

Tell Your Story to No One: 'Re-Servicing' Virtue in the Magdalen House

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Abstract

The article probes the amphibious character of the 'slippery' servant-maid who methodically migrates between servitude and prostitution. It focuses in particular on the revision of the servant-maid/prostitute in the 1759 novel *The Histories of Some of the Penitents in the Magdalen House*, published concomitantly with the opening of the Magdalen Hospital for Penitent Prostitutes as an aid in its object of re-training fallen women for domestic service. The literary re-imagining of *Histories* is analysed here through its engagement with the most significant *topoi* in master-servant relations recurring in both anti-servant literature and domestic conduct manuals as well as within the larger context of the so-called *Pamela* controversy.

Keywords: Eighteenth Century, Magdalen Charity, 'Pamela' Controversy, Prostitution, Service

Now, is it but reasonable to suppose, that such women will be found faithful and excellent servants, whose woeful experience hath taught them the sad consequences of deviation from virtue; whose minds have been diligently cultivated with the best instructions, and whose industrious way of life in, and attendance upon, the house, must necessarily qualify them for all menial offices. Nor have we any doubt but the virtuous and humane, nay, any such who perhaps can assist this charity in no other way, will at least endeavor to assist it by employing the women in their services; of whom at least they may be assured to have a faithful character, and whose former way of life may certainly, by proper measures, be preserved an inviolable secret.

William Dodd, *An Account of the Rise, Progress, and Present State of the Magdalen Hospital, for the Reception Penitent Prostitutes*, 1769

1. *Introduction*

It is safe to say that one of Daniel Defoe's pet peeves was the servant class, against which he orchestrated a long catalogue of complaints over a number of



different works either directly or indirectly addressing the ‘servant problem’.¹ Defoe’s concerns for the ‘Insufferable Liberty’ and ‘Universal Degeneracy’ of servants intensively and intriguingly narrow their target onto the character of the ‘slippery’ servant-maid, accused of methodically migrating between service and prostitution:

Many of them rove from place to place, from bawdy-house to service, and from service to bawdy-house again, ever unsettled and never easy, nothing being more common than to find these creatures one week in a good family and the next in a brothel: This amphibious existence makes them fit for neither. (1725, 7)

The focus of this essay is the relationship between servitude and prostitution as meticulously examined in the anonymous 1759 novel *The Histories of Some of the Penitents in the Magdalen House. Histories* (Batchelor and Hiatt 2007) was published concomitantly with, and indeed as a sort of ‘public relations vehicle’ for, the opening of the Magdalen House for Penitent Prostitutes in Goodman’s Fields (Grossman 2000, 247). The founding of this charitable institution was preceded by an impassioned debate aimed at identifying the social categories fuelling prostitution but more centrally concerned with the possibility of re-training prostitutes for legitimate trades, the most important of which, as my epigraph shows, was domestic service.²

In each ward of the Magdalen hung a plaque commanding the penitents to ‘Tell Your Story to No One’ (Compston 1917, 199). On entering the charity the penitents had to give a *single* detailed account of themselves, and, following this confession-like ritual marking their desire for purification and transition, they were re-named. The words on the plaque were aimed at protecting the women from their past, but also hinted at the seductive power of storytelling. In its bid to aid the Magdalen’s re-servicing of its *real* inmates into pardonable and potentially re-employable members of society, *Histories* had to do precisely the opposite and create imaginary connections with its protagonists through storytelling. The novel is composed of four first-person accounts; three are by women who have worked as prostitutes either in a brothel or walking the streets, while the anonymous Madgalen Two is a kept mistress. Gathered together after their daily labour, the women in turn tell the stories of their fall from virtue and the steps which led them to voluntarily enter the Magdalen House. Interestingly, as if to bring these characters into sharper focus, the only two women explicitly named, Emily and Fanny, are those who have moved from service to prostitution

¹ The beginnings of what, in the nineteenth century, came to be called ‘the servant problem’ are clearly detectable in commentators’ grievances from the preceding century; see Straub 2009, chapter 1.

² The charity published yearly lists citing its successes and failures so that subscribers could keep track of its progress (Dodd 1776, 325-326).

or vice versa. Since Jennie Batchelor and Megan Hiatt's important 2007 edition, *Histories* has received growing critical attention, but has so far not been read, as it is here, as a surprisingly articulated response to the social, economic, and ultimately narrative issue of de-coupling the servant from the whore.

2. *Prostitution and Service: Histories and the 'Overwriting' of the Pamela Controversy*

The ubiquitous visibility of female servants catering to England's expanding middle classes, and the seasonal surpluses of unskilled female labourers tempted by easy transition into prostitution, were often classed, by tormented eighteenth-century observers, as categories reciprocally feeding on one another (see Kent 1989, 111-128, and Lewis and Ellis 2012, 1). The servant-maid turned prostitute served to throw into relief anxieties about growing inurbation, changing marriage patterns, conspicuous consumption and the risks these posed to social order as well as to the proper separation of the public and private spheres. As the author of *Pretty Doings in a Protestant Nation* explains:

The Town being overstock'd with Harlots, is entirely owing [*sic*] to those Numbers of Woman-Servants, incessantly pouring into it from all Corners of the Universe, and those Debaucheries practis'd upon 'em in almost all Families that entertain them ... so that a poor Wench who serves for four or five Pounds a Year Wages, shall be liable to go through as much Drudgery, as a Livery-Horse, that's let out to a City Prentice for a Sunday's Airing. ('Father Poussin' 1734, 4-5)³

What is highlighted here is not simply the vast numbers but the systematic objectification of these women; in a similar vein, Richard Steele's *Spectator* had placed on the same perceptual plane the 'provisions' the narrator has come to pick up from the country and a young girl he witnesses being inveigled into prostitution through the promise of service: the girl, writes Steele, 'had come on the same wagon as my things' (No. 266, 4 January 1712). These writers offer a version of the two most popular kernel narratives for the servant-maid/prostitute: she is either seduced and lured into prostitution because it offers relief from the 'drudgery' of service, or she doesn't even make it into service and is tricked into a brothel by one of the many bawds patrolling the coaching inns or the register offices.

My argument on the 're-servicing' of penitent prostitutes within the Magdalen House will be built up by intertwining several strands of material. I shall try to re-trace the contours of the particular anxiety the figure of the servant-maid/prostitute elicited, showing how it concentrated especially around a number of recurrent concerns which became commonplaces in pamphlets, tracts

³ This work, which the title page says 'was written originally in French by Father Poussin', has been attributed to Bernard Mandeville.

and in both anti-servant literature and advice manuals. These concerns take the form of *topoi*, or expand into kernel narratives, which may in turn become more closely analysed sequences of events. I will be looking at the *topoi* of clothes, conspicuous consumption, thrift vs. idleness, productive and unproductive labour; I will examine the image-clusters which develop around the idea of the house, the space where the work of both servant and prostitute is carried out, with the related issues of 'giving notice' and intra-mural relationships between masters and servants; also, I shall concentrate on the way *Histories* transforms the inevitable 'progress' of the harlot into spiritual development, thereby confronting the servant-related issues of love across the social divide, pregnancy and education.

By dialoguing indirectly with the *topoi* and kernel narratives of the 'servant problem', *Histories* provided fictional bolstering for the charity's reformative scheme. Its reassessment of the character of the 'slippery servant-maid', however, could not be complete without tackling some of the issues related to its most renowned literary representative, Samuel Richardson's *Pamela*. The fascination with and fetishisation of this character found its most eloquent expression in what critics have dubbed the 'Pamela controversy' (Keymer and Sabor 2005, 2). The fevered textual responses (five in 1742 alone) to Richardson's best-selling novel demonstrate its status as a 'frame breaking work', and the bitterness of the controversy it generated was certainly prompted by the novelty of 'the new social paradigm it had presented' (Keymer and Sabor 2005, 87). However, Richardson's insistence on Pamela's exemplarity and uniqueness (all servant-maids should behave like Pamela but not all should expect to marry their master) bucked the established narrative of the servant-maid prostitute to the extent that all anti-*Pamela* narratives force the Pamela figure firmly back into whoredom, singling out her virtue as a 'sham', irredeemably corrupted *before* and *beyond* the textual action. The servant-maid 'acts' innocent, just like the prostitute; she 'performs' submissiveness and love, her real object being gain and social status. The actual instruction *Pamela* conveys, as Fielding's Parson Tickle text explains in *Shamela*, is that servants should 'look out for their masters as sharp as they can'. Harnessing traditional grievances against the servant-maid, he adds that the consequences of this will be 'the neglect of their business' and 'the using all manner of means to come at ornaments of their persons' (Ingrassia 2004, 239-240). As if in response to these accusations Richardson demonstrated his continuing interest in the servant-maid prostitute figure not only by penning the *Preface* to *Histories* himself,⁴ but by becoming one of the charity's governors in 1760.

