the contrary, she actively rejects payment on several occasions, claiming that she will neither take money from friends (p. 155), nor accept payment in advance before she has shown her full sexual skill set and proved her worth (p. 180). Compared to her maidservant, whose mouth waters when she sees a client's watch worth more than twenty-five *louis d'or* (p. 91), Rosine's mouth waters at the prospect of sex. Following a bout with one of Rosine's lovers, Fanchette diverts his attentions back to her mistress with the words 'l'eau doit lui être venue à la bouche pendant notre action; buvez ce verre de Rota, et songez qu'il est près de minuit' (p. 114).<sup>101</sup> With no hunger for money, and a constant eye for sexual encounters, Rosine remains unthreatening to the male purse and exciting to the male libido.

On the occasions where payment and ingestion are conflated, it is not the client's lifeblood or wealth that Rosine takes as her reward, but the gift of confectionery: foods created for elegant appetites, but not without nods to childlike or feminine tastes. After one supper, Rosine receives her payment of eight *louis d'or* from her lover hidden in a *bonbonnière* (p. 126). When she revives an impotent cardinal's lost erection, he offers her a similar gift of a gold and crystal *bonbonnière* filled with dragees along with her money, telling her 'c'est la recompense due à un enfant, qui s'est jeté dans les bras du temps' (p. 156). Crystal and gold certainly augment her wealth, but the conflation of

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<sup>100</sup> Darnton uses this episode to justify his claim that, by sleeping her way through society, Rosine 'learns that all men are equal, once you get them into bed [...] but the lower classes always outdo the upper' ('Sex for Thought', p. 68).

<sup>101</sup> Rota, a wine, was prescribed by the spoonful along with *vin d'Alicante* as a restorative in eighteenth-century medicine. See, for instance, its use for palpitations in Charles-Auguste Vandermonde, *Dictionnaire portatif de santé*, 2nd edn, 2 vols (Paris: Vincent, 1760), II, p. 147; or for restoring the stomach in 'Vin (Diet. & Med.)', in *Nouveau Dictionnaire universel et raisonné de médecine, de chirurgie, et de l'art vétérinaire*, 6 vols (Paris: Duchesne, 1772), VI, pp. 498–513 (p. 506).

money and sugary sweets by her clients nonetheless renders her childlike and unthreatening.

### *Feeding as femininity*

Although she is primarily a nourishing figure, Rosine is lovingly fed and watered by her male companions on two occasions within the text. Yet this does little to contradict the novel's overriding vision of the ideal sex worker, and the ideal woman, as both a source of nourishment and an appetitive consumer rather than a cool and rational libertine who deploys or rejects food and drink for her own gain. When Rosine is the object of nourishing attention, feeding is nonetheless tied to the realm of the feminine and, in one instance, the sex worker in particular, with the eater/eaten relationship still inscribed within a social hierarchy that privileges masculinity over femininity and rich over poor.

Beginning with the associations between feeding and femininity, Rosine uses classical imagery to describe the men who provide her with foods and drinks. Following an encounter with a ship's doctor named Desmarais who gives her anatomy lessons in exchange for sexual favours, Rosine describes how he performs her toilet and restores her with a nourishing drink: 'Plus adroit que Ganymède, il voulut que je prisse du chocolat; me le versant, il était la complaisance même; me présentant ma tasse, il me baisa la main avec un air de gratitude qui me pénétra' (p. 58). With *Vénus en rut* indebted to contemporary nutritional and sexual science, whether subverted or not, it is significant that chocolate – as much a health drink as a symbol of luxury and, as revealed by the doctor's 'penetrating' gratitude, symbolic of sensuality – should be the doctor's restorative drink of choice.<sup>102</sup> Yet although Rosine's anatomy lessons point to an increase in her knowledge – and thus, by extension, her reason and power – her approach to ingestion is still rooted in the image of nourishing femininity that defines her body. By comparing her doctor to Ganymede, Zeus' cupbearer synonymous with youth, androgynous beauty, and pederasty, she positions herself in the role of Zeus himself. Her description of the doctor as 'succulent' (p. 58), defined in the 1762 *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française* as juicy and 'fort nourrissant',<sup>103</sup> further moves him from the realm of the masculine consumer to that of the nourishing consumable of which Rosine is the ultimate example. The doctor, with his nurturing and nourishing compliance, plays a

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<sup>102</sup> For more on chocolate as health food, see Spary, *Feeding France*, p. 141.

<sup>103</sup> 'Succulent', *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française*, (1762), II, p. 770.

youthful and emasculated role.<sup>104</sup> A similar classical image is used in Rosine's description of her young servant, Honoré, who is 'beau comme Hylas' (p. 63), Hercules' catamite who was abducted by nymphs when collecting water for dinner.<sup>105</sup> In both instances, male figures who offer nourishment are likened to beautiful, prepubescent boys whose fame is the product of classical same-sex romances with powerful men and/or abduction by voracious women. Thus, even if Rosine is masculinised and seemingly empowered through these images, the act of nourishment that defines her in most of the narrative is coded as the preserve, if not of woman, then of the feminine.

Honoré's alimentary identity is also significant for its relationship to money. As well as having him wait on her, Rosine manifests her control of Honoré through references to his being edible. Although Rosine encourages Honoré to treat her as an equal so that he will not be sexually inhibited around her (p. 68), her alimentary allusions highlight the disparity in their age, status, and socio-economic power, further reaffirming the conventionality of food in *Vénus en rut*. Honoré, a poorer, less educated, and younger figure than Rosine, is explicitly likened to food. Unlike the abbé Succarino, who is briefly described as a 'moelleux' 'pigeonneau' that Rosine will consume, (p. 84), only to fall ill and have her spend her wealth on his medicine and act as his nurse, Honoré is consistently treated as a subordinate and an edible. Rosine first discovers Honoré in a garden of exotic fruits, where she 'plucks' him from amongst the perfumed boughs of lemon, pineapple and bergamot trees: 'aussi j'y cueillis..... quoi.....? Un amour. Tu vas me demander quel arbre apporte ce fruit si rare? Le hasard' (p. 63). His beauty lies in his 'joues, vraies petites pommes d'Api' (p. 65), so it is little wonder that Rosine picks out 'un gilet vert-pomme' for his livery (p. 70). Through Rosine's intervention, Honoré goes from growing and cultivating delicious fruits to become the fruit that is cultivated and consumed.

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<sup>104</sup> Michael Preston Worley explores the significance of Ganymede in eighteenth-century art in 'The Image of Ganymede in France, 1730–1820: The Survival of a Homeroeric Myth', *The Art Bulletin*, 76.4 (1994), 630–643. For eighteenth-century associations between Ganymede and contemporary responses to sodomy, see pp. 633–634.

<sup>105</sup> 'Meanwhile the golden-haired Hylas was gone to bring water against supper for his own Heracles and for the valiant Telamon – for they two did ever eat together at a common board – gone with a brazen ewer' (Theocritus, *Idyl XIII. Hylas*, ed. by T.E. Page and W.H.D. Rouse, trans. by J.M. Edmonds, in *Loeb Classical Library: The Greek Bucolic Poets* (London: William Heinemann, 1912), pp. 155–163 (pp. 159–161)).

Kathryn Norberg interprets Rosine's seduction, control, and pimping of Honoré as symbolic of her subverting fixed relations of power and gender, arguing that 'because she acts as both seller and commodity, dominator and dominated, she engages in a sensual commerce that confuses domination and subordination and, with them, sexual distinctions.'<sup>106</sup> While Honoré's delectability might seem to support this claim, the subversive potential of his status as the only truly consumed male within the text is undermined when considered alongside his feminised beauty and youth. Unlike the lackeys who are fed up by Margot, a woman who displays restraint and rationality throughout her narrative and who takes pains not to be consumed herself, Honoré's resemblance to a juicy apple must be considered in a similar vein to Rosine's own edibility. By consuming Honoré, her subordinate, Rosine appears to exert metaphorical alimentary power, but without ever threatening the male elite who would make up her clientele and dining partners. It is only Honoré, after all, who begins to waste away from excessive sexual expenditure with Rosine and Fanchette, becoming 'diaphane' (p. 145); only Honoré is truly consumed by Rosine. It is thus little surprise that, when Rosine offers Honoré to her male clients, she still considers his pleasure or displeasure in alimentary terms, much as she does her own: 'je me doutais qu'il pourrait être enfilé lui-même, c'était un mauvais régal, mais il fut occupé' (p. 93). Through Honoré and his varied food symbolism, *Vénus en rut* once again reaffirms the hierarchy of the gendered and socio-economic 'food chain' of *ancien régime* France, where the sex worker sits squarely at the bottom.

### ***Conclusion***

Ingestion is clearly and demonstrably different in *Margot la ravaudeuse* and *Vénus en rut*. Where Margot's experiences at the table are often unpleasant or demeaning, she nonetheless maintains a clear distinction between her performance of sociability and her consuming body on the one hand, and an integral, stable self that critiques the society from which she profits on the other. In a world of animals, Margot remains rational and human, but must suffer in the process. For Rosine, ingestion is a matter of relentless pleasure, necessity, and willing subordination to male desire. Scenes of eating and

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<sup>106</sup> Norberg, 'The Libertine Whore', p. 240.

drinking reveal how, rather than mirroring or amplifying *Margot la ravaudeuse*, *Vénus en rut* subverts and undermines its literary forebear. With the table a site at which monetary and sexual power struggles were played out in the referential world throughout the eighteenth century, and the 1760s and 1770s giving rise to a increased interest in prescriptive ideas of femininity, *Vénus en rut*'s depiction of the alimentary reveals itself not to match or surpass *Margot*'s, but instead to form part of an increasingly reactionary approach to sexual agency, sex work, and their relationship to acceptable womanhood. Rosine's consuming and consumable body incarnates a worldview where the increasingly powerful and wealthy sex worker – embodied by Margot – should be undermined for male benefit, and illuminates how neither sex work memoir novels nor the meals within them can be understood as homogenous unless one overlooks the fundamental ideological differences that exist within deceptively similar texts. While *Margot la ravaudeuse* and *Vénus en rut* espouse some similar views on social inequality and the acquisition of knowledge, the images of ingestion in *Vénus en rut* are often reactionary, undermining this apparently radical social commentary. Ingestion reinforces and highlights, rather than erases, social distinction. Where Margot broadly conforms to the model of the cynical, rational, and empowered sex worker, Rosine's relationship to food reveals her own disempowerment and reinforces a stable, stratified, socio-economic hierarchy. At table, Margot reveals herself as dangerous and philosophical, surrounded by grotesquery and unreason. Rosine, an unthinking glutton and consumable good, is an emblem of patriarchal, heteronormative fantasy. It is thus clear that supposedly autonomous libertine heroines are not, in fact, necessarily as autonomous as they seem. Nor can they be considered as one unified type, when their relationships to ingestion and the table show up such fundamental differences. Having interrogated mid-century heroines who recount their journeys through the libertine landscape with lackeys, clients, and lovers and who experience at least some degree of imagined alimentary pleasure or self-possession, the following chapter turns to another form of sex work text: the fictional brothel correspondance. Without a central heroine, autonomous and libertine or otherwise, these texts instead offer a varied patchwork of meals, encounters, and characters, with the table offering a central point at which disgust, isolation, and vulnerability are increasingly intimate companions.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SOCIABILITY AND FRACTURE AT THE TABLE IN FICTIONAL BROTHEL CORRESPONDENCE

#### *CORRESPONDANCE DE MADAME GOURDAN, DITE LA PETITE COMTESSE (1783) AND CORRESPONDANCE D'EULALIE (1785)*

Having interrogated the significance of the meal in two examples of the quintessential mid-century sex work ‘memoir’, this chapter turns to two anonymous late-eighteenth century epistolary texts that centre on the kept women and madams of the 1770s and 1780s: the *Correspondance de Madame Gourdan, dite la Petite Comtesse* (1783) and the *Correspondance d'Eulalie* (1785).<sup>1</sup> Focusing on ingestion and its connection to the key theme of male and female sociability that emerges through the contents of the letters and the texts’ epistolary networks, this chapter explores how the shared meal is used to navigate issues of solidarity and fracture within different social, professional, and, in particular, gendered groups. It considers how alimentary references are used to create solidarity between members of an assumed male readership, allowing them to experience literary, gustatory, and erotic pleasure on and off the page, and cultivate their identities through the symbolism and practice of dining. At the same time, rather than depicting alluring sex worker heroines at the table (whether cynical like Margot or idealised like Rosine), the *Correspondances* highlight the false and precarious nature of mealtime sociability for female sex workers, where shared dining is no guarantee of solidarity or stability.

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<sup>1</sup> Anon., *Correspondance de Madame Gourdan*, in *Anthologie érotique*, ed. by Lever, pp. 623–703; Anon., *Correspondance d'Eulalie ou tableau du libertinage de Paris*, in *Anthologie érotique*, ed. by Lever, pp. 711–837. The *Correspondance d'Eulalie*, printed in London ‘chez Nourse’ in 1785, is the second (and expanded) incarnation of the anonymously penned *Lettres de Julie à Eulalie ou tableau du libertinage de Paris*, produced by the same publishing house in 1784. Following these original editions, the *Correspondance* was reproduced in 1911 by Raoul Vèze, writing under the pseudonym of B. de Villeneuve, and then again in 1967 by Editions Tchou in an edition that managed to escape the confines of the *Enfer* and into the wider literary world. More recently, Eulalie’s cache of letters has been published in two anthologies of salacious eighteenth-century texts as part of Fayard’s edited collection of *Œuvres anonymes du XVIIIe siècle*, and in Maurice Lever’s *Anthologie érotique*, cited above. Despite these recent re-editions, however, Eulalie’s letters have been the object of extremely limited scholarly attention. For a more extensive history of the text and its publication, see Michel Camus, ‘Introduction générale’, in *Œuvres anonymes du XVIIIe siècle*, II (1986), pp. 11–18 (pp. 13–15). Later editions can be found in the same edition, pp. 59–256, and Lever’s edition cited above. All references to the text, unless otherwise stated, are taken from the 2003 edition.

The *Correspondance de Madame Gourdan*, sometimes attributed to the *libelliste* and spy Charles Thévenau de Morande,<sup>2</sup> offers the reader a fictionalised insight into one of the most famous Parisian brothels of the mid- to late-eighteenth century, and one at which, as was demonstrated in Chapter One, the meal played a crucial role in the sexual transaction (even if, according to Inspector Marais, those meals were not particularly good).<sup>3</sup> Gourdan's brothel was the object of significant attention from pamphleteers, gossip columnists, and hack writers up to and following her death in 1783.<sup>4</sup> The *Correspondance*, published that year, offers a polyphonic and impressionistic vision of life at her brothel through a series of brief missives from sex workers, pimps, and clients sent over a ten-year period, purportedly stolen from Gourdan's salon by the editor and published as a window into contemporary morals.<sup>5</sup> Gourdan herself provides the silent epicentre of the text with her name, along with references to notable dignitaries and Parisian locations, situating the text within a recognisable reality. The *Correspondance d'Eulalie*, in contrast, is not focused on one specific figure known within the Parisian sex trade (though the famous Madame Brissault is mentioned on several occasions).<sup>6</sup> Instead, the text depicts the epistolary network of a sex worker who has retired from Paris to Bordeaux, and receives updates on the cultural, economic, and sexual life of the capital from her friends and former colleagues. With its precisely dated letters, the text is explicitly historicised, depicting the exploits and sufferings of this small group of women between April 1782 and December 1783 against the backdrop of a society complete with

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<sup>2</sup> Maurice Lever, 'Correspondance de Madame Gourdan, dite la Petite Comtesse: Introduction', in *Anthologie érotique*, ed. by Lever, pp. 623–627 (p. 623). For more on Thévenau de Morande's role as a spy and journalist in London in the pre-Revolutionary period, see Simon Burrows, 'The Cosmopolitan Press', in *Press, Politics and the Public Sphere in Europe and North America, 1760-1820*, ed. by Hannah Barker and Simon Burrows (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 23–47 (pp. 28–30).

<sup>3</sup> BnF, MS f. fr. 11359, pp. 261–262. This is discussed in Chapter One of this thesis.

<sup>4</sup> Lever, 'Correspondance de Madame Gourdan: Introduction', pp. 623–627. Eugène Defrance's text *La Maison de Madame Gourdan: documents inédits sur l'histoire des mœurs de la fin du XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Société du Mercure de France, 1908) compiles contemporary police, journalistic and fictional sources to provide an extensive, if somewhat mythologised, portrait of Madame Gourdan. A more recent account of her life and notoriety can be found in Benabou, pp. 247–252.

<sup>5</sup> 'Conduit non par l'amour, mais par la débauche, dans le plus fameux temple qu'elle ait à Paris, c'est-à-dire chez la Gourdan, j'attendais dans le salon qu'une victime vînt se présenter. J'aperçus une écritoire. Ayant un billet à écrire, je me mis à l'ouvrir pour y prendre du papier : mais au lieu d'en trouver, je n'y vis que des lettres. La curiosité de voir la correspondance d'une pareille femme m'en fit lire quelques-unes. Elles me parurent plaisantes. J'en pris un paquet que je me mis dans ma poche. Ce sont celles que je donne au public, comme servant à l'histoire des mœurs du siècle et de celles de Paris' (*Gourdan*, pp. 629–630).

<sup>6</sup> Brissault, a famous Parisian madam, is described along with her brothel in Capon, pp. 162–171.

a decaying aristocracy, a blossoming middle-class, and the looming shadow of the American War of Independence.<sup>7</sup>

Sex work continued to flourish as part of urban life in the later eighteenth century, with the number of sex workers booming in towns across France,<sup>8</sup> and both texts are rooted in this recognisable, real-life context of which ingestion was a crucial part. Ingestion was, as we have seen, fundamental to elite eighteenth-century sociability and pleasure and underpinned rituals of sex work only slightly less than the sexual act itself. It was, then as now, crucial to ideas of social identity through the construction of one's character, the modification of one's inner self through the biological, chemical and ethical implications of dietary choice, and the shaping of one's public image, with food, drink, and rituals of consumption forming part of the performance of wealth, gender and nationhood. It was also (and remains) framed by paradoxical ideas of individualism and sociability, of absolute collectivity and of fragmentation. As Georg Simmel notes, the sociological structure of the meal is borne of 'the exclusive selfishness of eating', wherein 'what a single individual eats can under no circumstances be eaten by another', as well as arising from the collective human need for sustenance and the habit of eating together.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, as Peter Farb and George Armelagos have highlighted, '[w]ith so much cultural importance attached to eating, it is no wonder that food to a large extent is what holds a society together'.<sup>10</sup> Ingestion must therefore be interpreted as a process that can emphasise division and solitude as well as solidarity. The complementary and conflicting notions of shared human experience and fragmentation are visible in the epistolary form of the *Correspondances*. Whether it heightens or minimizes the distance between the author and the recipient, the epistolary form, like the meal, exemplifies the simultaneous separation and connection of individuals.<sup>11</sup> The epistolary networks in these texts are, as Benoît Melançon notes, marked by the multiplication, reflection, and refraction of viewpoints: those of the characters described, the letters' fictional authors, recipients,

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<sup>7</sup> Morgane Guillemet, 'La Femme dans quelques romans libertins de la fin du XVIIIe siècle: l'écriture d'une expérience de l'histoire', in *Les Femmes et l'écriture de l'histoire 1400–1800*, ed. by Jean-Claude Arnould and Sylvie Steinberg (Mont-Saint-Aignan: Publication des universités de Rouen et du Havre, 2008), pp. 449–465.

<sup>8</sup> van Crugten-André, *Le Roman du libertinage*, p. 107; Genand, p. 24.

<sup>9</sup> Georg Simmel, 'Sociology of the Meal', in *Simmel on Culture: Selected Writings*, ed. by Mike Featherstone and David Frisby (London: Sage, 1997), pp. 130–136 (p. 130).

<sup>10</sup> Farb and Armelagos, p. 6.

<sup>11</sup> Janet Gurkin Altman, *Epistolarity* (Ohio State Press: Columbus, 1982), p. 13.

editors, and finally the readers of the text.<sup>12</sup> Focusing on these ideas of multiple, refracted viewpoints as they relate to the meal, as well as the notions of distance and proximity, sociability and fragmentation, this chapter highlights the ambivalence of sex work in the *Correspondances*. The meal is consistently used to highlight contrasts between masculine and feminine experience, solidarity and isolation, revulsion and attraction, pleasure and displeasure, expectation and reality, while nonetheless allowing male readers to experience pleasure as a result.

Critical attention to *Gourdan* and *Eulalie* to date has been scant and has tended to highlight the role of pleasure and its erosion through socio-economic and bodily decline and misery. As Jean-Christophe Abramovici notes, the libertine *mise en scène* of earlier works makes way for these later descriptions of Parisian sex workers' increasingly miserable lives punctuated by illness, hunger, and violence.<sup>13</sup> The *Correspondance de Madame Gourdan* has been almost entirely ignored, save for Stéphanie Genand highlighting the intertextual significance of the libertine canon to a number of letters<sup>14</sup> and Maurice Lever's brief introduction to the text.<sup>15</sup> Consequently, although eating and drinking feature regularly in the *Correspondance de Madame Gourdan*, no attention has been paid to their varied and symbolic significance. *Eulalie* has received more attention than *Gourdan*, but with a similar lack of interest in the alimentary, with criticism instead focusing primarily on the shadow of misery looming over the text. Drawing on existing analyses of the texts' focus on instability, fragmentation, and misery, this chapter explores the meal as a significant crisis point that represents and works through the physical and social divides within French male society. At the same time, it depicts the fracture of a growing sex trade on the verge of its own social and economic upheaval in the approach to and aftermath of the Revolution, and in a world increasingly concerned, as we have seen, with curtailing women's autonomy.

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<sup>12</sup> Benoît Melançon, 'Épistolarité et libertinage: note sur quelques romans du tournant des Lumières', in *Du Genre libertin au XVIIIe siècle*, ed. by Jean-François Perrin and Philip Stewart (Paris: Desjonquères, 2004), pp. 272–284 (pp. 273–276).

