“By the Author of Fanny Hill”

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“By the Author of Fanny Hill”: Selling John Cleland

Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure was published anonymously in 1748-49, but it was not long before a name was attached to the title, or rather two names: that of its self-narrating protagonist Fanny Hill, and that of its self-concealing author John Cleland. Cleland's success as a novelist might even be measured by the degree to which the fame of his fictional creation outstrips his own. Outside the small world of eighteenth-century studies, mention of John Cleland is likely to draw a blank until “Fanny Hill” is offered by way of explanation. Hers is not just the name of an individual character, but a kind of shorthand for a category of fiction, be it pornography, harlot's progress, saucy romp, or narrative of sexual education. As such, it is a name universally recognized.

Following the 1963 New York Supreme Court decision that cleared the G. P. Putnam's Sons edition of the *Woman of Pleasure* for sale in that state—and implicitly, tacitly, elsewhere—a handful of other publishers took note of the commercial possibilities, and began searching for ways to latch onto the book's profitable notoriety. Putnam brought out its own paperback edition that same year, including Justice Klein's opinion in the New York state case—an opinion that set the terms of the 1966 US Supreme Court decision in “*Memoirs vs Massachusetts*”—and a brief note on “the American History” of the *Memoirs*.¹ That history is, by and large, one of legal suppression and semi-underground circulation, partly by means of what the Note's author calls “the limited-editions racket” of the nineteenth and earlier twentieth centuries.² Deploying this legal history to frame Cleland's newly vindicated text, Putnam situates its edition as part of an ongoing struggle for press freedom and liberty of thought (for readers and authors alike) at the same time as it uses the authority of the court to affirm that neither it nor its readers are motivated by prurient or wholly mercenary interests. The *Memoirs* purveys neither “dirt for dirt's sake” nor “dirt for money's sake,” as Klein puts it in his opinion.³ It is instead, as the literary expert witnesses testified under oath, a work of literary and historical value. Still, if the

court's judgment covered the text in a cloak of respectability, its inclusion in the Putnam edition also served as a kind of advertisement, a reminder that this is a book that "undeniably contain[s] numerous descriptions of the sex act and certain aberrations thereof": it might, indeed, appeal very much to "the salacious page turner."⁴

Reminders of a book's suppression, then, can act as a signal of its dangerous, hard-core, aberrant contents. Putnam exercised restraint, relying just on the name "Fanny Hill" blazoned in extra-large type across the front cover to sell the book, but publishers who brought out other, less familiar titles, hoping to cash in on the Fanny Hill craze, put greater stress on the censorial suppression their long-lost texts had suffered. First off the mark was Lancer Books (New York), who before the year's end issued what it labeled the "Unexpurgated First American Edition" of Cleland's second novel, *Memoirs of a Coxcomb* (1751), described as "the suppressed sequel to Fanny Hill."⁵ No matter that it never had been expurgated or suppressed, nor that its sexual content is always discreetly veiled; the promotional copy on the flyleaf suggests it has a place on the index of prohibited books:

The woman of pleasure was not a figment of John Cleland's imagination. She lived and moved among the colorful figures of 18th-century England. And she had her male counterpart: the coxcomb...*man* of pleasure.

John Cleland knew this life intimately. In *Memoirs of a Coxcomb*, as in *Fanny Hill*, he wrote of it with complete frankness and honesty.

Suppressed until now, it is a major work of *exotica*.⁶

The substitution of *exotica* for *erotica* (cognate with the use of *exotic dancer* for stripper) was a well-understood rhetorical ploy in the newspapers and paperback bookstores of 1950s and 60s North America, not unlike the substitution of "art movies" for stag films or "physical culture" as code for male nude photo mags in late-night newstands. The blurb on the *Coxcomb* flyleaf sets it as counterpart to the exotic *Fanny Hill* ("woman of pleasure...*man* of pleasure") and offers a

biographical ground for both texts: “John Cleland knew this life intimately...he wrote of it with complete frankness and honesty,” the synonymy of the last two terms serving to drive the point home. A portrait of the artist begins to emerge: a habitué of the demimonde, a man of pleasure himself.

The portrait is greatly amplified in the Lancer *Coxcomb*'s introduction by “Franklin S. Klaf, M. D.,” among whose other works for Lancer are the introduction to its edition of the *Kama Sutra* (“the Long Suppressed Oriental Manual on the Art and Techniques of Love”) and *Satyriasis: A Study of Male Nymphomania* (“more fascinating than *Male Sexual Response*—a famous psychiatrist's definitive report on uncontrollable sexual desire in the human male”).⁷ In Klaf's lively introduction—written a decade before William Epstein cleared out the weedy mess of misinformation that had accrued over centuries around Cleland's name—the *Coxcomb*'s author is a bit satyriatic himself, having “spent the first half of his life in a variety of dissipations, from the harems of Smyrna to the fleshpots of the Orient.”⁸ Cleland, Klaf writes, “was a man who profited from sensual experience, a man who knew all about women from their physical charms to their subterranean nature...an erotic scholar who practiced before he wrote.”⁹ In fact we know nothing about Cleland's erotic practice, though his texts, and the few glimpses we have of his emotionally fraught relationships with other men, weigh against Klaf's contention that “he spent his own youth in pursuit of women.”¹⁰ Whatever the case, Klaf's biographical sketch links the sexual explicitness of Cleland's first two novels to his “dissipations” in “the fleshpots of the Orient”: the author is at one with his subject.