⁴ While the identity of the author remains uncertain (Barbara Montagu, Sarah Fielding and Sarah Scott have all been discussed), she most probably belonged to the bluestocking coterie of Richardson readers and 'fans' residing in Bath.

The *Pamela* controversy highlighted one further obstacle to disentangling the love of money from that of morality: servant-related discourse sold well. As Solomon Lowe shrewdly pointed out to Richardson himself, his novel had been of great 'service to your very Bretheren' (Keymer and Sabor 2005, 1); the most venal body, in other words, may have been that of the text itself. Undoubtedly, many were keen to profit from the interest in and commercial value of all things *Pamela*. Eliza Haywood, for example, no stranger to bestsellerdom, wrote both *The Anti-Pamela; Or Feign'd Innocence Detected* (1741; Ingrassia 2004), and its antidote, as it were, the conduct book *A Present for a Servant-Maid* (1743), which went through seven editions in six years. Because her dramatic works and her fiction contain no particularly cruel indictment of servant-maids behaving badly, one might question the sincerity of Haywood's motives in advising the servant class, and whether the author herself may not be, Pamela-like, performing: Haywood's subtitle itself, *a Sure Means of gaining Love & Esteem*, hits an uncomfortably ambiguous note.

Swift, in his *Directions to Servants* (1731), and Fielding, in *Shamela* (1741; Ingrassia 2004), had also engaged with the conduct manual tradition and with aspects of the 'servant problem' many detected in *Pamela*, but while they had flattened incongruities into a satirical set of rules, *Histories* more compellingly incorporates the casuistical tradition re-kindled by Richardson as well as his tendency to 'entangle and perplex' (Keymer 1992, 140). Defoe's 'amphibious' maid is here shaded into a more nuanced, individualized, portrait: 'tho' the profession of a prostitute is the most despicable and hateful that the imagination can form; yet the individuals are frequently worthy objects of compassion'.⁵ In this sense *Histories* is a hitherto unnoticed voice in the *Pamela* controversy. It takes a character readers would have been attuned to and – to borrow William Warner's phrase – 'overwrites' the fictions she evoked through a pattern of alternative critical paradigms, re-deploying them 'towards higher cultural purposes' (1998, 203, 193). Because the main profession for which the Magdalen charity was hoping to prepare its inmates was domestic service, in its formal organization the House attempted to counter some of the most common accusations levelled against the servant-maid-turned-whore. Its success depended on this over-writing of established categories, on this re-making of the prostitute into a law-abiding labourer and of the servant-maid into a true servant (following Colossians 3:23) to the Lord rather than to men. In my analysis of the *topoi* related to the 'servant-problem' I shall try to show how fiction and practice worked at sometimes similar, sometimes different, paces to this end.

⁵ Batchelor and Hiatt 2007, 3; all subsequent references (indicated parenthetically) will be to this edition.

3. *Clothes*

The first *topos* I shall consider lies at the core of the ‘servant problem’. The custom of handing down clothes to female domestics excited, commentators believed, a dangerous vanity and pride which blurred class-lines: the well-dressed servant-maid ‘remained the whipping girl for vague social ills throughout the century’ (Buck 1979, 109). A variety of texts, from *Some Considerations Upon Streetwalkers* (1726) to *Sermons to Young Women* (1765), suggested reprising the Greek and Jewish habit of visually marking prostitutes through dress; in *Every Body’s Business* Defoe makes an impassioned appeal to extend this distinction to ‘Women-Servants’, while in *The Great Law of Subordination Consider’d* he advocates a ‘Badge of ... Servitude’ (1725, 18; 1724, 291). According to this master narrative, clothes, by descending the social ladder, allowed servants to climb it. The change, however, was merely an exterior one, a surface-mutation which posed a variety of risks. The *Great Law* mentions that of laxity on duty – ‘I have been at Places where the Maid has been so dizzied with these idle Compliments ... that she has not regarded her Mistress in the least’ (21); for another costly reciprocal emulation – ‘by their Extravagance in Dress, they put our Wives and Daughters on yet greater Excesses’ (15); and finally prostitution: ‘This makes the Girl take the first Offer to be made a Whore, and there is a good Servant spoil’d’ (16). As Chloe Wigston Smith has argued (2013, 111-144), Defoe’s pamphleteering on this subject was linked to the 1719-1721 ‘calico crisis’, which saw wool manufactures and weavers engage writers to campaign against competition from calicos and silks imported by the East India Company. This writing consolidated the stereotypes of earlier discourse against luxury. Whores and wool, apparently, did not go hand in hand, not only in terms of consumption, but also of production, and Defoe places alliterative blame on those female servants who ‘love sporting more than spinning’ (1728, 42). The fashion-conscious servant-maid thus became a dangerous consumer and shape-shifter.

Pamela’s agonizing over which of her different bundles of clothes she may take away from Mr B’s house (Letter XXIV) references this debate, attempting to dispel any implication that the heroine is prostituting herself: to keep B’s gift of clothes would reify her, making her buyable, and therefore sellable. By having her set aside clothes that do not strictly ‘belong’ to her, Richardson overwrites the short-circuiting of literary associations with whore narratives in which the prostitute is arrested for leaving the brothel with clothes that are not her property. The episode clearly states the separation between Pamela’s past and present status. However, the simple garb she chooses over the rich silks of her past, though plain and neat and ‘working class’ in shape, reveals her discernment and taste, leaving the door open to charges of vanity. The clothes *topos* focuses insistently (and ambiguously) on the issue of surface vs. depth, appearance vs. reality, which is the central theme of anti-*Pamela*

and *Pamela*-related writing. Syrena Tricksey, Eliza Haywood's fictional servant-maid whore, for example, is said to 'surpass the most experienced actresses on stage' in feigning modesty, and while in her advice manual, *A Present for a Servant Maid*, Haywood advises her readers to 'take care that all your Looks and Gestures correspond with what you say', her wording allows for the possibility of signifiers being appropriated (Ingrassia 2004, 53; Haywood 1743, 44). The problem of Pamela's duplicity, and consequently of the veracity of her virtue remained viscously attached to her garments; fabric and fabrication were perceived as intimately connected.

Histories attempted to break this mould and dispel such accusations. The first penitent, Emily, struggles with vanity, though it is a vanity that comes from being loved by a man such as she imagines her master's son, Mr Markland, to be, rather than from the rich clothes he gives her (25). That Emily's modesty is a pretence is, for example, taken for granted by her mistress: 'I never in my life knew a very demure girl come to any good' (17). Later, she is forced to learn the hard way about 'acting innocent' when, tricked into a whore-house she makes an impassioned plea to her first client to be spared, only to find that he thinks he is being treated to some brothel theatricals aimed at exciting his lust (39). Sartorial modesty also disconcertingly works *against* Emily; attempting to see if, instead of prostituting herself, she should 'have any better success as a higher degree of beggar', she dresses herself neatly, but immediately attracts an offer from a gentleman which she in the end accepts: 'I often thought the clean simplicity of my dress, (for I had no ornaments) pleased more than the tawdry decorations of women who generally follow that course; for while a man courts our vice, his reason hates our impudence' (48).