<sup>13</sup> Jean-Christophe Abramovici, 'Les Frontières du licite, l'obscénité', in *Histoire de la France littéraire: Classicismes XVII<sup>e</sup>-XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, ed. by Jean-Charles et Michel Delon (Paris: PUF, 2006), pp. 435–452 (p. 440).

<sup>14</sup> Genand, pp. 38–39.

<sup>15</sup> Lever, 'Correspondance de Madame Gourdan, dite la Petite Comtesse: Introduction', p. 625.

### *Male solidarity, on and off the page*

Solidarity amongst male consumers is visible in *Gourdan's* and *Eulalie's* letters within and beyond the confines of the texts. Although the meal is used to pillory gluttonous and undisciplined men, as was the case in *Margot la ravaudeuse*, for instance, references to consumption frequently establish cohesion between wealthy male consumers. With both texts written during a period of increasing tension surrounding the libertine's social, bodily, sexual, and political identity, and alongside the increasing threat of venereal disease, war, and the dawning of Revolutionary sentiment,<sup>16</sup> the textual meal offers a point at which a refined French homosociality can be depicted for the reader's pleasure, rather than anxiety.

To begin with the mere presence of ingestion in both texts, we must return to the mealtime scene as mimesis. Mealtime scenes feature in roughly one fifth of the letters in the *Correspondance de Madame Gourdan* and a third of those in the *Correspondance d'Eulalie*. This is perhaps unsurprising if, as both authors claim in their fictional editorial prefaces, these texts are intended as a real (or, more accurately, realistic) portrait of contemporary morals and practices.<sup>17</sup> The regularity with which meals emerge in the erotic transaction clearly resembles the successions of suppers found in the brothel records discussed in Chapters One and Two.<sup>18</sup> When describing a future encounter, *Eulalie's* friend Julie mentions her plans with the phrase 'ce soir je fais un souper avec un Russe' (*Eulalie*, p. 715). Mlle Felmé describes a recent supper party with a similar lack of alimentary detail, giving greater attention to time, space, and sexual acts: 'Lundi dernier, mon cœur, la Présidente fit me dire de venir chez elle à neuf heures du soir pour y souper et coucher [...] Ensuite, nous avons soupé. À une heure, nous sommes couchés' (*Eulalie*, p. 736), and a client of Madame Gourdan's simply tells her 'vendredi j'irai souper avec vous' (*Gourdan*, p. 685). These references to ingestion, though fleeting, create a convincing and readable representation of the referential world of the

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<sup>16</sup> Charles Hirsch, 'Préface', in *Œuvres anonymes*, II (1986), pp. 53–58 (p. 58).

<sup>17</sup> See *Gourdan*, pp. 629–630, *Eulalie*, p. 709. Valérie van Crugten-André has also argued that *Gourdan* in particular provided the quintessential image of the *maquerelle* in literature, even beyond the confines of the *roman de la prostituée*, allowing authors to situate their depictions of the sex trade within a recognisable vision of demimonde reality (*Le Roman du libertinage*, pp. 96, 185–186).

<sup>18</sup> Pamela Cheek describes how the *Correspondance de Madame Gourdan* and *Correspondance d'Eulalie* resemble the letters passed to the police by madams as part of their surveillance and highlights the brothel as located at 'the nexus of the intersection between police writing and sexualized writing' (Cheek, 'Prostitutes of "Political Institution"', pp. 197, 202).

*demimonde*, as part of what James W. Brown describes as the ‘mimetic’, rather than ‘mythic’ or ‘poetic’ meal:

Whereas a kind of self-conscious *écriture* underpins *la poétisation du mets*, so an intentionality – a *projet anthropologique* – on the part of the writer lies at the heart of eating practices and mores as are characteristic of the French throughout their literary history.<sup>19</sup>

The *Correspondances*, as fictional chronicles of contemporary morals designed to entertain, are realistic and consequently voyeuristic, offering visions of the brothel meal as a crucial part of the *demimonde* and its workings. This reality would be recognisable to the text’s intended readers, with the *dîner* and *souper* implying, in Vincent Jouve’s terms, the complete and recognised ‘script’ of the meal, sufficient to conjure up images of the referential world in fiction as in the brothel records.<sup>20</sup> Readers united by a shared knowledge of sex work and dining rituals would therefore find these brief references entertaining. Consequently, the repeated but brief references to meals help to cultivate a distinction between the knowledgeable reader and less experienced outsiders, promoting a pleasurable solidarity between members of an elite male audience at the imagined and referential tables.

The *Correspondances* also offer a network of signposts for the less knowledgeable reader, creating a textual map of Parisian dining hotspots at which pleasures akin to those described in the text might be found.<sup>21</sup> As well as numerous evenings *chez* Gourdan herself, her *Correspondance* describes meals at Saint-Cloud (*Gourdan*, p. 660), and the Tuileries (*Gourdan*, p. 687). The *Correspondance d’Eulalie* goes further, offering additional detail on hostelries, caterers, and the dishes available in the author’s explanatory footnotes. The *Pavillon royal* is described as an ‘[a]uberge où l’on fait très bonne chère. Il se passe peu de jours qu’il ne s’y fasse des parties’ (*Eulalie*, p. 729), and a lunch at Bancelin’s is illuminated as follows: ‘C’est le plus fameux traiteur du boulevard et chez lequel se font les plus belles parties. On y trouve toujours des joueuses de vieilles jeunes et assez gentilles, qui viennent chanter pendant le repas’ (*Eulalie*, p. 734).<sup>22</sup> Like the catalogues published in the early nineteenth century in which sex workers would be listed along with their addresses and the services they provided, the

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<sup>19</sup> James W. Brown, ‘Littérature et nourriture’, *Dalhousie French Studies*, 11 (1986), 4–8 (p. 6).

<sup>20</sup> Jouve, p. 17.

<sup>21</sup> Or might have been, where Gourdan’s brothel is concerned, in light of her death in 1783.

<sup>22</sup> *Eulalie*, p. 734. A similar description is given of Le Bœuf: ‘Traiteur au petit cours en face du Colysée, dont la maison s’appelle l’*Hôtel du Bel Air*’ (p. 748).

*Correspondances* function as brothel and restaurant guides, offering tips on where to find sex workers and a good meal, facilitating and encouraging the pursuit of male sensual and gustatory pleasure. *L’Espion libertin* (1803), for instance, describes women who can be found at different brothels, including specific *épiciers*, restaurants, and cafés along with descriptions of their tariffs, and *Les Bordels de Paris* (1790) offers a similar rundown of which establishments house women of different kinds, including *négresses*, *grisettes*, *provincials*, and *élégantes* (recommending brothels that pose a lower risk to the client until the fantasy brothel devised in the earlier part of the text is created), though with little detailed description of the meals on offer in either case.<sup>23</sup> Robert Darnton has noted this similarity between sex work narratives – and the *Correspondance d’Eulalie* in particular – and guidebooks, highlighting food along with music and theatre as key parts of their literary tour of the Paris *demimonde*.<sup>24</sup>

Yet his suggestion that the explanatory notes were ‘for the edification of ignorant provincials’ stops short of recognising their focus on food, or their potential to cultivate solidarity through pleasure amongst an already knowledgeable male readership. References to recognisable locations and rituals serve a dual function by alluding to pre-existing shared knowledge or by communicating this knowledge to a readership who could put it into practice and thus join an existing community. cursory descriptions of champagne suppers at the Bois de Boulogne (*Eulalie*, p. 729) or Pavillon Royal (*Eulalie*, p. 747) might also incite pleasure in men familiar with these real-life experiences and locations, creating an elite in-crowd of readers conscious they have no need for the accompanying footnotes. With Paris’ hotspots thus highlighted, the less knowledgeable reader might live vicariously through the text or, if opportunity allowed, act upon its recommendations, seating himself at a real-life *demimonde* table. Rather than offering fictional women a site of pleasure and social mobility that might confer greater economic power upon them, the meal, advertised in the *Correspondance*, becomes a site of sociability, sensuality, and potential social climbing for new male initiates. At the libertine table, women are explicitly excluded and thus denied social and political capital,

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<sup>23</sup> See Anon., *L’Espion libertin*, pp. 107–109, and *Les Bordels de Paris, avec les noms, demeures et prix, plan salubre et patriotique soumis aux illustres des états généraux pour en faire un article de la Constitution, Rédigés par MM. Dillon, Sartine, Lenoir, La Trolière, & Compagnie* ([n.p.]: [n. pub.], 1790), pp. 17–24.

<sup>24</sup> Darnton, ‘Sex for Thought’, p. 72.

in a world where sex workers become tools to facilitate the reification of homosocial bonds.

The connection established between the sex trade and the food and drink industries is reinforced further through the conflation of sex workers with foodstuffs, particularly in the *Correspondance de Madame Gourdan*. A large proportion of the letters are sent either by clients or by *entremetteurs* who send their requirements for supper parties in advance. One marquis requests a *souper* at which all the diners will be naked (*Gourdan*, p. 647), while a soldier requests ‘[d]u joli et du roué’ for company, before emphasising that Gourdan should provide ‘champagne mousseux. Mes camarades aiment à boire. Quant à moi, vous n’ignorez pas mon goût : j’ai décoiffé quelques bouteilles chez vous’ (*Gourdan*, p. 657). An *entremetteur* requests specific women – ‘*la Façonnée, la Pimpante, la Mignonne, la Mutine et l’Éventée*’, echoing names recognisable from Mercier’s description of ‘Matrones’ in his *Tableau de Paris*<sup>25</sup> – for a group of Italian diners, before specifying that they should dine ‘dans le salon de derrière’ – a smutty nod to Italians’ reputed taste for anal sex – with champagne and a fiddle for dancing (*Gourdan*, p. 700). Similar requests from English diners request tall women (*Gourdan*, p. 639), roast beef and sparkling wine (*Gourdan*, p. 684), or ‘*la chère la plus délicate*’ (*Gourdan*, p. 681), depending upon their individual or national tastes. This lack of distinction between women and ingesta, described in similar ways, one after the other and with scarcely any detail to differentiate them, reinforces a clear hierarchy between, on the one hand, women and food as interchangeable consumables on a shared menu, and on the other, men as human beings. Beyond the simple eater-eaten dynamic that this produces, the role of choice in the brothel’s combined alimentary and sexual menus reinforces the *souper* as a site of male agency, through the exercise of alimentary self-awareness and self-fashioning. Discussing the birth of the restaurant in the early 1770s, Rebecca Spang notes how

[w]hen ordering from a restaurant menu, the patron [...] made a highly individualistic statement, differentiating him- or herself [...] from the other eaters and their conditions. By the mere presence of a menu, the restaurant’s style of service demanded a degree of self-definition, an awareness and cultivation of personal tastes.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Mercier, VII (1783), p. 3.

<sup>26</sup> Spang, pp. 76–77. This cultivation of individual identity is still at play in the modern restaurant dynamic, as Elizabeth Telfer highlights in her discussion of pleasure in *Food for Thought: Philosophy and Food* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 2.

This practice would have been well established by the time of the *Correspondance*'s publication in 1783. Although no defined 'menu' exists at Gourdan's brothel, by ordering meals that suit his palate and choosing from the women or types of women on offer, the client is similarly positioned as an autonomous agent who can use the brothel as a proto-restaurant in which to demonstrate and realise his individual desires.

Distinctions made between cosmopolitan insiders and buffoonish outsiders further reinforce the meal's role in highlighting communality or fragmentation. As was the case in *Margot* and *Vénus*, divisions are drawn between the elite French or Parisian diner with admirable appetites on the one hand and an array of stereotypical provincial or foreign visitors on the other, as Maurice Lever has highlighted.<sup>27</sup> Even if an Englishman's choice of 'du rosbif et du pudding' taken early at five o'clock (*Gourdan*, p. 684) shows he is of higher status than the sex worker since he can exercise alimentary choice, he nonetheless conforms to a stereotype inferior to the French reader.<sup>28</sup> Further caricatures include Englishmen who are very fond of punch (*Eulalie*, p. 674), Germans who are so drunk they must be put to bed straight after lunch, before they can even reach the brothel (*Gourdan*, p. 636), and men from the provinces whose arrival is announced by an *entremetteur* with the positive but nonetheless distinctly Parisian advice that their supper might become 'bruyant, les provinciaux ayant pour l'ordinaire une gaieté éclatante' (*Gourdan*, p. 633). Such alimentary typologies are far from unusual, but nonetheless reinforce the air of Parisian male solidarity that frames both *Correspondances*, with non-Parisian table manners and habits emphasised as divergent from the norm.

### ***Fragmentation of female solidarity and the female professional body***

Since most meals pass with little comment, it is fair to suggest that eating and drinking is usually presented as unproblematic or even unremarkable for the female characters within the *Correspondances*. When a meal goes to plan, food and drink are barely mentioned, with the setting, clients and their sexual preferences making up the majority of the account. Other meals are simply enjoyable, and markers of pleasant sociability at

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<sup>27</sup> Lever, 'Correspondance de Madame Gourdan, dite la Petite Comtesse: Introduction', p. 625.

<sup>28</sup> Pudding, or 'Poudinge', was just as synonymous with Englishness in the eighteenth century as it is now: 'ragoût fort connu des Anglois, & qui parmi eux se diversifie à l'infini. La base en est ordinairement de la mie de pain, du lait, de la moëlle de boeuf, des raisins secs, des raisins de Corinthe, du riz, des pommes de terre même, & du sucre: toutes ces différentes substances diversement combinées, sont différens *poudingues*. On assure que les Anglois ont plus de mille manieres de diversifier ce ragoût' (Unknown, 'Poudingue (*Cuisine*)', *Encyclopédie*, XIII (1765), p. 187).

table. Writing to Eulalie, for instance, Mlle Julie describes a lucrative ‘petit souper bourgeois chez un de mes voisins, où je me suis bien amusée. Chaque convive (nous étions douze à tables) pétilla d’esprit au dessert’ (*Eulalie*, p. 743). Julie’s table, as for other successful sex workers, also serves as a measure of professional success and social ascent. Once she has found a wealthy *entreteneur*, she is set up in an apartment complete with a dining room that is ‘boisée et peinte en petit gris’ with a ‘service complet de porcelaine de la manufacture de Clignancourt’ and silverware from Rigal, all of which serve as explicit symbols of wealth and luxury, and she holds weekly *soupers d’esprit* for the poets and authors invited to her home by her new patron, who also ‘sparkle’ like the champagne that graced such elite tables (*Eulalie*, p. 755).<sup>29</sup> As a hostess, Julie finds herself in an elegant social network of which one epicentre is her dining room.

The pleasures and benefits of the meal also include, though are not limited to, meals shared exclusively by women, expanding the sphere of female sociability beyond letters and into the physical world they describe. Women use the table as a site to discuss and plan their professional lives, cultivating working relationships. When Mlle Victorine is invited to eat with Mlle Olympie, a close friend who has become a successful *dame entretenue* kept by a wealthy *financier*, they share an enjoyable meal – ‘Le dîner a été des plus gais’ – and Victorine is presented with a beautiful watch upon her arrival as a demonstration both of Olympie’s gratitude for her support during her early career and of her newfound wealth (*Eulalie*, p. 794). The meal also facilitates professional negotiations. Mlle Rosimont invites Julie to a *dîner* at which she proposes that they collaborate for a same-sex encounter to be performed for a wealthy old libertine later that

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<sup>29</sup> The Rigal family were notable goldsmiths working in Paris and the provinces in the eighteenth century (Solange Brault-Lerch, *Les Orfèvres de Franche-Comté et de la Principauté de Montbéliard du Moyen Age au XIXe siècle* (Genève: Librairie Droz, 1976), pp. 517–519). Madame Gourdan also receives a brief letter from Rigal in her *Correspondance*, informing her that her tableware is ready for engraving (*Gourdan*, p. 647). Porcelain was similarly a mainstay of the elite eighteenth-century table. The Clignancourt factory, while not as prestigious as Sèvres, was nonetheless one of the most important porcelain producers based in Paris (John Whitehead, *The French Interior in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Laurence King, 1992), pp. 165–183, particularly p. 183). Wood panelled walls were similarly fashionable (Wend von Kalnein, *Architecture in France in the Eighteenth Century*, trans. by David Britt, (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 57). A broad overview of the significance of material objects such as these to the understanding of food and history can be found in Jean-François Bergier’s introductory essay ‘Food and Material Culture’, in *Food and Material Culture: Proceedings of the Fourth Symposium of the International Commission for Research into European Food History*, ed. by Martin R. Schäfer and Alexander Fenton (East Linton: Tuckwell, 1998), pp. 1–7. For a discussion of the role of silver and porcelain on eighteenth-century French tables, primarily focusing upon its role as a socio-economic signifier, its valued aesthetic effects, and its role in exposing poisoning, see Hans Ottomeyer, ‘Service à la française and service à la russe: or the evolution of the table between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries’, in the same volume, pp. 107–115 (pp. 108–109).

day (*Eulalie*, p. 728), and Mlle Victorine describes how she has held a *dîner* with the young woman sent to her as an initiate by Eulalie from Bordeaux before taking her to Brissault's brothel to begin her career the next day (*Eulalie*, p. 829). The meal has the potential to underpin women's shared joy, social bonds and professional collaboration.

In spite of these positive images of female commensality and consumption, however, the meal is more often host to the erosion of social and professional bonds and opportunities, leading to women's increased atomisation. With the table a site not merely of ingestion, but of conversation, the diner can be isolated from her companions through gossip. When hosting a dinner at her own apartment, Mlle Julie is forced to laugh along to stories about a woman who was duped into sex with a stranger at the Bal d'Opéra for payment that turned out to be worthless small change (*Eulalie*, p. 783). The woman in question was, of course, Julie herself. More significant is the threat of physical violence that follows verbal exchange and sociability at the table. Mlle Rosimont recounts how, after losing an argument with another woman at a *souper*, she goes to her adversary's apartment disguised as a man, threatens her with pistols and swords, whips her, and then publicises her embarrassing fate (*Eulalie*, pp. 742–743). Solidarity is cultivated between Eulalie and her correspondents through the writing and receiving of these letters, sharing their embarrassment or pride at each breakdown in sisterhood, but this solidarity is nonetheless based on a moment of fragmentation at the table.

Alternatively, the sex worker's wellbeing can be undermined at the table by her own ill-considered ingestion, with long- and short-term repercussions. Unlike Margot and Rosine's seemingly invulnerable bodies, Eulalie and Gourdan's correspondents feel the effects of overindulgence and miss out on opportunities for work and economic advancement as a result. One woman says that she cannot work since 'Ces messieurs d'hier m'ont tant tracassée et tant fait boire de liqueurs que j'ai résolu de garder le lit et de me mettre à la diète. J'en suis au désespoir' (*Gourdan*, p. 684). A similar refusal of the opportunity to attend a 'partie' sees a woman ascribe her sickness to having drunk too much punch at a supper with English clients (*Gourdan*, pp. 674–675). These women are not idealised pleasure machines, but instead resemble the female libertines identified by Nancy Miller who, unlike their male counterparts, cannot live without consequence.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Nancy K. Miller, 'Libertinage and Feminism', *Yale French Studies*, 94 (1998), 17–28 (p. 19).

Meals undermine their healthy, wage-earning bodies and thus their access to capital. Moreover, their apologies, discussion of ‘désepoir’, and one woman’s plea that Gourdan should ‘Ménagez-moi [ses] bontés pour une autre fois’ (*Gourdan*, p. 675) indicates that a single episode of indiscipline could fracture professional relations between a madam and her workers and affect their long-term economic wellbeing. Given that the rules for Madame Gourdan’s establishment state that a woman who drinks too much at *soupers* ‘sera à l’amende d’un jour, et deux jours au service des vieux’ (*Gourdan*, p. 702) and advise women not to be drunkards or to abuse strong alcohols for fear of spoiling their looks and becoming brutish (*Gourdan*, pp. 691–692), indiscretion at the table is understood within a madam’s disciplinary framework, with negative fallout for unintelligent consumers. Where male ingestion is presented as a source of fun, female consumption leads to vulnerability and punishment.

Limited access to one’s livelihood is, moreover, not only the product of sex workers’ own indiscretion. In one letter to Madame Gourdan, a sex worker recounts a drunken supper where a dispute between three men over who will foot the bill leads to a swordfight in which one is gravely injured (*Gourdan*, p. 635). It is not the weapon-toting drunk who is arrested and imprisoned, however, but the woman in whose apartment the ruckus breaks out, highlighting her vulnerability and isolation even if she hosts others who have lost control at the table. Describing a different sort of displeasure in the face of overindulgent clients, Julie writes to Eulalie to recount a meal with an inebriate German baron, during which her distaste at his poor sexual etiquette is only compounded by his uncouth table manners. After a brutal and wordless sexual encounter, Julie is granted some reprieve by the news that supper is ready, only to dine in near silence and be given the baron’s leftovers rather than be treated like a desired guest, until he is eventually overcome by his gluttony:

Pendant tout les temps que nous avons été à table, notre Allemand n’a ouvert la bouche que pour dire, après avoir pris de chaque plat: “Prends-le, petit mamzelle” (car il ne servait personne). [...] Enfin, il a tant mangé et tant bu qu’on a été obligé de la porter dans sa voiture.

Quels sots personnages que les barons allemands! Nulles grâces, nulle politesse! (*Eulalie*, p. 722).

This encounter does more than compound the comical visions of drunken Germans presented in other contemporary literature: it highlights the sex worker’s potential displeasure and fragility when she is mistreated at the table. The meal is neither a site of

enjoyment, nor one at which she can gain the upper hand. She is, instead, forced to accept a subordinate role in the ritual that should frame her professional identity, and can only complain to a distant friend after the event.