This view of the author is nothing new: Klaf's portrait harks back to eighteenth-century texts like Archibald Campbell's *The Sale of Authors* (1767), in which “Mr. Cl---d” is portrayed as one who “haunts” London's bawdy houses in pursuit of “fine jolly, buxom, Wenches.”¹¹ For both Campbell and Klaf, the author is identified by his affinity for the fleshpots he portrays. Put another way, “John Cleland” is treated less as a biographical subject in his own right than as a

kind of back-formation from the dissipated contents of the book by which he is known. So it is entirely apposite that on the spine of the Lancer *Coxcomb*, in place of Cleland's name, we have the phrase "By the Author of Fanny Hill." Hers is the brand name that informs prospective buyers of what their 75¢ will get them: a book like hers, another saucy or hardcore period romp. John Cleland is the historical person behind the work, but it is only insofar as he sticks to the role of "Author of Fanny Hill"—that is, produces work in her manner—that he has trademark value in the torrid marketplace of erotic fiction.

In what follows I focus on two eighteenth-century novels reissued in the wake of Fanny Hill's trials, both passed off as long-suppressed works by her author: *Memoirs of an Oxford Scholar* (1756) and *Genuine Memoirs of the Celebrated Miss Maria Brown* (1766). In neither case is there evidence to tie Cleland to the text, nor does either exhibit his idiosyncratic writerly mix of sly, crabbed wit and orotundity. For all their differences, both are mildly racy "memoirs" that could be peddled as members of the same bawdy species as the *Coxcomb* and *Woman of Pleasure*: a narrative species that also includes Tony Richardson's multiple Oscar-winning 1963 film of *Tom Jones*, whose popularity likely contributed to this mini-boom of antiquarian porn.¹² Attributing both texts to "the author of Fanny Hill," their twentieth-century publishers exploited a feature of eighteenth-century publishing that bedevils all later scholarship: the practices of pseudo- and anonymity. That these are also common practices in the fields of pornography and exotica, while it makes things difficult for scholars, creates an opportunity for booksellers—as seen, for example, in the attribution of the floridly homoerotic *Teleny* to Oscar Wilde in numerous editions from the late 1950s on.¹³ Such tenuously-supported attributions do smack of commercial opportunism, but might also be read as ironic or backhanded homages to the unscrupulous, mischievous culture of eighteenth-century bookselling. In Cleland's case, the scandal associated with his first book served as a pretext to accuse him of involvement in a wide range of literary frauds and outrages, from the *Memoirs of Maria Brown* to the forgery of Lady

Mary Wortley Montagu's letters and authorship of the obscene *Essay on Woman* for which John Wilkes was tried.¹⁴ Problems of attribution, if widespread in the period, have been especially notable in Cleland's case, owing in part to the odd variety of his interests and in part to his disreputable status. Building on the foundational work of William Epstein and Roger Lonsdale, other scholars have grappled with the question of exactly what belongs to the Cleland canon, and proposed some intriguing new attributions: the Lady Vane memoirs from Smollett's *Adventures of Peregrine Pickle* (1751); the 1757 *Voyage to the East Indies* credited to John Henry Grose; and some or all of the *History of the Marchioness de Pompadour* (1758-66?).¹⁵ But intriguing as these are, the evidence is still too patchy to move us beyond the conjectural. The aims of scholarly attribution, of course, are far from those that inspired the repackaging of two eighteenth-century potboilers as long-suppressed works by the author of Fanny Hill. But both sorts of attribution can make us rethink the shape of a literary career, raising questions of authorial style, recurrent themes, and the dynamics of collaboration and influence. Neither *Maria Brown* nor the *Oxford Scholar* can be linked to the actual John Cleland. Both, however, owe not only their twentieth-century rediscovery but even their eighteenth-century invention to "the author of Fanny Hill," whose pioneering novel-as-memoir created the genre to which these successors, like his own *Memoirs of a Coxcomb*, belong.

Sexing up the eighteenth century

The most startling attribution from the years of the Fanny Hill trials was made by Swan Publishing of Toronto, which in 1965 issued "the sizzling sequel to Fanny Hill," *Memoirs of a Male Prostitute*, in its "original complete uncensored edition."¹⁶ Sadly, this previously unknown text "by John Cleland, author of Fanny Hill" turned out to be just a front-cover makeover of his never-censored *Memoirs of a Coxcomb*, and must have disappointed any buyers whose interest the bold new title had piqued. (Even the *Coxcomb's* most fervid admirers would be unlikely to

describe it as “sizzling.”) This fraudulent retitling aside, the first new ascription to Cleland came with the 1968 Zebra Books paperback edition of *Memoirs of an Oxford Scholar*, billed on the front cover as the “First American Publication” of “a bawdy chronicle by John Cleland / author of Fanny Hill.”¹⁷ Zebra Books appears to be an imprint of Canyon Books, itself a subsidiary of Parallax Publishing, distributed by Grove Press. Grove was known for its countercultural mix of political radicalism, French avant-gardism, beat writing, and pornography (among its authors were Beckett, Burroughs, Malcolm X, and Sade) while Zebra kept to the exploitation fringe of this spectrum, with a line in Kennedy assassination conspiracy books and reissues of Victorian pornography, such as *The Lustful Turk* (1967). Indeed the cover art of Zebra’s *Oxford Scholar* features a cartoon image of a woman in a distinctly Victorian corset. The flyleaf copy, however, situates the text in its proper period:

Of all John Cleland’s novels, *Memoirs of an Oxford Scholar* is the one that has been suppressed for the longest time. The notorious *Fanny Hill* has been called the [most] famous banned book of all time and yet it has been more or less freely available to the interested reader since its initial publication in 1749. *Memoirs of a Coxcomb*, the sequel to *Fanny Hill*, has been similarly available.

However, *Memoirs of an Oxford Scholar* has never been published in the United States. This first American edition will introduce readers to a ribald masterpiece too long suppressed and will add dimension to the already considerable reputation of its author, John Cleland.

