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Jessica Tanner, *Sex Work, Text Work: Mapping Prostitution in the Nineteenth-Century French Novel*. Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2023. ix + 278 pp. Notes, references, and index. $65.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 9780810145849; $65.00 U.S. (eb). ISBN 9780810145856.

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If every major male novelist in nineteenth-century France (and many forgotten ones) penned at least one novel on prostitution over the course of the century, it is because the sex worker served as a productive plot generator. For writers such as J. K. Huysmans, Edmond de Goncourt, and Emile Zola, prostitutes are "commercially and narratively seductive protagonists," Jessica Tanner argues in *Sex Work*, *Text Work*, because "their work at least in theory, engenders the chance encounters that generate plot" (p. 58). In the nineteenth century, administrators feared that unregulated prostitutes would contaminate society literally through syphilis and other venereal diseases and writers, fretting over morality, sought to regulate the *filles*' immoral sexual conduct outside of the norms of marriage. Tanner's work thus should be situated in the context of literary scholars and art historians who, in the last fifty years, have examined in their books how nineteenth-century French artists and writers toiled to make visible the activities of prostitutes whose presence was meant to remain invisible.

In the field of Impressionist painting, the groundbreaking work of T.J. Clark (*The Painting of Modern Life*, 1985) and Hollis Clayson (*Painted Love*, 1991) examine representations of sex workers in *brasseries*, brothels, on the stage, and on the streets. Scholars of fiction and journalism cite the foundational works of literary critic Charles Bernheimer (*Figures of Ill Repute,* 1997) and historians Alain Corbin (*Les filles de noce*, 1978) and Jill Harsin (*Policing Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century Paris*, 1985). Bernheimer and Corbin both mine the work of administrator Alexandre Parent-Duchâtelet's *De la prostitution dans la ville de Paris* (1836). Duchâtelet, under the auspices of public hygiene, approached the social phenomenon of prostitution the same way he regarded the threat of uncontrolled sewage contaminating Paris: the sewer as both receptacle and container. His theories greatly influenced the way novelists and journalists depicted prostitutes. Bernheimer relies on psychoanalytic theory to read the containment project on prostitution while Janet Beizer (*Ventriloquized Bodies,* 1994), Jann Matlock (*Scenes of Seduction*, 1994), and Rachel Mesch (*The Hysteric's Revenge,* 2006) consider the problem in tandem with hysteria. For her part, Tanner makes an important contribution to the field by bringing the theories of Jacques Rancière (*La mésentente,* 1995) and Michel de Certeau (*L'invention du quotidien,* 1, 1990) to the table. Over the course of an introduction, four chapters, and a conclusion, Tanner examines the largely naturalist project of mapping in a Paris wrecked and refashioned by Haussmannization by writers eager to navigate a new urban landscape and to master the prostitute in the Third Republic.

How do writers such as a young Huysmans, Goncourt (writing a novel for the first time without his brother), and Zola, as well as lesser-known ones, distinguish their novels from Honoré de Balzac's successful, monumental *Comédie humaine*? Taking *Père Goriot*'s Rastignac (1835) as a model of the *arriviste* who strives to make his "way throughout the city and the plot," Tanner, in her introduction, makes her first claim that the authors of realist and naturalist novels and their male protagonists navigate the maze of Paris to stake out and establish homes during the Second Empire and Third Republic (p. 5). Like Balzac in *Ferragus* (1833), Tanner intertwines the courtesan as a metaphor standing in for Paris, because "she encompasses the capital's physical and social topography, providing a map of Paris that incorporates time" (p. 5). Tanner's project, which oscillates between literal and figurative mapping of prostitution in Paris both by city authorities and authors, concentrates on their quest to master the prostitute within the bounds of the containment project set by Parent-Duchâtelet "to safeguard the social order" (p. 7). However, these writers undercut this "disciplinary logic," according to Tanner's second claim, "because they make even the 'clandestine' prostitutes the reglementarist system was designed to obscure indiscriminately visible and accessible to readers" (p. 7). The works of Haussmann, which sought to beautify and aggrandize the city with symmetry and monumental buildings while simultaneously razing narrow, unsanitary streets ripe for barricades, left the city's inhabitants reeling from constant construction and disorientation. They indeed complicated the task of making Paris mappable and thus readable for Paris's inhabitants and aspiring novelists alike due to the constant upheaval. Writers and regulators wanted the prostitute physically located and textually pinned down in their map plotting, but Tanner argues via Jacques Rancière's theories of the "police order" that the prostitute's tolerated status has no place (p. 22). Moreover, Tanner cites Michel de Certeau's "distinction between strategy and tactics as modes of negotiating space" to demonstrate how the prostitute disrupts this project with her "tactical practice of space and narrative" (p. 26). Reading the theories of the two philosophers together allows Tanner to examine what novels of prostitution in nineteenth-century French literature tell readers "about the politics of literature, of both reading and writing" (p. 31).