The significance of the meal to Julie's sense of self and professional identity is further emphasised in her account of a young man at the theatre mistaking her for 'une de ces demoiselles qui viennent chercher qu'on leur paye à souper chez quelque traiteur des boulevards pour prix de leurs faveurs' (*Eulalie*, p. 734) and trying to buy her favours with an informal supper, rather than the more formal contractual arrangements, money and gifts with which she, an elite sex worker, would expect to be paid (*ibid.*). Affronted, Julie strings the young man along by agreeing, with the proviso that he leaves to order the meal in advance, and then disappears as soon as he has gone. Food and drink, and their social and professional signification, are important enough to offend Julie when offered inappropriately and economically significant enough to provide Julie with a form of financial and social revenge. She thus appears to demonstrate economic and alimentary independence by rejecting a meal that she can afford not to eat, gloats over her presumed triumph with her female correspondent, again hinting at female solidarity against a male clientele,<sup>31</sup> and stings the young man's wallet into the bargain. Yet since Julie devotes an extensive section of her letter to this escapade, granting it more detail than many of her more pleasurable and formulaic meals, this episode suggests not only a desire to tell an unusual story as part of her detailed and regular correspondence (and thus, from an authorial perspective, to include another comical vignette in the sex worker's life), but a visible desire to work through these events in order to reframe her insulting encounter in a way that restores her control. This alimentary revenge is an attempt to bolster a perceived superiority that is shaken when she is misread as a lower-class sex worker, so as to restore her pride and bruised sense of identity within the professional hierarchy. In a climate where her fellow sex workers bemoan that they have been 'réduites à raccrocher' just to survive and with 'parties' and 'passades' now thin on the ground in the wake of the war, this hierarchy has become increasingly blurred. For Julie, the narrated meal is one of the few opportunities at which these blurry divisions can be sharpened, though only artificially, to reframe her self-image.

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<sup>31</sup> 'Je te laisse penser à l'étonnement de mon homme. À son retour, il aura été d'autant plus piqué qu'il m'avait donné un bouquet superbe et payé plusieurs rafraîchissements' (*Eulalie*, p. 734).

Even when manipulating men's bodies at the table – an act that features twice in the *Correspondance d'Eulalie* – the sex worker's independence and cooperation with others is undermined by yet more privileging of male desire and pleasure. Sex workers do not demonstrate their autonomy or self-possession in episodes where male bodies are targeted, but instead demonstrate their own limited ability to avoid or overcome male desire. While taking a meal with a German baron, for instance, Eulalie's friend Mlle Rosimont is interrupted by a Frenchman with whom she is also involved and who refuses to leave her before he has satisfied his desire (*Eulalie*, pp. 744–745). In an attempt to placate him without arousing the German's suspicion and compromising herself, Rosimont persuades the Frenchman to get the baron as drunk as he can and then introduces him as a relative so that he can join them at the table, giving the French lover sufficient access to the table's glasses to render the baron unconscious. A similar situation arises when Mlle Julie's *entreteneur*, a count, appears when she is in bed with her lover (*Eulalie*, p. 751), forcing her to feign a stomach ache to prevent him from trying to have sex with her before she has washed. Keen to restore her to health, the *entreteneur* returns home to find some curative tea, giving the lover an opportunity to flee and Julie an opportunity to perform her toilet. While this ruse allows Julie to sustain her double professional and personal life, she must forego full control of her own ingesting body as a result. Despite her protests that she is well again on the count's return, he insists that Julie take his medicine, fast until supper, and then eat with him before staying under his watch all night. On both occasions, the sex worker attempts to master a situation involving two men with recourse either to the meal or to the digesting body. On both occasions she succeeds, but only by accepting male intervention in that same table or body and dividing herself between two men who insist upon her affections at the same time.

### ***Juxtaposed meals***

The broad cast of voices that emerges in Gourdan's and Eulalie's letters highlights conflicts and differences, either between individual correspondents, or between ways of life for women at different points within the socio-professional hierarchy. These differences are also manifested through meals. By juxtaposing two stories or voices, these letters, already demonstrative of distance between sex workers, further emphasise women's potential isolation at the table. These contrasts illuminate the difference between the female characters' expectations of refinement and wealth within the sex

trade, and the realities of danger, loss of control, and fragmentation of one's social and professional bonds or of one's sense of self. As Laurence Sieuzac has highlighted with reference to *Eulalie*, the protagonists' multiple voices and varied fates expose the rhythms of a sexual (and literary) marketplace in which women who shift in status, fall sick or die are soon supplanted by newer replacements.<sup>32</sup> This vulnerability is drawn into particularly sharp focus in stories involving mealtimes.

The social and professional fragmentation to which women are exposed at the table is revealed in a pair of letters from sex workers to Madame Gourdan following a supper party gone awry. One woman, Mlle Violette, complains that she never wants to work with Mlle Justine again, since

elle est non seulement de mauvaise foi sur ce qu'on lui donne, mais encore, quand elle est grise, ce qui lui arrive toujours, elle se met toute nue, et nous sommes obligées de suivre son exemple pour ne pas passer pour des bégueules et éviter la mauvaise humeur des convives. Il est permis d'être libertine, mais faut-il au moins ne pas se prostituer indignement (*Gourdan*, p. 661).

Justine, in turn, rejects any future collaboration with Violette, accusing her of a fussy prudishness unbecoming in a sex worker:

je me moque de ce que peut dire une petite péronnelle comme elle, qui veut faire la prude [...]. Toutes ces demi-vertueuses sont plus coquines que nous, qui sommes de bonnes réjouies et nous moquons du qu'en dira-t-on [...] Elle ne veut plus faire de souper avec moi, et moi je n'en veux plus faire avec elle (ibid.).

Their conflicting views on intemperance at the table illuminate disagreement not only about dining etiquette, but also their own status within a professional hierarchy. Where Violette distinguishes between her suppertime entertaining and 'prostituting' herself, Justine maintains that Violette's protests are little more the hypocrisy and delusions of grandeur, laying bare the lack of solidarity between sex worker colleagues. These fractures between Violette and Justine are, however, compounded by interdependency between their consuming bodies. Even though only Justine is drunk, the effects of her consumption force her companions to imitate her, playing the role of tipsy, naked party girls so as not to anger their clients: even if only one mouth drinks, the collective body of the sex workers must appear similarly drunk. A similar episode, recounted to Eulalie, describes a chaotic party at which a drunken sex worker 's'est grisée et a fait mille horreurs' (*Eulalie*, p. 718), including beating the clients until they whip her in anger,

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<sup>32</sup> Laurence Sieuzac, 'Romans-mémoires de « filles » ou les tensions d'un mauvais genre', in *Écrire en mineur au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, ed. by Christelle Bahier-Porte and Régine Jomand-Baudry (Paris: Éditions Desjonquères, 2009), pp. 167–184 (pp. 173, 182).

with her colleagues forbidden from protecting her lest they receive the same fate, and then smashing all of the crockery in a violent rage. Again, the sex worker who does not overindulge is put at risk as a result of one woman's indiscretions and vows never to work with her again. Unlike Margot, for instance, who is bodily resilient, unscathed by the food fight that marks the start of her career, and quickly grows independent of other sex workers, late-century fictional brothel workers have a problematic relationship to commensality. As critics such as Morgane Guillemet and Domingo Pujante González have highlighted, much of the text is devoted to moralizing, phallogentric violence, with woman a constant victim of judgement, use, and abuse.<sup>33</sup> The table provides a key site at which this violence takes place, where women turn against one another, lose control, and are punished and beaten as a result. Supposedly a marker of refinement and solidarity, the shared meal reveals how contingent and interdependent the fictional late-century brothel worker's body can be.

Another pair of letters highlights the meal's significance as a symbol of social status and aspiration. These are written by an actress in Calais seeking employment with Gourdan and a former member of Gourdan's brothel who describes the cruel realities of life in Bicêtre when ill and abandoned by her madam. The actress, Mlle D'Aigremont, asks Gourdan to find her an *entreteneur*, complaining that she is tired of playing the role of a *femme de qualité* on the stage, only to retire home to 'un appartement mesquinement meublée pour y faire un mauvais souper' (*Gourdan*, p. 646). For a woman in the provinces, life as a Parisian kept woman means an upgrade in her dining arrangements and the end of a life dining in misery. However, D'Aigremont's vision of her professional future is immediately contrasted with the horrors of imprisonment:

Mes souffrances sont inouïes et, pour comble de malheur, je n'ai pour perspective qu'une captivité de trois ans à l'Hôpital, après lesquels que deviendrai-je? J'ai perdu une partie de mes dents, mes charmes sont disparus (*ibid.*).

With Bicêtre notorious for its punishing mercury cures and starvation diets, the luxury that D'Aigremont imagines will replace her lonely, unappetising meals is, it seems, more

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<sup>33</sup> Guillemet, 'De la Représentation au mythe' pp. 707–709; Domingo Pujante González, 'Vénus et Thanatos: une vision masculine de l'amour au XVIIIe siècle', *Estudios de Lengua y Literatura francesas*, 13 (2001) 151–180. See also Maurice Lever, 'Correspondance d'Eulalie ou Tableau du libertinage de Paris: Introduction', in *Anthologie érotique*, ed. by Lever, pp. 705–708.

likely to be replaced by even greater misery, malnourishment and isolation.<sup>34</sup> Far from rising to new heights at the dinner table, it is more likely that she will lose her teeth, and thus her ability to charm others at table – or even to eat at all.

Pairs of letters depicting positive and negative visions of the meal are not all as stark as those detailed above. Yet even when it cultivates or accompanies a dramatic increase in wealth and status, the meal remains resolutely ambivalent. The last meal mentioned in the *Correspondance d'Eulalie* takes place not at an apartment, brothel, or *traiteur* but at a splendid wedding feast at the *hôtel de ville* when Felmé, one of Eulalie's correspondents, marries a *conseiller du présidial*. As well as fulfilling a key part of the wedding ritual,<sup>35</sup> this meal provides the point at which, through assimilating food and being assimilated at the table, Felmé transitions out of the *demimonde* and into the world of bourgeois respectability.<sup>36</sup>

Rendus dans une salle voisine de celle du festin, il m'a fallu abandonner mon visage à tout le monde. Jamais je n'ai tant été baisée. Après ces compliments on a été dîner. Dès la soupe on a porté à ma santé et cela a continué jusqu'au dessert, qu'on a chanté des chansons à ma gloire et que de nouveau j'ai été baisée. À six heures, on s'est mis à danser jusqu'à dix, qu'on a servi un ambigu après lequel, à minuit, on m'a reconduite chez moi en triomphe, en me faisant mille plaisanteries sur la nuit (*Eulalie*, p. 835).

These meals, followed by the loss of a falsified wedding night 'virginity', mark what ought to be a happy ending for Felmé. Her new life is characterised by feasting and drinking, in contrast to the precarious existence in which trade was so infrequent that she complained that 'il n'y a pas de l'eau à boire' (*Eulalie*, p. 715).<sup>37</sup> She is repeatedly celebrated and toasted by diners whose sexual interest in her is limited to excitement for her wedding night, rather than parroting clichés of gallantry and seduction at supper before sleeping with her, and she has songs sung in her honour rather than performing

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<sup>34</sup> In Bicêtre, 'une diète extrêmement sévère est imposée aux malades, que l'on punit si on les surprend à dissimuler de la nourriture' (Benabou, p. 410).

<sup>35</sup> François Lebrun notes that '[t]rois grands moments marquent le jour des noces : la cérémonie religieuse, le repas, la soirée' (*La Vie conjugale sous l'ancien régime* (Paris: Armand Colin/Masson, 1998), p. 41. A detailed description of the *ancien régime* wedding feast is given on pp. 45–47).

<sup>36</sup> 'In almost every society, the milestones of passage from one stage to another in the biological and social development of the individual are celebrated with food and drink' (Farb and Armelagos, p. 71).

<sup>37</sup> 'On dit familièrement d'un marché, d'un travail où il n'y a rien à gagner, qu'il n'y a pas de l'eau à boire' ('Eau', in *Le Grand Vocabulaire français, par une société de gens de lettres*, 30 vols (Paris: C. Panckoucke, 1767–1774), VIII (1769), p. 471). This phrase is used on a number of occasions by Eulalie's correspondents. See, for instance, *Eulalie*, pp. 737, 771.

bawdy songs for or with her companions, as was demanded of her former colleagues.<sup>38</sup> The tropes of the professional courtesan's supper are inverted as part of Felmé's initiation into respectable society, with the meal suggesting a move towards social belonging and cohesion rather than isolation.

However, this welcoming supper also marks Felmé's movement from an existence that is independent, if unstable, to the more constrictive marital setup that she had, only a few months earlier, sworn to reject in favour of retirement and living as her own mistress.<sup>39</sup> During the meal, Felmé seems less to share in the feast than observe it and be swallowed up within it. Her face is 'abandoned' to the guests' mouths for kisses, and the meal's events are described using the impersonal 'on', suggesting detachment and loss of agency within the proceedings. Moreover, it is not only the mixed buffet served at the end of the ceremony that is an *ambigu*, but Felmé herself, the word also denoting '[a]u figuré, [un] mélange de choses opposées. Elle est *un ambigu de prude & de coquette*.'<sup>40</sup> By performing the role of a respectable virgin to conceal her true identity, Felmé guarantees her future while nonetheless rendering herself an edible part of the wedding feast and fragmenting her new life from her true identity. Her entry into a new familial order takes place less through the sharing of food as a recognition of shared subjectivity than through a scenario at which, whether consumed by mouths or celebrated as the centrepiece, she is an object rather than a subject at the meal.

Again, the juxtaposition of contrasting letters highlights the role of the meal in isolating, fragmenting or shoring up consumers. Sandwiched between Felmé's letters describing her anticipation of the wedding and the day itself, we find a letter from a newly initiated sex worker, Mlle Florival, who describes semi-cannibalistic encounters of a very different kind, this time with depraved libertines. Florival notes how she is asked to urinate and douche into old men's mouths and make *tourtines* from her menstrual blood ('comme si c'était de la confiture') to provoke a young man's erection (*Eulalie*, pp. 832–833). The contrast between these two moments of ingestion could not be greater, with Florival's description of the libertine consumption of bodily waste encapsulating the

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<sup>38</sup> See M. le Chevalier F\*\*\*'s letter on pp. 695–697, which contains a song that a woman should learn in advance of her first *souper* with him.

<sup>39</sup> 'Je veux maintenant être ma maîtresse et veux aussi que, si je me livre à quelqu'un, ce ne soit plus l'intérêt qui me guide. Dorénavant, je consulterai mon cœur. Je ne me marierai jamais ; j'aurais trop à craindre que mon mari ne me reproche mon inconduite passée' (*Eulalie*, p. 813).

<sup>40</sup> Féraud, *Dictionnaire critique de la langue française* (1787), I, p. 95.

perversity of an increasingly degraded aristocracy and, as a result, a degraded sex trade.<sup>41</sup> Where Felmé is fed, toasted, and at once absorbed and isolated from respectable society, Florival, although disgusted by the process, nevertheless asserts a degree of power over the sybaritic aristocracy who simultaneously demand and depend upon her bodily fluids, converting her human waste into profit.<sup>42</sup> Although ingesting as a sex worker is often an isolating and fragmenting process, it is, even in its most grotesque forms, perhaps less so than assimilation into the middle classes.

### ***Conclusion***

Eating and drinking in the *Correspondance de Madame Gourdan* and *Correspondance d'Eulalie* consistently valorise male consumption. For a select group of men inside and outside the text, consuming with the sex worker is an opportunity for pleasure, the affirmation of one's identity as an individual, and belonging to a group of consumers with a shared access to pleasure and sociability. The mealtime allows a new, more powerful, male middle-class reader to distinguish himself from drunken foreigners and depraved aristocrats, all the while keeping the sex worker in her place at the table even while her exploits facilitate this satire. For the women depicted in the texts, alimentary pleasure is a more elusive experience. The meal is a site at which the female sex worker is cut off from her friends and colleagues, denied independent agency and the chance to exercise her own alimentary choice, forced to relinquish control of the table for her own self-preservation, and runs the risk of losing money, work or something of herself. Contemporary fears surrounding the sex worker as a threat to society through the accumulation of increased wealth and her resultant social mobility, or her potential to poison France with her moral degradation or syphilitic body, are either overlooked, with the focus entirely on male pleasure and fun, champagne-fuelled dinners, or alternatively neutralised by denying her the chance for professional advancement or solidarity with her female friends and colleagues. The table thus becomes a site at which the male reader and consumer is privileged and allowed to experience vicarious pleasure with no fear of the woman who might, in the referential world, threaten him with her capacity to earn a wage or manipulate him over dinner. And even at his worst, man still does better at the table. Clownish, poor and foreign clients are still offered greater security at the meal than

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<sup>41</sup> Genand, pp. 24–26.

<sup>42</sup> Mathilde Cortey offers a brief overview of the relationship between the courtesan, ingestion, excretion, and money in *L'Invention de la courtisane*, pp. 153–154.

the most self-aware and intelligent sex worker. This gendered division at the table is made even clearer in contemporaneous depictions of male sex workers, whose access to power and pleasure at the table far exceeds that of Gourdan and Eulalie's correspondents, as Chapter Six will show.

## CHAPTER SIX

### EATING AND DRINKING IN NARRATIVES OF MALE SEX WORK

#### *MA CONVERSION OU LE LIBERTIN DE QUALITE (1783), LE PETIT-FILS D'HERCULE (1784), L'ANNEE GALANTE OU LES INTRIGUES SECRETES DU MARQUIS DE L\*\*\* (1785)*

So far, this thesis has focused exclusively on female sex workers. Yet sex work was not the preserve of women. Men also traded their sexual services for economic gain. This chapter focuses on the male sex worker in eighteenth-century libertine writing, considering three texts with male protagonists: *Ma Conversion ou le libertin de qualité* by Mirabeau (1783)<sup>1</sup> and two anonymous texts: *Le Petit-fils d'Hercule* (1784)<sup>2</sup> and *L'Année galante ou les intrigues secrètes du marquis de L\*\*\** (1785).<sup>3</sup> *Ma Conversion* is a first-person fictional memoir depicting an attractive libertine aristocrat who decides to increase his fortune by selling sexual favours to wealthy women. Written by Mirabeau after being imprisoned by his father for running up debts and running off with a magistrate's wife,<sup>4</sup> *Ma Conversion* offers a cynical, parodic vision of eighteenth-century society, exposing its vices and absurdities through the eyes of a money-hungry gigolo. *Le Petit-fils d'Hercule* is an abbreviated and accelerated version of the parvenu's story told in *Le Libertin de qualité*,<sup>5</sup> charting a young man's ascendancy from naïve peasant to charming gigolo who climbs in rank by selling sex and companionship to rich *bourgeoises*, nuns, and nobles. The *Année galante* charts a year in a male sex worker's life, chronicling his first steps as a paid lover to wealthy women, his growing reputation, his spiralling debts, his half-hearted attempts to set himself on the path to virtue thwarted

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<sup>1</sup> Honoré-Gabriel de Riquetti, comte de Mirabeau, *Ma Conversion ou le libertin de qualité*, in *Œuvres érotiques*, L'Enfer de la Bibliothèque Nationale (Paris: Fayard, 1984), pp. 37–175. Henceforth 'MC' when cited in-text.

<sup>2</sup> Anon., *Le Petit-fils d'Hercule*, in *Romanciers libertins du XVIIIe siècle*, ed. by Lasowski, II, pp. 1073–1132. Henceforth 'PffH' when cited in-text. The precise date of *Le Petit-fils d'Hercule*'s first publication is unknown. Lasowski suggests that the end of 1783 or the beginning of 1784 is the most plausible publication date in light of the contemporary events recounted in the text, and of Robert Darnton's discovery that the text was one of the most ordered books between 1783 and 1785 at a bookseller's in Troyes. It is Lasowski's dating that will be used here (Patrick Wald Lasowski, 'Le Petit-fils d'Hercule: Note sur le texte', in *Romanciers libertins du XVIIIe siècle*, ed. by Lasowski, II, p. 1556).

<sup>3</sup> Anon., *L'Année galante ou les intrigues secrètes du marquis de L\*\*\** (London, Paris: Rue et Hotel Serpente, 1785). Henceforth 'AG' when cited in-text.

<sup>4</sup> van Crugten-André, *Le Roman du libertinage*, p. 168.

<sup>5</sup> Patrick Wald Lasowski, 'Le Petit-fils d'Hercule: Notice', in *Romanciers libertins du XVIIIe siècle*, ed. by Lasowski, II, pp. 1549–1555 (pp. 1549–1550).

by his love of the gambling table, and his death from illness caused by debauchery and recidivism.

In analyzing these texts, this chapter has two main objectives. Firstly, it aims to explore the male sex worker at table as an independent entity in his own right. Analysing male-centric texts is significant from an ethical perspective, preventing us from overlooking the existence of men in eighteenth-century sex work or eliding the notion of ‘sex worker’ with that of ‘woman’. Secondly, this chapter seeks to understand him as a phenomenon that contextualises and is contextualised by the more widely represented figure of the female sex worker. Even if the sex worker heroine is far more common and receives the lion’s share of literary and critical attention, analyses of male sex work also provide us with a valuable prism through which to further examine and refine our understanding of female sex workers and their relationship to consumption.

By focusing on the male sexual agent who pursues women not for erotic pleasure but for money, this chapter nuances existing scholarship on libertine eating and its emphasis on aristocratic male ingestion, eroticism, and the representation of wealth and luxury. If this existing critical discourse fits well with the wealthy gigolo’s story, irrespective of his origins, but is not applicable to the more commonly depicted female sex worker’s experience, we might better understand the limitations of considering ingesta in sex work narratives under a vague and monolithic umbrella of ‘gastronomies libertines’ (to use Michel Delon’s phrase), and their masculinist relationship to pleasure.<sup>6</sup> This approach also grants us an insight into how ingestion relates not only to sex work as a profession, but also as a practice that is enmeshed with contemporary gender dynamics. Male sex workers’ relationships to food and drink are divergent from their female counterparts’, granting them increased self-possession, control of others, and a greater and more consistent access to sensual pleasure. In line with the fear of female power at the table highlighted in previous chapters and elaborated by twentieth-century feminist critics such as Susan Bordo, this chapter highlights how the male consumer is celebrated, even when he is a sex worker, while female consumption is restricted and controlled.<sup>7</sup> Exploring ingestion in relation to pleasure, transformation, power and economics sheds light on how the differences between male and female sex workers on the one hand, and male and

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<sup>6</sup> Delon, *Le Savoir-vivre libertin*, pp. 175–197.

<sup>7</sup> See Bordo, particularly ‘Hunger as Ideology’, pp. 99–134.

female clients on the other, are rooted less in their differing professions than in their gendered, consuming bodies.

