

Université de Montréal

“[O]ur virtues and our vices depend too much on our circumstances”:

Prostitution as Power in John Cleland’s *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*

Par

Asma Albouchi

Département de littératures et de langues du monde, Faculté Arts et Sciences

Mémoire présenté en vue de l’obtention du grade de maîtrise en études anglaises option avec
mémoire

Décembre 2022

© Asma Albouchi,

Ce mémoire intitulé

**“[O]ur virtues and our vices depend too much on our circumstances”:
Prostitution as Power in John Cleland’s *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure***

Présenté par

Albouchi Asma

A été évalué(e) par un jury composé des personnes suivantes

Jane Malcolm

Présidente-rapporteuse

Heather Meek

Directrice de recherche

Michael Sinatra

Membre du jury

Résumé

Ce mémoire étudie la prostitution dans le roman *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure de* John Cleland comme moyen réussi d'indépendance financière et de mobilité sociale dans une société patriarcale du XVIIIe siècle. Respectivement, il met en évidence la résistance de l'héroïne à ces structures. Dans le premier chapitre, j'analyse le personnage de Fanny Hill et l'importance des choix qu'elle fait pour transformer son statut financier. Ainsi, je discuterai des maquereles, les femmes qui supervisent l'affaire du bordel, en tant que figures centrales dans la formation de la personnalité de Fanny en plus de sa relation amoureuse avec Charles, le jeune homme qu'elle rencontre dans le bordel et s'échappe avec lui. Dans le chapitre 2, j'aborde, à travers la figure de Fanny, la notion d'un corps féminin en contrôle, et les manières dont Cleland dépeint l'agence de Fanny à travers son corps ; Fanny présente son agence à travers son corps de plusieurs façons. L'une des principales façons dont elle le fait est de faire des choix concernant ses expériences et ses relations sexuelles. Tout au long du roman, elle a un certain nombre de rencontres sexuelles avec différents hommes, et elle est souvent décrite comme contrôlant ces rencontres.. Dans ce chapitre, je discuterai le pouvoir des femmes à travers le thème de la virginité feinte telle qu'elle est représentée dans le roman et le mariage comme un concept transgressif qui remet en question les normes patriarcales.

Mots-clés : Fanny Hill, John Cleland, dix-huitième siècle, sexualité féminine, prostitution, mariage, féminisme

Abstract

Through a reading of John Cleland's *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* (1748), this thesis explores prostitution as a means of financial independence and social mobility within the patriarchal structures of eighteenth-century Britain. It considers the resistance of the novel's heroine, Fanny Hill, to these structures. In Chapter 1, I analyze Fanny Hill's character and the importance of the choices she makes in her attempts to transform her financial status. Thus, I discuss Cleland's portrayal of the 'bawds'— the women who oversee the brothel business in which Fanny becomes involved — as central figures in shaping Fanny's personality, while also considering her developing amorous relationship with Charles, the young man she meets in the brothel and escapes with. In Chapter 2, I address, through the figure of Fanny, the notion of a female body in control, and the ways in which Cleland portrays Fanny as finding agency through her body. She does so by making choices about her sexual experiences and relationships. I demonstrate that, throughout the novel, Fanny has a number of sexual encounters with various men, and that she is often depicted as being in control of these encounters. In this chapter, I discuss female empowerment through the phenomenon of feigned virginity and through a particular version of marriage that challenges patriarchy.

Keywords : Fanny Hill, John Cleland, eighteenth century, female sexuality, prostitution, marriage, Feminism

Table of Contents

| | |
|---|------------|
| Résumé | ii |
| Abstract | iii |
| Table of Contents | iv |
| Acknowledgements | vi |
| Introduction | 7 |
| Chapter One | 13 |
| The Phallogentric Plot and the Precedence of Male Pleasure | 19 |
| Sex for Love and Beauty..... | 22 |
| Fanny and Forms of Subordination..... | 26 |
| Chapter Two | 33 |
| Embracing Prostitution as an Economic Opportunity | 35 |
| Secondary Female Characters..... | 38 |
| Changing Power Dynamics..... | 44 |
| Fanny’s Professionalism in the Field..... | 48 |
| Marriage as a Bonus Prize | 51 |
| Conclusion | 55 |
| Bibliography | 58 |

*To my mother and father,
Thank you for your love and support*

Acknowledgements

I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Heather Meek, whose support was instrumental in writing and completing of this thesis. Her insight and encouragement were invaluable over the course of the last years. I could not have finished this thesis without her constructive criticism, suggestions, and moral support.

I would also like to thank the Department of Literatures and Languages of the World, especially the English Studies professors, and my classmates, for making me feel welcome at the university before and during the pandemic.

I am very grateful to the Tunisian Government and to La Mission Universitaire de Tunisie à Montréal for providing me with this thrilling opportunity to study at the UdeM. I am very thankful for their financial support. By granting me this scholarship, my country has given me the chance to fulfill one of my dreams.

Finally, I would like to thank my family for their love, patience, and constant support. To my brother Farouk and sister Nada, thank you for being there whenever I felt stressed and down. To everyone in my extended family, thank you for your encouragement and for believing in me. A special thanks for my friends, Eslem Slimeni, Amira Fodil, Kamal Malhotra, Amel Guedidi, Ferdaous Daiz, Adnan Bakshi and Marco Battista.

Introduction

Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure (1748) is perhaps John Cleland's most famous work, if not his only well-known work. Certainly, he experimented with other types of literary works, writing a tragedy, *Titus Vespasian* (1755), two comedies, and other novels such as *Memoirs of a Coxcomb* (1751) and *The Woman of Honour* (1768). However, as Andrea Haslanger declares, "For many years, the answer to the question 'Who is John Cleland?' has been 'the author of Fanny Hill'" (160). The factors that most likely made *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* thrive in the eighteenth century was its pornographic content and its appearance in a period presumably considered conservative.

Cleland is often seen as a rebellious figure who challenged the authorities and the censorship laws of his time in writing and publishing *Memoirs*. In a society sometimes identified as sexually repressed, sex itself was considered taboo and obscene, and thus writing about sex was often understood as a courageous and rule-breaking act. As Michel Foucault remarks of a larger time frame, ranging from the 17th to the mid 20th centuries: "A person who holds forth in such language places himself to a certain extent outside the reach of power; he upsets established law; he somehow anticipates the coming freedom" (6). Cleland indeed faced several challenging situations after the publication of *Memoirs*. He was interrogated and accused of spreading and encouraging immoral practices through his novel. Other erotic works had been published before *Memoirs*, but they did not attract as much attention as the novel in question. While the attention Cleland received through *Memoirs* was not entirely positive, he, indeed, earned a prominent position as a writer of erotic and pornographic literature. He was, however, arrested for obscenity, which is the primary reason he chose to distance himself from *Memoirs*, eventually

denying his authorship of the text to escape legal consequences. Later on, however, he confirmed that it was a work inspired and co-authored by someone else whose name he did not want to reveal. In fact, *Memoirs* was provoked by a bet on his ability to write about the adventurous life of a prostitute by using “neither coarse nor quite plain language” (17). Cleland succeeded, indeed, in delivering on his promise in his novel. As John. M. Aden remarks, *Memoirs* “is remarkable for its euphemism and synonymy of sexual language” (31).

What is peculiar about this novel is how the female heroine and narrator Cleland created became her own character, outgrowing in fame its original creator. According to Gladfelder, “Cleland’s success as a novelist might even be measured by the degree to which the fame of his fictional creation outstrips his own” (1). Cleland, indeed, was overshadowed; he lost control over his text, to the point that it came to be known by a title, *Fanny Hill*, he had not devised. Cleland paid his debts in publishing *Fanny Hill*, and thus, in a way, his heroine liberated him and helped him to overcome his difficult financial situation. Without her, he surely would have been imprisoned for a longer time. Some critics, such as John. M. Aden, go so far as to describe Cleland as a failure who would not have been noticed at all in the literary world had he not brought *Fanny Hill* to life. Beyond an eighteenth-century context, the name John Cleland means little without being accompanied by the name “Fanny Hill.” Even in his own time, Cleland affixed to his subsequent works, such as *The Memoirs of a Coxcomb*, “by the author of *Fanny Hill*” to increase the sales of these works. *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* became so famous that authors other than Cleland used her name to grab the attention of their audiences. As Nicholas D. Nace explains,

Suddenly, this centuries-old account of a prostitute’s progress into and out of the business of pleasure began to generate fresh sequels, parodies, comics, films, and even a

cookbook. Fanny as a character broke loose from Cleland. She adapted to the times, migrating into a variety of modern situations and giving birth to dozens of other first-person narrators that were either direct relations (as with Molly, Nellie, Danny, Roderick, and Freddy Hill), or disciples (as with Fanny Mill, Fanny Hillman, and Fanny Hell). (2)

There was, in the eighteenth century, a widespread societal curiosity with regards to the privacy of women and their hidden lifestyles. Male curiosity about women sparked authors' interests in writing more about the female sex and their veiled lives. Cleland was interested in uncovering what lay behind the veil of chastity. Furthermore, female narrators became more common. Mary Trouille explains that “[b]y the eighteenth century, the practice of male authors appropriating the female epistolary voice in their fiction had become a popular narrative ploy, which was perfected in the novels of Richardson, Rousseau, and Laclos” (107). Thus, Fanny became an iconic character and narrator of different facets of eighteenth-century social realities; Cleland thus both drew on the works of others, and inspired other authors in his invention of Fanny's first-person voice.

Bernard Duyfhuizen's comments on epistolary narratives are relevant to Cleland's novel; he maintains that “all epistolary novels contain a double narrative: a narrative of the events and a narrative of the letters that precipitate or report the events. This double narrative is produced within a textual society created for the reader by the private correspondence of its members” (1). In *Memoirs*, both the parallel narrative of the main plot and the narrator's opinions and feelings towards the letters' narrative are clear from the outset. *Memoirs*, which was considered socially undesirable and unacceptable to be publicly discussed in the refined circles of the age, had as its audience not merely the Madam (the recipient of Fanny's letters), but also a much larger public

community, bringing to light a certain public/private duality. Thus, Cleland placed his reader in a position of voyeurism by making a supposedly secret and private letter open to public scrutiny, a device that has remained effective through the centuries. The reader becomes a voyeur throughout the pages of this erotic novel, as William Gass explains. “As readers,” he writes, “that’s what we want: the penetration of privacy” (84). Hence, it is possible to explore the interconnections between knowledge, sexuality, and voyeurism through a study of Cleland’s novel.