Another traditional concern in this debate, that it is the surface of dress which causes the prostitution of the body, moving, from outside to inside, the seduction of silks anticipating the seduction of men, is problematized by *Histories*. The clergyman Thomas Seaton had pointed out that whenever the servant-maid 'takes a Pride in Being viewed with Admiration, and bewitching the Hearts of the Unwary, she her self lays the first Stumbling Block in their Way' (1720, 145). However, when the third Magdalen, Fanny, who interestingly comes from an adoptive family of virtuous spinners, is tricked out in the brothel with expensive clothes and fashionable fripperies, she retains her rural simplicity (the 'desire to be genteel was not so strong in me', 103); though she dresses the part she does not *act* the prostitute. On the other hand, when she is made to pretend that she is a sexually inexperienced maid and put to service in the Lafew family, she truly does become a virtuous servant.

Defoe had argued that if the servant-maid's dress 'were ... suitable to her Condition, it would teach her Humility, and put her in the mind of her Duty' (1725, 16). In its fusion of experiment and experience (see Van Sant 1993, 16-44), the Magdalen Charity seemed to adopt this strategy, expecting its inmates to discard their prostitute's garb and dressing them in a 'uniform

of light grey, of a durable but soft and agreeable manufacture, and in all their dress be as plain and neat as possible' (Hanway 1758a, 22). Clothes were marshalled as a powerful tool for re-working the women from the outside inwards: 're-clothing the prostitute's body was a symbolic process, intended to precipitate and subsequently enact the reformation of the Magdalen character' (Batchelor 2005, 140). Thus, re-dressing the women amounted, literally, to re-dressing the vexed matter of Pamela's clothes and the dangers they had not succeeded in covering.

3.1 *Conspicuous Consumption, Thrift vs. Idleness and the Spiritual Cleansing of Labour*

The overwriting of the servant-maid prostitute as Magdalen hinged on her rehabilitation in terms of conspicuous consumption, an issue intimately connected with the debate on servants' clothing, with the *topos* of thrift vs. idleness and with the larger question of productive and unproductive labour. Haywood, punning perhaps on the word 'service', urges her readers to avoid what 'drain[s] your purse as well as waste[s] your time ... all [those] things that are invented merely for the gratification of luxury, and are of no other service than temporary delight' (1743, 40). Reformer and magistrate Saunders Welch, who participated in the public debate leading to the establishment of the Magdalen, took his cue from Defoe, who had fustigated the servant-maid for 'Throw[ing] all her Income upon her back' (1725, 16), and traced a straightforward transition from her acceptance of the gift of clothes to her insistence 'on high wages'. This, Welch argued, 'induces them in difficulties ... for the whole of their wages [are] generally spent in clothes', and if 'they are thrown out of place', they have no other resource but 'to pawn or sell their clothes, and then prostitute their persons' (1758, 5-6). The servant-maid-turned-prostitute scared commentators because of the void she created in the economy. Domestic servants, as Adam Smith would argue later in the century, actually produced nothing but the leisure of their superiors; their work 'consists in services which perish generally in the very instance of their performance' (1976, II, 675). Prostitutes went one step further by commodifying themselves and 'performing' an unproductive labour for personal material gain. This unleashed in many writers not so much a fear of unrestrained female desire as a terror of women trading in something fluctuating and intangible, turning youth and beauty into money without real toil (Rosenthal 2006).

The received narrative of the servant-maid/prostitute had ossified through 'the 1690s, 1710s and 1720s [when] it was commonly thought that London was experiencing a crime-wave'; and the upper-classes grew increasingly fearful of London servants, in particular of 'female servants ... especially when unemployed' (Meldrum 2000, 63-64). Gradually, however, a shift had taken place in the perception of 'the evils of prostitution' so that the phrase was now understood as referring not to the damage caused to society

and family but to the woman herself. Following the dictates of the new sympathetic philanthropy (see Nash 1984, 617-628, and Andrew 2014, 98-127), reformers began to foreground the grim realities which underpinned female self-trade, and sentimental discourse transformed the 'consuming whore' into 'childlike victim' (McKeon 2005, 194). The main focus of this shift was work; unless a new character was carved out for the unproductive prostitute, hers would be literally 'labours lost' to the nation;⁶ as one 'Mr. Marchant' pointed out, it would be 'a Crime of the deepest Dye, to deprive the Country of the Benefit of their Labours' (1758, 12). Within this context, the figure of Defoe's amphibious servant-maid, 'fit for neither' service nor the Mandevillian 'public service' of whoredom, had to be assessed afresh.

Histories presents its prostitutes not as spendthrift servants but as good economists and productive labourers. Emily explains that she 'was desirous of putting [her] lover to as little expense as possible, therefore took but one servant' (25). The regularity of her *ménage* allows her to save 100 pounds, so when Mr Markland abandons her she sells some clothes unsuited to her new way of life and turns the parlour into a haberdasher's shop (31). Defoe had accused out-of-work maids of turning whores because they were incapable of 'living too long on their own hands' (1728, 24), but Emily does tolerably well in her business until the bailiffs arrive. At this point not only does her domestic bliss turn out to be a sham, it is also a credit bubble built on a lie: her lover had paid for nothing.

Markland's upper-class *sprezzatura* is contrasted with the decent behaviour of the ex-prostitute Fanny, who, having decided to leave keeping and enter the Magdalen, carefully defrays the expenses of her lodgings and pays off her servants (127). Thrift and frugality are positive markers of femininity and decorum in contrast with conspicuous consumption, for they signal the potential for reform in the servant-maid/prostitute, but it is rejection of idleness which definitively marks her out as a successful inmate. Pamela is never actually *seen* working, a fact which preserves her potential status as wife with its oxymoronic yoke of enforced leisure and unpaid labour. *Histories*, eschewing the uniqueness of Richardson's exemplar, goes about things differently. Fanny describes herself as 'no enemy to employment', and enters the Magdalen charity without there being any real need for her to do so, since her benefactress, Mrs Lafew, had offered to settle her in a state of ease. She worries, however, that she may be thought to have been swayed more by the temptation of ease than by a sense of her crime and, challenging common notions about prostitutes' unwillingness to work, she embraces moral re-training, not least because it allows her to hedge her expenses (the Magdalens were paid for their manual labour) before re-entering the marketplace:

⁶ I am referring to the title of Steedman 2009.

What more can be wanting to my felicity! My temporal concerns are all supplied in the most perfect manner; and I have every means for providing for my future welfare ... I hope I am not so bad a worker, but that I shall rather be a benefit than an expense to the society. (128)

The Magdalen placed great emphasis on its campaign against idleness – traditionally felt to be the main attraction of whoring – but one of the central questions asked by those who wished to re-service the prostitute was exactly what *type* of employment might be best suited to encouraging the silent workings of inner spiritual reform (see Batchelor 2004, 1-20). Just as the uniform was to work from the surface inwards, so the ‘habit’ of wage labour would, in the Charity’s plan, intimately transform strollers into strivers. John Fielding’s proposal in his 1758 *Plan for a Preservatory and Reformatory, for the Benefit of Deserted Girls, and Penitent Prostitutes* to subject penitents to a relentless regime of industry, sewing, washing and ironing met, however, with ridicule in a pamphlet addressed to the magistrate by a ‘Reformed Rake’. The writer, who subscribes to the ‘slippery-maid’ school of thought, mocks Fielding for having

so little studied to recommend your Project to those to whom it is meant for, that the very Preamble is enough to deter every Girl that has flown from Labour, and rather embraced Prostitution, Debauchery and Disease, from indenturing herself for Seven Years to the greatest of Drudgeries – the Wash Tub!

The Rake is certain that, while ‘Fornication is punished with Fine Cloaths’ and ‘Washing and hard Labour are the Reward for Chastity’, within months the inmates of the Reformatory will ‘fly from the soap-suds’ back into whoring’ (*A Congratulatory Epistle* 1758, 21-22).