In her first chapter, Tanner tackles both the tolerated brothel, the "cornerstone of the reglementarist system," and the nostalgia for a pre-Haussmannized Paris in Huysmans and Goncourt's first naturalist novels, respectively *Marthe, histoire d'une fille* (1876) and *La fille Elisa* (1877) (p. 45). She takes as a starting point the ambiguous ending of Gustave Flaubert's *L'éducation sentimentale* (1869) in which Frédéric and Deslauriers recall a long-ago trip to a brothel: "C'est là ce que nous avons eu de meilleur" (p. 43). First explaining that Flaubert "plots the brothel on a novel map that refers only to other maps, detached from any stable territory," she contends in her chapter that for all their aims of documenting in a realistic manner the tolerated brothels in Paris, Huysmans and Goncourt also run into similar problems in their fictions of "unhomely houses" (p. 44). If they have trouble accurately locating in their works the licensed bordellos, it is because Haussmann demolished many of them during the Second Empire. Brothels had fallen out of fashion during the Third Republic and faced with the literary monotony of "Haussmann's homogenous boulevards," the two writers pined for all the plot possibilities offered by the *bas fonds* of old Paris (p. 47). According to Tanner, these two authors "plot Paris and its vices in an effort to make their name, seeking to secure their authority by making out the city and the novel as their literary territory"(p. 47).

Tanner argues that while normally working-class prostitutes such as Marthe and Elisa, by virtue of their professions, are ideal protagonists due to all their chance encounters ripe to generate plots, when bound by the naturalist rules of documentation, the plots of Goncourt and Huysmans stall when their protagonists stagnate in brothels. In other words, the two authors use the prostitute as a "ready-made human document" to locate and therefore contain, à la Duchâtelet, venal sexuality. Yet in mastering her by realistically enclosing her in a brothel meant to incarcerate her, they risk "snuffing out her story" (p. 61). For Tanner, the brothel can serve as a *lieu propre* but is also understood as a "heterotopia" located outside of the respected social order. Elisa steps out of the brothel in order for Goncourt to move the plot forward, but she murders a soldier and dies in prison. For his part, Huysmans allows Marthe to live but ends the novel with her return to yet another brothel. Tanner winds down her chapter by arguing that *Marthe* already shows cracks in Huysmans's admiration for the literary movement against which he will famously turn in *A rebours* (1884).

Taking *A rebours* as her starting point, Tanner leans on historical and literary sources in her engaging second chapter to plot how the *brasserie à femmes (*"female-staffed beer houses"), a locale des Esseintes, the novel's protagonist, declares bleakly symptomatic of the period, fits in with the ever-evolving phenomenon of prostitution (p. 100). This trendy new public house, first created as a novelty to attract customers during the 1867 *Exposition Universelle*, greatly increased in number in the 1870s and 1880s as it replaced the unfashionable *maison close*. Tastes changed for men seeking sexual escapades as an "'embourgeoisement' ("bourgeoisification") of desire in French society" took hold. Tanner states: "By selling him a side of story along with his bocks and her sex, she skillfully manipulates what Huysmans names the "pensée dominante du siècle" --according to des Esseintes, "ce sentimentalisme imbécile combiné avec une férocité pratique" (p. 101). The *fille de brasserie* also sold clients stories of seduction she authored herself by teasing them with refusal before engaging in sex with them.