It is undeniably true that this novel, in its depth, consists of much more than erotic content. *Memoirs* reveals social issues that could not otherwise have been openly discussed within the social circles of eighteenth-century society. As Baines declares, “Nothing else that Cleland wrote, however successful or otherwise during his lifetime, has quite hit the fault lines of eighteenth-century culture in the way *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* did, and perhaps none of it can be read so interestingly against the grain” (348). *Memoirs* brings to light critical issues such as eighteenth-century prostitution, as well as the related issue of women’s lack of agency when it comes to financially supporting themselves. It explores how women could be put in situations where they had to become prostitutes out of necessity. The novel considers how social mobility for women was something only marriage could offer. As Wendy Moore explains, “At the beginning of the 18th century most marriages among landed or moneyed families were essentially financial arrangements designed to cement powerful alliances and exchange or acquire land and property” (8). Of course, some individuals resisted or rebelled against this convention. Members of the upper class would frequently marry of their own will and become richer; members of the middle and working classes would also marry from within their class, which might change their status slightly, but not considerably. More specifically, prostitutes, or

those who quit prostitution, were not considered fit to be housewives and mothers because of the scandalous profession with which they were associated. *Memoirs* sheds light, through fiction, on the different social realities faced by women of the time, looking at how they might have been led into prostitution. Cleland describes Fanny's and other women's backgrounds, exploring their journeys into prostitution. Generally, most of these women turn to prostitution because of poverty, and thus the novel shows how prostitution, must, indeed, be understood as one of the major issues that plagued eighteenth-century society.

With these issues in mind, this thesis considers the gradual transformation of Fanny from an innocent child into a woman of pleasure. I show how Fanny undergoes considerable physical and psychological transformations throughout her experiences in London, and how these developments are central to the narrative of *Memoirs*. Furthermore, in her first experience in a brothel (at Mrs. Brown's), Fanny escapes the conventional trajectory of the prostitute as she finds herself in a love relationship (with Charles). This initial escape is important to the development of Cleland's plot as he takes this chance to shape Fanny's identity beyond the limits of the prostitute, which then allows her to form her later experiences with prostitution. Fanny's maturing process, as I show, is crucial to her eventual financial independence. Had she submitted to Mrs. Brown's devious plans, she would not have been able to pursue a relationship with Charles, her first and final love, and she would not have acquired enough polish to enter the world of prostitution as a Mistress. Moreover, her initial heartbreak, when she initially loses Charles, is primordial in resetting her priorities. She becomes emotionally and psychologically mature enough to search for financial independence, before finding herself with Charles again. In the following chapters, I build on the work of scholars such as Laura J. Rosenthal, Andrea Haslanger, and Tassie Gwilliam, who explore notions of female sexuality and prostitution in

Memoirs. In Chapter One, I focus on the main character's ability to turn her weakness into power through prostitution. In other words, I explain how Fanny's identity is shaped by her subjection. I clarify, by drawing on Judith Butler's theories of subjection and performance, how Fanny's subjection eventually leads her to find a position of power and a lifestyle in which she transcends her initial social status. She uses her body and mind, I argue, to find a pattern of agency within the patriarchal society in which she finds herself entrapped. I demonstrate how the protagonist's choices feed her growth. Moreover, in an attempt to explore Cleland's larger interest in prostitution, I explore his portrayals of other female prostitutes' trajectories. In Chapter Two, I focus on the specific ways in which Fanny becomes a professional prostitute with a strong inclination for financial gain. Through her interactions with other female sex workers who exhibit similar characteristics, Fanny is able to develop strategies for increasing her income and expanding her client base. Additionally, I analyze how the theme of feigned virginity serves as a means of resistance against the patriarchal society in which Fanny operates. Furthermore, I examine the portrayal of marriage as a prize in *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, highlighting how it is presented as a reward for Fanny's dedication and success as a prostitute.

My thesis thus elaborates on the power of prostitution in *Memoirs*. Through the different elements explored in the first and second chapters, I describe how Fanny's work as a prostitute provides her with agency and financial independence. Although her decision to become a prostitute is initially presented as a necessity rather than a freely made choice, Fanny matures emotionally and sexually to the point where she is able to negotiate the terms of her work and exert control over her clients. In this study, I thus examine the interplay between power, agency, and the institution of prostitution in the context of this novel. By analyzing various elements of *Memoirs*, my thesis endeavors to deepen our understanding of these complex relationships.

Chapter One

Becoming Fanny Hill:

Psychological and Physical Initiations to Prostitution

Women are by Women ruin'd most

-Sophie Carter

John Cleland's *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* (1749) is a novel in which the narrator Fanny Hill takes the liberty to share the truth of her adventurous and scandalous life with an anonymous correspondent, whom she refers to as 'Madam' throughout the novel. This element of anonymity adds to the novel a mysterious dimension, which is compounded by its confessional tone. *Memoirs* highlights the role of women in shaping Fanny's life, beginning with her mother and all the other female figures she meets. This chapter will mainly focus on the functional association between the pornographic elements of *Memoirs* in an educational setting, the process of creating Fanny Hill, the prostitute, and her sexual awakening which is ultimately governed by patriarchal prescriptions. In order to present this argument, I will build on the work of scholars such as Laura J. Rosenthal and Gary Gautier, who have explored notions of female sexuality and social mobility in this novel. Moreover, I will examine Fanny's sexual and personal development in relation to the sensual experiences she became part of through a new school of sexual thought in the mid eighteenth century. I will point to the knowledge and power she comes to possess by becoming a prostitute – a power that would not have been possible for her to grasp had she not left her rural environment. This represents a location where sexuality is hidden under claims of chastity and modesty. Moreover, I will explore the importance of voyeurism in Fanny's journey towards sexual awakening. Finally, I will apply Judith Butler's

theory of subjection to Fanny's initial subjection, which is, in turn, necessary for the process of sexual awakening she undergoes, more specifically as it relates to her initiation into prostitution.

The protagonist's ability to transcend her low socio-economic background is a central focus of *Memoirs* and contributes to her growth as a character. From the beginning of the novel, Fanny confirms that she does not deny the pleasure and fortune she acquired throughout her 'scandalous' journey. Laura J. Rosenthal explains why this might be the case, noting that "[m]id century prostitute narratives often take th[e] form [of a narrative of regret, sin and redemption], but *Memoirs* differs in that the narrator does not present her story as an apology or a particular plea for sympathy" (79). Fanny makes sure to let the reader know that she is special and not everyone in the prostitution market has had the chance to enjoy the advantages she was able to experience. "[E]ven amidst the whirl of loose pleasures I had been tost in," she explains, "[I] exerted more observation on the characters and manners of the world than what is common to those of my unhappy profession" (1). To properly introduce his protagonist, Cleland chooses to start by giving a history of her personal life, perhaps to clarify the original reasons why many women of that era made the same choices as Fanny Hill. Thus, Fanny can give the reader a clear overview of her background and lifestyle before she launches into a description of her notorious adventure. She describes her poor family's financial status, her evident lack of education, and the death of her parents by smallpox, which leaves her an orphan. These circumstances place her firmly in the eighteenth-century lower classes. Such women had fewer opportunities, as Gwen Brewer and Vern Bullough explain, except for the "[f]ortunate females [who] had a father who could give them a dowry and the lucky few [who] might marry for love" (17). In Fanny's case, the death of her parents left her no choice but to take care of herself, which she does by moving to London where she claims to lose her innocence.

Fanny frequently mentions her timid, naïve, and extremely innocent nature, which is the main feature that governs her experiences and drives her sexual initiation. For instance, Fanny explains that Esther Davis, a girl from Fanny's village who lives in London, "took a motherly care of me, at the same time that she taxed me for her protection by making me bear all travelling charges, which I defrayed with the utmost cheerfulness, and thought myself much obliged to her into the bargain" (4). Fanny's innocence blinds her judgement and makes her view Esther's actions towards her as a favour. Her naivety is further stressed when she does not recognize the duplicitous intentions of Mrs. Brown, the owner of a brothel, from the moment she meets her. She is misguided due to her need for financial independence and her lack of social experiences. She explains she has experienced the "greatest good luck" by "fall[ing] into the hands of the kindest mistress, not to say friend, that the vast world could afford" (8).

Fanny starts as a naïve debutante who is far too innocent to know anything about pleasure and sex, but over the course of her journey to maturity, she transforms considerably. She activates her sexual curiosity and develops on both personal and mental levels as well. The first step towards this knowledge takes place through learning about her own body and its capacity for pleasure. She does not learn about sex in a conventional way through her mother or female friend. Rather, the brothels and bawds become her main source of sexual education. Her mother, we learn, had been too busy to devote some time to providing her with the basic knowledge she needed concerning her own body. She explains, "My poor mother had divided her time so entirely between her scholars and her little domestic cares, that she had spared very little of it to my instruction, having, from her own innocence from all ill, no hint or thought of guarding me against any" (2). Or, perhaps her mother did not tell her anything on purpose, following the eighteenth-century tendency, as explained by Lutz D.H. Sauerteig, in which cultural norms

followed Jean-Jacques Rousseau's "object[ion] to any form of moral teaching to children as this would make them aware 'that there are things shameful and immodest; it is inspiring them with a secret desire of knowing these things'" (160). Fanny's mother's decision to shield her daughter from everything about sex and sexuality could have been her technique to avoid arousing her curiosity about exploring her sexuality before marriage. Phoebe, a prostitute in Mrs. Brown's Brothel, rather than Fanny's mother, takes on the role of the teacher. She awakens her senses and desire with "touches, squeezes, pressures" (11), to which Fanny responds as follows: "I was transported, confused, and out of myself; feelings so new were too much for me" (12). Phoebe is merely the catalyst as she introduces Fanny to this new world of pleasure and feelings she never experienced before, sparking Fanny's sexual curiosity and the power derived from it. Gary Gautier names this phase as Fanny's discovery of her "vaginal identity" in which her sensations come to revolve around her vagina: "Here, Fanny discovers her vagina-centered identity. The innocence which had characterized her vagina, and her being, is seen as the mere absence of sensations" (478). The activation of her feelings and her realization of her vagina's capabilities become significant in the understanding of her character.

Voyeurism: Beyond Immorality.

The word voyeurism generally has a negative connotation, but it is an important pillar in the development of Fanny's sexual identity. In *Memoirs*, voyeurism is not only used for the purpose of pleasure, but also as a main source of visual education, particularly for Fanny. For instance, when she observes Mrs. Brown and her "paramour" having intercourse, she is moved to satisfy her own sexual needs. She discovers her body for the first time and reaches climax,

whilst they were in the heat of the action, guided by nature only, I stole my hand up my petticoats, and with fingers all on fire, seized, and yet more inflamed that center of all my

senses: my heart palpitated, as if it would force its way through my bosom; I breath'd with pain; I twisted my thighs, squeezed, and compressed the lips of that virgin slit, and following mechanically the example of Phoebe's manual operation on it, as far as I could find admission, brought on at last the critical extasy, the melting flow, into which nature, spent with excess of pleasure, dissolves and dies away. (26)

In this moment, Fanny proves herself to be an attentive student of Phoebe's previous lectures. She is aroused by the image and allows herself to declare her agency over her own orgasm, in solitude, through masturbation. Her first encounter with Phoebe was passive and unexpected, whereas the latter is planned and performed, and involves more enjoyment, since she recognizes and liberates her libidinal desires. For a moment, she succeeds in elevating female desire above the phallogentric plot upon which Cleland builds his novel. This moment marks the start of her journey towards satisfying her sexual desires and creating a sexual identity, which Gautier describes as a transformation in her female identity. "[I]n this initial scene of 'seats' and 'centers,'" Gautier writes, "we see Fanny move from a de-centered identity, or an identity as pure absence, to a narcissistic identity centered on vaginal sensations" (479). Once she uncovers these pleasurable feelings, she cannot restrain her sexual hunger.