The sex worker hero is a relatively late addition to eighteenth-century libertine writing. As Valérie van Crugten-André highlights in her study of the libertine novel from 1782-1815, men selling sex are virtually invisible prior to her period of study. When they do emerge, even in later writing, they tend to appear as secondary characters such as *greluchons*: sex workers' *amants de cœur*, usually of lower economic status than *entreteneurs*. These men, often valets and jockeys like Margot and Rosine's toyboys for instance, are usually 'simples instruments dans la vie de l'héroïne'.<sup>8</sup> With this in mind, van Crugten-André notes that although *Ma Conversion* is not the first novel to depict men who trade their sexual favours for financial gain, it appears to be the first French novel in which the male protagonist recounts his career and life story as a self-professed sex worker.<sup>9</sup> The three gigolo heroes studied in this chapter are the exception, rather than the rule, in literary depictions of male sex workers. They have, perhaps as a consequence, been somewhat ignored by critics. In comparison with the other two texts examined here, likely as a result of its notable author, *Ma Conversion* has run to many more re-editions<sup>10</sup> but has nonetheless received limited scholarly attention, while *L'Année galante* has been the object of almost no critical attention, save for a brief exploration of the text by Valérie van Crugten-André as a point of comparison with *Ma Conversion*.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, the male sex worker has been the object of even less historical study than his female counterpart.<sup>12</sup> In her analysis of eighteenth-century sex work, Benabou limits her discussion of male sex workers to several pages on the topic of the *greluchon*.<sup>13</sup> Kushner devotes somewhat more attention to the *greluchon*, highlighting the diversity of the role, and the difference in practices and power balances between men who were paid for their services, the so-called *greluchons mangeants*, and men who paid their lovers small,

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<sup>8</sup> van Crugten-André, *Le Roman du libertinage*, p. 164.

<sup>9</sup> van Crugten-André highlights *Le Paysan parvenu* as a possible exception to this, but classes the text as a picaresque adventure rather than a novel focused on prostitution. *Le Roman du libertinage*, p. 164, n. 7. See also Valérie van Crugten-André, 'Ma Conversion, ou la puissance satirique du grotesque', *Lumen*, 15 (1996), 215–228.

<sup>10</sup> For a biography of Mirabeau focused around his time writing *Ma Conversion*, see Jean-Pierre Dubost, 'Mirabeau', in *Romanciers libertins du XVIIIe siècle*, ed. by Lasowski, II, pp. 1514–1527. For editions of *Ma Conversion*, see Dubost's 'Bibliographie' in the same edition, pp. 1529–1530.

<sup>11</sup> van Crugten-André, *Le Roman du libertinage*, pp. 164–167.

<sup>12</sup> Randolph Trumbach offers a brief overview of studies on historical male sex work in 'Male Prostitution and the Emergence of the Modern Sexual System: Eighteenth-Century London', in *Prostitution and Eighteenth-Century Culture*, ed. by Lewis and Ellis, pp. 185–201 (p. 185).

<sup>13</sup> Benabou, p. 344.

occasional gifts in exchange for their affections – *greluchons payants*.<sup>14</sup> Kushner highlights how few *greluchons mangeants* were paid enough to qualify as toyboys or gigolos, but that they could, on rare occasions, ruin their female patrons just as the *dame entretenue* could ruin her *entreteneur*.<sup>15</sup> Significantly, Kushner also demonstrates how although *greluchonnage* was considered relatively banal, women who kept men for their own sexual pleasure and exerted all the power of a male *entreteneur* were the ridiculed parties in these relationships, portrayed as caricatures of excessive sexual desire. As Kushner puts it, the woman with a devoted *greluchon mangeant* was thought to have a ‘big appetite’.<sup>16</sup> Though Kushner does little to interrogate these images of consumption, it appears that male appetite passes without comment, while the sexual woman, whether paid or paying, is consistently framed as devouring and absurd. It is this heterosexual sex work, divorced from survival and male suffering, and connected to metaphorical and literal female gluttony, that is depicted in the texts discussed below.

While men who service women are the focus of this chapter, we must acknowledge another form of male sex work that does not appear in these fictions: men selling their services to other men. Homosexual transactions have been ignored even more than their heterosexual equivalents. In his 2016 article nuancing Michel Rey’s work on sodomy in the Paris police archives, Jeffrey Merrick notes how Rey devoted only a few lines to the subject of transactional sex, and ignored the fact that some men clearly relied upon sex work for survival.<sup>17</sup> Similar research on sodomy has highlighted how, like the vulnerable women discussed in Chapter One, young boys were kidnapped and pimped out to wealthy aristocrats.<sup>18</sup> Wealthy men also took their male servants as lovers or pimps, rewarding them with life annuities.<sup>19</sup> With sodomy a capital crime until 1791,<sup>20</sup> male sex workers faced condemnation, imprisonment, or death for earning their living. Although these forms of sex work do not feature in the fictions explored below, acknowledging

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<sup>14</sup> Kushner, *Erotic Exchanges*, p. 207.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 210.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 209.

<sup>17</sup> Jeffrey Merrick, ‘Patterns and Concepts in the Sodomitical Subculture of Eighteenth-Century Paris’, *Journal of Social History*, 50.2 (2016), 273-306 (p. 278).

<sup>18</sup> Michel Rey, ‘Police and Sodomy in Eighteenth-Century Paris: From Sin to Disorder’, in *The Pursuit of Sodomy: Male Homosexuality in Renaissance and Enlightenment Europe*, ed. by Kent Gerard and Gert Hekma (New York: Harrington Park Press, 1989), pp. 129–146 (p. 135).

<sup>19</sup> Michael Sibal, ‘Homosexuality in Early Modern France’, in *Queer Masculinities, 1550-1800: Siting Same-Sex Desire in the Early Modern World*, ed. by Katherine O’Donnell and Michael O’Rourke (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 211–231 (p. 217).

<sup>20</sup> Louis Crompton, *Homosexuality and Civilization* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2003), p. 527.

them prevents us from viewing these novels as representative of ‘male sex work’ in general. Instead, it helps us to recognise these fictional male sex workers as creations by and for an assumed wealthy, heterosexual authorship and audience.<sup>21</sup> As was the case when analysing brothel correspondences in the previous chapter, the following analysis takes a thematic approach, comparing and contrasting these texts in light both of their contemporaneity, with all three written within a three-year span from 1783 to 1785, and handling similar themes, allowing us to draw broad conclusions relating to male (fictional) sex work in contrast to its female equivalents discussed in Chapters Three and Four.

While issues of gender have already underpinned much of this thesis so far, a sharp focus on gender difference is particularly pertinent when considering late eighteenth-century texts. In the 1780s, the idea of ‘man’ was under intense scrutiny, beyond the fluctuating and necessarily gendered power dynamics already inherent to the sexual transaction.<sup>22</sup> Male identity was plagued by anxieties about ‘effeminacy’ and the potential conflict between the demands of polite refinement and female-driven sociability on the one hand, and the unmanly excesses of corrupting luxury on the other.<sup>23</sup> Libertinism and excessive female influence were accused of causing man’s (and masculinity’s) decline from the mid-eighteenth century onwards.<sup>24</sup> Reacting against this perceived feminisation of society, Revolutionary and pre-Revolutionary masculinity celebrated either an increasingly macho ideal, liberated from the corruption and decay supposedly caused by gynocentric and luxurious society or, as Abigail Solomon-Godeau has demonstrated, the figure of the ephebe, increasingly celebrated in French visual art, resembling,

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<sup>21</sup> While the gendering of pornography remains up for debate, as Lynn Hunt acknowledges, the dismissal of female agency and pleasure within these texts strongly supports the broadly accepted ideas that the intended reader of early modern libertine and pornographic material was male. Hunt, ‘Introduction’, pp. 36–42. It is, moreover, ethically important to recognise the similar dynamics faced by lower-class men and women who, for economic reasons, engaged in sex work within the hierarchical, heteropatriarchal power structures of eighteenth-century France, before focusing exclusively on the wealthier, more empowered figures featured in these texts.

<sup>22</sup> For a discussion of masculinity and its various forms in eighteenth-century France, see Part Six of *Histoire de la virilité: l’invention de la virilité de l’Antiquité aux Lumières*, ed. by Alain Corbin, Jean-Jacques Cortine and Georges Vigarello (Paris: Seuil, 2011), entitled ‘Les Lumières et la virilité inquiète’, comprising Arlette Farge, ‘Virilités populaires’, pp. 421–444, Élisabeth Belmas, ‘Jeux d’exercice, divertissement et virilité’, pp. 445–466, and Michel Delon ‘Hommes de fiction’, pp. 467–498.

<sup>23</sup> Christopher E. Forth and Bertrand Taithe, ‘Introduction: French Manhood in the Modern World’, in *French Masculinities: History, Culture and Politics*, ed. by Christopher E. Forth and Bertrand Taithe (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 1–14 (pp. 6–7).

<sup>24</sup> Sean Quinlan, ‘Men without Women? Ideal Masculinity and Male Sociability in the French Revolution, 1789–99’, in *French Masculinities*, ed., by Forth and Taithe, pp. 31–50 (p. 33).

assimilating, and therein supplanting woman through delicacy and beauty, rather than belligerent heroics.<sup>25</sup> The male sex worker, at once a serial seducer and ladies' man, a frequenter and manipulator of corrupting female spaces, and an attractive object of erotic interest, sits at the heart of these debates around male social and sexual identity.

Any focus on gender as it relates to male sex workers as divergent from the female norm is, admittedly, not without its limitations. Since the three texts studied in this chapter depict exclusively heterosexual professional relationships, any conclusions on the contrasting roles of 'male' and 'female' sex workers are the product of an imperfect comparison. The male sex worker who works for women is enmeshed in a different socio-political and gendered dynamic to that of the female sex worker who services a wealthy or aristocratic male clientele. In many respects, thanks to their difference in class and gender, these empowered, heterosexual male sex workers are structurally incomparable with most female sex workers. However, accepting the premise that these texts, whether attributed or anonymous, are the product of a male hand, designed for a male readership, it is nonetheless clear that they offer a useful counterpoint to the majority of male-authored texts depicting women in the sex trade, and help us to understand the role of ingestion in gendered pleasure and power. These male protagonists exercise power over the table, allowing them to self-fashion while experiencing alimentary pleasure, demonstrating how differences at the table are drawn primarily along gendered rather than professional lines.

### *Pleasure*

As demonstrated in previous chapters, ingestion is rarely linked to the natural satisfaction of the female sex worker's healthy body and appetite or to unproblematic enjoyment, luxury, and pleasure. However, novels depicting male sex workers broadly conform to the interpretations of libertine ingestion proposed by Delon, Safran and Lafon that focused on sensuality, pleasure and wealth. The apparently one-size-fits-all analyses of libertine eating to date are, in fact, primarily representative of a fictionalised and

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<sup>25</sup> See Abigail Solomon-Godeau, *Male Trouble: A Crisis in Representation* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1997), Chapter Three, 'Ephebic Masculinity: The Difference Within', pp. 99–175.

privileged male experience. In *Le Petit-fils d'Hercule*, for instance, the hero's first night with a wealthy woman is fuelled by an uninventive iteration of the quintessentially libertine, intimate champagne supper, which elicits nothing less than delight: 'Quel souper! quelle recherche! des vins de toute espèce [...] Point de laquais pour servir' (*PfH*, p. 1083). The night to which this meal is the prelude is no less sprinkled with culinary and erotic pleasures; it is 'entrecoupée de morale, de chocolat, de sommeil, de tentatives' (*PfH*, p. 1084), substances emblematic of sensuality, luxury, and erotic pleasure. The *petit-fils* is treated to a similar 'dîner superbe' on his arrival in Russia, prior to a stylised sexual contest: 'Tous les jus, les coulis, préparaient la victoire. Des vins de Grèce, de France, du Cap, de Hongrie, joignaient leurs actives vertus. La joie bachique prélude aux jeux plus paisibles et plus vifs de la tendre Vénus' (*PfH*, p. 1122). The competitors themselves are similarly fuelled and, later, refreshed by coffee, punch, and liqueurs including Madame Amphoux's aphrodisiac drinks (*PfH*, p. 1122). Although critics such as Jean Coutin, Catherine de Vulpillières, and Patrick Wald Lasowski have inaccurately suggested that food tends to be glossed over within *Le Petit-fils d'Hercule*, with culinary detail used to propel the hero through the more significant matter of the sexual encounter rather than serving as an important symbolic element of the text in its own right, they have nonetheless acknowledged that food is often linked to sensual pleasure and financial gain.<sup>26</sup> While this might not seem particularly remarkable, it is nonetheless in contrast to the miserable, or at least problematic, meals endured by the majority of female sex workers considered in this thesis so far.

The *libertin de qualité* has a similar experience of food as it relates to sensual enjoyment. When dining with one client, an ageing, wealthy American, he is offered a menu of aphrodisiacs, restoratives, and stimulants, with every item synonymous with luxurious sensuality:

des morilles, des truffes au coulis de jambon, des champignons à la marseillaise ; au dessert, les pastilles les plus échauffantes, sans oublier les liqueurs de Mme Anfou... De la table, nous nous élançons au lit, et de la vie, je crois, on n'a vu pareille scène (*MC*, p. 56).

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<sup>26</sup> Jean Coutin and Catherine de Vulpillières, 'Le Petit Fils d'Hercule (extrait)', *Études françaises*, 32.2 (1996), 87–93 (p. 88); Lasowski, 'Le Petit-fils d'Hercule: Notice', p. 1551).

With expensive mushrooms recognised as aphrodisiac luxuries, the dessert similarly made of aphrodisiacs,<sup>27</sup> and the meal following Delon's vision of the gradation and accumulation of pleasures,<sup>28</sup> it is little wonder the hero is propelled straight into bed. Food is consistently used as an unimaginative stepping-stone to, or refreshment following, the sexual act, providing the reader with an uncomplicated signpost or shorthand for erotic pleasure.

These aphrodisiacs are, moreover, unrelated to physical weakness or manipulation at a woman's hands. In spite of the authors' occasional focus on the stimulating effects or 'active' qualities of these aphrodisiacs,<sup>29</sup> there is little suggestion that their heroes would be any less active without them. Restoratives are used instead to demonstrate their health and their sexual prowess. When met with well-stocked tables after long bouts with their clients, the *libertin de qualité* tells us that he 'en avai[t] besoin' (*MC*, p.56), and the *petit-fils d'Hercule* similarly 'mourai[t] de faim' (*PfH*, p. 1083), but this physical need is the result of impressive sexual expenditure and a healthy, virile appetite. The act of serving and the presence of aphrodisiac foodstuffs do little to undermine the male sex worker's self-possession at the table.

Beyond the erotic significance of the foods and drinks listed, pleasure is also rooted in the dynamics between the feeder and the fed. Food is rarely provided by the male sex worker himself, but is offered to him by a woman, whether she is a servant girl, as is the case for the *petit-fils d'Hercule*,<sup>30</sup> or an *entreteneuse* and dining partner. When dining with a female client, the *libertin de qualité* emphasises how '[c]'est elle qui me sert' (*MC*, p. 56) and that foods and drinks '[lui] furent prodigués' (*MC*, p. 101). As was the case during the *petit-fils*' first night with his wealthy client, servants are absent from the scene. With staff often removed from the dining room during intimate meals and orgies,

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<sup>27</sup> Though also associated with the dangers of poisoning, mushrooms, and morels and truffles in particular, were noted for their aphrodisiac properties. In his *Précis de matière médicale*, Venel describes how 'la vertu d'exciter l'appétit vénérien est très-réelle dans la Truffe', and the morel is similarly 'un Aphrodisiaque : ce champignon est très-échauffant' (Gabriel-François Venel, *Précis de matière médicale*, 2 vols (Paris: André-Charles Cailleau, 1787) II, p. 377). As Jean-Louis Flandrin and Massimo Montanari have highlighted, wild mushrooms such as morels and truffles were also rehabilitated and included in elite cuisine from the seventeenth century onwards, having previously been considered unhealthy and relegated to the diets of the poor (*Histoire de l'alimentation* (Paris: Fayard, 1996), p. 562).

<sup>28</sup> Delon, *Le Savoir-vivre libertin*, p. 191.

<sup>29</sup> The *libertin de qualité* describes how '[l]es coulis, les restaurants les plus actifs me furent prodigués' (p. 101).

<sup>30</sup> 'Six jeunes filles de quinze ans [...] faisaient le tour pour servir ceux qui voulaient prendre quelque chose' (*Le Petit-fils d'Hercule*, p. 1122).

leaving the act of serving to the guests as part of the erotic ritual,<sup>31</sup> the young male sex worker does not play the role of seducer, but rather adopts the role of the faux-seduced, basking in the luxury of being catered to by the women who are paying for his sexual labour. Competition between women who wish to serve the Marquis of the *Année galante* further reinforces the table as a site at which the male sex worker is paid to be cosseted:

La bonne hollandaise s'étoit chargée de mes déjeuners: le thé le plus fin, le chocolat le mieux ambré, parfumoient alternativement mon palais, à moins qu'un excellent vin d'Hongrie qu'une charmante polonoise [sic] m'envoyoit de tems en tems, ne fit diversion (AG, pp. 71–72).

Instead of seducing women, the male sex worker plays a willing role in a simulacrum of seduction, wherein he is employed to play the role not of the servant but of the master, with luxury goods lavished upon him.

*Ma Conversion* depicts further masculine pleasure when male sex workers consume with other men. The table offers an elaborated version of the homosocial interaction and solidarity seen in the *Correspondances*, at which male characters can celebrate one another's friendship and virility. The *libertin de qualité* eats a 'rôtie sucrée' while waiting for a clergyman to finish his bout with a young woman he has come to share breakfast with, and then shares his meal (MC, p. 138) and drinks a toast with him (MC, p. 144) to celebrate their libertine solidarity. Even after receiving news that his pregnant lover has given birth to a stillborn daughter following the shock of witnessing her brother's death in a fight caused by her relationship with the *libertin* (MC, p. 164), he quickly dispels any sorrow with a tavern meal and drinks. Served by a pretty girl and shared with two old acquaintances, the *libertin's* meal conforms to Henri Lafon's understanding of the bathetic ironic meal inappropriately consumed after tragedy when one ought to express emotion by rejecting basic bodily needs, and reinforces the significance of hearty male sociability and the pursuit of desire over concern for female wellbeing.<sup>32</sup> Whatever the circumstances, little inhibits the male sex worker's appetite or access to alimentary pleasure and his ability to enjoy it in the company of his fellow men.

Not all mealtime experiences are equally pleasurable, however. *Ma Conversion*, unlike the *Petit-fils d'Hercule* or *L'Année galante*, describes several unpleasant meals with

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<sup>31</sup> For more on the intimacy of the eighteenth-century meal, see Wheaton, p. 194, Strong, pp. 211–213.

<sup>32</sup> Lafon, 'Du Thème alimentaire', p. 175.

unappealing clients. The *libertin de qualité* accepts an invitation to dine with an elderly countess, given ‘du ton dont on donne un ordre. J’étais au fait, je m’humiliai, je me confondis’ (*MC*, p. 92), and then endures a supper that is ‘cérémonieuse, par conséquent fort triste. Le souper fut d’un compassé assommant: on y mangea peu; on y parla moins’ (*ibid.*). During his first encounter with an aging American, the *libertin*’s first impression of her body and home is formed by an apartment containing luxuries intended to demonstrate her wealth: ‘des ballots de café, des essais de sucre, des factures ; enfin, un goût de mariné que je n’ai sacré dieu que trop reconnu dans mainte occasion’ (*MC*, p. 54). Instead, they too highlight how she has begun to ‘mariner’ like her belongings, mouldering after a long time at sea.<sup>33</sup> These unpleasant encounters with decaying woman and their comestibles might seem to tally with Michel Camus’ view of the text as ‘un factum contre la vénalité, la corruption privée et publique [...] tout est ici répugnant,’<sup>34</sup> yet despite the presence of less appealing foods and mealtimes within *Ma Conversion*, their effects are still, if not explicitly pleasurable, not couched in the rhetoric of misery and abjection found in contemporary narratives depicting female sex workers’ descriptions of the table. There are no bodily functions, violent partners or grotesque table manners. These meals, while more unpleasant than those depicted in *Le Petit-fils d’Hercule* or *L’Année galante*, can nonetheless expose moments of male gastronomic and erotic pleasure, through which the hero’s superiority is evoked.

### ***Formative consumption?***

As demonstrated in previous chapters exploring brothel records and novels, the act of ingestion could be crucial to a woman’s transformation into a sex worker or her developing awareness of sensuality, as was the case for Margot’s coffee and *petits pains*, or the young girl lured into sex work with *bonbons* described in the police archives. Whether she is innocent or sensual before consuming, the female sex worker has been represented as a mutable, corruptible, and thus potentially controllable entity. It is therefore significant that this process of formative ingestion holds little to no significance for our male heroes; the gigolo is not formed via his palate or his digestive system, defying any vulnerability one might expect from the eighteenth century’s increasingly

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<sup>33</sup> ‘Lorsque de certaines marchandises, comme du thé, du café, du cacao, de la cochenille, &c. ont été altérées & gâtées, pour avoir été trop long-temps sur mer, on dit, qu’ *Elles sont marinées*’ (‘Mariné’, *Dictionnaire de l’Académie française* (1762), II, p. 97).

<sup>34</sup> Charles Hirsch, ‘Introduction générale’, in *Mirabeau: Œuvres érotiques*, pp. 9–18 (p. 15).

self-aware representations of the material body.<sup>35</sup> Unlike their female counterparts, male sex workers experience no magical moment of intoxication, enchantment or deception that renders their bodies and fates mutable at another's hands. The only alimentary allusion that approaches the transformative moment is the brief mention in *L'Année galante* of the New Year's celebration and the *galette des rois* that mark the beginning of the Marquis' story:

Ce fut dans ce mois qui commence par deux fêtes antiques, les cérémonies du nouvel an, & celles de la fève, que ma bonne ou mauvaise étoile me conduisit à Paris, pour y devenir l'homme du jour, & pour servir de modele aux élégans (AG, pp. 1–2).