Tanner notes that "a proletariat of bachelors and whores" frequented the *brasserie à femmes*, according to *Les déracinés* (1897) the first volume of Maurice Barrès's trilogy, *Le roman de l'énergie nationale* (1897-1902) (p. 100). Young would-be Rastignacs have come to Paris "overeducated and physically understimulated, their big-city desires fueled by a stream of Balzacian metaphors and ideals" to make it big (p. 102). They find solace and success in a *brasserie*, but they fail to make their mark on Paris itself. For many young women from the provinces, employment in the beer hall is also a sort of "rite of passage." These ladies spin stories under false names for a few years of making money before they slip back unnoticed (because they never registered as prostitutes) into straight societies to pursue other dreams (p. 118). Alphonsine, the protagonist of Adolphe Tabarant's *Virus d'amour* (1886) has plans for life outside of the *brasserie*, but keeping in line with the containment project, Tabarant punishes her with certain death from syphilis, stomping out her threat textually in the same way Zola does in *Nana* (1880). Unlike Zola's character, "Alphonsine resists authorial mastery of her body's fate even and especially in her final breaths, as she reasserts herself into the narrative" (p. 136). As Tanner explains, Alphonsine kills herself rather than continue to suffer and cries out as an act of resistance.

In chapter three, Tanner examines Zola's efforts to establish himself as the ultimate cartographer of Paris. With theories of naturalism as his guide, Zola, in Tanner's estimation, makes

prostitution a site of mastery. As such, Tanner analyzes Zola's efforts to dispossess Balzac and Haussmann's hold "on the urban imaginary in order to make way for his own literary capital" (144). She focuses on three novels from his twenty-volume *Les Rougon-Macquart*: *Histoire naturelle et sociale d'une famille sous le Second Empire* (1871-1893). The "prostitute's body is the infrastructure," Tanner asserts, "making Zola's *oeuvre* a novel house of prostitution" (170). In *La Curée* (1871-72), the second novel in Zola's Rougon-Macquart series, the naturalist reduces the story of Haussmann's refashioning of Paris into the "mauvais lieu de l'Europe" (p. 150). If Zola personifies Haussmann's Paris as a "dolled-up street prostitute," it is to tear down the city for which *Nana* serves as a metonym (p. 150). According to Tanner, "Nana fulfills a dual function within the frame of Zola's series: facilitating the mapping of Haussmann's capital by binding it in text as a *mauvais lieu*, she also prepares the subsequent plotting of Zola's Paris by decomposing the imperial map she traces" (p. 152). Nana's decomposing body thus serves as the foundation for the department store Octave Mouret erected in *Au Bonheur des dames* (1883). Tanner describes Mouret's department store as an antidote to the scenes of seduction sold by prostitutes/beer servers at the *brasseries à femmes* with a sort of *brasserie à dames*: "By trafficking in sartorial stories that sell the Parisienne a self-serve fiction of her own desire, Zola invents a new prostitutional narrative, one that allows for the creation of a felicitous Paris that is properly his--a textual Paris-Bonheur that he weaves with Mouret's signature fabric" (p. 166). In this imaginary store, Zola has invented a space in which he contains female desire the way the Third Republic administrators attempt to regulate prostitution. Interpreting Zola's project with Rancière's "literarity" Tanner concludes that Zola's novel machine suffers from a fracture, because "readers cannot be seduced into silence or compliance" with it (p. 171).

In her engaging fourth chapter, Tanner takes her critical project to the streets. After analyzing Zola's titillating courtesan Nana and Balzac's ambitious arriviste Rastingnac, Tanner turns her attention to a novel that gives voice to Paris's ratés--impoverished, mediocre men who struggle to navigate Paris and masses of streetwalkers who remain anonymous in their efforts to dodge the police. Charles-Louis Philippe, in his largely forgotten autofictional *Bubu de Montparnasse* (1901), fictionalizes his "1898 affair with Maria Tixier, an unregistered street prostitute he first met on the Sébastopol one "lendemain du 14 juillet" (p. 177). His literary doppelgänger, the bland Pierre, tries to extract Berthe from the clutch of the eponymous pimp Bubu, a cunning "underworld *arriviste*, a *fin-de-siècle* hybrid of Balzac's Rastignac and Vautrin," who masters the streets of Paris, "rather than his ostensible leading man" (190). For this reason, Tanner claims the impoverished worker and the unregistered street prostitute demonstrate what Rancière calls the *sans-part*: "those who have no place in the dominant social configuration he calls *la police*" (p. 178). Unlike Rastignac, Pierre simply wants to find companionship and modest career success that will lift him out of poverty. Tanner explains: "Pierre continues to long for a woman he can claim as his own: a human presence, mappable as a sign and landmark that can make a place for him to call home in Paris" (185). He finds fulfillment with Berthe until Bubu comes back to reclaim her. As Pierre's friend Louis explains to him, his love should give him the force to save the prostitute from her pimp and thereby redeem her. Pierre's failure at the end of the novel to save Berthe from Bubu seems like a victory over "the poor, the ugly, and the timid" of Paris with whom Pierre identifies (p. 197). However, using Rancière's theory of "escaping 'plebeian' subjection," Tanner offers an alternate reading in which "Pierre's surrender is a necessary precondition for subverting the pimp's mastery--not by defeating Bubu, but by dispersing mastery itself" (197). In Tanner's estimation, the plebian prostitute also subverts the typical