Servant-maids and soap are also intriguingly bound together in Defoe’s polemical tracts. While *Every Body’s Business* sees the rise in the cost of household soap as yet another fallout from the expensive silks and satins chosen by servant-maids, *Augusta Triumphans* more darkly describes the sexual tension as old masters ‘stand slaving among a parcel of drabs at the wash tub’ (1725, 11; 1728, 42). Indeed, the erotic power of the weekly wash is also evoked by the anti-*Pamela* novel *Memoirs of the Life of Lady H-----, the celebrated Pamela, etc.* (1741), in which the Mr B character catches Pamela as ‘she is washing. The weather being hot her bosom was naked, for she imagined nobody saw her’ (13). In contrast to these lubricious visions, the penitents in *Histories* firmly re-connect the idea of washing to the cleansing from sin of Psalm 51 (‘here have all my misfortunes ended; and here I hope, by repentance, to wash out my sins’, 182), the daily employment actually succeeding in re-making not only the women but their social character (‘I hoped a course of regularity would ... wash out the infamy from my reputation’, 51). Laundry-work in the Magdalen was a labour-intensive skill designed both practically and metaphorically to eliminate the stains and smooth out the creases.

4. *House, Bawdy-House, Prison and Home*

The extended image-cluster of the house serves as the backdrop against which to read a number of important *topoi* connected to the servant-maid prostitute. The house may be a home, its fragile boundaries unable to contain the young woman, ever ready to roam; it may become an enclosure, or a prison; it may be a brothel, and hopefully, even a reformatory. Enticing master and apprentice out of the house, away from their duties as patriarch and labourer, the prostitute was 'a disturbingly liminal figure' who inhabited 'the carefully policed but largely spurious, ideological boundaries between the public world of commerce and the private sphere of sexuality and domesticity, between the economic and the erotic' (Jones 1997, 204). A merely visual encounter with such a woman, the reformer and co-founder of the Magdalen, Jonas Hanway, feared, was enough to alert to what was wrong within the orderly familial space of the home:

Shall we not become fearful of our own domestics, our own children, and yet more terrified at the faces of each other, when we meet in the streets or roads, even under the meridian sun? (1776, 61)

Such visibility, moreover, Defoe had fretted, created a dangerous association between the prostitute and the English woman in general:

Go all the world over, and you will see no such impudence as in the streets of London, which makes many foreigners give our women in general a bad character, from the vile specimens they meet with from one end of the town to the other. (1728, 28)

The journeying to and from the house to the brothel in which the slippery-tailed maid is said to excel is re-enacted in *Histories* in a neat parallel structure aimed at exploring the possible outcomes of these opposite transitions: Emily goes from service to brothel, while Fanny moves from brothel to service. And, as kept mistresses, both servant-maids are briefly put in possession of a house and servants of their own.

The first house-related *topos* deployed by *Histories* figures the uncertain position and threatening status of young female domestics within the household. When Emily, on her father's death, first seeks employment with 'a Lady' in the neighbourhood, she meets with a stark refusal: 'if she had no sons, or I was less handsome, she would receive me into her house' (13). At Lady Markland's, where she eventually finds a place, her arrival immediately prompts a debate as to whether domestics should be protected or feared, the mistress's accommodating position interestingly pinpointing the servant-maid's allure as a useful ploy to keep the master from roving. To a friend's ironic suggestion that she must not be of a jealous disposition, Lady Markland responds: 'No indeed, but if I was, it would be no reason why I should be

plagued with an ugly face about me; for Sir George must see handsome ones abroad, if I suffered none but Hottentots at home' (14). This Mandevillian sleight of hand (if the whore is a necessary evil to keep the middle-class woman pure, the servant-maid may be usefully prostituted to keep the middle-class male indoors) in effect turns the matriarch into a bawd who pre-selects Emily for her husband's – or as it will turn out, for her son's – domestic pleasure. Tacitly referencing the commonplace, unchallenged in the advice manuals of both Haywood (1743) and former servant Hannah Woolley (1673), that maids were fair game for their masters, and that it was up to them to resist seduction or even rape, *Histories* forces the reader to reflect on the moral premises of this assumption.

Closeness between master and maid bred within the house enclosure was delicately bound up with the issue of time devoted to labour. Whereas the satirical *Anti-Pamela* presents a grotesque role-inversion in which it is the manipulative Syrena who pulls the strings of the men of the household, placing herself at exactly the required points and times for amorous encounters, *Present to a Servant-Maid* grants it may be difficult to escape a persistent master within the confines of his house, 'Being so much under his Command, and obliged to attend him at any Hours, and at any Place he is pleased to call you', but does not expand on how to avoid these 'Importunities ... [which are] not easy to surmount' (Haywood 1743, 44). As Patrick Delaney lectures, 'your Time and Strength are no longer your own, when you are hired; they are your master's and to be employed in his service' (1750, 192). If Thomas Seaton concedes that 'It will sometimes happen that a Master of a Great House is young, and wanton, and Bold, and Rakeish; freely resigning himself to the Steerage of his Lusts' (1720, 44), in her section on 'Chastity', Haywood, perhaps more urbanely, advises servant-maids to vary their denial 'according to the different characters and persons who solicit them' (1743, 45). Though Seaton believes 'it cannot be hard for the Women that are always in the Family to discern when he's in this Humour, and contrive not to be where he may possibly come ... If sought for by him they must conceal themselves' (1720, 63), Emily's story, much as Pamela's had, repeatedly questions this simple solution: Mr Markland 'took every opportunity of finding me alone' and some bribery furthers his cause by 'multipl[ying] opportunities for his coming into her room' (17).

Rather than offering protection, therefore, houses may constitute dangerous traps for the unsuspecting. Haywood's *Present* opens by urging her 'Dear Girls' not to enter a house unless they wish to stay, but also alerting them to the dangers which may lie behind the domestic façade: 'There are some houses which appear well by Day, that it would be little safe for a Modest Maid to sleep in at Night'; here the 'country habit' of young girls is 'immediately stripp'd off, and a gay modish one put on in the stead; and then the design'd victim, willing or unwilling, is expos'd to sale' (1743, 2-3). This tableau, the missing scene between Plates One and Two of *The Harlot's*

Progress, is re-enacted in Fanny's story, where the brothel-keeper Madam Tent calls her mantua-maker for a fitting within minutes of Fanny's arrival. Hoping to profit from the girl's innocent awkwardness and make the best bargain of her virginity, she later makes her 'drink tea in the parlour with the gentlemen who came to the house' (99). Provocatively, *Histories* contrives to highlight certain moments in which house and 'house of ill repute' seem to overlap: far from being the basis of conjugality, domestic abodes are often breeding grounds for vice. Emily, for example, having become used to the Marklands' late entertaining, is deceived by the fact that the 'family' here 'take great pride in the great concourse of people and the late hours' (36) into thinking that the brothel she has come to is a respectable house. Conversely, Fanny is tricked by Madam Tent into 'marrying' Mr. Mastin in the brothel, and when the bawd forces her to 'marry' another man, she is grotesquely wracked by guilt towards her 'real' husband.

As with the brothel into which Emily is lured, the house may also become a prison from which it is impossible to escape. The young servant is first cajoled, then threatened, beaten and almost blinded by the other prostitutes in an attempt to break her into the trade; then attention and care, which in a normal domestic environment would be dedicated to an injured servant, are lavished upon her to prevent her from repelling customers. It is a scenario Haywood also envisages: if the young woman 'refuses the shameful Business ... and prefers the Preservation of her Virtue ... which way can she escape? She is immediately confined, close watched, threatened, and at last forced to Compliance' (1743, 3).

Overall, the free-spirited and exceedingly mobile wenches Defoe denounces contrast strongly with the imprisoned and oppressed prostitutes in *Histories*. This appears especially in the history of Magdalen Four, where the house-as-prison motif is developed in the decaying mansions of the battered rake she is forced to marry. Her parents virtually sell their daughter to this man, and she is led to the altar 'more dead than alive' – a phrase often used to describe the first unwilling act of prostitution. Here the house, referred to as 'a gaudy prison' (135), a 'splendid slavery' (136), mirrors Mr Merton's perverted (old, decrepit and outmoded) libertine principles, but it is also used to evoke, obliquely, the state of 'matrimonial whoredom'. The woman's rich trappings of jewels and clothes serve only to attract other men, and when this slave finally succumbs to adultery, she is discovered and repeatedly imprisoned in filthy garrets and freezing servant-quarters, maltreated and malnourished. The dark nights of the soul which she experiences in these confinements anticipate the isolation that she must undergo at the Magdalen House; but while this safe haven will offer the penitent the opportunity for proper repentance, Mr Merton's houses only afford 'despair, remorse, resentment'.