There is no suggestion that the Marquis takes part in these celebrations, yet by opening his narrative with a reference to the ritual of the *fève*, he evokes an alimentary rite bound up with ideas of feasting, shifting hierarchies, and Saturnalian revelry: the crowning of one lucky individual once the bean has been found in the *galette*.<sup>36</sup> Although the image of the *fève* is, however, somewhat tempered by the implicit transience of the pleasures it evokes – one is not king or queen forever – gently foreshadowing the hero's downfall, this reference to the *fête des rois* is fleeting and relatively anodyne. Beyond the Marquis' *fève*, the only transformative mentioned in any of the three texts is alcohol and its capacity to give the consumer a little Dutch courage. In *Le Petit-fils d'Hercule*, the hero's nerves are steeled by the wine he drinks at his first dinner with a client: 'Et ce soir, où couchez-vous vicomte? dit-elle. – Ici madame, répliquai-je avec une hardiesse que je ne devais qu'au vin de Champagne' (*PfH*, p. 1083). Drink does not render the young libertine more vulnerable. It emboldens and empowers him.

### **Power**

The male sex worker is not a passive recipient of food, drink, and pleasure. He also uses the mealtime to control others and advance his career by gaining access to elite spaces, charming multiple wealthy women therein, and thus gaining power over individuals whom he can use for his erotic and financial benefit. The libertine hero controls the meal by profiting from the small, cosy, eighteenth-century dining table's effect upon intimacy, with the diners held close to one another, able to flirt without concern for hierarchy or

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<sup>35</sup> This increased awareness of the implications of ingestion on the material body is discussed in the introduction to this thesis.

<sup>36</sup> The *Encyclopédie* offers a brief description of the Saturnalian origins of eighteenth-century Epiphany celebrations (Louis de Jaucourt, 'Epiphanie (*Hist. eccles.*)', in *Encyclopédie*, v (1755), pp. 808–809).

being observed, and its role as a hub of elite sociability at which multiple conquests might be found.<sup>37</sup> Under the veil of apparent commensality, the *libertin* uses the table to quietly break the bonds of loyalty and friendship between diners. At a meal with a gloomy country baron and his wife, the *libertin de qualité* is so convincing in his performance of a man who is wary of women that his host warms to him, drinks with him, and confides all of his marital woes once his wife has left the table. So certain is the baron of their bond that he grants the *libertin* permission to speak privately with his wife the next day, during which time he seduces her (*MC*, pp. 117-118). In the *Année galante*, the Marquis describes how, at his first society dinner, '[m]on adoratrice me fit souper avec des femmes, tant marquises que baronnes, & ce fut sa défaite; elle compta trop sur ses charmes & sur ma constance. Mes nouvelles conquêtes me firent insensiblement connoître Versailles & Paris' (*AG*, pp. 11–12). While his client assumes that she exercises control over him, presenting him at the table for her friends' admiration, the gigolo instead breaks free from this control by seducing these same friends, all at once, even within the confines of the intimate meal, demonstrating an implausible degree of seductive skill. He not only gains the affections of multiple women but expands his professional sphere to locations synonymous with elite wealth: Paris and Versailles. Admission to the restricted space of just one table dramatically increases his control over the broader territories of the French elite, offering a gateway to further successes and wealth. A similar encounter takes place later in the text when, having established himself within this elite society, the hero comfortably seduces five women simultaneously, in stark contrast to the disputed mealtimes featured in fictional brothel correspondences, where women cannot even control one client easily, never mind two: 'D'un coup de baguette j'eus un repas délicieux; mais chose plus difficile, je fis, sans me trahir, à chacune les yeux doux, & chacune crut de bonne-foi être la sultane chérie' (*AG*, pp. 86–87). This mastery is further reinforced by his description of each dining companion believing herself to be his 'sultane', framing the sex worker (now at his own dining table) as the ruler, with future paying admirers as his consorts, subverting the economic hierarchy of buyer and seller. Moreover, his supper appears effortlessly, requiring no more than the metaphorical touch of a magic wand. Thus, Mathilde Cortey's understanding of the sex worker as a dangerous enchantress at the table seems less

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<sup>37</sup> Wheaton, pp. 157–159, 194.

overstated when applied to the gigolo's charms than when applied to female sex workers.<sup>38</sup>

*L'Année galante* also sees the libertine winning and regaining the admiration of hostile patrons at the table, using the mealtime as a moment of reconciliation and charm. A 'grand souper' complete with charming chatter and excellent wine leads an angry former conquest to exclaim 'O ciel! comme il est ravissant! mon chagrin s'est dissipé comme un nuage' (AG, pp. 21–22). Similarly, when attempting to win a bet for one hundred *louis d'or* by bedding a duchess who has sworn her dislike of him, it is the progression into the dining room that confirms his victory: 'Les paroles n'arrivent que lentement; on se plaint d'une migraine, & lorsqu'enfin on passe dans la salle à manger, je dis en moi-même, la victoire est à moi. Le champagne ramène la sérénité' (AG, p. 96). As was the case for the *petit-fils* after his first glasses of champagne, alcohol is linked not to the male sex worker's downfall but his success, offering a source and confirmation of power where, for the (foreign) men in novels narrated by female protagonists, it might have temporarily castrated them. The serenity described here, moreover, might be more accurately described as manipulation. It is, after all, champagne that offers his victory in the form of his conquest's acquiescence. At once hinting towards godly power, masculine collusion, and cerebral elegance by poetically describing how 'Bacchus [lui] servit au mieux' (AG, p. 96) to get a duchess into bed, the Marquis frames what is, to modern eyes, date rape, as an amusing demonstration of his power over the female body and resistance.

Alimentary control of the female body also emerges as a theme in *Ma Conversion*, with the *libertin de qualité* describing the principles by which one ought to cultivate the ideal sex worker and dining partner, focusing on the importance of her drunkenness at the table. Encouraging female ingestive indiscipline offers the libertine a means of amplifying his earning capacity and control of others in the process, since a woman's drunkenness and debauchery provide a lucrative source of pleasure for her pimp:

Quel diable de parti voudrais-tu tirer dans un souper d'une mijaurée qui s'avise d'avoir de la pudeur? Que tous les raffinements de la débauche viennent investir sa jeune âme; qu'elle soit ivresse, crapuleuse ; que les plus sales propos assaisonnent les actions les plus débordées (MC, p. 126).

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<sup>38</sup> Cortey, *L'Invention de la courtisane*, p. 151.

By artificially loosening up his protégées, he succeeds in augmenting his own power. While the narrator admits that the debauch stirred up by alcohol will not suffice on its own – ‘l’effervescence des sens, des liqueurs traîtresses peuvent en faire autant que des autres; et si elle n’avait que cet avantage, elle ne serait pas distinguée’ (*MC*, p. 126) – it certainly helps him to achieve his ends. The meal is not a light-hearted site of cooperative seduction but, now with a focus on male mastery, once again a site at which male control can be exercised over female ingesting bodies.

Where the Marquis of the *Année galante* and the *libertin de qualité* manipulate the dining ritual for their own profit, the *petit-fils d’Hercule* goes one step further by teaching others across Europe how to manage and enjoy the pleasures of the erotic *souper*. His control of the alimentary space brings him professional benefit, but without the cruelty demonstrated in *Ma Conversion*. He explains the *souper* to his pupils as follows:

«[...] Ordinairement on invente une fête qu’on compose de femmes qui sont sages; mais non pas prudes. On prépare leur tempérament par de la danse, du champagne et une bonne demi-douzaine de polissonneries qu’on se dit à l’oreille et qui circulent dans toute la chambre. Dans le moment de l’ivresse, on propose un jeu, un plaisir : cela, c’est mon affaire. » On accepte ; le souper est fixé; les invitations se font, et la fête composée de douze femmes et douze hommes, commence ainsi que je l’avais proposé (*PfH*, p. 1117).

While the distancing effects of the neutral ‘on’ and reflexive verbs do not suggest the *petit-fils* exercises practical control over the meal, remaining at a theoretical, consultational level, his authority over the supper, his knowledge of the foods and drinks provided and his description of their positive effects upon the female guests highlight his mastery of the scene. Like the event-planning madams described by Nina Kushner, whose profit comes from catering to male audiences, the *petit-fils*’ social ascendancy is marked through his absolute control of the eroticised supper ritual, demonstrating and augmenting his economic and social capital.<sup>39</sup>

### **Payment**

Blurring the realms of pleasure, food and economics further, the table also sees consumables playing a role in the heroes’ payment, as is consistently the case for real and fictional female sex workers. To begin with the combined effects of money and pleasure, the *petit-fils d’Hercule*, for instance, offers his services to an unattractive old nun who

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<sup>39</sup> Kushner, *Erotic Exchanges*, p. 117.

offers a fee of ‘cinq louis par coup, souper, liqueur, chocolat à discretion’ (*PfH*, p. 1086). Patrick Wald Lasowski has described this payment as representative of the ‘efficacité’ and ‘brutalité’ of the story, arguing that

[c]ela est net. Le salaire efface l’effusion et vise au rendement. [...] Les deux parties s’engagent sans considération inutile, au plus près de ce qui se laisse compter dans la jouissance sexuelle. Et notre héros emporte ce soir-là trente-cinq louis.<sup>40</sup>

However, this analysis overlooks the effects and connotations of the foods and drinks included within this payment. These comestibles do not just augment his salary but demonstrate his client’s practical self-awareness. She adds stimulating ingesta to the meal in order to facilitate the sexual act in the first place, guaranteeing her own satisfaction while acknowledging the aphrodisiac effect of her own appearance. When the *petit-fils* suggests that he mightn’t be able to perform, the older nun summons two attractive young women to stimulate him. The liqueurs and chocolate, luxury goods with noted aphrodisiac properties, serve a similar purpose. Moreover, to reduce the meal simply to another aspect of this brisk transaction is to overlook what follows: when the *petit-fils*, the abbess, and three other attractive young nuns dine on their ‘souper fin’ after their sexual encounter, the abbess’s bitterness has abated, and she becomes charming and likeable: ‘elle n’était plus acariâtre, déployant au contraire un esprit aimable, je ne la reconnus plus’ (*PfH*, p. 1086). Her sexual gratification at her lover’s hands is hardly irrelevant to her changing mood, but it is nonetheless noteworthy that the meal that forms part of the *petit-fils*’ payment, and supposedly symbolises the brutality of the economic transaction, is marked by shared and pleasant sociability after a demonstration of his sexual prowess.

Alongside foods that facilitate profitable sexual encounters, the male sex worker uses alimentary metaphor to describe how he consumes money. He approaches riches with a hungry stomach and takes food as part of his payment just like his female counterparts, though with ambiguous results. The strength of the male sex worker’s devouring throat and belly is not threatening or grotesque, however, but underscores his ability to regain control of himself and others, even when he is at his lowest ebb. The gigolo in *L’Année galante* presents himself as admirable and powerful in his natural consumption of women’s wealth. When consulting with his doctor after falling ill with a near-fatal fever,

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<sup>40</sup> Lasowski, ‘*Le Petit-fils d’Hercule: Notice*’ p. 1551.

he responds to the suggestion that his stomach might be the source of his sickness as follows: ‘non, mon cher docteur: c’est la partie de moi-même la plus robuste, & la mieux constituée. Cet estomac, tel qu’il se comporte, a digéré des perles, des diamans, & peut-être plus de cent aunes de tapisseries des Gobelins’ (*AG*, p. 64). Unlike the vampiric images of female sex workers found in novels and regulationist texts, the gigolo’s consumption of money is celebratory, the alimentary metaphor of ingestion and absorption a clear symbol of his dominion over his clients. A similar, though less metaphorical, vision of ingestion as strength emerges in *Le Petit-fils d’Hercule*. The hero describes how, compared to the weak, languishing courtiers and aristocrats he encounters, he has gained his independence thanks to a nature that has furnished him with ‘les couillons retapés, un vit infatigable, une humeur toujours enjouée, un estomac dévorant’ (*PfH*, p. 1106). The capacity to devour, whether that be money, food or women, is not repulsive but admirable, indicative of a healthy and sexually capable body, more aligned with proto-Revolutionary ideas of ideal masculinity than refined, courtly appetites. Moreover, the text’s admiration for the male sex worker’s devouring body is no great surprise: to the male author (and male reader) there is little to be feared from a man who consumes the money and meals of wealthy, dissolute women. The presumed audience was more likely at risk of consumption from dissolute women than being devoured by a gigolo. Male ingestion, therefore, is free to be celebrated, rather than feared.

The *libertin de qualité* describes his use of money in less positive terms, though nonetheless through the image of a body able to digest material wealth. As van Crugten-André and Sante Viselli have highlighted, money, rather than love or erotic strategy, lies at the heart of the novel, controlling the *libertin*’s actions and enslavement, and underpinning the text’s cynical parody of the libertine figure and the world in which he operates.<sup>41</sup> Describing the dwindling spoils he has taken with the help of a young sex worker, Mimi, to whom he plays the role of lover and pimp, ingestive metaphor is used to describe the struggle to make ends meet: ‘en deux mois nous mangeâmes bijoux, vaisselle, diamants, argent, meubles, jusqu’aux chevaux quoiqu’ils fussent bien maigres

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<sup>41</sup> Sante Viselli, ‘Liberté, libertinage et despotisme chez Mirabeau’, *Man and Nature*, 8 (1989), 17–28 ; van Crugten-André, *Le Roman du libertinage*, pp. 170–171, quoting from Philippe Laroche, *Petits-mâîtres et roués: évolution de la notion du libertinage dans le roman français* (Québec: Presses de l’Université de Laval, 1979), p. 152; Viselli, p. 19. See also Jean-Pierre Dubost ‘*Ma Conversion: Notice*’ in *Romanciers libertins du XVIIIe siècle*, ed. by Lasowski, II, pp. 1531–1539 (pp. 1538–9).

(*MC*, p. 133). The consumption of goods and money results in his (albeit temporary) fall from grace, reduced to metaphorically eating his own horses to survive when living the high life with his similarly appetitive lover. When consuming *with* a woman, rather than consuming the spoils taken from an encounter with one, ingestion is not a matter of unmitigated strength.

The *libertin de qualité* also understands the loss of his own wealth as an act of consumption taken against him, though with debt collectors, rather than women, as his consumers: ‘Paierai-je mes dettes? Fi donc, cela porte malheur. D’ailleurs ces coquins d’usuriers s’imaginent-ils que je leur donnerai mon sang, ma plus pure substance à dévorer?’ (*MC*, p. 91). Unlike the *petit-fils d’Hercule* or the Marquis, who consume unproblematically, the *libertin de qualité* understands economic wellbeing as a matter of consuming or being consumed, fighting to preserve his own bodily and economic integrity from the metaphorical ingestive process by which he makes his living. The *libertin de qualité* thus betrays a resemblance to the poorer women depicted in previous chapters for whom sex work was not simply a matter of destructive attacks on the male purse in the pursuit of luxury but a matter of life or death. By conceptualising his consumption of money with the terms he uses to describe how others attempt to wrest money from his own purse, the *libertin* uses the dangers of eating to depict a financial battle of individuals in an increasingly mercantile society all attempting to cannibalise one another. His difficulty in reconciling his need to eat with his claims to independence and exceptionality is borne out by his condemnation of the ‘Apollons modernes’ who ‘viennent chercher des dîners qu’ils paient en sornettes’ (*MC*, p. 168), which are directly comparable to Margot’s disdain of the men who prostrate themselves at her patron’s table. At the same time, defending pimping with his core philosophy that ‘il n’y a point de sot métier quand il nourrit son maître’ (*MC*, p. 126), the *libertin de qualité* approaches Manon Lescaut’s justification of profitable infidelity with economic vulnerability: ‘Crois-tu qu’on puisse être bien tendre lorsqu’on manque de pain?’<sup>42</sup> His awareness of his own alimentary and economic fragility leads him to make contradictory claims rooted in ingestive metaphor, revealing that for the *libertin de qualité*, the relationship between money and food is underpinned by the economic and bodily necessity that ultimately colours all consumption.

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<sup>42</sup> Prévost, p. 100.

### *Consuming women*

As well as consuming food and money, one might also assume that the powerful male sex worker would consume his clients. Rejecting the cannibalisation of his own body, what better way to assert his dominance over the mealtime than by absorbing his fellow diners? However, these texts include very few allusions to the consumption of the female body. It is only in *Ma Conversion*, the darkest of these texts, that consuming women emerges as a theme, and then on rare occasions within the story. The first client he describes is: ‘une dondon, qui n’a plus que six mois à passer pour finir la quarantaine, m’offri[t] la molle épaisseur d’une ample fressure. Elle est fraîche encore dans sa courte grosseur’ (*MC*, p. 39). This image of the woman as foodstuff is both more violent and ambiguous than the visions of grotesque, fat men like pears and waddling ducks, or luscious apple-like servant boys seen in *Margot*, for instance. The term ‘dondon’, a familiar and relatively complementary name for a chubby woman,<sup>43</sup> is lent sexual allure by her ‘freshness’. However, her body is not integral, but ‘fressure’: the organs of a slaughtered animal.<sup>44</sup> This vision of woman as offal is reprised later within the text when the hero asks whether another conquest would be prepared to ‘prêter son tripe à [lui] pour cent guinées’ (*MC*, p. 132). In Mandevillian style, the libertine strips the woman of her individuality by reducing her to butchered viscera.

The language of ingestion also demonstrates another difference between the *libertin de qualité* on the one hand, and the *petit-fils* or Marquis of the *Année galante* on the other. Neither the *petit-fils* nor the Marquis use images of food to convey a dependency on, desire for, or disgust at womanhood. For the *libertin*, however, these conflicting ideas are worked through in alimentary language, combining notions of addiction and disgust. Seductresses, described as closer to an addictive than a nourishing substance, ‘peuvent enivrer nos sens’ (*MC*, p. 160), and protracted involvement with them leads the consumer to a sensation of disgust that must be fought through before one can bring oneself to ‘taste’ (‘goûter’) a woman again. Although he swears his allegiance only to

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<sup>43</sup> ‘DONDON. s.f. On appelle ainsi familièrement Une femme ou une fille qui a beaucoup d'embonpoint & de la fraîcheur’ (*Dictionnaire de l’Académie française* (1762), I, p. 555).

<sup>44</sup> ‘FRESSURE. s. f. coll. Il se dit De plusieurs parties intérieures de quelques animaux prises ensemble, comme sont le foie, le coeur, la rate & le poumon. *Fressure de pourceau. Fressure de mouton. Fressure d’agneau. Fressure de veau, &c*’ (*Dictionnaire de l’Académie française* (1762), I, p. 783).

money, the libertine thus demonstrates that he is beholden to another force: a sexual appetite that is understood in alimentary terms, simultaneously driving him with dependency and desire, rather than a clear-headed desire to amass wealth. This inner conflict is absent from narratives voiced by female protagonists who either desire without disgust, like Rosine, or experience disgust without desire, like Margot. If she is not a pure source of money and pleasure, woman, tempting and revolting, disturbs the male sex worker when she ought to be a source of income and power rather than a threat to it.

### ***Women who consume***

Unlike the obese clients that Margot services and who provide much of the satirical value of her story, few of the women depicted in these male-centred narratives have hefty bodies that negatively affect the heroes' pleasure. Women might be plump, in the manner of the *libertin de qualité*'s 'dondon' of a client, but the male sex worker is usually shielded from encounters with fatness that he might find unarousing. When the young *libertin de qualité*'s madam is choosing him a suitable client, she rules out a certain Madame de Culsouple on the basis that she is 'pas votre affaire: elle est trop large' (*MC*, p. 53). Although the heroes' partners are often far from alluring, their repulsive characteristics are not the product of their exploits at the table. Demonstrations of excessive female appetite, whether alimentary, sexual or economic, are similarly infrequent and, when they do appear, they do not pose a threat to the integrity of the heroes' bodies or purses. *Ma Conversion*, the text that offers the only vision of men consuming women within these three novels, also depicts devouring females. Describing a duchess with a string of noble lovers, but who turns to the lower orders for sexual fulfilment, the *libertin de qualité* reprises the trope of the edible servant seen in *Margot la ravaudeuse* and *Vénus en rut*, noting how 'pour le physique elle eut ses laquais, c'est le pain quotidien d'une duchesse' (*MC*, p. 81). Another conquest, Dorville, is described as having 'l'âme d'une furie bizarre, capricieuse [...] elle n'attire des amants que pour les dévorer' (*MC*, p. 155.) However, although these images depict devouring femininity, and satirise the upper classes through images of consumption – and not without the same implications for class and the hierarchy of the erotic food chain seen in *Margot* and *Vénus* – the wealthy sex worker hero himself is in no danger of being consumed and thus remains integral, exceptional, and in control of an ingestive ritual that he shares with alluringly restrained women with appropriate bodies.

Women who consume men are also used explicitly to benefit, rather than to threaten, the male sex worker. When the *libertin de qualité* describes how he cultivates Mimi as his ideal accomplice in the sex trade, he states how she should be a ‘sirène dangereuse, elle n’enchainera que pour dévorer’ (*MC*, p. 127). With Mimi already wealthy before the *libertin de qualité*’s entrance into her life as her lover and pimp, the purpose of this devouring is not to supplement her own income, but to augment his. For the *libertin*, dangerous female appetites need not pose a threat if they can be harnessed as yet another means of exercising control over other men, women, and money. The devouring woman who consumes men who are not below her in the social order does so only in the service of an exceptional male.

