The eighteenth century in Britain is often understood as a time of commercial success, economic growth and improving living standards. Yet during this period, tens of thousands of men and women were imprisoned for failing to pay their debts. *The Poverty of Disaster* tells their stories, focusing on the experiences of the middle classes who enjoyed opportunities for success on one hand, but who also faced the prospect of downward social mobility on the other. Tawny Paul examines the role that debt insecurity played within society and the fragility of the credit relations that underpinned commercial activity, livelihood and social status. She demonstrates how, for the middle classes, insecurity took economic, social and embodied forms. It shaped the work people did, their social status, their sense of self, their bodily autonomy and their relationships with others. In an era of growing debt and the squeeze of the middle class, *The Poverty of Disaster* offers a new history of capitalism and takes a long view of the financial insecurities that plague our own uncertain times.

**Tawny Paul** is Senior Lecturer in the Department of History at the University of Exeter, where her research focuses on the economic and social history of eighteenth-century Britain. She has published widely on the history of economic life as well as in the field of heritage studies. She is the author of numerous journal articles and the co-editor of *Art and Public History: Approaches, Opportunities, and Challenges* (2017) with Rebecca Bush.
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THE POVERTY OF DISASTER

Debt and Insecurity in Eighteenth-Century Britain

TAWNY PAUL

University of Exeter
To Aaron
Contents

List of Figures page viii
List of Tables ix
Acknowledgements xi

Introduction 1

PART I STRUCTURES OF INSECURITY 29
1 The Scale of Incarceration: Debt and the Middling Sort 31
2 Credit and the Economic Structures of Insecurity 67
3 Social Structures of Insecurity 95

PART II THE INSECURE SELF 135
4 Keeping in Credit: Reputation and Gender 137
5 Occupational Identities and the Precariousness of Work 165

PART III THE DEBTOR’S BODY 189
6 Punishing the Body: Harm and the Coercive Nature of Credit 191
7 The Worth of Bodies: Debt Bondage, Value and Selfhood 214
Conclusion 236

Bibliography 248
Index 277
Figures

1.1 Prison populations, Fleet, King’s Bench and Edinburgh Tolbooth, 1707–1790  page 46
2.1 Comparison of wealth constitution amongst imprisoned and free occupational groups, 1720–1760  72
3.1 Discharge of Insolvent Debtors, Sept. 2, 1743. London, 1761  107
3.2 The First of April, c.1780  121
4.1 Public insults waged against men and women in Edinburgh  151
Tables

1.1 Incarceration time, Edinburgh, Lancaster and London, 1720–1770  
   page 43
1.2 Incarceration rate of adult males, London  
   45
1.3 Incarceration rate of adult males, Edinburgh  
   47
1.4 Occupational status of imprisoned debtors, Edinburgh and London  
   50
1.5 Occupations of imprisoned debtors compared with occupational structure of the general population  
   52
1.6 Incarceration rate of middling adult males, London  
   53
1.7 Status of women incarcerated for debt, London and Edinburgh  
   53
1.8 Age profile of prisoners applying for release from the Marshalsea, 1696–1704  
   55
1.9 Gender composition of imprisoned debtors and creditors  
   58
1.10 Occupational status of female debtors applying for relief  
   59
2.1 Constitution of household wealth of imprisoned debtors, Lancaster and London, 1725–1755  
   77
2.2 Comparison of assets and debts owed by imprisoned debtors, London  
   79
2.3 Status of desperate debts due to London prisoners  
   82
2.4 Frequency of direct and secondary debts pursued in Edinburgh bailie court  
   91
3.1 Mechanisms used to release imprisoned debtors, London and Edinburgh  
   104
3.2 Occupational comparison of creditors and debtors in Edinburgh Tolbooth, 1730–1770  
   119
3.3 Time elapsed between due date of a debt and date of imprisonment, Edinburgh Tolbooth, 1730–1770  
   130
3.4 Value of debts due by prisoners incarcerated in Edinburgh and London, 1730–1770  
   131
List of Tables

4.1 Gender composition of litigants in defamation cases, Edinburgh consistory court, 1700–1770 142
4.2 Occupational status of litigants in defamation cases, Edinburgh consistory court, 1700–1770 146
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