Zebra’s blurb cannily (and fraudulently) substitutes *suppressed* for *ignored*: in fact, the *Oxford Scholar* was never suppressed or taken any notice of. The original was published in London in 1756 by William Reeve, who the year before had co-published the first edition of Charlotte Charke’s autobiographical *Narrative* and, coincidentally, a reprint of Cleland’s 1751 translation of Giovanni Bianchi’s *Case of Catherine Vizzani*: two of the most notable accounts of cross-

dressing woman-loving women in the eighteenth century.¹⁸ Apart from this coincidence, however, which the editors at Zebra are unlikely to have known of, what is there to link Cleland to the *Oxford Scholar*?

On the title page of the 1756 *Oxford Scholar*, the text is said to have been “Written by Himself.” But in 1970, Leo Braudy noted that the copy in Yale’s Beinecke Library, which he thought may have been the source of the Zebra edition, has “Cleland’s Oxford Scholar” written on the spine.¹⁹ If the unknown sub-editor or hack who prepared Zebra’s version copied it from the Beinecke’s holding, that label may have seemed evidence enough. Although there is no way of knowing who wrote the label or on what basis, library records and notes written on or inside books are among the sorts of evidence on which attributions can be based, as are title pages, auction-house catalogues, publishers’ archives, authors’ or booksellers’ letters, the claims of contemporaries (friends, gossips, reviewers), and stylistic or thematic parallels to known works. Stylistic traits can be measured by complex forms of statistical analysis facilitated by literary computing (as has recently been done for some doubtful attributions to Oliver Goldsmith), but traditionally have been judged more qualitatively, even intuitively, by methods closer to those of connoisseurship.²⁰ Such methods, however, are also those of the amateur, and their evidentiary value is slight.²¹ Beyond this, imitation, plagiarism, editorial alteration, and collaboration, among other practices in the writing trade, vitiate the reliability of thematic and stylistic resemblance as evidence of authorship—which, as Catherine Gallagher, Frank Donoghue, and Isobel Grundy, among others, have demonstrated, was seldom if ever understood in the period as a solitary or self-contained endeavor.²² Still, if the connoisseur’s eye is the least rigorous sort of evidence, it may be the most satisfying. In the case, for example, of Cleland’s version of *Catherine Vizzani*, Lonsdale made the attribution on the basis of a note in Ralph Griffiths’s marked editorial set of the *Monthly Review*; and Griffiths’s professional links to Cleland in the 1750s give his word an almost unassailable authority.²³ But it is the striking resonance of this work with the treatment of

transgressive desire and the fluidly sexed body in the *Woman of Pleasure* that acts as Cleland's signature and confirms *Catherine Vizzani's* place in his authorial corpus.²⁴

Nothing apart from a single word on the spine of a single copy of the *Oxford Scholar* supports its ascription to Cleland, and nothing gives authority to that word. But the label on that single copy's spine tells us that at some point in the object's history, one reader believed it to be Cleland's work. Or perhaps, instead, it tells us that someone putting up this copy for sale aimed to catch a buyer's interest by attributing the text to the author of *Fanny Hill*. In either case, the authorial surname identifies the *Oxford Scholar* as a member of the same species (erotic novel-memoir, or "bawdy chronicle," in the Zebra Books blurb) as its more famous precursor. Yet if we read past the cover, the 1756 *Memoirs of an Oxford Scholar* is a pallid, rather melancholy romance. Structurally, it is similar to *Memoirs of a Coxcomb*. In both, the narrator falls in love at first sight with a beautiful Lydia or Chloe; circumstances separate them; avowedly constant in love, the memoirist nevertheless has other affairs in the beloved's absence; after some wavering, he renounces them, finds his Chloe, and the lovers are reunited till death.²⁵ This is so generic a romance plot, however, that no particular connection between the two novels can reasonably be staked on the basis of that similarity; nor does the *Oxford Scholar* resemble Cleland's work in its style or form. It is parcelled out into twenty-eight short chapters, each headed with its own bill of fare: "Chap. X: An Intrigue. Chap. XI: Contains Matters very extraordinary. Chap. XII: Contains what passed between the Author and his Friend," and so on. This is not a device used in the *Woman of Pleasure* or the *Coxcomb*, nor in Cleland's later fiction—the four novellas of *The Surprises of Love* (1760-64) and the three-volume epistolary novel *The Woman of Honor* (1768). Neither does the Cleland we know share the *Oxford Scholar's* penchant for the dash, as when he learns of his widower-father's marriage to a long-time secret mistress:

I was astonish'd, when I came to reflect upon his Conduct—A Man so regular, to all Appearance, in his Way of Life; so seemingly fond of my Mother; so outwardly

good, and so inwardly bad---Yet he was my Father, and I was sorry for my precipitate Resolution [to leave London without notice], though, at the same Time, I determined never to go near him again, unless he sent for me---which he never thought it worth his while to do.²⁶

As against Cleland's elegant, highly wrought periods, this jerkily punctuated prose conveys the conflicted feelings of the narrator effectively enough, breaking the sentence into fragments and outlining the abrupt shifts of thought as they occur. And while it has to be said that the narrative interest of the *Oxford Scholar's* plot is slight, it succeeds in constructing a social milieu and a mesh of relationships among its small cast of characters which the author carries out with some skill.

Unlike the orphan protagonists of Cleland's novels, the *Oxford Scholar's* Mr. A--- is embroiled in family conflicts originating a generation earlier. It is only at the time of his mother's death, for example, that he learns he has no fortune, the six hundred pounds per annum he enjoyed as his own income turning out to be only a life settlement on her, owing to her family's resentment at her elopement with a half-pay army captain. So disinterested is Chloe's love for Mr. A--- that his loss of all prospective fortune only makes her love him the more, but an atmosphere of romance constrained by the effects of ancient jealousies and familial disowning builds up over the novel's final chapters, such that the promised happy ending of the lovers' marriage is swiftly quashed by her death from a fever that "seize[s]" her (262) after she loses hope of a reconciliation with her mother.