The image of the devouring woman is stripped of its potential to threaten masculine dominance even further in *Le Petit-fils d’Hercule*. In an episode that follows the *petit-fils* boasting that he possesses a powerful and devouring stomach, he has sex with a twenty-six-year-old virgin princess desperate to experience sexual pleasure (*PfH*, p. 1106). So grateful is she for her initiation, she drops to her knees to kiss the organ that has given her previously unknown sensations, only to do so ‘avec une telle gloutonnerie, que la mâchoire se démantibule’ (*PfH*, p. 1107). In an attempt to resolve the problem, she gestures to the *petit-fils* to help her remobilise her jaw according to a scheme she has heard, wherein the body’s mechanisms are reset by the vigorous motions of one’s behind; in absurd sign language, she asks that he sodomise her, thereby popping her jaw back into place.<sup>45</sup> In contrast to the powerful genitals and stomach that mark out the *petit-fils*’ sexual and alimentary agency, the princess becomes desperate, gluttonous, and paralysed by her desire as a result. A gesture that would see her consume her sexual partner instead causes her to lose control over both ends of her alimentary canal at once. She can no longer move her mouth and depends upon anal intercourse to cure her. The full length of her digestive system is thus dominated by, and dependent upon, the regulating power of the male member, adding further weight to the idea that the positive or negative effects of ingestion revolve around male power. Moreover, where the *petit-fils* has a sturdy, consuming body, those less hardy than he must bow to the limits of their individual capacity and moderate their consumption accordingly: gluttony, as opposed to

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<sup>45</sup> ‘elle me fit signe de la suivre. Elle se penche sur une commode, me présente son cul ferme et me fit signe de lui mettre. Je ne savais quelle route il fallait prendre; dès lors qu’elle me sent, elle se met à caracoler, à faire des hauts-le-cul, à bondir ; en effet, cette suite de mouvements lui remit la mâchoire’ (*Le Petit-fils d’Hercule*, p. 1107).

moderation, can only lead to the loss of bodily control, and the reduction of the mouth, the site of both ingestion and speech, to an absurd, mute orifice overpowered by unchecked desire.<sup>46</sup>

### *Thwarted female control*

With the meal established as a male-oriented space, women are consistently outwitted when they try to exert bodily or social control over the men they hire at the table. Unlike the meals orchestrated for female sex workers by their clients, those fed to male sex workers are usually pleasurable even when they are intended as a regulatory mechanism, and provide a way for the heroes to visibly outdo women who try to assert their authority with positive sensual and financial effects. Refusing and subverting female financial control of the meal, the narrator of the *Année galante* describes a party at which wealthy women attempt to con male diners out of the price of a luxurious meal for their own amusement:

Commes elles étoient riches, elles ne doutoient de rien, & croyant qu'on pouvoit impunément me leurrer, ainsi que deux amis qui se trouvoient de la société, elles firent venir au dîner tous les vins, tant bons que mauvais, qu'on pût trouver; & après en avoir arrosé le plancher, brisé bouteilles, verres, porcelaines, elles s'applaudissoient des frais que cela devoit nous causer (AG, pp. 47–48).

However, the Marquis recognises this ploy and immediately signals to his friends that they should flee, leaving the women to foot the bill for their own mayhem and undermining their attempts to control him at the table. In so doing, he not only leaves wealthy, irresponsible women open to mockery and punishment but also cultivates male solidarity and self-preservation as a product of the thwarted trick, educating his companions in how to avoid female manipulation: 'L'on m'en sut bon gré; sur-tout mes camarades qui prirent note de la recette, pour en user en pareille circonstance' (AG, pp. 48–49). Just as the *petit-fils d'Hercule* educates Europeans on how to host erotic suppers, the Marquis shares knowledge that cements the bonds of male solidarity in a tussle over the disputed table. Unlike the libertines who successfully play multiple roles at the table highlighted above, easily isolating, seducing, and duping their companions, the women who attempt to sow discord at the table fail, instead strengthening the bonds between their intended victims and highlighting their inferiority to their male counterparts.

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<sup>46</sup> For more on the mouth as a dual site of *phagos* and *logos*, see Lupton, p. 18.

A similar failed attempt to use the mealtime to control the male protagonists emerges in *Ma Conversion*, when one woman tries to keep the *libertin de qualité* from attending to rival clients by inviting him to her home for a *dîner*, and then leaving him imprisoned under her attractive niece's gaze while she attends to business in town, thereby guaranteeing his presence at supper (*MC*, p. 55). However, rather than restricting him, this imprisonment between meals allows the libertine to satisfy his own desires by seducing the young woman. Similarly unrestricted when kidnapped and imprisoned in the home of a marquise in an attempt to ensure his fidelity, the hero of the *Année galante* lives a life of diverse pleasures, among which 'Des ris, des historiettes, des repas, des bons mots, des lectures divertissantes' (*AG*, p. 59). These pleasures, meals included, are intended to make the hero forget other women vying for his affections and thus, like the *libertin de qualité's* inter-meal imprisonment, ensure his fidelity. However, in both instances these attempts to exercise control are unsuccessful, instead enhancing the libertines' opportunities for sensual delight. Rather than inhibiting them, as the regulated repast does for the female sex worker, these meals both please the libertines and emphasise their power over the women who court their affections: competitive female desire for a desirable mate, and male allure, rather than weakness, are manifested in women's attempts to regulate the male body through the meal.

When women succeed in controlling the meal, as in the latter part of *le petit-fils's* career, this is once again not a product of male weakness. Instead, it is the result of female collusion with a sex worker who is already wealthy and successful. When La Darmand, the madam who began the *petit-fils's* career by sprucing him up and finding his first clients, agrees to come to Catherine the Great's court to help run his national brothel, she has several conditions, among which, '[q]u'elle serait présentée chez lui et dînerait et souperait dans toutes les *Parties*' (*PfH*, p. 1124). Darmand demonstrates her intelligence by using the meal as a bargaining chip, ensuring that, having arranged suppers throughout her career, she takes on her new mantle only with the guarantee that she may also oversee and partake of mealtime pleasure and sensuality in her new world. Darmand's accession to the Russian brothel table within a sexual utopia overseen by a female monarch certainly marks her professional advancement. Yet this advancement is nonetheless contingent upon male success. In an inversion of her former role, Darmand is transformed from a madam who delivers young men into luxury into a madam who is delivered into luxury by one of these same young men. Female admission to a position of

power at the dining table is ultimately contingent upon and representative of collusion and cooperation with the male sex worker, once again reaffirming male control.

If the female diner's potential to pose an ingestive threat is neutralised, since she can be controlled by the regulatory force of the man at the table or seeks no power via ingestive means, the mealtime ceases to be a space at which a troublesome, gendered power struggle plays out. In such a world, only at a meal over which male control is impossible should ingestion become problematic. It is thus unsurprising that the only uncontrollable meal depicted within these three texts is one at which male sexual dominance is impossible and meaningless: a *tribades'* banquet and orgy.

La ronde achevée, l'orgie commence ; des flots de vin de Champagne coulent bientôt. L'ivresse s'en mêle; mes tribades deviennent des vraies bacchantes [...] Tout à coup, les cris, les imprécations, la fureur s'élèvent au sein de leurs plaisirs; leurs traits s'altèrent; elles ne se connaissent plus; elles se frappent l'une l'autre ; leurs seins sont meurtris, livides, pantelants ; leur chevelure jonche la terre ... Eh bien! leurs forces ne répondent pas à leur rage ; elles tombent épuisées sur les tapis qu'elles souillent de sang, de vin et d'aliments [...] Éperdu, rempli d'horreur, je me sauve de ce bordel infernal, en jurant bien de n'y remettre les pieds de ma vie (*MC*, p. 127).

Female sexuality that does not have the male as its primary object is manifested through an animalistic, violent approach to food that is, if titillating, also demonstrative of uncontrollable and discomfiting appetites. If, as Catherine Cusset reminds us,

[t]he sapphic scene is a stereotype in the eighteenth-century pornographic novel, as if the representation of two women making love were one of the primary male fantasies, the fantasy of a pleasure from which men are excluded but they control through voyeurism,<sup>47</sup>

then this control is demonstrably lacking at this sapphic table. They have no interest in the *libertin's* presence, despite his vain attempts to gain their attention by declaiming them as foul meat themselves with the words 'viande creuse', a term used to describe undisciplined and bawdy women.<sup>48</sup> His words are ignored, the women are undeterred from their erotic interest in one another, and the libertine cannot even attract attention by insulting them or by implicitly framing himself as a more appealing edible good than the women's own carcasses – an image which, as we have seen above, is tied to his fear of losing financial and bodily control. The orderly meal can thus be read as analogous to the established phallogentric sexual order, with the disorderly meal emblematic of its

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<sup>47</sup> Cusset, *No Tomorrow*, pp. 104–105.

<sup>48</sup> Cotgrave defines 'viande creuse' as 'Wenches, trulls, two-legg'd beasts' (Randall Cotgrave, 'viande creuse' in *A Dictionarie of the French and English Tongues* (Adam Islip, London: 1611)).

subversion. When the male sex worker who regulates women via the mealtime is confronted by a group for whom he holds no appeal, his control of the table and its ritual, and therein a fundamental source of his power, evaporates entirely.

### *Conclusion*

What, then, should we conclude if the existing narrative on food in the libertine text is too simplistic when applied even to well-known narratives with sex worker heroines, but fits well with texts that feature male protagonists, even if they are virtually unheard of? Two main ideas suggest themselves. Firstly, as has been demonstrated in previous chapters, it becomes clear that the existing critical narrative on libertine eating is inadequate when applied to the question of literary sex work. It fails to account for the role of the fictional meal in determining or negotiating womanhood, and an author or society's fear or loathing of that womanhood. Beyond studies focusing purely on sex workers, the analysed libertine consumer is usually implicitly or explicitly male. The visions of pleasure, excess, and luxury espoused by Delon, Safran and the like are concerned with class, philosophy, and nationhood but are untouched by deeper questions of sex as a profession or, most significantly, questions of gender. If these conclusions are broadly applicable only to sex work narratives with male protagonists, their limitations clearly lie in a monolithic vision of libertine consumption that overlooks women entirely, ignoring them as potential consumers. Secondly, this gender disparity – and critics' frequent blindness thereto – highlights how libertine writing itself is, where sex work is concerned, defined more by issues of gender than profession. The meal, written by a male author, consumed by a male sex worker, and intended for a male audience, consistently privileges masculinity and in so doing appeals to a male palate. Little wonder that the libertine meal has been praised as a moment of pleasure and sensuality by a number of male scholars. The female consumer is consistently subordinate, consumable or repellent. No matter her social or professional status she is, above all else, a woman.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### THE CANNIBALISED SEX WORKER IN RÉTIF DE LA BRETONNE'S *L'ANTI-JUSTINE* (1798)

So far, this thesis has demonstrated that the manipulation of the consumed or consuming female body to resolve male concerns and insecurities is a commonplace of eighteenth-century writing on sex work. It is thus little wonder that, at the cusp of the nineteenth century, the consumable sex worker's body should become a tool not only for discussing sex work itself, but a motif with which other forms of male, social, and literary insecurity might be worked through. The following chapter explores one of the most extreme manifestations of sex work, ingestion, and the manipulation of the female body in eighteenth-century texts: a scene of cannibalism in Rétif de la Bretonne's *L'Anti-Justine*, his rebuttal to Sade's *Justine*, which had been published seven years earlier in 1791. This analysis demonstrates how, in *L'Anti-Justine*, the sex worker is not consumed, controlled, and destroyed simply to address concerns about the trade in eroticism, but is instead reduced to a consumable tool with which to resolve a personal authorial rivalry. No longer representative merely of herself or women like her, the sex worker in *L'Anti-Justine* is dehumanised and degraded to appalling new depths for the sake of depicting the dangers of writing, purported immorality, and social disorder.

In the epilogue to Book One of his unfinished novel *l'Anti-Justine*, written in 1798, Rétif de la Bretonne pauses to consider the possible dangers and merits of publishing a pornographic, incestuous, yet supposedly moral work:

j'ai résolu de ne tirer que quelques exemplaires pour mettre deux ou trois amis éclairés, et autant de femmes d'esprit, à portée de juger sainement de son effet, et s'il ne fera pas autant de mal que l'œuvre infernale à laquelle on veut le faire servir de contre-poison. Je ne suis pas assez dépourvu de sens pour ne pas sentir que *l'Anti-Justine* est un poison, mais ce n'est pas là ce dont il s'agit: sera-ce le contre-poison de la fatale *Justine*?<sup>1</sup>

With *l'Anti-Justine* abandoned mid-sentence only eight short chapters into the second of a planned four volumes, it seems that Rétif might have lost faith in his anti-Sadean

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<sup>1</sup> Nicolas-Edme Restif de la Bretonne, *L'Anti-Justine*, in Restif de la Bretonne, *Œuvres Érotiques*, pp. 271–539 (p. 493).

enterprise.<sup>2</sup> And with good reason, perhaps. *L'Anti-Justine* purports to celebrate voluptuousness and tender sensuality. Yet it contains an episode of extreme violence that, in mimicking and surpassing Sadean brutality, appears to destabilise Rétif's project. Chapter Fifteen, 'Du fouteur à la Justine', and the pages that follow offer a lurid account of a sex worker's death at the hands of a depraved monk who butchers, cooks, and eats his victim. Critics have foundered in the face of this episode, viewing it as, at best, a crude parody of Sade's writing, at worst, 'obvious and raving pornography'.<sup>3</sup> Yet in light of ingestion's significance to eighteenth-century depictions of sex work – Rétif's *Pornographe* included – this episode should not be overlooked. If 'Du fouteur à la Justine' is unusual, what should we make of such an apparently aberrant chapter? What is the significance of ingestion to the erotic text when the sex worker is literally served upon the table? How does cannibalistic murder cohere with Rétif's broader project of creating a 'contre-poison' to Sade's toxic novel? And how should we understand the cannibalised sex worker as part of the Rétivian text? This chapter seeks to answer these questions by exploring the role of the sex worker as a consumable deployed to help resolve Rétif's hatred of Sade, whom he considered an 'exécrable auteur' and 'égoïste vicieux', and the Sadean text.<sup>4</sup> Through a focus on the symbolic importance of cannibalism, it reveals how the late-eighteenth century sex worker is, for the aging Rétif, an ambivalent figure who can be used to cleanse the literary landscape of his enemy's influence, even if she is degraded and poisonous. Focusing on the figure of the sex worker and the act of ingestion, we find that this cannibalistic episode is in fact an extended fantasy of Rétif and Sade's authorial rivalry, and a literalisation of how dangerous the production and consumption of sexually explicit material can be. Written at the end of the century and forming the zenith (or, perhaps, nadir) of literary eating,

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<sup>2</sup> Daniel Baruch, 'Introduction générale', in *Restif de la Bretonne: Œuvres érotiques*, pp. 9–26, (p. 12). Rétif entered into the services of the police as a translator in May 1798, the point at which he appears to have stopped composing *L'Anti-Justine*. The text ends, incomplete, part way through Chapter Forty-eight: 'Je sors. Elle ' (p. 537). Moreover, of the forty planned illustrations to the text, we have only three. Of these, two depict the cannibal monk Foutamort, whose exploits are discussed in this chapter (pp. 273–279).

<sup>3</sup> Jean Marie Goulemot and Jonathan M. Weiss use this term in 'Sadean Novels and Pornographic Novels: Narration, its Objectives and its Effects', *Paragraph*, 23.1 (2000), 63–74 (p. 65).

<sup>4</sup> David Coward, 'Rétif Critique de Sade', *Études rétiviennes*, 10 (1989), 73–86 (p. 74 n. 8). Sade was, for his part, no great fan of Rétif. Writing to his wife when imprisoned at Vincennes in 1783, he begged her 'Surtout n'achetez rien de ce Rétif, au nom de Dieu! C'est un auteur du Pont-Neuf et de la Bibliothèque bleue, dont il est inouï que vous ayez imaginé de m'envoyer quelque chose' (Coward (1989), p. 75 n. 17). For a more in depth account of Sade and Rétif's mutual hatred, see Maurice Blanchot, *Sade et Restif de la Bretonne* (Brussels: Editions Complexe, 1986), pp. 105–106; Gilbert Lély, 'Le marquis de Sade et Restif de la Bretonne', *Mercur de France*, 1130, October 1957, pp. 364–366. See also Wyngaard, pp. 59–60, particularly p. 59 n. 62.

reading, and sex work, the figure of the sex worker character provides the key with which a seemingly incomprehensible depiction of violence can be unlocked.

Although incest and sexual coercion lie at the heart of the text, which depicts a pedagogical sexual relationship between a father and daughter, *l'Anti-Justine* is intended as a rebuttal to the 'sales ouvrages de l'infâme Dsds' (p. 287). Rétif claims to have written *l'Anti-Justine* in the hope that an erotic vision of social and family life founded on gentleness and love might help to mitigate *Justine's* allure and influence and overpower Sade's violent cynicism. The original *Justine* recounts the trials of a young orphaned woman, whose attempts to make her way in the world while resolutely retaining her goodness are met with violence, rape, entanglement in crime, and a violent death. Faced with such a barrage of horrors in response to unwavering virtue, the reader is taught that a life of pious victimhood is not always rewarded. *L'Anti-Justine*, in contrast, tells the story of a father, Cupidonnet, who develops a romantic interest in his daughter, Conquette-Ingénue, after a youth spent in sexual encounters with attractive female relations. Conquette, initially keen to preserve her virginity from her father's advances, hurries into a marriage with a cruel man named Vitnègre, who sells her body to other men in an attempt to stretch her when he discovers his penis is too large to successfully penetrate her. After taking his daughter's virginity (disguised as one of Vitnègre's clients, no less), Cupidonnet saves his daughter from certain death at the hands of a rapist, cannibal monk, and finally wins her romantic sentiments for good. He then takes her away to live a life of gentle voluptuousness, with father and daughter as incestuous lovers, while pimping her to other men in a form of sexual pedagogy.<sup>5</sup> However, this gentle voluptuousness is borne of an episode of extreme and depraved violence.

When still with her husband, Vitnègre, Conquette-Ingénue is sold for the night to the aptly named monk, Foutamort, whose colossal genitalia and vicious sexual appetite would guarantee her death during the sexual act. On discovering his daughter is in danger, Cupidonnet secretly hires a local streetwalker named Conillette to take Conquette-Ingénue's place during the sexual encounter. Conillette, though beautiful, is infected with a particularly violent strain of syphilis. Foutamort, unaware of the switch,

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<sup>5</sup> Valérie van Cruyten-André notes how Rétif and Sade both deal with sex work and coercion, with Rétifian pimping also serving a pedagogical function (*Le Roman du libertinage*, pp. 119–121).

rapes Conillette, who dies from her injuries. He then butchers her body and carries the parts back to the monastery to prepare a meal for himself and his brethren. Foutamort's pleasure is short-lived, however. Conillette's syphilitic body poisons the monastery when she is consumed and kills Foutamort before he can avenge himself or reveal that he has been tricked. With Foutamort dead, Rétif assures his reader that 'il n'y aura plus, dans le reste de l'ouvrage aucune horreur qui ressemble à celle du moine Foutamort' (p. 347). Cupidonnet's incestuous utopia can now develop unhindered.

### *Critical approaches to Rétif's cannibalism*

In light of its brutality, 'Du fouteur à la Justine' has long been the object of critical attention, though to little end. Foutamort's shadow still looms over the text, confounding readers and dominating critical appraisals of the scene to the detriment of other characters, most notably Conillette. Charles Porter has explicitly questioned why the 'Foutamort' episode should have appeared in *l'Anti-Justine* at all,<sup>6</sup> asking why, in a text written explicitly to oppose Sadean cruelty, Rétif should include a scene of such horrific brutality. How can Rétif's replication and amplification of Sadean violence be reconciled with the authors' mutual loathing and their disdain for one another's work? Catherine Lafarge has suggested three possible reasons for Foutamort's inclusion: Rétif's inability to resist the temptation to try to outdo his literary rival, given the opportunity; his inability to resist the sexual allure of the sadistic scene; or his desire to create a contrast between Sadean cruelty and the voluptuousness that follows.<sup>7</sup> The theory of authorial one-upmanship corresponds neatly with Rétif's own claim that 'Les horreurs à la Dsds sont aisées à présenter. C'est la peinture de la douce volupté qui est le chef-d'œuvre du génie' (p. 347). Peter Cryle expands upon the idea of Foutamort's inclusion as a counterpoint to Rétivian sensuality, suggesting that Rétif's move from extreme violence to softer scenes is a narrative technique intended to subvert the structure of the Sadean text, which is built on the constant amplification of pleasures and perversions.<sup>8</sup> David Coward, who writes off *l'Anti-Justine* as 'the product of a senile imagination', nods to

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<sup>6</sup> Charles A. Porter, *Restif's Novels, Or, An Autobiography in Search of an Author* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), p. 388. Catherine Lafarge has also frankly described the monk's presence in the text as 'difficile à comprendre' (Catherine Lafarge, 'Les Délices de l'amour de Restif de la Bretonne: attaque efficace contre Sade?', *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*, 153 (1976), 1245–1253 (p. 1251)).

<sup>7</sup> Lafarge, 'Les Délices de l'amour', p. 1251. Amy Wyngaard also alludes to the Foutamort scene as a counterpoint to the loving sensuality that follows in *Bad Books* (Wyngaard, p. 62).

<sup>8</sup> Peter Cryle, 'Time Out in Erotic Narrative: The Recreative Pause in Sade and Restif de La Bretonne', *French Forum*, 15.3 (1990), 277–299 (p. 278).

Foutamort as a ‘satirical portrait of a ‘vivodisséqueur’ intended to parody and thus demonstrate the inadequacy of Sade’s project through reference to the *Affaire d’Arcueil* (and Rétif’s own description of this scandal in his *Nuits de Paris*), in which Sade is reported to have hired a sex worker named Rose Keller, whipped her, and covered her with small incisions into which he dripped either hot wax or an experimental curative ointment.<sup>9</sup> Barry Ivker similarly views Foutamort as a boorish parody of Sade’s intellectual libertines, inflicting pain without philosophy and then dying at Cupidonnet’s (and thus at Rétif’s) hands.<sup>10</sup> John Phillips takes a psychoanalytic approach, suggesting that Rétif’s novel is the manifestation of a critical project-cum-Oedipal struggle, in which Rétif’s attempt to critique and master *Justine* nevertheless repeats and reaffirms Sadean sexual violence in its attempts to oppose it.<sup>11</sup> Crucially, only Phillips has drawn a connection between the Foutamort episode and Rétif’s admission that his project is an ambivalent one, noting how *l’Anti-Justine* recalls the image of the *pharmakon*, that which is simultaneously (and paradoxically) both poison and antidote.<sup>12</sup> For Phillips, this act of poisoning and curing takes place through writing, while the presence of Sadean images in the text is not mere parody or pastiche, but an effect of reading *Justine* in the first place: *l’Anti-Justine* is, Phillips argues, a *mise-en-scene* of Rétif’s response to Sade’s text.<sup>13</sup>

Although he comes closer than most, Phillips still ignores the crucial aspect of Rétif’s text as *pharmakon* that explains and rehabilitates Foutamort’s presence within the narrative: Conillette herself. By focusing purely on the monk as a perplexing Sadean presence, readers have overlooked the figure of the sex worker. Yet Conillette and her consumption hold the key to this episode. In order to demonstrate the importance of the cannibalised sex worker, arguing that Conillette’s body offers a symbolic realisation of Rétif’s text, this chapter begins by sketching out the significance of ingestion in *l’Anti-*

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<sup>9</sup> Coward, *The Philosophy of Restif La Bretonne*, pp. 818–819; James Steintrager, *Cruel Delight: Enlightenment Culture and the Inhuman* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2004), pp. 87–89. For more on Sade and vivisection, see pp. 87–145 of the same volume.