Fanny's inability to ignore her sexual impulses grows with the seductions she goes on to experience. In the light of Phoebe's manipulations to prepare Fanny for Mr. Croft, the man to whom Mrs. Brown planned to sell Fanny's maidenhead, Freud's theory of sex and innocence is useful in situating Phoebe as the principal source of seduction. Freud condemns seduction as one of the main causes of masturbation and believes that this is connected to children looking at their own genitals, as well as those of others. Yet, this act is believed to be a natural instinct, already existing in the infant. According to Freud, "Under the influence of seduction the looking

perversion may attain great importance for the sexual life of the child. Still, from my investigations of the childhood years of normal and neurotic patients, I must conclude that the impulse for looking can appear in the child as a spontaneous sexual manifestation." (56). In line with Freud's theory, witnessing the act of sex between other persons stimulates Fanny and turns her genital pleasure into an obsession and a main objective.

In *Memoirs*, the brothel is represented as the most adequate setting for an eighteenth-century sexual education. In this respect, Fanny's experiences in the brothel could be understood as mainly educative. She constantly seeks professional counselling from her trustworthy tutoress Phoebe, "to whom all modes and devices of pleasure were known and familiar" (12). Fanny finds that the most suitable method to learn is based on seeing rather than listening. She declares, "But I could not long remain in such a house as that, without being an eyewitness of more than I could conceive from her descriptions" (24). Hence, voyeurism plays a didactic role in Fanny's sexual growth. Indeed, whenever she hides and observes, she collects a new piece of the puzzle to add to her knowledge. For instance, she has fears concerning the size of the male "machine" and the unbearable thought of pain and death during sex. In one instance, in which she secretly watches Mrs. Brown and a young man engaging in sexual intercourse, she writes, "having very curiously and attentively compared the size of that enormous machine, which did not appear, at least to my fearful imagination, less than my wrist, and at least three of my handfuls long, to that of the tender small part of me which was framed to receive it, I can not conceive its being possible to afford it entrance without dying" (28). However, the next visual lesson Phoebe gives her completely changes her mind and transforms all her fears into lust and desire. In the following passage, she declares her triumph over her previous thoughts of the male penis:

For my part, I will not pretend to describe what I felt all over me during this scene; but from that instant, adieu all fears of what man could do unto me; they were now changed into such ardent desires, such ungovernable longings, that I could have pull'd the first of that sex that should present himself, by the sleeve, and offered him the bauble, which I now imagined the loss of would be a gain I could not too soon procure myself. (33)

The Phallogentric Plot and the Precedence of Male Pleasure

Fanny's sexual awakening is, however, controlled by patriarchal norms. Her subdued fears of the phallus can be understood as a symbol of rejecting homosexuality and embracing the gendered hierarchies of eighteenth-century sexual culture. She becomes restless and aims to expand her physical experiences to a higher level, which involves the opposite sex and full penetration. Hence, she considers her previous escapade with Phoebe as "foolery from woman to woman" (35), rather than as a truly pleasurable experience. One might understand this as Cleland's attempt to assert his authority over the text and redirect his plot to cater to patriarchal discourse and to stress the importance of male pleasure. "Phoebe cannot truly make Fanny 'a woman,'" Jad Smith argues, "because the investiture of 'female' desire requires the presence of a penis" (197). Gautier elaborates on the novel's movement away from homosexuality as a concept, and the eventual denouncement of the concept. He explains that it "becomes a visible index which represents the underside of all the supposedly 'normal' sexual transactions in *Memoirs*. It is the abjected self of bourgeois sexuality and must be identified as such in order that Fanny may 'wash her hands' of it" (485). Phoebe is merely the tool by which Mrs. Brown tames new recruits such as Fanny, who seem to be too innocent to have any knowledge whatsoever of sex. The moment Fanny is familiarized with her body and realizes the maximum potential that can be reached with penetration from the other sex, Phoebe intentionally inserts in Fanny's unconsciousness the

necessity of the man's presence in order to fulfill pleasure. Phoebe says to Fanny, "'Oh! what a charming creature thou art! ... What a happy man will he be that first makes a woman of you! ... Oh! that I were a man for your sake!'" (12) -- thus, preparing her for the work Mrs. Brown is arranging for her. Later on, Fanny explains Phoebe's tendency "to break young girls" (12) for the purpose of attaining pleasure only and rejects the idea of Phoebe's homosexuality or bisexuality. She concludes, "Not that she hated men, or did not even prefer them to her own sex; but when she met with such occasions as this was, a satiety of enjoyments in the common road, perhaps too, a secret bias, inclined her to make the most of pleasure, wherever she could find it, without distinction of sexes" (12). Cleland rejects the possibility of Phoebe's lesbianism, and more specifically, of Fanny's. He relates this scene to what he perceives as the sex ideal in patriarchal culture. Phoebe serves as Fanny's personal sexual educator and helps her explore that source of "fire that rag'd all over [her]," but the novel presents a dismissive view of homosexuality. Cleland's detailed description of homosexual scenes on the one hand and his denouncement of this idea on the other represents an ambiguous stance towards the concept of homosexuality current in eighteenth-century British society.

In short, *Memoirs* is intended for an eighteenth-century male audience and the message it transfers to them through a phallogentric plot revolves around patriarchal authority. Hence, Cleland's tendency to provide an extravagant description of the phallus at every possible occasion serves to consolidate its superiority. Moreover, Fanny's feelings at each encounter with a phallus is accompanied with fear and horror, thus reflecting women's feelings in a patriarchal society. Indeed, Fanny's pleasure tends to be stronger whenever it is linked to pain and fear, a tendency which could be interpreted as reinforcing the patriarchal elevation of female compliance and its ultimate pleasurable reward.

Fanny finds pleasure in defying the so-called ‘natural’ and accepted physical sexual positions dictated by eighteenth-century conventions. Cleland allows Fanny to acknowledge the existence of different sexual positions, but he reminds the reader that these positions are not looked upon as normal in British society. Phoebe warns Fanny before letting her observe Polly and her Genoise client, explaining that “she receives him in her light closet up one pair of stairs, where he enjoys her in a taste, I suppose, peculiar to the heat, or perhaps the caprices of his own country” (29). In graphic detail, Fanny narrates how Polly and her lover experience a new sexual position:

But guess my surprise, when I saw the lazy young rogue lie down on his back, and gently pull down Polly upon him, who giving way to his humour, straddled, and with her hands conducted her blind favourite to the right place; and following her impulse, ran directly upon the flaming point of this weapon of pleasure, which she stak'd herself upon, up pierc'd and infix'd to the extremest hair-breadth of it: thus she sat on him a few instants, enjoying and relishing her situation, whilst he toyed with her provoking breasts. (34)

Cleland rejects the validity of this position due to the threat it poses to male dominance. He declares that this unusual position, which allows females to be in control, is deviant, and he does so by attributing it and similar practices to Italians and foreigners. Despite this, Fanny is both fascinated and aroused by the new position she discovers and the pleasure it procures both in Polly and her client. Fanny’s earlier, near-rape experience with Mr. Crofts, on the other hand, forces her into accepting the submissive position. This instance marks the first experience in which she is not in control over the situation, and it provokes in her feelings of weakness and helplessness. However, later in the novel, once she recognizes herself as a woman of pleasure,

she becomes convinced that she is satisfying the desires of her clients according to their tastes. Fanny writes, “but at my age, and with my taste for pleasure, a taste strongly constitutional to me, the talent of pleasing, with which nature has endowed a handsome person, form'd to me the greatest of all merits” (85). In other words, she elaborates her sexuality in whatever way her sexual partners desire. Most importantly, she can pick her clients later and explore new sexual fantasies and positions in the process. Thus, making female pleasure tantamount.

Sex for Love and Beauty

Fanny’s sexual needs have different motives, and change depending on the stage of her journey. The moment she meets Charles marks a developing need for the fusion of sex, love, and beauty. Cleland’s presentation of Charles, Fanny’s ‘true’ love, in the right place at the right moment is suggestive of a romantic narrative, implying that Fanny’s sexual awakening should end in a conventional, heterosexual, and monogamous relationship. It is no surprise that Cleland chooses Charles as the man to whom Fanny loses her virginity. Moreover, she instantly connects her desire for Charles with feelings of love. She writes, “for love itself took charge of the disposal of [her], in spite of interest, or gross lust” (35). Her need to prove what Gary Gautier calls her vaginal identity reaches its climax at this point. Furthermore, Fanny, in order to convince both herself and the reader that this is the right choice for her, sets Charles in stark contrast to Mr. Crofts, whom she finds physically “detestable”:

for ugly, and disagreeable, were terms too gentle to convey a just idea of [him]...Imagine to yourself a man rather past threescore, short and ill-made, with a yellow cadaverous hue, great goggling eyes that stared as if he was strangled; and out-mouth from two more properly tusks than teeth, livid-lips, and breath like a jake's:

then he had a peculiar ghastliness in his grin that made him perfectly frightful, if not dangerous to women with child. (16)

This description reflects an eighteenth-century reality in which class and status determined masculinity and upper-class men were often represented as the embodiment of beauty and sexual allure. They expressed their wealth and high status mainly through clothing, to show superiority and prosperity. However, Fanny describes Mr. Crofts as a hideous monster who is apparently, in her opinion, not “among [her] own degree” (17). She does not explain her point regarding incompatibility, but it could be a reference to the age gap between them. Her standards of beauty are defined when meeting Charles for the first time; his fair complexion and young age – he is “between eighteen and nineteen” (36) – draw her to him. She describes her instant attraction to Charles: “besides all the perfections of manly beauty which were assembled in his form, he had an air of neatness and gentility, a certain smartness in the carriage and port of his head, that yet more distinguish'd him; his eyes were sprightly and full of meaning; his looks had in them something at once sweet and commanding” (38). Physical beauty and status are two interrelated parameters in Fanny’s sexual choices. And thus, sex for love becomes her priority.