The Magdalen House set itself up as a "Place", a "Hospital", a "Charity" and an "Asylum" ... terms often used apparently interchangeably, even in the same passage' (Peace 2012, 142). The selection process through which

penitent prostitutes became its inmates, however, and the *Rules and Regulations* which they had to abide by in order to keep their place, echoed – indeed almost aped – the formalities of a servant’s admission into a household or the *formulae* of apprenticeship. Robert Dingley, a silk-merchant and one of the key advocates for the Magdalen, laid down in his *Proposals for Establishing a Public Place of Reception for Penitent Prostitutes* that once the petitioner had been examined, if her ‘character’ was ‘found proper’ she ‘must be bound Apprentice, or articed Servant to the Matron, for seven Years, but with a reserve to be dismissed, never more to be re-admitted’ (Dingley 1758, 12). As with servants on entering a household, on being admitted to the Magdalen prostitutes had to relinquish their personal property for safe-keeping, and accept a no-visitors policy (Hecht 1980, 127-138). The ‘minute surveillance’ (Vickery 2009, 306) masters and mistresses customarily subjected their servants to – a quasi-medical scrutiny aimed at assessing character and trustworthiness, and, crucially, at detecting pregnancy – translated, in the actual practice of the reformatory, into inmates being regularly paraded before the public eye during Sunday Mass at the Magdalen Chapel, and carefully observed for signs of ‘improvement’, ‘progress’ or ‘lapsing’. House and prison however, were not to be superimposed, and to pre-empt accusations, letters from its actual inmates were published: ‘Don’t think our house is a place of confinement, for our benefactors won’t keep anyone against their will, nor detain them a minute’ (Dodd 1776, 28). Another accusation, that by offering asylum the charity would in fact encourage vice, is silenced in *Histories*, which stresses that ‘to be one of its inhabitants is certainly less eligible to a woman, who does not want to hide her head from shame, than the commonest service; and that to a person still viciously, or even gaily inclined, it would be the most dismal prison’ (5), a statement that cleverly evokes the slippery servant-maid narrative only to deny it yet again.

The overlapping of house and prison also proves useful for comprehending *Histories’* place in the *Pamela* controversy. Pamela’s drama of servitude is largely played out indoors, in Mr B’s two houses, which sometimes approximate to prisons, sometimes to brothels. Incarceration is a key concept for understanding Pamela’s migration from servant to wife (Folkenflik 1999); the solitude of her Lincolnshire confinement engenders her realization that she can only hope to improve her position, indeed attain freedom, through ‘truckling matrimonial subservience’ (McKeon 2002, 380). Just before marrying Mr B, she asserts ‘he shall always be my Master; and I shall think myself more and more his servant’ (Richardson, 1976, 271). This disturbingly conservative closure has led some critics to seek ways of rehabilitating Pamela’s agency by focusing on how ‘with her incarceration comes self-employment and the creative power of writing’ (Sussman 2012, 170). On the other hand, the penitents in *Histories* embrace what Hanway later called ‘solitude in imprisonment’ (1776) as an enabling forward drive leading them, now

emancipated from both the heterosexual love plot and the exitless condition of prostitution, *out* of the house and into the world of wage labour.

5. *Giving Notice*

Linked to the idea-cluster of the house and its variously permeable boundaries is the *topos* of 'giving notice'. For Hannah Woolley service was essentially a training ground for marriage and therefore required stability, which in turn guaranteed a good reputation: 'Be not subject to change, For a *rouling-stone gathers no Moss*; and as you will gain but little money, so if you ramble up and down you will lose your Credit' (1673, 214), while Haywood advises against giving notice and paints a grim picture of the young maid wandering, a monad in the marketplace, 'without character, without money, without Friends or Support' (1743, 4). For Defoe, willingness to leave one's place heralded a dangerous class disruption and meant 'that we shall have scarce a servant left, but our wives, &c., must do the household-work themselves' (1728, 27), while *Pretty Doings in a Protestant Nation* clearly links quitting with whoring: 'Now Hussey a Month's Wages or a Month's Warning, / And to Bed with your Master every Morning' ('Father Poussin' 1734, 5). Servants in search of employment were said to be looking not for work, but for a 'place'. This 'place' where the physical work of service was carried out was, moreover, often analogized with that 'proper place' which servants had to be constantly reminded of or taught: the pert servant-maid, ever-popular on stage, is one of the period's enduring gripes. 'This way of conceiving labour' was 'static, intransitive, and hierarchical, less an activity than a dependence ... [and] clearly helped to restrict social mobility' (Robbins 1986, 53). Defoe was especially disgusted by all aspects of rapid transition fuelled by pride; the quick change of clothes that transforms the coquettish maid into the mistress, all the 'clopping and changing' that turns into 'whoring and thieving' (Defoe 1725, 7) signal a dangerous volatility. His project is to limit wages, but his complaints are always about wantonness:

Is it not time to fix them, when they stroll from place to place, and we are hardly sure of a servant a month together? Is it not time to prevent the increase of harlots, by making it penal for servants to be harboured in idleness, and tempted to theft, whoredom, murder, &c., by living too long out of place? (1728, 27)

This need to 'fix' them is the apex of a litany of complaints against servant-maids' increasing propensity to 'give notice', which 'encourages a roving temper, and makes them never easy' (1728, 25), and against the apparent facility with which they migrate in and out of service:

for if the Bawd uses them ill away they trip to Service, and if the Mistress gives them a wry Word, whip they are at the Bawdy-House again so that in effect they make neither good Whores nor good Servants. (1725, 7)

Defoe's words may have been motivated by economic considerations, but there is also in this misogynistic tirade a real nostalgia for some fading image of the faithful family retainer obliterated by these 'slippery-tailed' strollers, who, 'if they are not restrained from quitting service on every vagary', in one swift downward spiralling movement

will throw themselves on the town, and, not only ruin themselves, but others; for example, a girl quits a place and turns whore; if there is not a bastard to be murdered, or left to the parish, there is one or more unwary youths drawn in to support her in lewdness and idleness; in order to which, they rob their parents and masters, nay, sometimes, anybody else, to support their strumpets; not to mention the communication of loathsome distempers. (1728, 26)

Both Fanny's and Emily's stories contravene this kernel narrative by showing how difficult it actually is for the women to leave the brothel; far from offering a sanctuary from the indignities of servitude, prostitution constitutes a deeper and more binding form of service in which women are held ransom for debts incurred, and their bodies constitute the only viable payment for their apprenticeship. While Emily pleads with the brothel madam to allow her to 'submit to the lowest offices in her house, or rather what she considered to be the lowest, and perform the part of her menial servant, till she herself should acknowledge that I had amply paid my debt' (38), the bawd remains unmoved, explaining that here the only possible service is that which she herself, who has 'taught every passion, as well as every principle, to be subservient to her interest' (37), is proficient in. Even when freed from the brothel, Emily finds it impossible to return to honest service. Earlier narratives, such as *A Genuine Epistle Written Some Time Since to the Late Famous Mother Lodge* (1735) clearly stated that when a fallen woman *did* attempt traditional occupations such as service, she soon tired of dragging out such 'a Starving Life' and turned (and remained unrepentantly) prostitute. Emily, on the other hand, decries the 'hard fate' of being 'willing and able to work, and yet to starve for want of employment' (47):

when I offered myself, one said, 'I was too handsome'; another, 'that I appeared too genteel for such a place as I offered for' ... and 'there must be something very bad in my conduct, or I could not be reduced to such low services'. [Others] asked, 'What recommendation I had? Who would give me a character? In this manner I was repulsed from every door ... I offered my labour at half price, but even my industry was made an argument against me, 'I must be very bad to be reduced to that, and they supposed I intended to steal the other half of my wages'. (43-44)