The novel's gloomy ending is signalled even before the story begins, as a prefatory letter from editor to reader informs us that Chloe "died about eighteen Years ago," and that Mr. A--- "yet idolizes her Memory." In its mournful, valedictory tone the *Oxford Scholar* is closer to the sentimentalism of Henry Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* than to anything in Cleland's fiction; and like that 1771 novel, it valorizes the melancholy contemplations that seem to grow out of its

hero's reclusive withdrawal from the world. The one thing the *Oxford Scholar* is decidedly not is *bawdy*, even though that word appears on the front cover of the 1968 Zebra edition (as it also does on that of the 1969 British reprint of the Zebra from Sphere Books, where it is reinforced by a close-up photograph of a blonde barmaid's décolletage).²⁷ Rather, it is a narrative haunted by wrongful death, which seems to hover round the figure of the narrator's kindly and generous friend Colonel Standard, who lives in "pleasant Retirement in a small Village" outside London (18). It is the colonel who enables the lovers to marry by providing them with a secluded retreat to which Chloe's family cannot trace her; but this retreat, we learn, is a "Haunted House" (200, 251), whose only previous inhabitant was "villainously murdered" (203) by a man and wife with whom he charitably shared it. No wonder that Chloe "burst[s] into a violent Fit of Crying" (250) when she first sets foot in it, after fleeing her family's house by way of a conveniently unwatched garden door. Even this lucky escape, it turns out, is haunted by an earlier, violent, death, for the colonel's lover was shot dead at her own family's garden door when stealing away to elope with him. Chloe is not murdered, but her death, and the narrator's lifelong mourning, are foretold, even foredoomed, by those earlier deaths.

All in all, then, the *Oxford Scholar* was not an obvious choice for a bawdy romp to cash in on the Fanny Hill craze of the swinging sixties. But the anonymous Zebra sub-editor or hack in charge of the 1968 text, undeterred by the original's chaste gravity, obliged a potential market of salacious page-turners by embellishing the novel with eight pornographically extended sexual scenes, to make it worthy of ascription to the author of Fanny Hill. He (or she) even took pains to dovetail the new scenes into the old text, and to simulate Cleland's elaborately metaphorical style. As in the *Woman of Pleasure*, the "coarseness" of "plain words" is scrupulously bypassed in favor of euphemism, the author even mimicking Cleland's recurrent use of nautical imagery:

Behind my rod, past its shaft and down in the jewels which husband passion's liquor, I began to feel the hot surge of boiling liquid....I was no longer the captain

of my fate. The wave surged in me with a violence of its own. It thundered on, bursting out of the rigid head of my instrument with the force of hurricanes. Its crash on the shores of Corinna's receptive inner beaches was met with a shriek from the sweet girl herself, and writhings which fair tossed me from on top of her.²⁸

The effort to reproduce Cleland's style, or eighteenth-century diction in general, is not totally successful, but this is not too much more absurd than some of Fanny Hill's circumlocutions, even if the shortish declarative sentences are no match for Cleland's florid, elaborate syntax. Towards the end of the novel, however, it seems increasingly as if the modern pornographer is straining, as in this last sexual encounter of the narrator and Chloe:

Immediately my member, responding to impulses deep within me, begins to transform himself into the stiff gristle of *amour*....Up and down she moved, in the inverted position of mortar and pestle....She embraced love's arrow in eager, dear suction round it, compressing it inwardly. Every fibre of her love bowl strained too to be conjoined with my weapon of love....and we were near drowned in the waves of liquid sweets which emanated with the immensest force from our bliss-parts.²⁹

But if phrases like "love bowl" and "bliss-parts" are groan-inducing (and not in a sexy way), they do adhere pretty faithfully to Cleland's manner, and are not glaringly incongruous with the style of the original *Oxford Scholar*, though the narrator's interest in oral sex, and his breast fixation, reflect the sexual tastes of the 1960s more than those of the 1750s.

Copies of the Zebra and Sphere editions of the *Oxford Scholar* are easy to find online, so they may have sold well enough; but there was no second printing, and the pornographically enhanced text seems to have made as little lasting impression as the original. The juxtaposition of tragic romance with hard-core sex is jarring, and the appeal of Fanny Hill pastiches may have subsided in a period that saw so many formerly banned books, and so much new pornography, more freely available. But a revival of interest came after the publication of a new edition of the

Woman of Pleasure a few years later: *The Illustrated Fanny Hill*, with an introduction by Erica Jong, published in 1978 by the Erotic Art Book Society. This Society, directed by the maverick publisher Ralph Ginzburg, was the successor to his high-end, hardbound magazine *Eros*, whose fourth and final issue, featuring a soft-core “photographic tone poem” of a white woman with a black man, led to his 1962 indictment by the US Attorney General Robert Kennedy on charges of distributing obscene literature through the mails. (The third issue had featured excerpts from Cleland’s *Woman of Pleasure*, a year before the Putnam edition.) After three trials, Ginzburg’s conviction was upheld by the US Supreme Court, whose decision, ironically enough, came out the same day as that in ‘Memoirs vs Massachusetts.’³⁰ By the late 1970s, however, Ginzburg was able to publish a deluxe edition of the *Woman of Pleasure*—sporting illustrations out of Aubrey Beardsley by Zevi Blum and designed by the innovative graphic artist Herb Lubalin—without threat of prosecution. Erica Jong was a smart choice to write a new introduction: the bestselling author of *Fear of Flying* (1973) and *How to Save Your Own Life* (1977), she had also earned an MA in eighteenth-century literature at Columbia, and by 1978 had started work on her third novel, a revisionist take on the *Woman of Pleasure* titled *Fanny*, published in 1980.³¹ With Brigid Brophy, who in a review of Cleland’s novel wrote that “the two most fascinating subjects in the universe are sex and the eighteenth century,” Jong made the case for feminist pleasure in Cleland’s brand of pornography, and for a reading of the eighteenth century as in itself sexy.³²