Fanny’s agency is demonstrated in her ability to choose which man will be her first “ravisher.” It is ‘love at first sight,’ according to Fanny. Given that this man is someone she barely knows, she merely trusts her instincts, which seems at first to be the wrong thing to do, especially after witnessing the consequences of all her innocent and naïve decisions. She attributes to Charles the character of a gentleman. Physical attraction plays a huge role in this first impression as she compares his beauty to Adonis and calls him “*My Adonis*” [emphasis mine], indirectly making herself the Greek goddess Aphrodite. This draws our attention to what Fanny thinks of herself and her status. She praises herself and provides a lengthy description of

her natural beauty after Phoebe dresses her up properly for the occasion of meeting Mr. Crofts and attempting to seal the deal over her valuable maidenhead and to sell her virginity for monetary compensation. She confirms with great confidence and pride the great value of her beauty in the eyes of not only herself but also other people:

In short, all the points of beauty that are most universally in request, I had, or at least my vanity forbade me to appeal from the decision of our sovereign judges the men, who all, that I ever knew at least, gave it thus highly in my favour; and I met with, even in my own sex, some that were above denying me that justice, whilst others praised me yet more unsuspectedly, by endeavouring to detract from me, in points of person and figure that I obviously excelled in. This is, I own, too strong of self praise; but should I not be ungrateful to nature, and to a form to which I owe such singular blessings of pleasure and fortune, were I to suppress, through an affectation of modesty, the mention of such valuable gifts? (15)

After this extravagant self-praise she rejects Mr. Crofts and alludes to their incompatibility with regards to degree. This suggests her feelings of superiority are based on beauty, not class. In the beginning of her journey towards sexual maturity, she does not acknowledge the importance of class. Yet, she learns to reassess the worth of class and status in her new lifestyle. Nonetheless, at one point she revolts against this concept in an attempt at exact revenge on her keeper Mr. H, with whom she stays after her sudden separation with Charles. She decides to punish him for his infidelity by cheating on him with his servant boy Will. With Will, she questions the injustice of the established social hierarchy, since she finds Will's true ability to please worthy of a higher social class than other, richer men. She writes, "Oh! but, say you, this was a young fellow of too low a rank of life to deserve so great a display" (85).

Fanny's deep aversion to Mr. Crofts should be placed with her journey within the framework of what we might call a *bildungsroman* in which she continually learns and grows with the help of different characters in different aspects of her life. Scott J. Juengel contends that "*Memoirs* sounds a surprisingly cohesive discourse of erudition, wherein the Bildung that organizes the novel throws into peculiar relief the teleological nature and coinherence of self-satisfaction and self-enrichment" (423). On this matter, Rosenthal invites us to question Fanny's particularly aggressive reaction towards Mr. Crofts and her utter disgust towards him. Significantly, the other women in the brothel do not seem to share her opinion, and Rosenthal relates this discrepancy to a certain maturity that Fanny did not possess at the time. According to Rosenthal, the novel "invites readers to observe Fanny's astute analysis and management of the feelings of her clients, which require sensitivity, analysis, and self-control...But Fanny must acquire them, for her initial encounter with an unattractive man seeking commercial sex, as we will see, produces in her a disgust that she cannot yet control" (85). Thus, physical attraction and libidinal desires are her principal motives for accepting Charles as a person with whom she can have intercourse. She does not reject his physical approaches from the beginning; she even yearns for his touch and receives from him "the first kiss that [she]ever relish'd from man in [her] life" (37). In contrast, she is entirely grossed out by Mr. Crofts' kiss. Her subjection later leads her to appreciate men of all forms and to develop a new understanding of attraction through pleasure, where her new main object of admiration is the shape of the penis.

Leaving Mrs. Brown's brothel to live with Charles presents a transformational experience for Fanny. It starts as romantically and ends tragically but prepares her for her journey towards cultural awareness. She goes from being independent to having someone she relies on financially and emotionally. She explains, "Here, However, under the wings of my sovereignly belov'd, did

I flow the most delicious hours of my life” (55). For a time, Charles enables her to avoid prostitution as he builds a romantic life with her. He even seeks to culture her by “[taking her] to plays, operas, masquerades, and every diversion of the town” (55). These activities are, indeed, new to a country girl like her, since only people of a higher class were able to enjoy such cultural entertainment in the eighteenth century. Fanny’s willingness to become polished under the eyes of her lover comes from her deep desire to be admired by him and not to leave his side, which indirectly leads her to happiness and satisfaction. She claims, “My country accent, and the rusticity of my gait, manners, and deportment, began now sensibly to wear off, so quick was my observation, and so efficacious my desire of growing every day worthier of his heart” (56). It is relevant that her transformation is mostly consistent with eighteenth-century patriarchal conventions of femininity. Moreover, her transformation on a cultural level only helps her to shape an identity more amiable within the prostitution market later on.

Fanny and Forms of Subordination

Fanny’s sexual evolution takes the form of subordination to different powers, which depend on the circumstances in which she finds herself. In this way, her sexual experiences might be understood through Judith Butler’s notion of subjection. Butler enlarges upon the Foucauldian concept of subjection, which itself describes the process of an individual’s transformation into a subject in relation to different forms of power relations. Hence, such an individual not only becomes a subordinated individual, but also forms a deep attachment to their own subordination. Fanny, similarly, relates her need to find her own identity in tandem with the presence of her lover. This need might be aligned with Butler’s notion of a child’s attachment to their parents in her introduction to *The Psychic Life of Power*, in which she draws a parallel between love and the provision of basic needs and care. Fanny’s pattern of attachment indeed manifests itself as a

dependent passionate attachment. Butler argues that “there is no possibility of not loving, where love is bound up with the requirements for life.” She elaborates: “This attachment in its primary form must both come to be and be denied, its coming to be must consist in its partial denial, for the subject to emerge” (8). This statement might help us understand Fanny’s attachment to Charles as she has no one to nurture her after the death of her parents and arguably creates this bond to compensate for the protectors she has lost. Furthermore, her search for a mother figure in Mrs. Brown confirms her longing to form an attachment. She develops a pattern by trusting and then immediately considering the people she encounters as caregivers. Her innocence and financial dependence are, this way, her constant weaknesses.

The disruption of Fanny and Charles’ relationship is an important step in Fanny’s development. Charles’s unforeseen absence pushes Fanny into a trance of psychological and physical shock and fright. She loses consciousness as she “miscarried of the dear pledge of [her] Charles's love” (59). Thus, his disappearance launches her into a position of vulnerability, and she grieves her lover for six weeks. In contrast, the death of her parents did not afflict her with the same amount of perturbation and she skips the details of her “natural” grief. This reaction might be understood as the consequence of the distraction she experiences as she thinks of a future life in London. Esther, her guardian, makes her believe going to London would be her opportunity to “SEEK HER FORTUNE” (3). However, subsequently, through her personal experience, she comes to understand that London is no place for naïve country girls such as her. Thus, in London, Charles causes her first heartbreak, and her emotional trauma leads to a drastic change in her identity.

The loss of Charles represents Fanny’s initiation into a career of prostitution. Her mourning process is interrupted by the landlady who makes sure to draw Fanny’s attention to her

inability to pay for the service she has been offered after the death of her lover. According to Rosenthal, “when Charles disappears, despondency to the point of near madness followed by extreme emotional detachment leads to a prostitute career in a way that sexual arousal could not” (89). This might be understood through a process described by Freud, in which the incomplete process of grieving is tied to the formation of ego. Judith Butler’s reflections on Freud’s “Mourning and Melancholia” draw a connection between the “unresolved grieving” process and the process of subjection. She explains:

Insofar as identification is the psychic preserve of the object and such identifications come to form the ego, the lost object continues to haunt and inhabit the ego as one of its constitutive identifications. The lost object is, in that sense, made coextensive with the ego itself. Indeed, one might conclude that melancholic identification permits the loss of the object in the external world precisely because it provides a way to preserve the object as part of the ego and, hence, to avert the loss as a complete loss. (134)

Ultimately, Fanny’s traumatic experience is heightened by the threat to her liberty by the landlady, who threatens to imprison her because she cannot afford the expenses of her stay anymore. She explains, “At the word ‘prison!’ every drop of my blood chill’d, and my fright acted so strongly upon me, that, turning as pale and faint as a criminal at the first sight of his place of execution, I was on the point of swooning” (60). Hence, the law becomes the first element of her subordination. In this respect, Butler writes, “a prior desire for the law, a passionate complicity with law, without which no subject can exist” (108) is apparent in Fanny’s trajectory. Her feelings of guilt stem from her ignorance of the law; therefore, she submits to the landlady’s wishes in silence. The landlady’s acquaintance demonstrates the illusion of a

gentleman who is willing to help free Fanny of her financial troubles under the disguise of a client. Her destitution leaves her no choice but to accept the “help” of the gentleman.

The threat of losing freedom and the fear of the law is another characteristic of Fanny’s subjection. As Butler argues, “within subjection the price of existence is subordination. Precisely at the moment in which choice is impossible, the subject pursues subordination as the promise of existence. This pursuit is not choice, but neither is it necessity” (20 Butler). Hence, afflicted by the pressure of fear from the power of the law, she does not resist. Fanny describes her astonishment in this instance: “on my part, [I offered] neither resistance nor compliance. I sat stock-still; and now looking on myself as bought by the payment that had been transacted before me” (63). Surely, her melancholic thoughts persist throughout the events that take place with Mr. H, the man who paid her debts to the landlady, as she feels a certain guilt for her submission to his kisses and touches. Moreover, she highlights the difference between sex out of love with Charles and “animal pleasure” in intercourse with Mr. H. Her resistance in the beginning to Mr. H’s attempts to penetrate her is suggestive of her denial of any feelings of sexual pleasure whatsoever.

However, as the first enjoyment is decisive, and he was now over the bar, I thought I had no longer a right to refuse the caresses of one that had got that advantage over me, no matter how obtain'd; conforming myself then to this maxim, I consider'd myself as so much in his power that I endur'd his kisses and embraces without affecting struggles or anger; not that they, as yet, gave me any pleasure, or prevail'd over the aversion of my soul to give myself up to any sensation of that sort; what I suffer'd, I suffer'd out of a kind of gratitude, and as a matter of course after what had pass'd. (64)

Fanny's psyche represents a means of resistance against the idea of losing Charles and her authority at the same time. To understand this, we might turn to Judith Butler's discussion of Foucault's theory of the body's subordination and ask where resistance would be located, if it is to be found at all. Butler writes, "If the body is subordinated and to some extent destroyed as the dissociated self emerges, and if that emergence might be read as the sublimation of the body and the self be read as the body's ghostly form, then is there some part of the body which is not preserved in sublimation, some part of the body which remains unsublimated?" (92). She specifically evokes the notion of the psyche's ability to resist, a paradigm which could explain Fanny's attempt to not allow herself to feel pleasure with Mr. H by channeling her feelings of guilt as a way of replacing pleasure. However, she loses control over her psyche when she consumes "three or four glasses of wine, which he compelled me to drink by way of restoring nature" (65) and "a small silver porringer of what she called a bridal posset" (66) given to her by the maid. These substances make her weaker, while also arousing her and therefore her psyche's resistance disappears for a time. After this complete submission to her "new Master," she allows herself to stop the mourning process over Charles. She declares, "our virtues and our vices depend too much on our circumstances". Hence "[t]here are not, on earth at least, eternal griefs" (65), which "were, if not at an end, at least suspended" (63). As Butler puts it, "Here we see that letting the object go means, paradoxically, not full abandonment of the object but transferring the status of the object from external to internal. Giving up the object becomes possible only on the condition of a melancholic internalization or, what might for our purposes turn out to be even more important, a melancholic incorporation" (134). According to Butler's perception of partial detachment, Fanny would keep the memories of her lover stored within her through the novel, but continue with her journey of subjection, which takes multiple forms, in her particular case. If

we take into consideration her experiences of subjection in the novel, we might, moreover, confirm Foucault's ideas on the production of a subject. According to Foucault, a process of repetition is necessary in order to transform the individual fully into a subject (93 Butler).