<sup>10</sup> Barry Ivker, ‘On the Darker Side of Enlightenment: A Comparison of the Literary Techniques of Sade and Restif’, *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth-Century*, 79 (1971), 199–218, (p. 215).

<sup>11</sup> John Phillips, ‘Critique littéraire et intertextualité: le cas de Sade et de Rétif de la Bretonne’, in *Critique, Critiques au 18e siècle*, ed. by Malcolm Cook, Marie-Emmanuelle Plagnol-Diéval (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2006), pp. 269–280.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 278 ; For the *pharmakon*, see ‘La Pharmacie de Platon’, in Jacques Derrida, *La Dissemination* (Paris: Éditions de Seuil, 1972), pp. 77–214.

<sup>13</sup> Peter Cryle also describes how *L’Anti-Justine* is ‘written with Sade, as the textual inscription of a certain complicity’ (Cryle, ‘Time Out In Erotic Narrative’, p. 277).

*Justine* more broadly. This is followed by a brief summary of Conillette's role and its relation to late eighteenth-century ideas on sex work. Finally, the chapter examines 'Du fouteur à la Justine' as a realisation and phantasmatic resolution of Rétif's authorial rivalry with Sade, focusing on Conillette as the ambivalent incarnation of pornography.

### ***Consuming the text***

*L'Anti-Justine* is not a text to be read, but to be tasted. Ingestion is central to Rétif's presentation of his novel from the very beginning. Its subtitle, *Les Délices de l'Amour*, prepares the reader for a celebration of pleasure described in explicitly gustatory terms. Despite suggesting that he would only produce a few copies of his work to give to his closest friends, Rétif also suggests that his text could and should have a broader social benefit. In his *Avertissement*, Rétif declares that he wishes to create an '*Erotikon savoureux*' (p. 285), with this deliciousness serving a worthy cause, as he tells us in his preface: 'je n'ai composé cet ouvrage, tout savoureux qu'il est, que dans des vues utiles' (p. 287). Before he can begin his narrative, Rétif consistently justifies his salacious writing with recourse to the idea of flavour:

*Ce n'est qu'à force de volupté, de tableaux libidineux, tels que les savoureuses jouissances qui vont suivre, qu'on peut combattre avantageusement, dans le cœur et l'esprit des libertins blasés, les goûts atroces éveillés par les abominables productions de l'infâme et cruel Dsds!* [italics in original] (p. 303)

For Rétif, it is precisely this alimentary appeal that renders *Justine* so threatening; he claims that *l'Anti-Justine* will be 'plus savoureux' than Sade's original (p. 287), therein admitting that Sadean violence can stir the appetite, but that he can create something even more delectable. It is precisely the flavoursome and thus potentially problematic aspects of his own story that he proposes will overpower Sade's allure, inscribing his attack on cruelty within the realm of the edible – an approach that underscores his alimentary understanding of Sade's text. Only by retaliating in kind, he argues, can he tempt the reader's palate back to love and moral redemption.

The moral value of the text is linked to the combined erotic and gustatory responses it elicits. For Rétif, the text is analogous to an aphrodisiac food; its spice, as well as its flavour, contributes to its social and sexual value: 'Mon but moral, qui en vaut bien un autre, est de donner à ceux qui ont le tempérament paresseux un *Erotikon* épice qui les fasse servir convenablement une épouse qui n'est plus belle' (p. 393). Spiciness, thought

to be an aphrodisiacal quality, is used to frame the text as a marital aid, thereby shoring up the marital (and by extension familial) unit in explicitly gustatory terms.<sup>14</sup>

Consequently, with textual flavour and ingestion at the heart of Rétif's paratexts, any moments of literal ingestion in the main body of the text should be considered with reference to this metaphorical link between eating and reading.<sup>15</sup> We will return to this later, in relation to Foutamort's consumption of Conillette.

Beyond metaphors of consuming literature, ingestion plays a significant role in the main text of *l'Anti-Justine*. Sex is consistently conflated with eating, and purportedly loving and natural sexual acts are described with reference to hunger, appetite, and nourishment. Conquette-Ingénue is a 'fouteuse mise en appétit' who grows hungrier for her father's body the more she sleeps with him: 'L'appétit vient en mangeant, dit le proverbe, et l'on va voir comment il a raison, pour Conquette' (p. 373). Young women are nourished and moulded by diets that see them suckling at their lovers' and guardians' penises, taking a regular 'déjeuner de foutre' that renders them more beautiful and more libidinous (pp. 457–459),<sup>16</sup> and the text's claim to wholesomeness is mirrored by the fresh foods consumed by its sexual agents. Rétif's lovers dine 'légèrement [...] exprès pour faire collation' (p. 515), 'sans trop manger, ni trop boire' (p. 499), and favour restrained, unrefined, though clearly sensual menus. Cupidonnet, Conquette, and their friends dine, for instance, on 'un excellent gigot de 18 livres, & du vin de Bourgogne, avec un pâté chaud' (p. 427) and 'des fraïses au vin-muscato, avec des pains-molets du Pont-Michel: Puis nous primes d'excellent café [...] & nous goûtames aux liqueurs' (p. 515). Foregoing displeasure or excess, Rétif's dinners are marked by pleasant, easy laughter and moderated sensual pleasure, usually taken as a prelude or conclusion to a mutually satisfying sexual encounter. These fresh ingredients are also used as sex aids: 'beurre

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<sup>14</sup> Jennifer Evans, *Aphrodisiacs, Fertility and Medicine in Early Modern England* (London: Royal Historical Society, 2014), pp. 90–91.

<sup>15</sup> Gerard Genette highlights the importance of closely analysing paratextual material in *Seuils* (Paris: Seuil, 1987).

<sup>16</sup> A young woman who becomes involved with Cupidonnet and Conquette-Ingénue describes how a 'déjeuner de foutre [lui] avait rendu la peau plus blanche, le teint plus brillant, le Con plus satiné, et me donnait un temperament si violent, que je n'étais à mon aise qu'un vit au con' (p. 458). While only mentioned in passing, Michel Delon's brief description of incest in *l'Anti-Justine* highlights the image of 'un père nourrissant de son sperme sa propre fille' acknowledging the importance of feeding and nutrition as part of the sexual act (Michel Delon, *Le Principe de délicatesse: libertinage et mélancolie au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2011), p. 101).

frais' is repeatedly used as a lubricant.<sup>17</sup> *L'Anti-Justine* repeatedly blurs the lines between ingestion, pleasure, and sex, as well as ingestion and the text.

These positive, nourishing, and sensual visions of eroticised ingestion lie in stark contrast to Foutamort's treatment of Conillette, who is neither nourished nor sensually indulged, but raped, slaughtered, and reduced to cuts of meat and offal in an extraordinary amplification of the cannibalistic imagery linked to the eighteenth-century sex worker:

Il la déshabilla, l'emporta nue dans l'autre pièce, la mit sur une grande table, alla prendre un vaste saladier, tira un bistouri [...] Il lui cerna la partie charnue des seins, la motte toute entière, la chair des cuisses, lui fendit le ventre, lui arracha le cœur, les poumons, le foie, la vessie, la matrice, la retourna, lui coupa les pieds chaussés, qu'il mit dans une poche, les mains, qu'il serra dans l'autre. Il la retourna encore, lui coupa la langue, la tête, ôta la chair des bras. Il vint ensuite chercher sa chemise et un drap du lit en disant:  
- Voilà un bon régal pour nos moines et pour moi (p. 343).

With Conillette suffering such a gruesome fate and ingestion highlighted as significant to the purported moral value of Rétif's text, we must consider two complementary questions. Firstly, how does Conillette's immolation and consumption relate to her status as a sex worker? And secondly, how should we interpret Conillette's fate as part of Rétif's ambitions for his novel as an anti-Sadean enterprise?

### ***Sex Work in L'Anti-Justine***

Critics such as Kathryn Norberg and Valérie van-Crugten André have demonstrated that the literary sex worker was a degraded figure by the turn of the nineteenth century.<sup>18</sup> *L'Anti-Justine*'s iteration of this trope is no exception. Relegated to narratives of poverty and with little opportunity for social climbing, the once elite courtesan-heroine was replaced by the democratised 'grisette' found walking the streets and virtually synonymous with venereal disease.<sup>19</sup> In the referential world of sex work, the late eighteenth century saw an increase both in the spread of syphilis and in the official

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<sup>17</sup> For references to 'beurre-frais', see for example *l'Anti-Justine*, pp. 363, 367, 400, 403, 440. *Beurre-frais*, a country staple, is frequently mentioned in *l'Anti-Justine*, and also features in Rétif's wider œuvre. See Andries, 'Cuisine et littérature populaire', pp. 37–38 for an overview of the simple, rural diet fêted by Rétif (among others) in the eighteenth century.

<sup>18</sup> Norberg, 'From Courtesan to Prostitute', pp. 34–35; van Crugten-André, *Le Roman du libertinage*, p. 129.

<sup>19</sup> Revolutionary sex workers tended, unlike their *ancien régime* counterparts, to be full-time professional, proletarian women on the extreme fringes of society (Conner, 'Public Virtue', p. 224).

measures taken to combat it.<sup>20</sup> Revolutionary politics was preoccupied with the perfection of (particularly male) virtue through moral and sexual hygiene.<sup>21</sup> As of 1793, the sex worker's body was legally accessible to government forces of order: sex workers could be rounded up and subjected to mandatory and invasive venereal disease inspections (or *visites*).<sup>22</sup> Norberg suggests that by 1802, only four years after *l'Anti-Justine*'s publication, 'the prostitute had become a health problem, a biological threat defined by syphilis.'<sup>23</sup> Conillette, a young, pretty streetwalker infected with a violent strain of venereal disease, is the epitome of the late eighteenth-century sex worker figure as a low-status woman and disease incarnate. She can thus easily become a tool with which Cupidonnet can preserve his virtuous daughter from death at Foutamort's hands and bring about the villain's demise, mirroring the official process of male forces of order managing the public woman's body in late eighteenth-century society.

At this point, a brief digression is required on what constitutes 'sex work' in *l'Anti-Justine*. As highlighted above, Conquette-Ingénue is pimped by her husband and, subsequently, her father, as part of her sexual education. Furnished with a loving, innocent nature and a constantly virginally tight vagina, Conquette is put through a programme of sexual initiation and genital stretching by different partners so that she might accommodate and pleasure any man, her education focused exclusively on her body rather than her mind.<sup>24</sup> As such, her sexual relationship founded on orality also takes place within the context of what Valérie van Crugten-André terms 'la prostitution coercitive dans un but didactique.'<sup>25</sup> There are thus two types of sex work at play in *l'Anti-Justine*, one of which is admirable, the other of which must be condemned.

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<sup>20</sup> For more on venereal disease and its treatment in the late eighteenth-century, see Susan P. Conner, 'Politics, Prostitution, and the Pox in Revolutionary Paris, 1789-1799', *Journal of Social History*, 22.4 (1989), 713-734, particularly pp. 723-728.

<sup>21</sup> Sean M. Quinlan, 'Medicine in the Boudoir: Sade and moral hygiene in post-Thermidorean France', *Textual Practice*, 20.2 (2006), 231-255 (p. 235).

<sup>22</sup> Conner, 'Public Virtue', p. 224.

<sup>23</sup> Norberg, 'From Courtesan to Prostitute', p. 35.

<sup>24</sup> Cryle, 'Time Out', pp. 277-99, particularly p. 286. The lack of intellectual stimulation that Cupidonnet offers his daughter conforms with Rétif's broader ideas on the education of women: in short, that it was a dangerous enterprise. All education that did not reinscribe traditional gender roles and train young women to be wives and mothers was condemned, with Rétif expressing a particular distaste for instruction in the arts, suggesting that it provided women with an unwelcome distraction from the duty of pleasing their husbands. As such, it is unsurprising that Conquette's 'education', such as it is, remains grounded exclusively in the sensual and sexual, is explicitly limited to bodily as opposed to mental training, and takes place under the watchful eye of her father. For more on Rétif and education, see Mark Poster, *The Utopian Thought of Restif de La Bretonne* (New York: New York University Press, 1971), p. 15 ff.

<sup>25</sup> van Crugten-André, *Le Roman du libertinage*, p. 121.

However, it does not follow that Rétif need make Conillette into a victim of cannibalism in order to condemn her lifestyle. Why, then, should Conillette be eaten?

By depicting her carved upon the table, rather than describing her seated at it ('Il la déshabilla, l'emporta nue dans l'autre pièce, la mit sur une grande table [...] tira un bistouri' p. 343), Rétif subverts the image of a sex worker who has the potential to gain power and prestige at the meal, recalling the cannibalism of the satirical plans for sex work reform discussed in Chapter Three.<sup>26</sup> Expanding upon his desire to restrict sex workers' access to mealtime sociability, articulated in *Le Pornographe*, Rétif literalises the image of the sex worker as a disempowered consumable rather than an empowered consumer.<sup>27</sup> The purely instrumental use of the sex worker reinforces her position in the referential hierarchy and within Rétif's vision of a patriarchal and morally upstanding utopia. Available to anyone who will pay, devoid of wealthy patrons, the turn-of-the-century streetwalker becomes a consumable object within the market economy. This diminishing of the sex worker to the status of consumable is gently foreshadowed in her description as 'la jolie putain du Port-au-Blé' (p. 331) – she attracts male attention and plies her trade at the alimentary heart of the city. Transformed into cuts of meat, and appraised as 'un bon régal' (p. 343), Conillette incarnates the new literary and social order of purely consumable, poor sex workers, and their grounding in a theory of sexual difference that sees women, and public women in particular, as less worthy of human dignity than men.<sup>28</sup> Yet this alone does not explain the violence of the cannibalism to which she is exposed. Since, according to Marshall Sahlins, cannibalism 'is always 'symbolic,' even when it is 'real'', a deeper meaning that pertains to the text itself should be sought out.<sup>29</sup>

### ***The edible sex worker: authorial rivalry and textual metaphor***

The reduction of Conillette to a butchered, poisonous carcass has significance beyond the image of a dehumanised sex worker and her depiction at the hands of a would-be reformer and moralist. Given that she is eaten, her meaning might best be found in the

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<sup>26</sup> As we have seen, of course, this access to power was often illusory.

<sup>27</sup> See discussion of *Le Pornographe* in Chapter Three.

<sup>28</sup> Here we see the fullest manifestation of Carol Adams' vision of patriarchal discourse eliding the concepts of woman and meat.

<sup>29</sup> Marshall Sahlins, 'Raw Women, Cooked Men, and Other 'Great Things' of the Fiji Islands', in *The Ethnography of Cannibalism*, ed. by Paula Brown and Donald Tuzin (Washington: Society for Psychological Anthropology, 1983), pp. 72–93 (p. 88).

text's other references to ingestion. Rather than approach this episode as a confusing aberration, as many of the aforementioned critics have done, we might more productively consider 'Du fouteur à la Justine' in relation to Rétif's paratextual discourse on appetising literature, poison and counter-poison. A close reading of 'Du fouteur à la Justine' as part of Rétif's attempted 'contre-poison' to Sade's *Justine* reveals how Conillette and her cannibalised body form part of a metaphorical depiction of authorial rivalry, and the potential benefits, toxicity and danger of pornographic material. If Conillette is appetising, consumed, and poisonous, ultimately erasing the living embodiment of Sadean influences from the text, might we not read her as a deliberate incarnation of Rétif's own ambivalent pornographic story?

To best understand Conillette's role as pornography incarnate, we must first explore the significance of the other characters within this episode, beginning with the interpretation of Cupidonnet as a barely veiled vision of Rétif himself. That Rétif's literary output was often autobiographical or semi-autobiographical is widely recognised;<sup>30</sup> *L'Anti-Justine* is no exception. Cupidonnet's penchant for young women's shoes, his sexual precocity and appetite, and his desire to rescue his daughter from a cruel marriage and seduce her himself offer a clear amplification of the author's life and desires. Rétif was himself a foot fetishist, sexually voracious, and the father to a young woman, Agnès, who was both the wife of an abusive husband and Rétif's own sexual partner.<sup>31</sup> Conquette-Ingénue and her husband Vitnègre are recognisable ciphers for Agnès and her husband respectively.<sup>32</sup>

In light of Rétif's use of barely fictionalised figures from real life, including his own self-insertion as the hero of the text, and his authorial position as Sade's would-be destroyer,

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<sup>30</sup> Charles A. Porter divides Rétif's output into 'autobiographical' novels (such as *Le Paysan pervers*), autobiography (*Monsieur Nicolas*), and 'biographical' novels depicting his family (such as *La Vie de mon père* and *Ingénue Saxancour*). For Porter, *L'Anti-Justine* falls into the category of 'imagined or imitated autobiography [...] in which we see Restif relating the life he might have lived according to certain of his fantasies' (Porter, pp. 16–17. See also Ivker, p. 215; Wyngaard, p. 62.)

<sup>31</sup> Mary Trouille has highlighted the explicit similarities between Rétif and his daughter Agnès, and their fictionalised counterparts in the sentimental novel *L'Ingénue Saxancour* in her in depth 'Introduction', in Rétif de la Bretonne, *Ingénue Saxancour ou la femme séparée*, ed. by Mary Trouille (London: MHRA, 2014) pp. 1–38. For details of Rétif's journals and their evidence of his sexual relationships with his daughters, see Rétif de la Bretonne, *Monsieur Nicolas*, ed. by Pierre Testud, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1989), II, p. 346 n. 3.

<sup>32</sup> With reference to J. Rives Childs's work, Pierre Testud identifies a number of characters within *L'Anti-Justine* as members of Rétif's family, most notably confirming Conquette-Ingénue as his daughter Agnès, Cupidonnet as Rétif, and Vitnègre and Guae as Agnès' husband Augé. Testud also highlights how the events of *L'Anti-Justine* match stories found in the autobiographical *Monsieur Nicolas* (Pierre Testud, *Rétif de la Bretonne et la création littéraire* (Geneva: Droz, 1977), pp. 556–557. See also Porter, p. 387).

we might look beyond Rétif's family and into the literary realm to identify the real-life equivalent of the enemy he destroys within the text. Foutamort is clearly a copycat Sadean figure, as Barry Ivker has highlighted, sharing the sexually violent and cannibalistic qualities of the libertines found in *Justine*.<sup>33</sup> While many of Sade's most notorious depictions of cannibals, such as *Juliette*'s Minski or the anthropophagic gluttons of the *120 Journées*, had not been published at Rétif's time of writing, the presence in *Justine* of Rodin, who feeds on his wife's blood, nonetheless links anthropophagia with Sade and amoral libertine autonomy. We might also read Foutamort as a cartoonish representation of Sade himself. Describing Sade as a 'vivodisséqueur' in his preface (p. 287), Rétif refers to the *Affaire d'Arcueil*, described mentioned above. Foutamort's surgical opening up and evisceration of Conilette with a scalpel (p. 343) when he is unsure whether she is alive or dead makes of him the only 'vivodisséqueur' in the text, and firmly aligns him with Sade.

Moreover, as well as violent sexuality, Foutamort displays a remarkable gourmandise. This quality can also be directly linked to Sade, who gained a reputation for perverse appetites following an episode in Marseille, during which he fed an excess of aniseed balls laced with Spanish fly to a group of sex workers and was subsequently convicted for sodomy and murder when they accused him of attempting to poison them.<sup>34</sup> Upon first seeing Conquette-Ingénue, Foutamort 'devours' her with his eyes, and rejects the offer of a bout with her before taking his *dîner*, preferring to eat first and save himself for the evening's pleasures (pp. 324–325). His sexual preferences also display a taste for violent oral satisfaction. He tells Vitnègre: 'j'aime à foutre au lit, à suçoter la langue et tétons, à enconner, enculer, entétonner, etc., à mordre, arracher les bouts' (p. 325). Similarly, when cutting up Conilette's body, Foutamort skilfully transforms her from a human carcass into various cuts of meat and offal, with the culinary side of his

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<sup>33</sup> Ivker, p. 215; Steintrager, *Cruel Delight*, pp. 87–89. For more on cannibalism in Sade, see Frank Lestringant, *Cannibals: The Discovery and Representation of the Cannibal from Columbus to Jules Verne* (Cambridge: Polity, 1997), pp. 162–169.

<sup>34</sup> Michel Delon has described the mythic dimension of the Marseilles episode in his introduction to the Pléiade edition of Sade's work, highlighting how Sade's relationship to sweets and cantharides is elaborated into fiction and becomes part of the shared cultural imaginary surrounding Sade's monstrosity. See Delon, 'Introduction' in Sade, *Œuvres complètes du Marquis de Sade*, ed. by Michel Delon, 3 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1990), I, pp. ix–lviii (pp. xvi–xvi), and also Cryle, *The Telling of the Act*, pp. 96–102. Likely unbeknownst to Rétif, Sade was also a prolific *gourmand*, whose demanding appetites led him to gargantuan obesity, to school his prison cooks in how to make a decent meal, and to harangue his long-suffering wife for sweet delicacies while he was incarcerated. See, for instance, the descriptions of Sade's preferred foodstuffs and judgements of meals in Neil Schaeffer, *The Marquis de Sade: A Life* (London: Picador, 2001), pp. 329–30, 484.

