

Carter, Sophie, *Representing Prostitution in Eighteenth-Century English Popular Print and Culture* (British art and visual culture since 1750: new readings), Aldershot, Ashgate, 2004; cloth; pp. ix, 211; 37 b/w illustrations; RRP £49.95; ISBN 0754606295.

This is an extremely uneven book. It would have been much better if, to begin with, the visual material under discussion had been more satisfactorily presented. The illustrations are too small, and the full length of the page should have been used rather than only a small portion. Many details – including details referred to in the text – are largely invisible. As importantly, one of the sets of prints, from *The Harlot's Progress: being the Life of the Noted Moll Hackabout* (1732) is numbered quite incorrectly. *The Harlot's Progress* offers crude illustrations based on Hogarth's *A Harlot Progress*. However, what is shown as Plate II of *The Harlot's Progress* should undoubtedly be Plate IV, as it is a match for Plate IV in Hogarth's publication. 'Plate III' should be 'Plate II' and 'Plate IV' ought to be 'Plate III'. As a result of this disorder, a good deal of Carter's discussion is not easy to follow. On p. 147, she quotes a caption belonging to, supposedly, Plate II in her book, but it does not resemble any of the verses shown on pp. 17-22 as accompanying the plates from *The Harlot's Progress*.

In terms of content there is otherwise a good deal of interest. Chapter 1 is one of the best, especially because it is mostly factual rather than – as much of this book is – merely interpretive and tendentious. We learn, for example, a good deal about the places where prostitution was practised, and that it was a very prominent

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activity in eighteenth century London. It is intriguing to learn that, probably, by far 'the majority [*sic*] of prostitution in London was undertaken by women operating independently, unsupervised, and, as necessity dictated, on the streets or in private lodgings' (p. 12). To say this is not, of course, to suggest that their life was easy; as Carter reminds us, prostitution was an illegal activity and thus 'subject to a variety of regulatory, and punitive measures' (p. 17). Soon, however, she starts claiming matters she cannot — and does not — prove, e.g. that 'the majority of women working as prostitutes in London endured an utterly wretched and miserable life' (p. 18). Sweeping statements like this become all too readily part of a construct in which prostitutes are, in effect, always victims, and men always their exploiters. This suits Carter's purposes because she wishes to make out that eighteenth century 'culture' was one which saw matters the other way round.

The arguments advanced are often quite forced or even perverse, as when we read that the several plagiarised versions of Hogarth's *A Harlot's Progress* are to be seen, with 'only a slight adjustment of perspective', as 'the gauge, not of the originality of *Hogarth's Progress*, but of its derivative nature' (p. 36). By definition, it is difficult to argue that if B follows A, which came first, somehow that proves lack of originality in A, and Carter simply does not make her case in an instance like this, even though the view on prostitution which Hogarth's illustrations imply *may* well have been widespread.

Visual material from the past, especially if there is a dearth of other material to guide us, is often extremely difficult to interpret with confidence. Carter is unhappy to note 'how much energy has been expended by generations of commentators in seeking to determine once and for all whether Hogarth's Moll Hackabout enters into prostitution knowingly and willingly' (p. 38). If anything, I veer toward the view that Hogarth may very well deliberately have left the matter quite open. I agree with Carter that the verses she quotes from plagiarised material (p. 39) suggest that, at the least, Moll is far too easily bribed, but no such commentary accompanies Hogarth's images.

I think that on the whole Carter is on safer ground in one of the central tenets of her book: that there was a tendency, on the part of the artists, to present pictures of women who were at one and the same time seen as both attractive to males and a potent and immoral threat to them. While she sees this syndrome as a matter of huge complexity, which perhaps in some senses it was, I would think that what happens in an instance like that of 'A Man Trap' (1780, reproduced as fig. 32 on p. 101) is in essence quite simple: the picture shows us an extremely attractive young woman, but any male who decides to consort with her runs a risk of an

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undefined sort. Thus the implication certainly is that the woman in such cases of sexual contact is the one who should be blamed for whatever happens rather than the man, who ought to be on his guard against her. The best thing about Carter's book is that she shows very well how that message was conveyed again and again. Thus this publication was worth undertaking, but it would have greatly benefited if more care and restraint had been applied in producing it.

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Clunies Ross, Margaret, ed., *The Old Norse Poetic Translations of Thomas Percy* (Making the Middle Ages 4), Turnhout, Brepols, 2001; hardback; pp. xiii, 290; RRP €55; ISBN 2503510779.

The core of this book is a facsimile reprint of Thomas Percy's *Five Pieces of Runic Poetry* (1763) with very extensive notes. It also provides editions from the surviving manuscripts of other Percy translations of Old Norse poetry (some never before published, others only previously published in incomplete form) and his two versions of *The Battle of Brunanburh*, the sole Old English text. What might seem at first glance like a relatively simple task proves, of course, to be one of fascinating complexity. In order to annotate these texts adequately the editor needs to take into account many factors: (1) the editions of the original texts that Percy was using; (2) the glosses (usually in Latin but sometimes in other languages such as Swedish) included in those editions; (3) other translations available to him (such as the French ones of Paul-Henri Mallet); (4) the linguistic choices open to him (for example, words like *valkyrie*, first tentatively used by Gray in 1768, and *berserk*, first used by Scott in 1822, had not yet been adopted into English); (5) the differences between the editions (and manuscripts) Percy was using and modern editions; (6) the information that Percy was able to obtain from other British scholars, notably his neighbour Edward Lye (described in the book as 'probably the most able English scholar of his day in the field of comparative Germanic languages' (p. 12)); and (7) the general level of knowledge of Norse mythology and history in eighteenth century Britain. All of this requires a formidable level of scholarship of which Margaret Clunies Ross has full command. She guides the reader expertly through this complex maze so that by the end we can clearly appreciate the strengths and weaknesses of Percy's translations and how they

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