The disruption of Charles and Fanny's relationship launches her into a life of prostitution which she had previously only avoided temporarily. It also leads to her sexual maturation as she learns more than she could ever before regarding pleasure, specifically through the brothel clients' different tastes. More importantly, she gains financial independence, notably after one of the gentlemen she meets through her work as a prostitute keeps her with him and leaves her his fortune after his death as she explains: "having generously trusted me with a genteel, independent settlement, proceeding to heap marks of affection on me, he appointed me, by an authentick will, his sole heiress and executrix" (181). As she reunites with her lover, Fanny is the knight in shining armour in this novel as she offers her fortune to Charles to start a new life with him. This end obviously could be read as running counter to patriarchal conventions concerning their dislike of prostitutes and their inability to be housewives, thus perhaps subtly disrupting the phallogocentric narrative Cleland seems intent on promoting for most of the novel.

Finally, Fanny would not have obtained this degree of freedom to understand her body and the power of pleasure in all its forms had she not gone through this experience. As Haslanger concludes, "Cleland creates a heroine strengthened by her various encounters in ways that strain body, mind, and feelings, although often, without a doubt, credulity as well" (101). Cleland has his heroine undertake a journey of sexual awakening and evolution, which turns her into a mature character. This is stressed as a necessity to launch her into the market of prostitution. In this regard, Rance Denton claims that "Sexuality is the tool that chisels her, for without religious guidance or worldly knowledge she is left to rely upon her only remaining recourse: her body, 'a

constitution perfectly healthy” (3). Fanny prospers through exploiting her body in a male dominant society to gain her financial independence. Her growth as an individual by the end of the novel is the direct result of her prostitution. Hence, the disruption of her relationship with Charles is the main factor in its accomplishment. In this way, her reunion with her lover, Charles, is her reward as she wants him back, but not for the purpose of freeing her or giving her financial stability. Her attachment to Charles ends up being purely romantic. Instead of punishing her, Cleland rewards Fanny’s diversion with love. While upholding patriarchal norms elsewhere. Ultimately, he challenges patriarchal ideas of the whore who cannot also be a housewife.

Chapter Two

Fanny Hill and Prostitution: The Profit of Carnal Ways

Good girls go to heaven, bad girls go everywhere.

--Helen Gurley Brown

Written in the mid-eighteenth century, Cleland's *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* takes place in a period of rigid distinction between the lifestyles of the rich and those of the poor. The rich lived luxuriously, spending their fortunes on hosting parties or attending lavish dinners and banquets. Meanwhile, despite a growing middle class, the poor had few options for upward mobility and often lived in extremely horrible conditions. Moreover, being a woman in a society ruled by men made it even harder for poor women. Evidently, patriarchal figures made decisions for female members of the family. Women were basically treated as property and had few rights; they were governed by their fathers until they got married, at which point they came under the rule of their husbands.¹ Those who decided to seek economic independence had limited options; they could work in factories or become maids or seamstresses. In fact, these last three

¹ For more details on the legal status of women in eighteenth-century England, with particular attention to marriage, the doctrine of coverture, and the relationship between women, the law, and property, see Chapone, Sarah Kirkham, and Susan Glover. *The Hardships of the English Laws in Relation to Wives*. Routledge, 2018. In the similar context of women's oppression and lack of liberty in a marriage, see Foyster, Elizabeth. "At the Limits of Liberty: Married Women and Confinement in Eighteenth-Century England." *Continuity and Change*, vol. 17, no. 1, May 2002, pp. 39–62. Cambridge University Press. To understand the reality of ordinary women's financial state in early modern England see, Erickson, Amy Louise. *Women and Property: In Early Modern England*. Routledge, 1995.

professions often led to prostitution. It is important to note, however, that some women willingly picked prostitution as a job since it seemed to offer better financial advantages compared to the other options they had. What Deborah Anna Logan says of the Victorian period might also be applied to the eighteenth century: “Some women, it is true, entered prostitution by choice, attracted by its comparatively lucrative remuneration for very little work; simply put, prostitution made good business sense at a time when women had few employment options” (37).

Generally, eighteenth-century representations of the prostitute in this period are complex. For instance, some printed texts described her as a purely evil and lustful creature and “once they had exhausted conventional insults such as ‘whore’, ‘bitch’ and ‘she-devil’, authors were forced to come up with ever-more inventive terms of abuse such as ‘Amazonian Strumpets’ and ‘degenerated animals’” (21). Sophie Carter relates this verbal aggression towards prostitutes to the society’s rejection of prostitution and its distortion of their concept of femininity. While many other texts and novels represent her as a poor woman who was pushed by her unlucky destiny into becoming a prostitute. Rosenthal confirms: “from Grub Street whore biographies to major novels by Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding, tell their stories from the perspective of or with some form of empathy for a character faced with a choice between remunerated sexual activity and abject poverty” (7).

In her book *Infamous Commerce*, Laura J. Rosenthal confirms that in the eighteenth century, “prostitutes appear to embody a new kind of commercial identity that can empower or threaten the individual through self-control, self-sacrifice, and self-division in marketplace exchanges” (2). Her statement confirms a shift in focus towards the importance of commercial transactions and a movement away from an earlier preoccupation with the uncontrollable sexual appetites of prostitutes. Cleland’s *Fanny Hill* is a clear example of the phenomenon Rosenthal

discusses in her book. I intend to build on her work in this chapter as I focus on how prostitution can be understood as empowering in *Memoirs*. To do so, I explore the figure of a prostitute as a hustler of sorts who comes into being out of economic necessity. I will discuss the temporary change in power dynamics and female empowerment, particularly through the topic of feigned virginity as it is represented in *Memoirs*. Through a reading of Cleland's novel, this chapter argues that the character of Fanny (as well as some of her fellow prostitutes) presents a scenario in which prostitutes could attain a certain amount of power and challenge patriarchal structures, not only through the achievement of economic independence but also by finally experiencing the so-called 'happily-ever-after' ending (i.e. marriage) their virtuous fictional women counterparts similarly enjoyed. While Cleland's novel might be understood as depicting a "pornotopia" that does not properly reflect the potentially grim and life-threatening dangers of prostitution for women in eighteenth-century Britain, he imagines an ideal of a financially secure, self-sufficient, and sexually satisfied woman prostitute.

Embracing Prostitution as an Economic Opportunity

In *Memoirs*, prostitutes tend to turn their initial victimization into economic opportunity. The novel suggests that such women have the potential to change their status and to assume a more elevated lifestyle than before. Fanny, for instance, is depicted in the beginning of the novel as an innocent, young victim. However, as the novel progresses, she becomes able to control her feelings as much as her body. She masters the role of the woman of pleasure, and, through certain choices, achieves a higher status. Evidently, Fanny's ability to restrain her feelings for Charles and let herself go with Mr. H, a man with whom she enters into a relationship out of necessity, enables her to become a mistress with a personal maid and to lead a luxurious life she had never experienced before. Mr. H spoils her with expensive gifts as Fanny herself confirms:

“Silks, laces, ear-rings, pearl-necklace, gold watch, in short, all the trinkets and articles of dress were lavishly heap'd upon me” (70). Not even her lover Charles could offer her such an extravagant lifestyle. Economic gain becomes her priority and eventually numbs her feelings and her memories of her lover. She ascends the social ladder to transform from a woman in debt with an unknown future, to a woman who has everything she needs, and more. Mr. H is indeed Fanny’s first actual ‘transaction’ within the market of prostitution, even though being a ‘mistress’ could be understood differently from being a prostitute. She ends up ruining her financial agreement with Mr. H, yet she leaves with profits that include fifty guineas and clothes at the value of two hundred pounds. Moreover, at this point, she is fearless with regards to what comes next and is much more confident and aware of her role and her worth in the market at this point. As Fanny remarks, “his leaving me gave me a sort of liberty that I had often long'd for, I was soon comforted; and flattering myself that the stock of youth and beauty I was going into trade with could hardly fail of procuring me a maintenance, I saw myself under a necessity of trying my fortune with them, rather, with pleasure and gaiety, than with the least idea of despondency” (92).

After she parts with Mr. H, Fanny makes clear her longing for different experiences and her unwillingness to be content with her actual situation. She knows her strengths and plans to exploit them in her upcoming adventures. Moreover, even before leaving Mr. H, she shows her industriousness by making connections and acquaintances that could help her in the prostitution market. As soon as her deal with Mr. H comes to an end, Mrs. Cole, the owner of a brothel for elite prostitutes, comes with a business proposal that Fanny does not reject, thinking that “[she] could not have put [herself] into worse, or into better hands in all London” (93). Fanny picks Mrs. Cole based on her reputation as an employer in the market. She confirms her experience in

the field; “she was consummately at the top of her profession” (93), declares Fanny, noting her ability to protect prostitutes in her brothel, which is indispensably valuable in this field of work. Additionally, Fanny seems to relate to Mrs. Cole, in part because they both became prostitutes “partly through necessity, partly through choice” (93). However, most importantly, she assesses the situation financially as she knows that Mrs. Cole will not take an unreasonable amount of money from her income, explaining: “what was rare to be met with in those of her [profession] she contented herself with a moderate living profit upon her industry and good offices, and had nothing of their (other brothel owners) greedy rapacious turn” (93). Mrs. Cole was a prostitute, who at some point became a business owner.

Mrs. Cole has her own brothel and employs elite prostitutes. She can, therefore, be regarded as an entrepreneur. Because of this, at least in the beginning, Fanny seems to idealize both Mrs. Cole and her business. Cleland contrasts Mrs. Cole to Mrs. Brown, a colleague of the same profession, who would fall into the description of a wicked woman. In this matter Sophie Carter argues how bawds are always depicted as the source of all evil and misrepresented in narratives of prostitution to blame prostitution solely on women:

across narratives of prostitution, the bawd essentially served a dual function: she was at once the architect of the prostitute’s initial fall and the agent through who’s machinations women were inducted into prostitution. More generally, she presided over the organization after having exercised the profession. The centrality and agency of this figure of deviant matriarchal authority served to ensure that women alone bore full moral responsibility for the phenomenon of urban prostitution (110).

Cleland gives two examples of bawds through Mrs. Brown and Mrs. Cole; one used immoral ways to trick the innocent Fanny into prostitution, which is more relevant in narratives of prostitution,

while the later offered Fanny a work proposal in a more civilized manner and asked for her consent. Furthermore Mrs. Cole functions as a solution for Fanny's wishes to explore more options after the end of her relationship with Mr.H.