‘vivisection’ cemented further by his darkly perverse use of a salad bowl to carry the fruits of his labours (p. 343).<sup>35</sup> Moreover, he not only takes the choicest morsels for himself, but also cooks a feast for his brethren with the rest, further emphasising his interest in the alimentary realm. The act of ingestion is thus, in Chapter Fifteen of *L’Anti-Justine*, another point of association with Sade and the Sadean.

With Rétif and Sade pitted against one another, what of the two female figures within this episode? As highlighted above, Conquette-Ingénue can be read as a representation of Rétif’s daughter Agnès. Yet if Cupidonnet’s plan is grounded in the desire to save his daughter from death at Foutamort’s hands, Conquette-Ingénue might also be analogous (in this episode, if not in any other) to the figure Rétif wishes to keep safe from Sade: the reader. In his preface, Rétif states that he hopes *l’Anti-Justine*’s effect on the reader might ‘lui rende plutôt la vie, que de lui causer la mort’ (p. 287). One might therefore read the figure of Conquette as representative not simply of Rétif’s daughter, but of a readership and society vulnerable to Sadean violence both within and beyond the confines of the text.<sup>36</sup> With ‘Du fouteur à la Justine’ depicting the metaphorical relationship between Sade, Rétif, and the vulnerable reader, the figure of the murdered sex worker can be interpreted as that which is deployed by Cupidonnet/Rétif to protect Conquette-Ingénue/the reader from Foutamort/Sade: the sexually explicit and corrupting text itself. The fictional sex worker emblematises the Retivian pornography in which she is depicted.

It is through the sacrifice of Conillette to Foutamort, and Foutamort’s subsequent consumption of her body, that the most explicitly depraved element of the text can be eradicated, thanks to the violent strain of syphilis with which Conillette is infected. Conillette is therefore not so much a woman but a poison incarnate. Consequently, when deployed by Cupidonnet, Conillette’s body loses none of its poisonous qualities and acts as a cathartic force, purifying the text of its Sadean elements by killing off Foutamort

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<sup>35</sup> Using a ‘saladier’ to carry a sex worker’s butchered flesh also symbolically profanes Rétif’s vision of the natural and moral diet detailed above, defined by the uncorrupted tastes of the countryside. For more on the representation of food in Rétif de la Bretonne see Jean-Paul Moreau, ‘Le Régime alimentaire du pays de Basse-Bourgogne d’après Rétif de la Bretonne’, in *Alimentation & régions*, ed. by Jean Peltre and Claude Thouvenot (Nancy: Presses Universitaires de Nancy, 1989), pp. 103–112.

<sup>36</sup> See Rétif’s own recognition of the extra-textual effects of *Justine* upon himself, discussed above, describing his shame and horror at the arousal he felt and thus highlighting his own vulnerability to Sade’s writing (*L’Anti-Justine*, p. 285).

gruesomely and definitively. When she is consumed, Conillette's body functions as a darkly erotic *pharmakon*, in precisely the manner that Rétif describes his novel. Like *l'Anti-Justine*, Conillette is a 'poison', but also a very real 'contre-poison' that neutralises Sade and, by extension, 'la fatale *Justine*'.

While anachronistic, the term 'pornography', is nonetheless of some use to us here, particularly given its origins in another of Rétif's texts, *Le Pornographe* (1769), which describes his vision of state-administered sex work and its resultant eradication of venereal disease from society (as discussed in Chapter Three). With 'pornographic' etymologically denoting that which pertains to writing (-γράφος) about 'prostitutes' (πορνο-), the inclusion of Conillette and her saleable, infected body renders 'Du fouteur à la *Justine*' pornographic in its most literal sense. Thus, when Foutamort/Sade consumes Conillette/the poisonous text, we see the 'poison'/'contrepoison' of pornographic literature at work. As has been demonstrated, Rétif conceptualises reading and eating in similar ways, designing his text with alimentary appeal in mind. *L'Anti-Justine* is a tantalising aphrodisiac, as well as a literary means of overcoming Sade's violence. In order to save his daughter and reader from the ravages of cruel Sadean sexual violence, then, and to destroy his literary rival, Rétif must sacrifice his text both to the poison of sexual violence and to the devouring, sensual appetites of the Sadean libertine. Only when it is consumed can the simultaneous destructive and curative potential of dangerous pornography be unleashed.

Reading Conillette's syphilitic body as a symbolic and redemptive force is, moreover, coherent with Rétif's earlier work. The syphilitic as simultaneously degenerate and purifying is not unique to *l'Anti-Justine*, featuring in both *Le Paysan perversi* (1775) and *La Paysanne perversie* (1784), in which the libertine protagonists become infected only to save those around them from moral and spiritual decay as a result.<sup>37</sup> Diane Fourny demonstrates how Edmond, the libertine hero of *Le Paysan perversi*, becomes a redemptive figure when his syphilis-ravaged body attracts the outcast and vulnerable, allowing him to save them from similar physical and spiritual corruption. Fourny argues that:

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<sup>37</sup> Diane Fourny, 'Job's Curse and Social Degeneracy in Rétif de la Bretonne's *Le Paysan perversi*', in *The Secret Malady: Venereal Disease in Eighteenth-Century Britain and France*, ed. by Linda Evi Merians (Lexington, K.Y.: University Press of Kentucky, 1996), pp. 228–242.

[t]hanks to the diseased sufferer's long relationship to the sacred, Rétif is able to raise a banal story of social degeneracy to a higher mythical plane where redemption of the body politic is made possible by return of the sexually diseased body, which acts like a *pharmakon* – both poison and antidote – for the purging of chaos and violence infecting the community.<sup>38</sup>

In *l'Anti-Justine*, Rétif reprises and amplifies this use of the syphilitic body. When the sex worker is portrayed as poisonous, she is not granted the agency to save herself and her community through her actions, instead purging evil only when she is violently destroyed and dehumanised. Cannibalism is thus demonstrative of Rétif's amplified view, set out in *Le Pornographe*, that sex workers are potentially poisonous but, like the pornographic text, are a necessary evil.<sup>39</sup> Benefit can only be derived from the sex worker when she is stripped completely of agency, reduced to mere body without mind or thought. When Conillette is eaten, she loses every part of her human power. Yet the connection that Fourny highlights between the sick and the sacred is also amplified through this cannibalistic episode which, through its images of sacrifice and the purging of society through the consumption of redemptive flesh with textual symbolism, evokes a perverse vision of communion.<sup>40</sup> Rétif, the patriarch of the piece, does not sacrifice his own virtuous child, however, but the beautiful, diseased whore, in a move that crystallises the contradictions of patriarchal desire and the confused status of the simultaneously indispensable and disposable sex worker in Revolutionary France.

The 'poison' that is Conillette does not just lead to Foutamort's death. It denies him further recourse to words or speech, symbolically destroying not only Sade the individual, but Sadean power over language and thus his wider oeuvre. While in the literary sense it is Rétif who is cannibalising Sade's subject matter in this episode, when Sade cannibalistically consumes Rétif's pornography he is stripped of the power ever to create again. After realising that Conquette must have been swapped with a syphilitic woman, the dying Foutamort summons her husband, Vitnègre, to the monastery infirmary, threatening to expose his fraud either verbally or in writing, and have him condemned to death. These threats rapidly reveal themselves to be empty, however. Having consumed the most poisonous parts of Conillette's body, Foutamort's disease

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 230.

<sup>39</sup> See *Le Pornographe*, p. 65.

<sup>40</sup> Kilgour also highlights the similarities between the act of reading and ingestion (p. 9), and reading and communion (p. 16), informed by J. Hillis Miller's notion of the 'The Critic as Host', in *Critical Inquiry*, 3.3 (1977), pp. 439–447.

advances at an incredible rate. Within moments of Vitnègre's arrival, his tongue begins to swell up, becoming 'grosse comme celle d'un bœuf' (p. 371), robbing him of the power of speech and rendering him little more than a grotesque, mute beast. He is also robbed of the power of the written word. Before he can confront Vitnègre, Foutamort has already been turned blind by his sickness, thus preventing him from skillfully putting pen to paper and revealing his secret (pp. 370–371). All that Foutamort does manage to scrawl during his illness is burned, unread, immediately following his death. This does more than ensure that the incestuous utopia of the rest of the novel can remain untroubled. By consuming the material manifestation of corrupting pornography, perverse sexual appetites and excess, the imagined Foutamort/Sade is silenced once and for all, robbed of the power to create damaging texts, and with his written legacy entirely erased.

Although the symbolic importance of Conillette and her consumed flesh is clear, this episode nonetheless highlights two ambiguities in Rétif's vision of literary cannibalism: the potential for collateral damage when releasing pornographic material into the world and his own half-disguised cannibalistic desires. Beginning with collateral damage, the death of Foutamort's brethren following their human feast highlights the complexities and dangers of disseminating pornographic material. Foutamort is a cook as well as a cannibal, who uses Conillette's flesh to create a 'bon régal' for monks who also end up in the monastery infirmary. Notwithstanding the trope of anticlericalism in late eighteenth-century salacious writing, this episode also shows up a potential danger in perverting the Sadean creative process. If the pornographic text is toxic, and disseminated amongst a wide audience, its potential to cause damage is extensive. Thus, if Foutamort's act of cooking is understood as a creative process akin to Rétif's writing, with the same assemblage of raw materials to create a finished piece that is 'savoureux', as well as an act of cannibalism, the creation of cruel pornographic material leaves a trail of visible destruction in its wake. Since we are not told whether Foutamort's brethren know what they have eaten, their suffering only mentioned in passing, we do not know whether they are just as guilty of cruelty as their brother and warrant their punishment or are simply victims of Foutamort's own perversions. However, whether conscious or unconscious, the consumption of the poisoned sex worker purifies a broader readership, by purging corrupted figures associated with Foutamort/Sade and who have consumed Sadean material.

More troubling, however, is the impossibility of a clear binary between Rétif/Cupidonnet and Sade/Foutamort, evidenced by Rétif's self-confessed cannibal impulses after reading Sade's text. In his avowal of shame and guilt at his arousal when reading *Justine*, Rétif tells us that: 'Je voulus jouir, et ce fut avec fureur: je mordis les seins de ma monture' (p. 285). This same desire to bite his partner is manifested by Foutamort in almost exactly the same terms: 'Le premier acte du père Foutamort (comme Vitnègre le nomma), ce fut de mordre le bout des tétons de sa monture [...] il lui arracha le bout des seins avec ses dents' (p. 342). Foutamort also displays a recognisably Rétivian love for feet and shoes, slicing Conillette at the ankles and stuffing her feet into his pockets (p. 343). Foutamort's cannibalistic impulse must therefore be recognised as more than a Sadean quality, blurring any clear opposition between Sade's and Rétif's desires. By making Conillette the object of Foutamort's hunger, Rétif disposes of the corrupt sex worker, a figure he supposedly despises, while nonetheless giving free rein to his own violent and cannibalistic desires for her, conveniently also using Foutamort/Sade as a proxy for his own pleasure in the process.

### ***Conclusion***

With *l'Anti-Justine*, Rétif offers the most extreme and ambivalent vision of the sex worker and her relationship to the world of ingestion. At once repulsive and appetising, destructive and curative, disposable and indispensable, Conillette is the apotheosis of the sex worker as an edible good. She becomes the consumable on which Rétif's authorial and moral projects are dependent and yet who must be destroyed to be of benefit. She is not a complex character with agency and motivation, but is instead reduced to pure flesh or pure text. She is stripped of her individuality, becoming the vehicle for enacting authorial fantasy, the incarnation of poison and contagion, a sacrificial victim, and a butchered carcass ready for male consumption. By being consumed, Conillette demonstrates and immediately loses her sexual allure and her power to seduce and poison the society in which she lives. Removed from her seat at the table following the Revolution, the fictional sex worker is now served upon it. As we have seen in this thesis, mid-eighteenth-century authors created sex worker heroines, and in so doing concerned themselves with addressing and undermining the power a public woman might wield through the meal. At the dawn of the nineteenth century, more than twenty years after his vision of sex workers whose power and corruption must be regulated via the

*Parthénion*'s dining table, Rétif de la Bretonne offers his readership a woman seemingly so stripped of power and social capital that she is no longer a consumer. She emerges only to be slaughtered and eaten herself, as a tool to work through authorial rivalries and fantasies. This use and abuse of Conillette's body for symbolic, literary ends, designed by and for men aware of the libertine literary landscape, emblematises the twentieth-century critical approaches to food and sex work in libertine literature discussed throughout this thesis, which have consistently privileged a focus on male pleasure and gratification over the personhood and wellbeing of the sex workers depicted at the table.

## CONCLUSION

It is now 2017, and we have yet to reach any resolution on how we should approach the issues of nutrition and sex work. Our preoccupation with food and drink is seemingly limitless. Fitness magazines, wellness blogs, and tabloid newspapers churn out thousands of words of dietary advice every week. Nutritional science is a booming field of study in universities and research centres worldwide. Countless cookery programmes fill our television screens, and recipe blogs and ‘food porn’ Instagrams proliferate constantly. Food choice and body shape are still used to judge, alienate, and ‘other’ different genders, classes, and cultural groups. Men and women of all ages destroy themselves trying to conform to unattainable body goals, and much of the Western world is grappling with crises of malnutrition, disordered eating, and obesity on an individual and national scale. Sex work remains similarly divisive and confusing, with government bodies, police forces, sex workers’ advocacy groups, feminist activists, and the general public engaged in regular debates over whether sex work should be legalized, decriminalized, or fought as a criminal activity and an affront to moral values. The sex trade continues to diversify and expand, with the industry no longer limited to the direct sale of sexual services, but also encompassing (amongst other things) phone and cam sex, paid chatrooms, stripping, and pornography. Many men and women are involved in the sex trade through choice. Many are forced into sex work through trafficking, abusive relationships, and poverty. Whatever their reasons for engaging in sex work, sex workers remain at the fringes of society, often objects, rather than subjects, in the debates surrounding their legal and professional status and protection. In short, despite our advances in medical science and sexual revolutions, European society is still negotiating the same fundamental questions as those negotiated by the eighteenth-century writers examined in this thesis. How should sex work be managed? What should we be eating and drinking? What are the acceptable limits of female professional, economic, and sexual self-possession? And how should we regulate the satisfaction of alimentary and sexual appetites on an individual or national scale? The regularity with which nutrition and sex work appear in today’s media suggest that we are just as preoccupied with these questions as the authors of the texts discussed in this thesis, and perhaps no closer to resolving them.

But might we be closer to understanding how and why these issues were thought about in the eighteenth century, and therefore closer to understanding the contexts from which our own preoccupations have developed? This thesis set out to explore how the connections between food and sex work were represented in a selection of eighteenth-century texts, with a particular focus on marginal and libertine writing, asking what the symbolic implications of ingestion were for the individual – whether a sex worker or a client – and for other members of society. It asked how our understanding of sex work and eighteenth-century ideas about sex work could be deepened by examining how food and drink were deployed and described in these texts. Focusing on food and drink as material goods tied to social and biological processes and imbued with cultural and symbolic meanings, this thesis sought to establish how food and drink were used to produce and reproduce ideas about sex workers in the eighteenth-century cultural imaginary. Were food and drink used simply to add flavour to texts depicting sex workers, enhancing the reader’s sensual pleasure and providing a stepping-stone to the more important matter of the sexual act, or were they indicative, deliberately or otherwise, of an unease about sex work, ingestion, and their potential effects upon gender, power, and bodies?

Following limited existing work on ingestion in sex work narratives (notably by Mathilde Cortey) which highlighted the significance of food and drink in creating a text’s atmosphere of pleasure and *volupté*, as well as their potential for grotesquery and potential capacity to allow sex workers to exercise dangerous power over their clients, this thesis interrogated the role of ingestion more closely, revealing a newly detailed and nuanced picture of ingestion’s role in written representations of the sex trade. Since, as Ann Lewis has highlighted, only limited attention has been paid to sex work in eighteenth-century French writing, despite the frequency with which sex workers appear in Enlightenment texts, this thesis also sought to help redress this balance, placing sex work at the heart of its investigation and contributing to this neglected field of knowledge. Through exploring a range of texts, this thesis has demonstrated the importance of ingestion to narratives of sex work and its potential to highlight several recurring and significant themes: fears of female power and autonomy, the vulnerability inherent to the act of consumption, and food’s capacity to symbolise male fears and fantasies about the sexual economy. By interrogating ingestion’s role in depth, however, it also demonstrated that food and drink consistently carry highly specific and nuanced

meanings, depending upon the manner and context in which they are used. In comparing *Margot la ravaudeuse* and *Vénus en rut*, for example, it became clear that the image of a sex worker feeding her male sexual partners could demonstrate either her power to control others, in Margot's case, or her deference to and dependency upon male bodies, demonstrated by Rosine. Exploring the role of the sex worker and of alimentary imagery in *L'Anti-Justine* showed how the symbolic implications of cannibalism could offer a rationale for a seemingly aberrant episode of sexual violence.

It thus becomes clear that broad claims concerning 'gastronomies libertines' (à la Delon) or brief incursions into the role of consumption in sex work narratives (as offered by Mathilde Cortey) are, if a valuable starting point, fundamentally insufficient. Considering the breadth of potential meanings that food and drink can hold, as was briefly highlighted in the introduction of this thesis, an in-depth study of literary ingestion and ingesta shows that, even if broad themes can be teased out, there is much to be gained from examining the particularities of eating and drinking in any narrative. As is the case with eighteenth-century sex work, this is particularly fruitful in narratives where food and drink seem to offer an uncomplicated, mimetic backdrop against which a text's events can be played out. Only an in-depth, multidisciplinary approach to any moment of ingestion can tease out all of its potential meanings. This thesis cannot claim to have unpacked all of the potential meanings in the alimentary scenes analysed. It can, however, claim to have demonstrated that the brief and sweeping analyses of ingestion in libertine and sex work-focused texts to date have tended to be insufficient.

In so doing, this thesis has contributed to the fields of eighteenth-century literary food studies, libertine writing, and studies of sex work in literature. By taking a narrow approach, focused on close readings of often fleeting moments or images, it has demonstrated the polyvalence and significance of ingestion in sex work narratives. Significantly, this thesis has not attempted to give an overview of sex work in literature more broadly. It has instead used food as a lens through which to examine this understudied field of eighteenth-century writing. It might be argued that in focusing on small, specific details such as food before a comprehensive overview of a subject has been written, this thesis has perhaps put the cart before the horse. Yet this viewpoint would depend upon the (commonly held) belief that ingestion is no more than decoration and detail, subordinate to bigger, more inherently significant themes. While much future

work remains to be undertaken on sex work in literature, this thesis has nonetheless demonstrated that although alimentary images are often brief, they are filled with meaning, worthy of study, and can illuminate the wider themes of a text as a whole. This thesis might therefore help to pave the way for future studies on food in libertine and pornographic literature more broadly.

This thesis has also sought to explore a wide variety of text types from across the eighteenth century. In so doing, it has illuminated the commonalities and differences in how ingestion is represented and understood across decades and genres. However, sex workers appear in more forms of text than are explored in this thesis. Future work might therefore look to interrogate the meal's role in writings beyond those studied here to consider how the alimentary functions in abolitionist texts, sentimental novels, political and satirical pamphlets and tracts also depicting sex workers, and representations of sex work in visual art. It is also important to consider that the texts featured in this thesis have primarily been explored with a specific focus on food and sex work as their core themes, rather than refracting this analysis through a study of the political context in which they were written. This thesis has privileged the meal as a way to explore socio-political issues where appropriate, instead of foregrounding those socio-political issues in order to interrogate the meal as just one aspect of the text. This is, in part, down to the fantastical, ahistorical or retrospective nature of some of these texts and to the thesis's focus on issues of bodies, gender, and power in broader, less politically specific senses. This thesis has acknowledged that politics is an important consideration without framing it as the most important consideration. Yet in light of the political upheaval of the eighteenth century, future work might take a closer look at mid-century or revolutionary eating to consider the alimentary field with a greater reference to the world beyond the dining table.

Finally, it is important to recognise that the texts discussed in this thesis were chosen, in part, since they included significant literal or symbolic ingestion. However, while this might appear to create, rather than demonstrate, a literary context in which food and drink play a significant role, the meal's symbolic and material importance in the sex worker's (and therefore the madam's and the client's) life is indisputable in the historical record, as demonstrated in existing scholarship and in the brothel archives explored in Chapter One. The confines of this thesis have not allowed for every moment of ingestion

in a sex work-related text to be discussed. However, scholars pursuing this subject in future would have little difficulty finding further material. When sex work is depicted, ingestion, however fleeting, is likely to make an appearance. If ingestion has been (and remains) tied to sex work for centuries and in different cultures, this topic may well be ripe for investigation in any number of literatures from classical texts to contemporary world literature to reveal the differences and similarities in their depictions of consumable womanhood, meals as money and power, and gender and class relations at the table.

Beyond its contribution to the field of eighteenth-century studies, this thesis has been tacitly positioned within contemporary discourses on food, womanhood, sex, and sex work. Although it was not written with a view to applying contemporary feminism to eighteenth-century texts, as highlighted in the introduction, this thesis was not without a twenty-first century feminist author. In the process of writing, I have been forced to confront my own personal relationship to food, my political opinions on sex work, and my awareness of my position in a world that constantly frames, approves or condemns women through discourses of food, sex, and the body. Confronting the intersections between ingestion, oppression, and the potential for female power to be won and lost at the table could not help but affect me on a personal level. As much as this thesis is a product of my research, I am a product of this thesis: a female consumer who has, by interrogating food's role in eighteenth-century sex work, become an increasingly informed and critical consumer of food, literature, and the way in which women are treated in resolutely heteropatriarchal societies and their media and politics. As a result, my own relationship to ingestion has changed. Rather than allowing my own nutrition to be dictated by societally imposed norms of acceptable feminine consumption and appearances and the commodification and consumption of female bodies, I have been able to reclaim the kitchen and the table as sites of my own self-determination. Whatever its measurable contribution to future scholarship may be, this thesis has contributed in no small way to my own wellbeing. If it can help one other reader to reassert her control over what and how she consumes, these three years of research will have been worthwhile.

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