6. *Progress vs. Inevitability*

Histories seeks to debunk Defoe's accusations by reversing gears on the servant-maid's dangerous mobility and transforming the inexorable downward spiral which 'giving notice' led to into a spiritual progress. Earlier prostitution

narratives had developed the fatal 'seduction-into-prostitution' step into titillating accounts of triumphal careers followed by successful retirement or marriage (Ellis 1996, 177-179).⁷ *Histories*, on the other hand, displays strong interest in complicating this clear-cut either/or solution, and engages with the Hogarthian principle of life as a 'progress', shaped by both circumstances *and* choice. By doing so it also ties into reformers' keenness to understand new forms of prostitution, which women were most vulnerable and which combination of circumstances ultimately forced them into the trade:

the first step into that way of life oftener proceeds from weakness than from vice; and that if the beginning of their misfortunes, or rather their crimes, have been owing to a want of steadiness in themselves in the practice of virtue, many of their subsequent vices have arisen from the affectation of too overstrained a chastity in others, who, unlike their Maker, ever ready to accept the repentant sinner, and to heal the contrite heart, exclude them from the means of reformation, by hunting them out of every way of obtaining an honest subsistence, till the only alternative left them, is either to owe their support to a continuance in vicious courses, or to die martyrs of chastity. (3-4)

In re-writing the hitherto tacitly accepted subtext of prostitutes' *innate* propensity to vice *Histories* attempts to separate the idea of progress from that of inevitability, the 'disease, death, eternal destruction' (Dodd 1776, 4) which usually concluded the harlot's career and the seduced servant's tendency to 'End her miserable days in an Hospital or Work-house' or to 'find her Death-bed on a Dunghill' (Haywood 1743, 3). Emily clarifies this: 'criminal as I had been, my detestation to this way of life was as great as if I had been more consistently virtuous' (38). To demonstrate the penitents' progress in gaining consciousness of their errors, biblical allusion is used throughout the novel, while literary quotation, either in the shape of epigraphs or of *staccato* commentary on the action performed by the more educated women, functions as an ironic critique, signposting the development of the plot as a systematic disappointment of illusions, an eschewal of romance, an invitation to ponder the differences between the ideal and the actual, allowing room for posthumous rethinking, re-reading and growth (Greenup 2008).

6.1 *Illness, Love and Spiritual Development*

Played out against the vision of progress promoted by the novel are the themes of illness, of erotic love between master and maid and of spiritual development. Illness, the 'litmus test of household relationships' (Meldrum 2000, 89), receives

⁷ The fact that both Fanny's name and the initial stages of her story also appear to reference that other famous prostitute, John Cleland's *Fanny Hill*, also puts readers on the look-out for alternative endings.

prolonged examination in Fanny's story. Here the traditional fear of contagion spread by prostitution is 'treated' intra-murally, within the Lafew household where the former prostitute comes to work and falls in love with her married master. The metaphorization of illness – in this case the scarlet fever which all members of the family catch in turn – as developing love, first the wrong, then the right love, also resonates with other important issues relating to the 'servant problem': the responsibility masters should feel for the physical and spiritual health of their servants; how far the bond of loyalty between servant-maid and masters should extend; the closeness of servants and children of the family; the scrutinizing of servants to determine their true character.

When Mrs Lafew falls ill, Fanny nurses her with the kind of loyal devotion we are told Pamela expended on her beloved mistress, but which was not unheard of in real households (Meldrum 2000, 170). Mr Lafew is greatly affected both by his wife's illness and his servant's devotion: 'while he grieved, I was inconsolable, and he was charmed with such a proof of my affection for the great object of his' (111). Haywood is very specific with regard to sickness in the family, recommending the maid to 'add to your Attendance a softness of behaviour, which may convince them you are truly concerned for them' (1743, 34). But Fanny is not merely performing the part of the good servant; her love for the family that has (unknowingly) saved her from the brothel leads her to try the experiment of saving their four-year-old daughter by sharing her bed and forcing the fever to break:

How nobly was I rewarded! The deadly coldness of the poor babe had chilled me; but the inexpressible joy I felt from seeing him so much obliged, and hearing myself placed so very high in his estimation, warmed my heart and renewed the vital heat, which was so much suppressed by having almost a corpse in my arms. (112)

These images of warmth then subtly develop into the mutual passion which blossoms between Mr Lafew and Fanny, precipitated by the physical closeness of the sick room. When Fanny herself finally succumbs, he visits her, displaying much remorse that 'having so long escaped the infection, I should at last catch it from him' (116): good masters, as social historians have documented, were expected to show solicitude towards sick servants (see Hecht 1980, 97 ff.). But as the scarlet fever abates, the sexual relationship begins:

the knowledge of my love for him, which was too apparent, extinguished his esteem, while it excited his tenderness; and the affection which was founded on my apparent virtues, increased on the appearance of a weakness ... the sickness ... gave rise to love, which instead of ceasing with it, increased daily; and continued undisputed till I proved with child. (117)

Fanny is moved to a house set up for her by Mr Lafew, where she gives birth to a boy. Here she enjoys great happiness, but during a long period of absence on his part she falls ill again. She is discovered and nursed back to health and,

with health, to virtue by Mrs Lafew who, since Fanny's own maid cannot write, even undertakes the task of answering in disguised handwriting Mr Lafew's anxious enquiries. By her example and by her religious instruction Mrs Lafew fulfils her duty as a good mistress; thus the 'progress' of the illness and the spread of the prostitute's malady are stemmed and transformed into a spiritual development. This forward dynamic, however, is only possible because Fanny is *sensible* to instruction; indeed, *Histories* reworks the traditional image of erotic love as sickness into the sentimental deployment of fever as a marker of sensibility (Ward 2007, 15). Whereas Pamela's education takes place *off stage*, before the action begins, forcing growth and transformation exclusively onto Mr B, Fanny is taught the paths of repentance and religion by her mistress's example and by an account of Christian revelation which brings her first to despair, and then to hope. Mrs Lafew, however, does what Pamela sometimes fails to do: she carefully distinguishes between the power of man and the power of God by acknowledging 'the greatness of the temptation ... no common share of religion and virtue could resist Mr Lafew's superior power to charm' (126).

The *topos* of love 'across the divide' is used in *Histories* to resolutely oppose misreadings of the servant as enamoured of riches rather than romance, a familiar refrain of anti-*Pamela* writing. Indeed, for all their focus on avarice and pretence, both Fielding's Shamela and Haywood's Syrena Triksey had seemed to enjoy the game of love rather than that of money; in Fielding this is funny, in Haywood it begins to look serious, even slightly tragic. *Histories* takes the argument one step further and entirely subscribes to the idea of economic indifference, thus anticipating the later eighteenth-century tendency of servant literature to mirror children's literature by separating 'moral satisfaction from immediate financial compensation' and substituting 'narratives of moral autonomy and class stability' for 'narratives of economic autonomy and class fluidity' (Straub 2009, 22). Before the penitents are 'cured' of their love, however, and before they have attained what amounts to middle-class regulation of desire (a virtue also traditionally boasted of by bawds and prostitutes), the novel makes at least two provocative points about what Sarah Maza has termed the 'eroticism of inequality' (Straub 2009, 197). Emily's earlier habit of service briefly turns her, while she is being 'kept' by her former master, Mr Markland, into a model sentimental wife, enduring and patient (a subtle evocation of the more disturbing qualities in Pamela's married state), while Mr Lafew's *ménage* with Fanny is intriguingly described as *better* than his marriage with Mrs Lafew because it includes sexual passion (and is, in effect, an out-of-wedlock version of that between the reformed B and Pamela).⁸

⁸ See Binhammer 2009, 57. Jennie Batchelor argues that it is precisely this erotic side to her nature that has the 'potential to make her a better mother' (2012, 165).