Fanny goes into the market with her body and beauty as her only reliable resources and Mrs. Cole encourages her to look beyond her status and exploit her body in the process. For instance, at Fanny's initiation party, Mrs. Cole tells her that "there was no dress like an undress" (100) to impress the gentlemen she is meeting. Moreover, Mrs. Cole makes sure to boost Fanny's confidence and self-esteem by telling her that these rich men could leave a duchess at any moment for a "ruddy, healthy, firm-flesh'd country maid" (100). Notably, Mrs. Cole clarifies to her girls that in order to make a profit as a prostitute, they must accept and follow the desires of their clients no matter how peculiar or strange they might be, because their sole purpose is profit. Fanny seems to see, immediately following her initiation party, that she has made the right choice and that Mrs. Cole's reputation is built on true foundations. The gentleman who she accompanies that night discreetly leaves a reward for Fanny. However, when she tells Mrs. Cole about this, her employer exceeds her expectations as Fanny says that "She would on no terms, no entreaties, no shape I could put it in, receive any part of it" (129).

Secondary Female Characters

While Fanny is certainly the protagonist of *Memoirs*, the novel sheds light on various female characters. Because they ultimately share similar destinies, readers have access to different perspectives on the journey Fanny takes. At Mrs. Coles' brothel, Fanny meets many young ladies who share a fate similar to hers. Each one of them tells her story They explain how they ended up in this place and situation. Remarkably, these women share a mutual feeling of gratitude and appreciation for finding Mrs. Cole and working under her protection. It is important, of course,

to take into consideration the issues that have driven each of these girls into the world of prostitution, particularly because each of their stories highlights different social and economic issues characteristic of eighteenth-century British life. For instance, one of Mrs. Cole's prostitutes, Emily, a young girl raised in the countryside, explains how her parents' "barbarity to [her], in favour of a son, on whom only they vouchsafed to bestow their tenderness" (101) is the main reason she fled her home. Emily's feeling that she has been treated unjustly compared to her brother serves as an example of the common feeling of inferiority young women experienced in a patriarchal society where sons, brothers, and husbands were privileged. In a way, Emily's rejection of her parents' biased behaviour shapes her into a rebellious figure. However, despite her disobedient nature she shares Fanny's naivety and falls into prostitution as a result. Losing her virginity after rejecting her family's mistreatment could be considered a punishment, or as a one-way ticket to self-liberation.

Meanwhile, another girl, Harriett, an orphan who lived with her aunt, refused all her suitors for the simple reason of not having any feelings for them. Harriett relates her previous inability to form a connection with her suitors to two possibilities: "whether nature was slow in making me sensible in her favourite passion, or that I had not seen any of the other sex who had stirr'd up the least emotion or curiosity to be better acquainted with it" (104). Ironically, the only man who wakes up her emotions of desire leads her to Mrs. Cole's house. Granted, Harriett's story is suspicious to the extent that it seems to be lacking important details with regards to what stopped her from marrying this desirable man. Perhaps Cleland is suggesting, through the depiction of Harriett's misfortune and downfall, that love and desire are not the main factors to rely on when it comes to choosing the 'right' man to marry in eighteenth-century society. Realistically, Harriett's choice was rushed and based solely on physical attraction towards the

young man who end up raping her. The next girl introduced by Fanny; Louisa, who is the fruit of an unmarried relationship, is inclined by nature to what her mother tries so hard to protect her from. Unlike the other girls, she discovers on her own the source of her desire at an early age and is taunted by its fulfillment. She explains, “In short, this dev'lish thing, with its impetuous girds and itching fires, led me such a life that I could neither night nor day be at peace with it or myself” (111). Louisa takes the first opportunity to fulfill her desire when a man shows up in her room whom she describes as an angel sent from above to relieve her agony and constant search for pleasure. Evidently, her excessive love for pleasure is what “betray'd [her] into indiscretions fatal to [her] private fortune” (115). Women such as Louisa show no regret for what happened to them in Cleland’s novel. Rather, they frown on the fact that their actions become publicly known by their society, which is why they end up in the brothel. More importantly, in the brothel, they embark on a new chapter of life, free of humiliation and judgement. A life in which financial gain and pleasure are their ultimate objectives.

Mrs. Cole, the owner of the brothel, represents the relatively enviable figure of a retired prostitute who becomes a businesswoman. Fanny meets many women in the market throughout her journey, but her description of Mrs. Cole confirms that she takes a higher place above all the others. In a way, she symbolizes the perfect employer in the prostitution market. Being a woman who has been through the same situation as her employees, she shows more appreciation and care for them than other brothel owners might. Her girls work hard, and she offers them a lifestyle they never had as a reward. The prostitutes in her brothel think of it as a refuge, and they lead glamorous lifestyles. This portrait reflects Rosenthal’s claim that “[such] narratives turn prostitutes, from impoverished streetwalkers to glamorous celebrities, into novelistic heroines with their ups and downs, twists of fate, humiliations, conflicts, upward mobility, suffering, and

sometimes triumph” (128). *Memoirs* without a doubt portrays most of the prostitutes as icons of beauty and social mobility. Mrs. Cole, as a retired prostitute, has no more physical assets to continue in her field, and, indeed, the times being what they were, there were few lucrative alternatives available for prostitutes like her. However, she chooses to profit through the knowledge and skills she has acquired in her career, by her basic capital, and by the connections she has made throughout her life as a prostitute. Indeed, Fanny mentions four young gentlemen whom Mrs. Cole considers to be her main benefactors. “[U]nited,” she writes, “and holding together by the band of common pleasures, they composed the chief support of her house, and made very liberal presents to the girls that pleas'd and humour'd them, so that they were, properly speaking, the founders and patrons of this little seraglio” (99).

Of course, finding a profitable idea can never be enough to become an entrepreneur, and making sure there is adequate funding is key to the success of the idea. This is how Mrs. Cole approaches her business. It is hard for the contemporary reader to imagine that a prostitute could save enough money to launch a business on her own in eighteenth-century Britain. Yet, Mrs. Cole's connections help her considerably, and she takes her opportunity. Moreover, she launches her brothel posing as a millinery shop and is thus the main network to pick her workers. Fanny meets Mrs. Cole initially at Mr. H's lodgings, “where she had made errands to sell [her] some millinery ware” (96) and thus eventually earns her trust. Mrs. Cole's business, as portrayed by Cleland, seems to reflect a social reality, as revealed in Campbell's description of milliners: “These are Decoys for the Unwary; they are but places for assignations, and take the Title of Milliner, a more polite name for a Bawd, a procuress, . . . promote nothing but Vice, and live by Lust” (209). In short, as many other bawds in the eighteenth century, Mrs. Cole covers her business with a millinery shop. Her business empowers both her and her female workers as they

become financially independent and enjoy the opportunity to be part of a more refined lifestyle that is out of reach for other women. According to Fanny's description, Mrs. Cole's brothel is sophisticated and offers services only for a certain class of society, despite each girl's different taste in pleasure. The prostitutes in her brothel repeatedly express gratitude, relief, and happiness to be part of this experience and to work under Mrs. Cole's protection. To a certain extent her brothel is a haven for these fallen women, pointing to the creation of a 'pornotopia' in *Memoirs*.

Of course, a 'pornotopia', by definition, does not exist in reality. Tassie Gwilliam elaborates on the implications of the flawless image Cleland presents of prostitution and Mrs. Cole's brothel: "the smooth functioning of fantasy in this text is disturbed, paradoxically, by its very smoothness; in order to imagine a world of prostitution without guilt and suffering, Cleland virtually eliminates several of that world's defining features or changes them out of recognition" (538). There are few references to the possible dangers of prostitution in the novel. The only instance where the perils of prostitution are clearly declared is when Fanny is picked up by a sailor from the streets. After Fanny has sex with this sailor and goes back to the brothel, she tells Mrs. Cole, who warns her of the dangers to her health of her reckless behaviour. Undoubtedly, Cleland implicitly refers to venereal diseases without disturbing the main theme of pleasure. Gwilliam explains that "The prevalence of venereal disease among the prostitutes of London seems to have been accepted as an unavoidable risk; the rigorous exclusion of disease-mentioned but not experienced-in *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* is so striking that disease can virtually be considered a kind of shadow" (540). While this is true, Mrs. Cole succeeds in showing herself as the generous and wise patroness as she, in the episode with the sailor, highlights the risks of venereal disease to street prostitutes. However, it must be noted that there is a hint of irony in the

presentation of this situation, since when the prostitute is supposed to be more afraid of catching the disease from the sailor than vice versa. In short, the realities and attitudes of that surrounded eighteenth-century prostitutes and their relationship to venereal disease were quite different than what is depicted in *Memoirs*.²

Cleland's novel does, however, reproduce certain stereotypes around the prostitute such as what Marie E. McAllister describes as a popular theory by which "the prostitute might spontaneously generate V.D. because of the physical damage caused by her sexual behavior" (36). The scene where Mrs. Cole warns Fanny of the dangers of her foolish act with the sailor reinforces the idealization of Mrs. Coles' brothel and the quality of her employees. Moreover, it confirms common ideas around social status and its relation to venereal diseases in the 18th century. The poor were more likely to catch these diseases (even if aristocrats were also affected). *Memoirs* presents a narrative that confirms Gwilliam's points on gendered prejudices which saw "female prostitutes and women in general ... as the primary if not sole source of venereal disease. In popular as well as medical thinking, while women and men were both victims of the disease, women alone spread it and were defined by it" (542). After her little promiscuous adventure with the sailor, Mr. Norbert, the man who has Fanny as his mistress at that time, travels to Bath with his sister and Fanny reveals that he is sick and soon later dies. Some critics such as Sara Fernandes argue that Mr. Norbert's sickness is directly related to Fanny's experience with the sailor and that she is infected with a venereal disease which caused his death. She confirms that "Fanny attributes Norbert's untimely demise to excessive

² For more on venereal diseases see, Weisser, Olivia. *Treating the Secret Disease: Sex, Sin, and Authority in Eighteenth-Century Venereal Cases*. See page 708 in particular for the 18th-century perspective on gender, sexuality, and the contraction of venereal diseases.

consumption of alcohol; however, the emphasis that the text places on fever and delirium hints at symptoms of venereal infection” (508). Nonetheless, Fanny does not think of his death in a sentimental way, as a tragedy. Rather she considers it a financial loss more than anything as she explains, “Had he been in his senses to make a will, perhaps he might have made favourable mention of me in it” (147). His death, for her, only marks the end of a deal.