redemption narrative because Berthe has the ability to read (through her accurate sizing up of punters on the street) and to write (through her capacity to spin stories that will earn her money from men like Pierre). Tanner concludes that common characters like Pierre and Berthe make the narrative distinctive by "democratizing" its potential. Hence in "textualizing his own experience and assigning it to a character like Pierre, Philippe undermines his own sovereignty, subjecting his story to the authority of the readers" (p. 206). In the end, Philippe, the anti-Rastingnac, establishes himself as a "man of letters" (p. 208).

For all their efforts to master and contain prostitutes, naturalist writers, in making the sex worker visible to readers, cannot control how she will be interpreted by the public. Their efforts could in fact disrupt their own containment project by allowing "prostitutes to recognize themselves as subject by becoming readers" (p. 39). Tanner optimistically notes in her conclusion that Philippe's former lover, Tixier, on whom Berthe is based, also gains "subjectivity" in real life after she leaves Bubu and reads the novel she inspired. Theorizing literary politics with the help of Rancière (literarity and dissensus) and Roberto Esposito (*Terms of the Political,* 2012, affirmative community), Tanner explains how Philippe's novel carves out a space for the prostitute outside of works seeking to subject her to authorial submission. Other former sex workers such as Virginie Despentes (*King Kong Theory*, 2006), Jewish-Algerian author Germaine Aziz (*Histoire d'une prostituée juive d'Algérie*, 1980), and brothel proprietress Berthe Leroy (*Mémoires de Berthe Leroy, Maison Mystère*, *racontées par elle-même*, 1895), Tanner asserts, demonstrate the "practice of thinking with, and rewriting, the male-authored texts that prostitutes generate and 'write' but which deny them a voice of their own" (p. 223). Readers of fictions on prostitution, including those who lived the life, commit a political act by reading the text in a way that suits them, not necessarily in the way the writer wanted them to interpret the text. Literature always has the power to potentially tear apart and reconstruct in a new way that "undermines the mastery it plots" (p. 223). In this way, the common working-class *fille* "writes back" in a way that recalls the memoirs and novels of the courtesans who did the same during the Second Empire and Third Republic.

At its best, Tanner's book places canonical and largely forgotten works in dialogue to offer new areas of exploration in the vast field of scholarship on prostitution in nineteenth-century literature. Yet for all her attempts to demonstrate literary mapping of prostitution and its scalability, Tanner devotes scant space to the work in the last twenty years examining the various types and social ranking of prostitutes. Indeed, the courtesan in Balzac can "stand in" for Paris, but she also plays different roles (some of them even positive) throughout the *Comédie humaine*. Moreover, the attempt by French administrators, police, and authors to contain prostitutes in order to master the female body they cast as venal, dangerous, and often contaminating is an eminently misogynist project. While it was true that several works of scholarship point this out, it would be good for Tanner to briefly acknowledge--because she tackles the political potential of literature--how these efforts by men fit into the overarching patriarchal social structure. Her contextualizing the Haussmannization of Paris and its relationship to the mapping and mastery of prostitution in the city is innovative but a mention of the economics of prostitution and a brief discussion of the financial reasons that drove women into prostitution would be welcome. That said, anyone who has ever published on prostitution has always confronted the impossible task of limiting one's project so that it will be readable. No one critic could ever address every facet of

prostitution within a single critical work. The good news is that these criticisms offer topics and questions Tanner and other industrious scholars can address in the future.

Theory-heavy, this excellent book would best serve scholars and advanced graduate students who work on prostitution in nineteenth-century French literature, society, history, and art, because as the title indicates, it demands challenging work on the part of the reader. In her conclusion, Tanner acknowledges that her scholarship, just as the *oeuvres* she examines within it, is subject to the same "politics of reading" and "indeterminate reception" it identifies. Her ultimate goal is to "make space for us to think together" about prostitution and her book does so swimmingly (p. 224).

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