“She’s frank, she’s shocking, she’s delightful”

The conjunction of *Fanny Hill*, Jong’s *Fanny*, and *Fear of Flying*’s “zipless fuck” led directly to the 1981 St. Martin’s Press reissue of a novel unread since its original appearance in 1766, *Genuine Memoirs of the Celebrated Miss Maria Brown*, whose first-person protagonist displays all “the delightful cheerfulness...the sheer healthiness and bounciness” that Jong found in Cleland’s work.³³ That St. Martin’s editors had Jong and *The Illustrated Fanny Hill* in mind

when they published *Maria Brown* is graphically confirmed by their use of an identical font for the dust jacket lettering to the very distinctive one Herb Lubalin had devised for the Erotic Art Book Society. And on that jacket, in dusky pink and letters as large as those of the book's title, the tell-tale words: "By the Author of Fanny Hill."³⁴

In the case of *Maria Brown*, St. Martin's had some authority for the attribution, because it was first made on the title page of the 1766 original, which reads "Published by the Author of a Woman of Pleasure." Here, unlike the embellished Zebra/Sphere *Oxford Scholar*, the fraud was in the original text.³⁵ No external evidence links Cleland to *Maria Brown*, but it's telling that the original bookseller (with his leering pseudonym, "I. Allcock") relied on the avowed link to sell the book, eighteen years after Cleland's debut. As with the *Oxford Scholar*, there is scant resemblance in style between *Maria Brown* and Cleland's known work: again the parcelling into bite-sized chapters (fifty-two here), each prefixed with a summary of contents. In *Maria Brown*, these are almost chapters in themselves, the headnote to chapter twelve, for example, reading, "She is persuaded against her inclination to go with Fitzherbert to a ball--takes her to a tavern near Soho--they wait for the company, who never come--repeated expedients are used to prevail upon her to stay--He puts laudanum into her liquor, which brings on an involuntary sleep, when he deflours her of her virginity."³⁶ Such spoiler-riddled headings were presumably meant to catch the interest of bookshop browsers, and they convey the novel's headlong pace and plain words, though it lacks the sexual descriptions of the *Woman of Pleasure*. Yet *Maria Brown* draws our attention to the earlier text not only on the title page but in passages that echo or parallel it, as when a Parisian madam tells Maria how she draws young girls into prostitution by giving them "the Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure, or such lascivious prints for those who cannot read, as may tend to inflame their passions" (II, 90-91 [137]). Arousal by reading or the voyeuristic gaze, as in Cleland's texts, leads inevitably to imitation: this is the etiology of desire.³⁷ But it might also be the etiology of authorship: to read the *Woman of Pleasure* was, for at least

one mid-eighteenth-century writer, to desire to reproduce it, to author a pastiche or riposte with the name of Maria Brown.

The story she tells is episodic, unkempt. Maria, born like Fanny Hill in Lancashire, but to a soberly well-off Catholic family, is sent as a girl to a convent in Douai, but after her father's death she returns to live with an aunt in London who sponges off her, plays on her vanity, and abandons her after she is "defloured" and miscarries. After sundry vicissitudes she finds herself penniless and in Paris, and along with a friend from her convent days she is taken in by the charitable-seeming Madame Laborde, who, it turns out, is "one of the most celebrated bawds of that great metropolis" (II, 4 [92]). Soon Maria embarks on her new "vocation" (II, 14 [97]), "consider[ing] whoredom as a complete science" by which she makes sense of the instability of experience. "She whom we to-day see triumphing in her gilt chariot," she writes, "whose luxury and magnificence strike the eyes of the whole town, and who insolently dictates to her keeper when and how he shall think, speak, and eat; even she was but late the refuse of footmen, chairmen, and porters, the heroine of night-cellars, and the concubine of link-boys...Such are the extraordinary transitions in the republic of fornication" (II, 19 [100]). Diverging from the usual narrative trajectory of the whore's life as, inexorably, a downward moral and social spiral, Maria Brown treats prostitution as a figure for the changeability of fortune and status in a world of universal sexual commodification.

Maria plies this trade, sometimes in an established house, sometimes freelance, for the duration of her story, until happening to hear a preacher's "sensible and pathetic discourse" (II, 128 [156]) at a chapel where she has gone to meet a lover, she is "seized with all the horrors of a reproachable conscience" and undergoes a conversion which ultimately leads to her marriage to a kind and pious tradesman. Like Fanny Hill, she ends her account with some reflections on virtue and on herself as one "who, to her cost, has evinced the rocks and shoals which a female navigator must be so careful to avoid" (II, 132 [158]). The figure of a female navigator may be a

homage to Fanny's concluding "Thus...I got snug into port," but Maria's final pages show none of Cleland's slyness in skewing the ostensible moral lesson with double-entendres.³⁸ Yet if this closing chapter calls an abrupt end to her high-spirited memoirs with an unironic moral tag, what comes before is largely in a humorous vein, serving up a panoramic tour, as the title page promised, of "the most fashionable scenes of dissipation"—though these are wholly bereft of the erotic glamour and sensory pleasure that suffuse Fanny Hill's memoirs. Instead, the prevailing tone of Maria's account of her sexual life is one of amused disdain and disgust, as if to confirm Fanny's penitent claim that "scenes of debauchery" are only "fit to nauseate a good taste."³⁹