Changing Power Dynamics

Fanny succeeds at one point in changing conventional male-female power dynamics by fooling the patriarchal system. In *Memoirs*, fallen women do not always finally end up in bad situations. Some women exploit their bodies to change their status, and do not let the patriarchal obsession with virtue obstruct their journey. Fanny, with the help of her mentor Mrs. Cole, exploits males’ deep obsession with purity and virginity in order to continue her journey towards economic independence. The notion of purity was, certainly, elevated and idealized in this period, and Cleland’s novel clearly explores how virginal blood was of a paramount importance in proving the virtue of a woman.³ It was considered as a moral standard that confirmed a woman’s chastity, as well as her family’s moral standing. In the beginning, Fanny starts narrating her life by presenting her character as a young girl who has little communication with the opposite sex. Initially, her understanding of “virtue” revolves around the fact that she does not know anything about men. She declares, “and then all my foundation in virtue was no other than a total ignorance of vice, and the shy timidity general to our sex” (6). Fanny’s perception of virtue as a

³ For more on this point see Harol, Corrinne. *Faking It: Female Virginity and Pamela’s Virtue*. p. 21. She talks about virginity as an epistemological problem during the 18th century and the ways virtue was evaluated through virginity. For more on sexuality in the 18th century see, Boucé, Paul-Gabriel. *Sexuality in Eighteenth-Century Britain*. Manchester University Press, 1982.

child is obviously influenced by patriarchal norms. Because women were supposed to look and act innocently and to not be desired or have desires themselves women who lacked virtue and chastity were perceived as lacking in value.

As a prostitute Fanny exploits these conventions around virtue and women's value as she fools a man and completes the mission Mrs. Cole appointed to her, which is to repeatedly pass as a virgin in the prostitution market. Fanny explains her first encounter with her target: "he went into other leading questions, I put so much innocence, simplicity, and even childishness into my answers that on no better foundation, liking my person as he did, I will answer for it, he would have been sworn for my modesty" (132). By stressing her 'innocence', 'childishness', and 'modesty', she calculates her words and reactions, notably blushing, to make this man believe she is indeed a virgin. Significantly, the duped gentleman, who goes by the name Mr. Norbert, is both rich and known to be a maidenhead hunter. Moreover, Fanny explains that "he had ruin'd a number of girls, sparing no expense to compass his ends" (134). All these factors make him a perfect victim as Mrs. Cole confirms, "the sin would be, not to make the best of our market of him" (134). Mr. Norbert, who exploits virgins and throws them away afterwards, finally meets his rival, who makes a fool of him. This is, then, revenge in the name of all the women he has mistreated, and Fanny takes on the role of executioner. Mrs. Cole bargained her way into a deal with Mr. Norbert, where he agrees to pay for "the purchase of [Fanny's] imaginary jewel (...), at no more than three hundred guineas to [Fanny], and a hundred to the brokeress" (136), in addition to all the gifts they receive throughout the negotiation period.

Similarly, Fanny shows her dislike of eighteenth-century notions of purity and demonstrates her ability to deceive the men who are overly fixated on this notion. She explains, "all my looks and gestures ever breathing nothing but that innocence which the men so ardently

require in us, for no other end than to feast themselves with the pleasures of destroying it, and which they are so grievously, with all their skill, subject to mistakes in” (136). There is a hint of pleasure in swindling Mr. Norbert specifically, and symbolically, all of patriarchal society. More importantly, however, financial gain is what motivates Fanny. Even though their actions are fraudulent, they grant Fanny and Mrs. Cole a position of power, as Tassie Gwilliam observes,

Counterfeit maidenheads can level the battle ground between the sexes or even reverse the apparent balance of power completely. Instead of an encounter between rapist and victim, or purchaser and commodity seller, the deployment of false virginity can imply a contest between two equally knowing parties, or even the presence of a wicked female deceiver (variously the bawd or the counterfeiter herself) preying upon a male dupe. (519)

Fanny is clever and she exploits her skills in order to subject Mr. Norbert to her plans. Women in general and prostitutes specifically were seen as the source of all evil and malignancy for nothing more than their sexuality. However, in Fanny’s case, there is a reversal of roles, for fraud is used to deceive a male who represents an evil figure and therefore deserves to be a target. In a way, Fanny’s actions can be considered as strategic. She uses both her body language and mind to make Mr. Norbert believe she is a virgin. Cleland puts Mr. Norbert in a position of weakness and depicts him as incapable of satisfying a woman; as Fanny remarks, “In the meantime his machine ... was one of those sizes that slip in and out without being minded” (138) (this serves as one of the rare scenes in the novel where the male penis is not glorified). Cleland renders the scene partially comic to show Mr. Norbert’s lack of manhood, looking forward to a later scene where his problem with premature ejaculation is highlighted.

Mrs. Cole's ingenuity is further emphasized when she invents a method to make Fanny successfully counterfeit her virginity. She makes a built-in accessory in the bed specifically for this scheme. As Fanny explains,

In each of the head bed-posts, just above where the bedsteads are inserted into them, there was a small drawer, so artfully adapted to the mouldings of the timber-work, that it might have escap'd even the most curious search: which drawers were easily open'd or shut by the touch of a spring, and were fitted each with a shallow glass tumbler, full of a prepared fluid blood, in which lay soak'd, for ready use, a sponge that required no more than gently reaching the hand to it, taking it out and properly squeezing between the thighs, when it yielded a great deal more of the red liquid than would save a girl's honour; after which, replacing it, and touching the spring, all possibility of discovery, or even of suspicion, was taken away; and all this was not the work of the fourth part of a minute, and on which ever side one lay, the thing was equally easy and practicable, by the double care taken to have each bed-post provided alike. (140)

When it comes to profit, Mrs. Cole and Fanny become creative in order to perfect their plan without being caught and undermining the virtuous image they have secured in Mr. Norbert's mind.

Counterfeit virginity can have the effect of troubling patriarchal systems as it grants women the ability to manipulate their bodies and hide traces of other men and past experiences, just as men often did (Gwilliam 519). This may reinforce the duplicitous nature of women that the patriarchy fears. However, in this instance the tables are turned, and Fanny becomes equal to, or maybe even more powerful than, Mr. Norbert. Fanny resorts to removing the traces of infidelity from her body in another situation in which she cheats on her keeper Mr. H. She uses a

“warm bath of aromatick and sweet herbs” (83) to restore her private parts to their initial condition. Furthermore, Fanny presents for us a link between physical and moral virginity. She manages at a certain point to present herself as a virtuous woman, even if she is not, according to the standards of her society. This might be Cleland’s way of exploring a new definition of virtue, one which depends upon Fanny’s infinitely rejuvenating virginity. Cleland takes this concept further by explaining having Fanny describe her dissatisfaction: “You would ask me, perhaps, whether all this time I enjoy'd any perception of pleasure? I assure you, little or none” (142). In this particular situation, Fanny’s sole pleasure is represented by the sum of money she receives: “which now amounted to a kind of little fortune, that a child of ten years old might have kept the account and property of them safe in its hands” (143). Fanny goes on to explain how men such as Mr. Norbert are the most favourable source of income because of their feelings of deficiency. Indeed, she stays with him for a while due to the financial gain she acquires from him, even if it means that she must sacrifice her feelings of pleasure. She states, “sensible that a woman must be satisfy'd some way, [men such as Norbert] ply her with a thousand little tender attentions, presents, caresses, confidences, and exhaust their inventions in means and devices to make up for the capital deficiency” (143).

Fanny’s Professionalism in the Field

Throughout the novel Fanny is moved by financial gain, personal ambition, and pleasure. She even accepts experiences which cause her pain, as seen in her encounter with Mr. Barville, a masochist, for the purpose of experimenting and proving her abilities as a prostitute. She accepts this temporary suffering because “he paid extravagantly those who had the courage and complaisance to submit to his humour” (148). In reality, of course, not all prostitutes had the

choice to pick their customers and to pursue their own sexual tastes. Prostitutes often fell into situations where the pain inflicted on them was out of their control, and they had no choice but to endure this pain if they were to avoid facing problems with these men or their employers. Jessica Steinberg explains how status and gender were two important factors in a court's decisions accusations of violence cases. She elaborates:

During the eighteenth century, the Bridewell Court of Governors' records, the newspaper press, governing elites, and popular publications seem to have most frequently reported on incidents in which prostitutes were the victims of violence when this violence was extraordinarily brutal or the circumstances surrounding the incident were atypical. However, rather than portray prostitutes who were the targets of violence as pitiable victims, these women were often presented as being partly responsible for becoming an object of violence and portrayed as predatory criminals. 246-247

In short, prostitutes who were women, especially those of a lower class, as most were, could not depend upon the protection of the courts when subjected to violence. Despite the troubling possibilities of violence against prostitutes – a reality omitted in *Memoirs* -- Cleland chooses to depict a mere part of that reality, and he only does so in the context of pleasure and mutual consent. Although Cleland fails to portray a realistic portrait of prostitution in his time, he perhaps imagines an ideal world in which female prostitutes could at once earn a decent living, enjoy pleasurable experiences, and feel protected from male violence.

Within the imaginary of Cleland's pornotopia, Fanny displays her professionalism. She works on herself constantly as a prostitute to add experience and knowledge to her new identity, and to add to the significant sum of money she raises. Every job she takes from Mrs. Cole seems

to be harder than the one before it. Nevertheless, as she unlocks new levels in the field, she gains more money accordingly. Fanny could of course be understood as a hustler by contemporary standards, but 'hustler' had a different meaning in the 18th century and generally referred to men. However, nowadays it mainly describes someone who does anything they can to become successful. Everyone wants to be a hustler. In Fanny's case, she indulges herself in any sexual act, no matter how peculiar or strange it might seem. Still, she has agency over her sexual experiences to a certain point when she starts working in Mr. Coles' brothel. In reality, prostitutes, then as now, were generally driven by necessity or pressure, and, thus, had no control over the quality or tastes of their clients and, consequently, suffered from these experiences. By contrast, in Cleland's ideal world, Fanny consistently praises herself for taking jobs that might be difficult for others, and she takes risks, aiming for success and a higher status in her own eyes and Mrs. Coles' as well. Her ambition and risky adventures enable her to gather a small fortune and become independent after leaving Mrs. Coles' brothel. As she explains, "I had on my separation from Mrs. Cole, taken a pleasant convenient house at Marybone, but easy to rent and manage from its smallness, which I furnish'd neatly and modestly. There, with a reserve of eight hundred pounds, the fruit of my deference to Mrs. Cole's counsels, exclusive of cloaths, some jewels, some plate" (178). She continues to work on her own, even after settling down in a new area, away from the brothel. She applies everything Mrs. Cole has taught her to carry on in her work with discretion. Fanny's life changes drastically after meeting the old gentleman who dies and leaves his fortune to her. She inherits a big amount of money and becomes aware, at one point, after the experience of being able to afford and reach her material needs (and more), that being rich does not necessarily come with happiness.

