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Portrait de l'artiste en fille de joie. La littérature publique. By ELEONORE REVERZY. Paris: CNRS Editions, 2016. 340 pp.

In this rich exploration of an old metaphor based on the oldest profession, Eléonore Reverzy's focus is on the period from 1830 to 1900, the height of the "civilisation of the newspaper". She adds to the work on the body in literature by scholars such as Peter Brooks, and to the body of work on literature and the press by Marie-Eve Thérénty and others. As the latter has shown, the socio-economic changes of this period had profound consequences for the production and consumption of imaginative literature, making it readily available to the masses and opening it to accusations of the degradation of truth, beauty and goodness. From the Palais Royal to the pavement, Reverzy opens new perspectives on the association between the selling of literary news and the selling of sex, between Grub Street and grubby sheets, looking back to Pietro Aretino and to the eighteenth century and bringing her investigations to a close as the twentieth century shifts away from the inquisitorial Realism which found its perfect metaphor in prostitution and protagonist in the prostitute. Central to her account of the metaphor is the exchange of the commodified beauty of one individual for the money of the many, usually for the ultimate financial benefit of someone other than the prostitute; a situation clearly analogous to that of the late nineteenth-century professional writer. As protagonist, the prostitute is the incarnation of beauty and corruption, the ultimate social outsider, freed by this very exclusion from the constraints of her original social class. Reverzy's study of the narrative structures thus facilitated lays bare the gendered outcomes of literary prostitution: while the female prostitute may start high or low, her final trajectory is always downwards after a peak, as her commercial value drops over time and she is ravaged by the syphilis which her clients pass on as some form of miraculous infection, for they never seem to suffer from it themselves. The male journalist-as-prostitute can and often does succeed through his corruption, like Georges Duroy gazing across to the Palais Bourbon from – where else – the Madeleine. At the same time, this literature destabilises gender assumptions, often representing male writers with conventionally feminine traits, or serving as cover for a female's intellect. Similarly disruptive is the association between the nudity of the prostitute's body and truth. Nudity reveals truth in a society which usually conceals it; and not only her truth, but also that of the men from all walks of life stripped of all that connotes social status, reduced to little more than the imperatives of their genitals by the power of the female body's anatomization of society. Reverzy explores well beyond the obvious touchstones of *Illusions perdues*, *Bel-Ami*, and *Nana*, although Zola's novel in particular offers her a pertinent case study of the ways in which a story of prostitution, skilfully marketed in newspapers through glimpses of its erotic content, incarnates the "littérature publique" of her title, simultaneously available to all and serious in its aesthetic approach to titillating taboos.

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