Accordingly, she recalls one suitor as "that compendium of perfumery, who spoke only to hear his own sweet voice, smiled only to display his dimple, and laughed only to manifest the whiteness of his teeth...unmeaning, insignificant, odoriferous" (I, 45 [34]). This Dorimont, like the other sexless "fops and dangles" (I, 43 [33]) her aunt parades before her, is "an utter stranger to all impure ideas of carnality" (I, 47 [35]); but the thoroughly carnal lovers she encounters in the novel's second volume are "still more nauseous and disgusting" (II, 17 [99]). Of sex work, she writes that "It is impossible for anyone who has not followed the profession to imagine half the horrors that attend it" (II, 19 [100]), seeming to set prostitution in a social and sexual underworld whose "horrors" are unimaginable to those outside it. But this underworld is just the social world itself, and Maria's "republic of fornication" is where we all live. Indeed it is the "woman of pleasure," she writes in a nod to Fanny Hill, who topsy-turvily provides a model for "the modest part of the sex" to emulate. As she notes, of whores and ladies, "*We* are upon every occasion the objects of *their* attention and study" (II, 14-15 [98], emphasis added). Like readers of pornographic fiction, the modest part of the sex are avid consumers of the woman of pleasure's immodest sexual self-display: "I was convinced they had borrowed our look, our gait, our air, and that every modest woman strove who should most resemble a prostitute" (ibid.). If

prostitution is an explicit enactment of sexual commodification, so, she suggests, is respectable femininity just an upmarket performance of the alluring “horrors” of prostitution.

Her bleak portrayal of the condition of women in eighteenth-century London and Paris does not, however, lead Maria to despondency; as the dust jacket of the St Martin’s edition puts it, “She’s frank, she’s shocking, she’s delightful.” Within the perfunctory, conventional frame of a conversion narrative, her tour of the fashionable scenes of dissipation is anecdotal and comic. In one sequence, she contracts “a virulent gonorrhoea” (II, 75 [129]) which she passes on to a young “scribble[r]” of “ænigmas, acrostics, and rebus’s” (II, 79 [132]) who lodges in her house, and she reports in all its “ludicrous” detail his story of a visit to a “high-German doctor” whose claim that the case requires drastic surgery is confuted by his disfigured face, for “he could have no great skill in venereal cases, who had not the talent to save his own nose” (II, 77 [130]). Just before, she had told the story of “two veteran lechers” whose “great delight” is “the indulgence of the Sapphic passion”—that is, to watch as Maria and her colleague Miss P. make each other “concupiscentially happy” (II, 66, 69 [125-6])—and just after, she recounts the “singular” case of her “cleanly lover” (II, 80-1 [132]), who pays her five guineas a week for the pleasure of wearing a maid’s apron and “scour[ing] the room out perfectly clean.” No particular logic governs the episodic unrolling of Maria’s memoirs; what counts is variety of incident.

The novel as a whole is structured by the alternation between Maria’s narration of her own experience and a series of female-spoken interpolated narratives, stories of seduction and betrayal told her by the women she encounters. In the most lurid of these a self-styled Countess is, with her lover, kidnapped by Turkish corsairs, he to be cast into a dungeon and she to be taken as mistress to the Grand Seignior (ancestor of the Victorians’ “Lustful Turk”), guarded over by two black eunuchs. Her lover manages to escape the dungeon, disguise himself as one of her eunuchs, and save her, but is treacherously murdered after they return to France by a Venetian Jew who not only steals the Countess’s jewels but, disguised as the lover he has killed,

rapes her. The crude anti-Semitism of this story (unlike its sexual violence) is edited out of the St. Martin's edition, which labels the villain simply "the Venetian" and changes the original's "barbarous son of Israel" to "barbarous merchant" (II, 108 [146]). But if anti-Semitism was felt to be incompatible, in 1981, with a saucy romp, the racialized "carnal passions" of the Turkish Grand Seignior remain, along with the lover's disguise as an African eunuch, keeping the Orientalist and blackface fantasies in play.

In *Maria Brown*, the main and interpolated narratives are not only female-authored, but directed to female listeners and readers. The text's closing sentence expresses hope that its "fair readers" should "gain prudence and discretion enough to escape perdition, by what they have learnt from these sheets" (II, 132 [158]). With its focus on women as authors and audience, the novel frames its multiple plots of bad romance within a pattern of same-sex sympathy, love, and counsel—not unlike the way the women in Mrs. Cole's "little family of love" in the *Woman of Pleasure* create a Sapphic community of desire amidst that most "heterosexual" of institutions, a brothel.⁴⁰ In this light, the Sapphic episode in *Maria Brown*, while initiated in classic straight-man vein as a piece of play-acting to gratify its male observers, is more ambiguous in its effects. For if Maria later says that she took a male lover "to solace me after the ineffectual attempts of indulgence, which Miss P. had made in the Sapphic stile" (II, 71 [127]), at the time the effects seemed real enough: "Miss P. made love to me with all the fervour of a young fellow that was in the extasies of enjoyment, and forced from me that acknowledgment which nature meant to be manifested upon a very different occasion" (II, 69 [126]). It is possible that Miss P. only feigns her "fervour" and "extasies of enjoyment," although we're given no reason to think so; but what about Maria's "acknowledgment"? Is this a cry, or a climax? Her use of "manifested" suggests a visible sign, as does the fact that their lecherous clients soon "perceived that my female lover had completely effected her design." What precisely do they perceive? No answer is given, but such phrases as "completely effected" and "forced from me" must suggest an involuntary bodily

response, akin to the “waves of liquid sweets” which the *Oxford Scholar’s* modern editor added to that less sexually demonstrative fiction. In this respect, too, *Maria Brown* parodies or echoes the *Woman of Pleasure*, in which Fanny, despite her later disavowal, reports that her bedfellow Phoebe’s “salacious” caresses produced “a tumult that robb’d me of all liberty of thought; tears of pleasure gush’d from my eyes, and somewhat assuaged the fire that rag’d all over me.”⁴¹ The body’s “gush[ing]” tells of pleasure even when the narrator wants to tell a different tale.