7. *Pregnancy and the Novelistic Solution*

Histories also tackles a *topos* which comprehends both conflict between surface and depth (appearance vs. reality) and ideas of illness/progress: that of pregnancy. In Defoe's terse evaluation the result of a sexual relationship between master and maid was 'a bastard to be murdered, or left to the parish' (1728, 26). To avoid involving the masters of the house in any scandal, a maid found to be pregnant was normally dismissed immediately – though recent archival findings suggest nuances in the application of this norm (Fairchilds 1984, 90; Hill 1996, 60; Meldrum 2000, 100-117).⁹ Court cases for breach of promise were often instigated by outraged fathers lamenting their daughter's loss of service (Staves 1980-1981, 110); this was a move which emphasized finance rather than fornication, economic worth rather than moral value (significantly, the two lower-class Magdalens in *Histories* are fatherless, while the two middle-class ones are disowned by their fathers). Moreover, confessions of pregnancy often displayed how limited the language available for the accused women was and how the 'question of their own honesty was never far from the surface' (Gowing 1998, 75). Indeed, in many accounts, both fictional and non-fictional, the servant-maid drops off the narrative plane following an unwanted pregnancy, only to reappear, before a horror-struck audience, at a trial for child-murder: 'the typical infanticidal mother was an unmarried servant' (Jackson 1996, 49; Sharpe 1998, 110; see also Amussen 1988, 113).

In the course of its literary campaigning for the Magdalen Charity, *Histories* presents some unexpected solutions to these issues, ones which gloss over the unpleasantness presented by this area of the 'servant problem'. Dismissal, for example, is a strategy Mrs Lafew pointedly refuses in Fanny's case, and poverty does not constitute a risk for either Fanny or Emily after they become pregnant: they are both willingly provided for – at least at first – by their lovers. More importantly, however, *Histories* goes vigorously against the grain of the stereotype in describing all the prostitutes as loving and tender mothers. The language Emily uses to speak of her brief out-of-wedlock happiness strikes a very different note from the discourse of crime or sex usually associated with the fallen woman:

our fondness for [the child] was equal; and instead of our affection being lessened, by having a third to share it with us, each seemed to look on the other's being a parent to this little darling, as a new merit, which caused, if possible, an increase of fondness. (29)

⁹ The pregnancy/dismissal commonplace is obliquely evoked by Pamela, who cannot understand why she is being asked to leave B Hall, when 'Squire Martin in the Grove has had three lyings in, it seems, in the house, in three months past; one by himself, and one by his coachman, and one by his woodman; and yet he has not turned one of them away' (Richardson 1976, 57).

Emily is willing to part with her 'own life' rather than with her son (42); Magdalen Four becomes a prostitute out of 'true maternal love' (179); Fanny, far from considering infanticide at any stage of her life, is described as 'naturally fond of children' (109). Her willingness to share a bed with the Lafew's sick daughter both transforms her into a child of the family (thereby referencing the literature which enjoined masters to consider servants as their children), and prepares her to be a mother herself. Even more intriguingly, however, on entering the Magdalen, Emily is assured that though she must part with her child, he will be 'educated and provided for' (51). Here we have a consolatory fiction, a 'novelistic' solution which conveniently writes the children of the servant-maid/prostitute out of the picture. However, as the modern editors of *Histories* have pointed out, no such institution existed: 'it is a fantasy of both penitence and charity, intended to generate both reformation and sympathy' (Batchelor and Hiatt 2007, xvii). If impregnated servants were being forced to kill their children, the novel is telling us, they should be offered an alternative solution. In this sense, the value of the Magdalen as a 'scheme', or a 'Plan', as reformers were fond of terming their proposals, may be said to outstrip its impact as an actual institution; however limited the actual success of the charity in improving the lives of these women, the campaign for the scheme led to changes in the way they were perceived and written about.

8. *Masters and Servants: From Household to Magdalen House*

The relationship between masters and servants, and in particular the issue of servants' education within the family, is central, in *Histories*, to the testing of the ready-made template of the servant-maid/prostitute. Pamela had worried that all her 'learning and education [would] be of little service' (Richardson 1976, 66) and in his writings on prostitution, Saunders Welch, himself of pauper background, had highlighted over-education in the middling classes as one of the causes of whoring (1758, 5). If Fanny's story illustrates the risks inherent to the old paternalistic relationship between masters and servants, Emily's period of service in the Markland family does the same for the more modern, less affective, and increasingly contractual agreement described by Bridget Hill (1996, 5). Fanny enters a household where contractual and affective relations between master and servants coincide; but, Eliza Heywood argues, if masters behave with affability, then 'not to love would be the highest Ingratitude' (1743, 31). Even Thomas Seaton concedes that it may be hard to 'withstand ... One, whom there is naturally a Tenderness in disobeying', and that because of this tenderness there may be 'a readier Submission than ... otherwise' (1720, 145). Observing the Lafews, Fanny cannot 'imagine greater happiness [could] be enjoyed in the marriage state ... the pleasures of mutual love being increased by the joy they took in their lovely offspring,

which they beheld with equal tenderness' (108). Into this circle of love she wishes to be admitted, and this is presented as a sign of the young prostitute's improvability and willingness to exchange mercenary love for something purer ('I felt both love and gratitude towards them', 110). If bad servants are those who remain separate from the family and are therefore potentially disloyal, ignorant Fanny is a good servant, who 'internalizes the values, behaviors, beliefs, and even aesthetics of his or her employer's family' (Straub 2009, 19). However, it is this very quality that makes her so desirable to her otherwise virtuous master and plunges her once again into whoredom.

The lessons in love Fanny learns at the Lafews' contrast vividly with Emily's apprenticeship, but while the one becomes a whore because of the *excess* of love within the family, the other does so because the venal relationships which dominate the Markland household leave her spiritually stranded, 'for every servant was bought to [Mr Markland's] interest' (20). The Marklands and their servants exemplify Haywood's belief that 'Tho' [Corruption] begins at the Head, [it] ceases not its Progress till it reaches the most inferior Parts' (1743, *Preface*), and indeed Emily is 'Sensible of [her] own weakness, and how far everyone was combined for my destruction' (21):

Sir George and my Lady, by winking at the intrigues of their servants, and speaking lightly of religion and virtue, banished both from their family, and became not only answerable for their own faults, but for those which their examples encouraged in their domestics. (17)

In contrast to this failure in master-servant relations (also criticized by Defoe 1724, 15), *Histories* stresses the virtuous middle course held by Magdalen Two, thus paradoxically, with an incredibly bold stroke, making the kept mistress the best mistress:

I was not too indulgent, in order to blind their eyes to my failings, nor mean enough to wish to make them feel their inferiority, by adding weight to the burden of servitude I made them neither my companions nor my slaves; but enabled, by the happy composure of my mind, to preserve a just medium. I treated them as persons to whose happiness it was my duty to contribute, without putting them out of their sphere. (75)

The description of the Markland's domestic regime, on the other hand, reads (almost paragraph by paragraph) like a grotesque negative of the programme counselled in manuals such as Jonas Hanway's *Advice from Farmer Trueman to his Daughter, Mary, Upon her going to Service*. Hanway explains 'the necessity of attending to religion' (1760, 57); warns against 'carelessness in devotions' (59), the 'danger of neglecting the Sabbath' (60), 'reserve in talking of devotion' (89), 'shame in doing what is right [which may lead] to do wrong' (85); and exhorts to 'Resolution in regard to prayer' (85). Emily, a clergyman's

daughter, tries to attend to recommendations such as these, but is (almost by a collective family effort) stripped of her religious beliefs one by one before she is seduced: 'were it not that they sometimes attended the parish church on Sundays', she observes, 'I should not know whether the family I lived in was Jew, Mahometan, or Christian' (1760, 17). Entirely abdicating her role as matriarch, Mrs Markland even mocks Emily, treating 'piety ... as enthusiasm, strictness of manners as folly'. Indeed, 'she never knew a puritanical servant who did not turn out a whore or a thief; and that she wanted not to have her jewellery stolen to feed a Methodist parson; or her cloaths pawned, to furnish out their weekly contributions' (18).