Tail-piece

It is striking that the moment in *Maria Brown* that comes closest to sexual explicitness should be one she retells with embarrassment as to her own pleasure, and that Miss P. should prove the most fervent of her “young fellow[s].” For all the zest of their memoirs, both Fanny and Maria are taken aback by the unexpectedness of their Sapphic “extasies,” and both of them work hard to bring such “tumult[uous]” pleasures under rhetorical control. That they fail in this is a sign not only of their authors’ wish to give readers as many forms of vicarious enjoyment as they can get away with, but also of the ineradicable—even enabling—tension in the erotic novel-memoir form between the transgressive pleasures of remembrance and the moralistic pressures of instruction. A similar tension animates Defoe’s novel-memoirs from a generation earlier, but Cleland was the first English-language author to put eros, or erotic education, at the heart of the first-person novel, so that the narrator’s identity or self only emerges as the by-product of sexual experience. The same is true of even so verbally chaste a novel as the *Oxford Scholar*: although the 1756 text is free of any explicit scenes, the plot, like that of Cleland’s *Coxcomb* or *Woman of Pleasure*, is structured around a conflict between sexual indulgence and temperance, so that Mr. A—, like Cleland’s William or Fanny, repeatedly puts his beloved out of mind, in order to multiply both his pleasures and his consequent self-reproach, by which he defines who he is.

In the wake of the Fanny Hill trials, a sharp dealer could exploit the passing fad for old-fashioned erotica by assigning texts of unknown provenance to the author of Fanny Hill, using the pretence of common authorship as a marketing tool. In the case of the *Oxford Scholar*, the pornographic embellishments are certainly fraudulent, even if the publisher really believed it to be Cleland's work; and while the 1766 title page of *Maria Brown* might lend some weight to the Cleland attribution, the twentieth-century editor was careful not to inquire too deeply, turning a blind eye, for example, to William Epstein's rejection of the authorial claim in his biography of 1974.⁴² But if these publishers' ploys smack of deceit, their misattributions actually bring to light a real affiliation among these eighteenth-century fictions. *Maria Brown*, of course, pronounces itself kin to the *Woman of Pleasure*, and by way of echo, allusion, and pastiche self-consciously plays on, and so illuminates, some of the themes and animating tensions within Cleland's work. The author of the *Oxford Scholar* may or may not have drawn on Cleland's *Coxcomb* for the novel's overall design, but it shares with both Cleland's erotic novel-memoirs what I have called an enabling tension between the pleasures of sexual remembrance and the pressures of didactic reformation. That tension is perfectly, if also absurdly, conveyed in the phrase Fanny devises to sum up the lesson of her life story—"this tail-piece of morality"—which reduces her sermonizing to a dirty joke.⁴³ Neither the *Oxford Scholar* nor *Maria Brown* will ever be canonized, but they both attest to the impact of Cleland's sexual fictions. Although neither is truly "by the author of Fanny Hill," the claim that they are is not *just* a lie, for it reveals how thoroughly the name of Fanny Hill has come to refer to the erotic imaginary itself, in all its unexpected, unstable forms.

¹ "A Note on the American History of *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*" in John Cleland, *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* [given as *Fanny Hill* on front cover and spine], with an introduction by Peter Quennell (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1963), xv-xxiii.

² "Note" xvi-xvii.

³ Arthur G. Klein, Decision in *Larkin v. G. P. Putnam's Sons*, 14 N.Y.2d 399, 200 N.E.2d 760 (1963), quoted in "Note" xxvii.

⁴ Klein, quoted in "Note" xxiv and xxvi.

⁵ John Cleland, *Memoirs of a Coxcomb*, with an introduction by Franklin S. Klaf, MD (New York: Lancer, 1963), front cover copy.

⁶ Cleland, *Coxcomb* [1963], publicity copy on flyleaf.

⁷ *Kama Sutra of Vatsyayana*, with an introduction by Franklin S. Klaf, MD (New York: Lancer, 1964); Franklin S. Klaf, *Satyriasis: A Study of Male Nymphomania* (New York: Lancer, 1966). Front cover copy.

⁸ Klaf, introduction to Cleland, *Coxcomb* [1963], 7. William H. Epstein, *John Cleland: Images of a Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974). Among other things, Epstein established that Cleland was unlikely to have lived in Smyrna before joining the East India Company, as many writers claimed based on John Nichols's Cleland obituary in the *Gentleman's Magazine* 59 (Feb. 1789): see Epstein 213 n85.

⁹ Klaf, introduction 9.

¹⁰ Klaf, introduction 10. On Cleland's "sodomitical" reputation and fictional treatment of same-sex desire, see Hal Gladfelder, *Fanny Hill in Bombay: The Making and Unmaking of John Cleland* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), esp. chapters 1, 3, 4.

¹¹ Archibald Campbell [attrib.], *The Sale of Authors, a Dialogue* (London, 1767); see also Gladfelder 82.

¹² The dust jacket of the St. Martin's edition of the *Memoirs of Maria Brown* describe it, indeed, as "a delightful romp in the tradition of *Tom Jones*."

¹³ See the "Introduction" to Oscar Wilde and Others, *Teleny*, ed. John McRae (London: Gay Men's Press, 1986).

¹⁴ On these and other accusations, see Epstein 142-146, 178, 231-233.

¹⁵ All discussions of the Cleland canon start from the dozen or so attributions in Epstein and the further eight made by Roger Lonsdale in "New Attributions to John Cleland," *Review of English Studies*, new series, 30:119 (1979), 268-290. On the Lady Vane attribution, see Neil Guthrie, "New Light on Lady Vane," *Notes and Queries* n.s. 49 (2002), 372-378, and "Lady Vane Revisited," *The Scriblerian* 46:1 (2013), 29-34. On *Voyage to the East Indies*, see Gladfelder 34-36, 193. On the Pompadour *History*, see James G. Basker, "'The Wages of Sin': The Later Career of John Cleland," *Études anglaises* 40:2 (1987), 178-194, at 187-188.

¹⁶ I owe this reference and the details that follow to Brian Busby's blog *The Dusty Bookcase*, accessed 08/19/14. See <http://brianbusby.blogspot.co.uk/2010/05/gav-swans.html>

¹⁷ "John Cleland" [attrib.], *Memoirs of an Oxford Scholar* (n.p.: Zebra Books (Canyon Books), 1968).

¹⁸ On Charke, see Kristina Straub, *Sexual Suspects: Eighteenth-Century Players and Sexual Ideology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992). On Vizzani, see Clorinda Donato, "Public and Private Negotiations of Gender in Eighteenth-Century England and Italy: Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and the Case of Catherine Vizzani," *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 29:2 (2006), 169-189; and Gladfelder 157-168.

¹⁹ Leo Braudy, "Fanny Hill and Materialism," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 4:1 (1970), 21-40; at 40 n21.

²⁰ On Goldsmith, see Peter Dixon and David Mannion, "Goldsmith's Contributions to the *Weekly Magazine*," *Literary and Linguistic Computing* 22:4 (2007), 447-468.

²¹ For one notable example of the skeptical response to intuitive or artisanal attributions, see P. N. Furbank and W. R. Owens, *The Canonisation of Daniel Defoe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988). More recently, Leah Orr has examined attributions to Eliza Haywood, emphasizing the need for a more skeptical, rigorous approach: see Orr, "The Basis for Attribution in the Canon of Eliza Haywood," *The Library: The Transactions of the Bibliographical Society* 12.4 (2011), 335-375.

²² Catherine Gallagher, *Nobody's Story: The Vanishing Acts of Women Writers in the Marketplace, 1670-1820* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994); Frank Donoghue, *The Fame Machine: Book Reviewing and Eighteenth-Century Literary Careers* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996); Isobel Grundy, "Attribution to Women," in J. Paul Hunter, ed., "Who Wrote What? The Question of Attribution," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 8.4 (1996), 519-538.

²³ See Lonsdale 270, 277.

²⁴ See Donato, esp. 183-185; Gladfelder 157-168.

²⁵ On the ending of *Memoirs of a Coxcomb*, which seems to effect a reunion of the two lovers while refusing to provide the expected closure of romance, see Gladfelder 113-134.

²⁶ *Memoirs of an Oxford Scholar* (London: W. Reeve, 1756), 140-141. Subsequent page references are to this edition, except where noted.

²⁷ *Memoirs of an Oxford Scholar* (London: Sphere Books, 1969).

²⁸ *Memoirs of an Oxford Scholar* (1968 Zebra edition), 76. It was James Boswell who recorded Cleland stating that the challenge in writing the *Woman of Pleasure* was to avoid "the coarseness of *L'École des filles*, which had quite plain words": see Boswell, *Laird of Auchinleck, 1778-1782*, ed. Joseph W. Reed and Frederick A. Pottle (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1977), 76-77. See also Gladfelder 15-20 and 250 n. 5.

²⁹ *Oxford Scholar* (1968), 151, 152, 153.

³⁰ The tortuous reasoning of the 5-4 majority decision in *Ginzburg vs United States* (written by William Brennan) was that even though the materials distributed by mail were not themselves obscene, they had been promoted in a manner that emphasized their sexually arousing content, and could thus be judged obscene for "pandering" to the reader's prurient interest. The case can be found at <https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/383/463/case.html> (accessed 13 September 2014). After further failed appeals, Ginzburg went to prison in 1972, serving eight months of his original five year sentence.

³¹ Erica Jong, *Fanny, Being the True History of the Adventures of Fanny Hackabout-Jones* (New York: New American Library, 1980).

³² Brigid Brophy, 'Mersey Sound, 1750' [review of *Fanny Hill*], *New Statesman*, 15 November 1963, 710.

³³ Erica Jong, Introduction to *The Illustrated Fanny Hill* (New York: The Erotic Art Book Society, 1978), 7.

³⁴ *The Memoirs of Maria Brown*, ed. Maurice Renfrew (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981).

³⁵ The British Library holds two copies of *Genuine Memoirs of the Celebrated Miss Maria Brown*, both dated 1766 and purporting to be published by "I. Allcock"; but these are completely different editions, one (shelf mark 012635.b.85) of 148 + 132 pages, the other (shelf mark 12654.f.8) of 239 + 228 pages. Both are available on *Eighteenth-Century Collections Online*. On the title page of the latter, "Woman of Pleasure" is printed as "W* * of P* * *."

³⁶ *Genuine Memoirs of the Celebrated Miss Maria Brown* (London: I. Allcock, 1766), I, 64. Page references are to this edition (BL shelf mark 012635.b.85), followed by the corresponding page in the St. Martin's edition in square brackets [44].

³⁷ On this imitative pattern in Cleland's *Woman of Pleasure* and *Catherine Vizzani*, see Gladfelder 78-79, 134-135, 165-168.

³⁸ John Cleland, *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, ed. Peter Sabor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 187.

³⁹ Cleland, *Memoirs* 188.

⁴⁰ Cleland, *Memoirs* 93. On this Sapphic community, see John Beynon, "'Traffic in More Precious Commodities': Sapphic Erotics and Economics in *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*," in *Launching Fanny Hill: Essays on the Novel and Its Influences*, ed. Patsy S. Fowler and Alan Jackson (New York: AMS Press, 2003), 3-26; Lisa L. Moore, *Dangerous Intimacies: Toward a Sapphic History of the British Novel* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997); Gladfelder 88-103.

⁴¹ Cleland, *Memoirs* 11-12.

⁴² See Epstein 144-145, 233 n108.

⁴³ Cleland, *Memoirs* 187.