Emily's attempts at conduct-manual behaviour are presented as failures by *Histories*, and simplistic prescriptivism is generally condemned: 'My religion was rather founded on habit than reason. I had been told *what* I should do; but my father's continual occupation abroad had prevented his teaching me *why* I was to do so' (18). To counter the dangers arising from lack of family cohesion, the Magdalen House offered the penitent prostitute opportune spiritual re-training within a different kind of family. John Fielding's *Plan* visualized the Matron as 'a good mother to all her Family' (1758, 24), while Hanway's *Thoughts* stress the role of the charity governors as father figures, and the force of their 'parental love' (1758b, 30). This love, *Histories* promises, creates a safe haven where

Equal distress, and equal relief, begets a sort of mutual affection; while their hearts overflow with gratitude to their noble benefactors, (noble, if not by blood or descent, intrinsically so from the generous benevolence of their worthy hearts) they rejoice not only in their own deliverance, but in that of all they behold. (10)

9. *The Reformed Servant-Maid and Other Domestics: Distinguishing the General from the Particular*

Finally, in order to allow the reformability of the servant-maid/prostitute to shine forth, and to aid the reader in the all-important task of distinguishing the general from the particular, the cultural stereotype from the deserving individual, her behaviour is often contrasted with that of other domestics. All four of the narratives that make up *Histories* are stocked with a striking array of servant characters who either confirm or critique the types of intra-domestic relationships and cultural stereotypes of contemporary drama, fiction and conduct literature. Some bad servants propel the plot, such as Magdalen Two's maid, who steals all her money, thereby forcing her first almost into service, then almost into streetwalking but ultimately into the charity (87). Another bad servant is the jealous nursery-maid who tells Mrs Lafew that Fanny is pregnant by her husband (117). Other – good – servants, such as Sally, the sympathetic servant-maid turned jailor, who helps Magdalen Four escape

(163), or Emily's sister's servant, a good-natured girl who 'could not forebear joining her tears' with those of the young prostitute (43), act, through their projective identification with the Magdalens' plight as textually created readers, tutoring real readers into a just sense of pity. The behaviour of the servant-maid/prostitutes, Emily and Fanny, is carefully scrutinized against that of these other servants.

Tying in with the conspicuous lack of viable mother figures, the housekeepers in *Histories* are all relentlessly unpleasant characters. The Marklands' housekeeper, for example, is a perfect representative of those bad servants condemned in Colossians 3:22 – and in Haywood (1743, 12) – for obeying only with eye-service, as man-pleasers. The woman is held in great esteem, as she understands nothing 'better than flattery' and though 'she was an assiduous watch over the other servants, yet her first attachment was to her own interest, of which she was never neglectful' (14). She is also unchaste, and her very public intrigue with her master's *valet-de-chambre* shocks and disgusts Emily. This below-stairs debauchery is portrayed as similar to the type of visual education virgins received in brothels to prepare them for business (see Cleland 1985, 60-71). But this bawd-like figure pales in comparison to Mr Merton's housekeeper in the story of Magdalen Four. The viciousness of this 'extravagant, wasteful, idle, insolent' and almost grotesquely vindictive servant is explained by the fact of her having been the master's mistress, and having continued in this dual role until shortly before he married the younger woman whom she 'looked upon as the cause of her being degraded into servant, and an interloper on her rights' (144). The unredeemability of this particular 'amphibious maid' once again serves to underscore the argument made by *Histories* (as well as by the Magdalen Charity) in favour of a humane capacity on the part of readers and funders to distinguish between received narrative patterns and individual cases.

10. *Conclusions*

Though the instruction given to the penitents in the Magdalen house was to 'Tell Your Story to No One', *Histories* does indeed tell a story and, as regards the servant-maid/prostitute figure, it is a very different one. As Carolyn Steedman has observed of a later period, 'Street-walking by dismissed maid-servants was a cultural text, not a sociological observation' (2009, 151). The work *Histories* carries out in relation to the 'slippery maid' problem is that of a fiction scrutinizing a fiction, teasing out what appeared as overblown anxieties, creating an alternative narrative and clearing an important rhetorical space for the realization of the ideals of moral 're-servicing' urgently championed by the Magdalen House.

If many of the problems *Pamela* had failed to solve were connected to centuries-long misogynistic anxieties about surface/depth, it is also true that, following the publication of Richardson's bestseller, these problems

had become inextricably entangled with the more specific discourse of the servant-maid/prostitute and even more so with that of women's writing. Pamela's writing, too intimately bound up with the fabric of her clothes, had not entirely succeeded as a touchstone of her innocence. The strategy adopted by *Histories* to obviate this issue was to invoke the ultimate bugbear of the 'servant problem', that is the fear of the tattling servant whose tale breaks through the boundaries of the family home (Mr B's insistent suspicion), and play it off against the prohibition on story-telling used by the Magdalen House as a crucial reformatory tool. To do so, it uses speech rather than writing and the private audience of the community of penitents as its sounding board and test of truth. Thus it creates a powerful narrative weapon to tell the 'true' story of the servant-maid turned whore to the widest possible public and to the best possible advantage. Expanding on the idea of the Charity as a perfect experimental terrain, *Histories* becomes a space where errors may be judged, the limits of the conventional marriage plot usefully tested, and where the 'other' may be progressively appreciated not as monolithic but as consisting of degrees of otherness which resonate importantly with the self.

Though unsuccessful in making the slippery servant-maid less slippery, what the *Pamela* controversy *did* establish was that the ambiguous sexuality of Richardson's maidservant was essentially a matter of close reading and textual interpretation, and that the reason why ideological stakes were being played so high was that readers tended to elide the maidservant's sexuality with female sexuality in general (Straub 2009, 81). While Emily's and Fanny's stories contain large narrative portions in which the women are employed in domestic service – and are therefore told, to use Bruce Robbins' phrase, 'from below'¹⁰ – the stories of the other two penitents hint at issues more germane to slavery than to service (slavery to vanity, slavery to love, slavery to parental tyranny, even the clichés of slavery in lovers' speech), thereby subtly extending to women in general both the cautionary lesson and the re-birthing project aimed at the character of the servant-maid prostitute.

Through its insistence on progress vs. inevitability and on the possibility of 're-servicing' prostitutes, *Histories* also makes a bid to create a new readership. It does this by inviting careful scrutiny of the several responsibilities as well as of the 'extenuating circumstances' (9) which have led to their fall: by demanding, in other words, what Richardson called 'attentive' readers (Carroll 1964, 315). By urging these readers to reconsider the clear-cut boundaries between vice and virtue, *Histories* forwards Richardson's ideal of a text as something that should 'new-Model the Affections of the Reader', an operation which 'was often viewed by eighteenth century reformers as a re-modelling' (Koehler 2005, 14-15). Thus, in encouraging casuistical analysis, *Histories* helps to

¹⁰ Robbins also uses the phrase 'servant topoi', but in a different sense (1986, 54).

bring reader (who would also have been a potential subscriber or employer) and character closer to each other; by showing that as regards comportment, and in its sexual subtext, there is no *innate* separation of wife from whore or of maid from mistress. In these ‘modern moral subjects’, as Hogarth called his Progresses, differences may be more blurred, more contextual, and less dependent on free will: ‘the different degrees in which we rank our guilt and theirs may possibly proceed from self-partiality: For if we take into account their superior temptations, and inferior advantages towards the repressing them, the balance may not, to an All-seeing eye, appear in our favour’ (5).

The charity depicted in *Histories* levels and ‘uniforms’ its inmates and their carefully examined progresses: ‘all are in much the same state, tho’ brought to it by different steps’ (9). In this tight-knit community of women a utopian experiment is underway: class distinction is achieved through virtuous industriousness and emulation is no longer exemplified by that pernicious desire of the maid ‘to go as fine as her mistress’ or the vanity of those who seek ‘place or precedency’. Here, the only ‘title’ they ‘can pretend to claim’ is ‘priority of reformation’ (52). Though this narrative did not always reflect actual practice, its importance cannot go unnoticed: by powerfully questioning the cultural superimposition of sexual innocence onto virtue, *Histories* firmly locates exemplarity in the penitents’ teachability and willingness to embrace change. Prostitution is just a step, but not the last one, in the moral progress of these women’s lives.

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