Marriage as a Bonus Prize

Marriage as it is depicted in *Memoirs* can be understood as a challenge to patriarchal norms. When prostitutes like Fanny get married after pursuing ‘unvirtuous’ lifestyles, they appear to be rewarded for the unlawful behaviors. In Cleland’s hands, prostitutes, much like other women, have the right to marry someone they love and desire rather someone who will merely rescue them from destitution. Two prominent examples in the novel in this respect are Emily and Fanny, both of whom end their adventures with marriage. They prove that fallen women can reverse their trajectory or decide to end their lives of prostitution when they find what they are looking for, which is ultimately financial stability. Emily, who is reunited with her family, marries “a neighbour's son of her own rank, and a young man of sense and order” (177). Fanny confirms that “she naturally struck into all the duties of their domestic life with as much constancy and regularity, as if she had never swerv'd from a state of undebauch'd innocence from her youth” (178). Cleland confirms with this statement that, at least in his imaginary landscape, a prostitute can become a proper wife who takes care of her domestic environment, much like ‘proper’ eighteenth-century women. Granted, Emily hides the truth about her past from her husband, which might be deemed fraudulent and duplicitous. But Cleland seems to present it as her right to decide whether to share details about her past or not. Meanwhile, Fanny marries her first love Charles, but only after she becomes financially independent. As Haslanger comments, “Despite the fact that Fanny claims that her heart has been engaged by Charles since she first met him, her marriage to him at the end of the novel does not erase her history, nor does it retroactively confer legitimacy on her career as a woman of pleasure. Fanny, after all, brings a fortune to the penniless Charles, and their marriage is the novel’s final transaction” (182). In a way, Fanny buys her final happiness with Charles, and he does not reject her new identity. Fanny

finally discovers that fortune is not enough to make her happy. Cleland offers his protagonist an even happier end by marrying her to the love of her life, Charles. Her marriage does not delete her past or her career, but it challenges the patriarchal system that insists that virtue is paramount and that virtuous wives are the only ones who deserve a devoted husband and a family.

Cleland's novel, however, is not primarily about marriage. Rather, it is about a fallen woman who rises economically on her own in a society ruled by men. Financial gain and economic independence are the main themes in *Memoirs*. The novel reveals how prostitution and brothels might enable women to find a certain amount of independence and empowerment. In his pornotopian portrait, women use their bodies and wit, which are presented as their only assets, in order to make a profit. Some women might even go further and exploit the type of man who idolizes notions such as purity and virginity. Kuo-jung Chen justifies their actions explaining: "Moreover, if deception, trick, or stratagem is allowed in political maneuvers or commercial exchanges, it is also legitimate for a vulnerable woman to resort to whatever resources she can have for her day-to-day survival and economic gains. To be a part of the game of male fantasy or heroic adventure, a young woman needs only to play up to her role correspondingly" (91-92).

Accordingly, women such as Mrs. Cole are pictured as saviors, protectors, and mentors for other women who fall or pick this path for a career. As Rosenthal writes of Fanny's case, "[p]rostitution provides upward mobility from rural obscurity to fashionable retirement, rewriting reformist anxieties about the threats to integrity from commercial luxury and imperial expansion as an opportunity instead for personal growth and material advance" (121). Indeed, Fanny's prostitution brings her wealth and a lifestyle she could not have attained had she stayed in her native town. Moreover, as Bonnie Bullough and Vern L. Bullough argue, "prostitution has often been called the world's oldest profession, but it might be more accurate to say that in a

male-dominated world, prostitution was almost the only way that many women lacking a husband, father, or brother to support or protect them were able to survive” (158). Therefore, it is possible to understand how Fanny takes the opportunity to transform her identity completely, finding a loophole within the patriarchal system which prostitutes such as her can exploit in their favour. She becomes successful with one of the few viable options she has in a male-dominated environment. Attaining power, money and social mobility through prostitution can be interpreted as ‘getting even’ with a patriarchal system. Bromberg describes the existentialist feminist point of view:

In the existentialist view, the power of a competent woman over a man is not an illusion. a man may think he is in charge of a situation by virtue of his power to degrade and subdue a woman, but with a woman of competence and spirit this “power” is not incontrovertible. in Carol Pateman’s words directed toward the role of a woman as a prostitute, ‘the man may think he ‘has’ her, but his sexual possession is an illusion; it is she who has him... she will not be ‘taken’, since she is being paid’ (308).

Moreover, marriage is a secondary concern for the women in Cleland’s novel, who choose a different lifestyle from that outlined by conventional eighteenth-century standards. Nonetheless, marriage is presented as a possibility for them, at least if it appears beneficial. Once Fanny achieves her financial independence, she yearns for passion and what she believes is true love, which can only be achieved with Charles. Love and sex are two main plot elements that Cleland manipulates and inserts according to Fanny’s situation. He paints a romantic story for Fanny with Charles, and then completely strips her of his love for the sake of her career. Evidently, an absence of love, and the lack emotional and financial support, push Fanny to

prostitution. Later, when Charles returns as a poor man, he helps Fanny to feel pride and grants her power in their relationship. Ultimately, she becomes a kind of 'investor' in their relationship, using her fortune to help him find a respectable social status again. Finally, Cleland rewards Fanny with what Janet Tod describes as "society's highest prize: marriage with money" (69), but she seems unable to stop herself from thinking about her past experiences of pleasure. Her letters are proof of her tendency towards reminiscence and longing for her former life as a prostitute, even as she accepts her role as a housewife and a mother.

Conclusion

Cleland's *Memoirs* incites an exploration of how prostitution might have empowered women in the eighteenth century. The plot of the novel, as I have argued, focuses on how prostitution, in the case of Fanny Hill, enables her to access a rich lifestyle to which she had been previously denied. Women's economic independence was not easily achieved in the eighteenth century, and women had few options once they were no longer considered as 'virtuous' by the standards of their time. Quite unusually, within his novel, Cleland depicts a woman who discovers the existence of desire within her because of her experience in brothels. She becomes a woman of pleasure after experiencing heartbreak and being pressured into prostitution. The process of Fanny Hill's creation is important as she undergoes psychological and mental developments before emerging as a prostitute. Despite her involuntary launch into prostitution, she finds herself in a position of power where she can profit from her beauty. Furthermore, as I have attempted to demonstrate, Fanny turns the tables and gets the upper hand in a patriarchal society in certain instances.

Fanny's process of maturation is portrayed as both emotional and materialistic in nature. Emotionally, she learns to accept the truth about the difference between class and pleasure. She also learns to put her financial gains first. The disruption of her relationship with Charles, her first love, essentially leads her towards self-discovery and prompts a reevaluation of her needs and priorities under patriarchy. She undergoes different hardships that shape her identity. The first brothel in which she finds herself, Mrs. Brown's, works as an element of introduction into her career as a prostitute. In this brothel, she discovers the fiery desire within her that was previously repressed due her upbringing in a society where sex and sexuality are obscure and taboo. Cleland describes Fanny's sexual orientation as a straight female in this brothel, even though she

experiences her first sexual arousal with another woman, Phoebe. Of course, Cleland's choice can be explained by the nature of his target audience and what some have perceived as his inherent conservatism; there was no question that his heroine would be interested in men, and that the male phallus would be elevated in the novel. Nonetheless, Cleland defies convention by showing how Fanny works through her emotions in sophisticated ways and reaches a stage in her life where she can be financially independent because of her choices.

Somewhat paradoxically, Fanny's subjection is the main factor in her eventual economic independence. As I demonstrate in my first chapter, Fanny's subjection to external powers plays a central role when it comes to the process of her transformation into a prostitute. Her fear of jail because of debt is her initial motive to search for financial freedom and to avoid feelings of distress and vulnerability. She undergoes a paradigmatic process of self-regeneration through her journey. More importantly, she represents an archetype of female power and sexual transgression who suffers yet survives in eighteenth-century society, rising above the oppressive forces of male gender politics. She successfully dissociates herself from the sexual acts she performs during her transactions and emerges, strangely, mostly 'pure' and, sometimes, even seemingly 'virginal.' Moreover, she comes to terms with an inner fragmentation she feels between a desire for sex for money, and desire for sex for love, which is essential to her success as a prostitute. Had she not developed this differentiation in her relationship with Charles, she would not have been able to control her feelings in her professional relationships. As I have shown, the moment Fanny stops resisting and accepts her vulnerability is the moment her life changes. She accepts becoming a prostitute and continues being one to maintain her social and economic existence. In prostitution, much like in any other career, she must endure hardships and dire conditions for monetary compensation. Her triumph and power are eventually seen through her transition from poor to

rich and her ability to transform the configurations of power in a patriarchal society. Finally, even her marriage, in the end, can be seen as a reward for her promiscuous lifestyle, which is set in contrast to the more common eighteenth-century literary representations of the prostitute's tragic death as a punishment for their sins. Evidently, Cleland's depiction of Fanny, whether intentional or not, challenges prevalent eighteenth-century views of prostitutes.

Bibliography

- Aden, John M. "Cleland and Fanny." *The Sewanee Review*, vol. 83, no. 3, 1975, p. lxxvi–lxxxii. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27542976>.
- Baines, Paul. "Review of Fanny Hill in Bombay: The Making and Unmaking of John Cleland." *The Review of English Studies*, vol. 64, no. 264, 2013, pp. 347–49.
- Brewer, G., Bullough, V. "Women, Pornography, and Prostitution in Eighteenth-Century Britain". *P Sexuality & Culture* **9**, 14–27 (2005). <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02908760>
- Bullough, Bonnie R.N., Ph.D., and Vern L. Bullough R.N., Ph.D. "Female Prostitution: Current Research and Changing Interpretations." *Annual Review of Sex Research*, vol. 7, no. 1, 1996, pp. 158-180, doi: 10.1080/10532528.1996.10559912.
- Cleland, John. *The Memoirs of Fanny Hill*. Global Grey, 2018
- Campbell, R. *The London Tradesman: Being a Compendious View of All the Trades, Professions, Arts, Both Liberal and Mechanic, Now Practised in the Cities of London and Westminster. Calculated for the Information of Parents, and Instruction of Youth in Their Choice of Business. ... By R. Campbell, Esq.* T. Gardner, 1747.
- Carter, Sophie. *Purchasing Power: Representing Prostitution in Eighteenth-Century English Popular Print Culture*. Ashgate, 2004.
- Chapone, Sarah Kirkham, and Susan Glover. *The Hardships of the English Laws in Relation to Wives*. Routledge, 2018.
- Chen, Kuo-jung. "The Concept of Virginity and Its Representations in Eighteenth-Century English Literature." *Wenshan Review of Literature and Culture*, vol. 3, no. 2, 2010, pp. 75-96.

- Duyfhuizen, Bernard. "Epistolary Narratives of Transmission and Transgression." *Comparative Literature*, vol. 37, no. 1, 1985, pp. 1–26. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1770522>.
- Erickson, Amy Louise. *Women and Property: In Early Modern England*. Routledge, 1995, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203435939>.
- Freud, Sigmund. *Three Contributions to the Theory of Sex*. New York: Nervous and Mental Disease Pub. Co, 1930.
- Fernandes, Sara. "An Uneasy Pleasure: Representing the Dangers of Skin-to-Skin Contact in Eighteenth-Century London 'The William Bynum Prize Essay.'" *Medical History*, vol. 63, no. 4, Oct. 2019, pp. 494–511. *PubMed Central*, <https://doi.org/10.1017/mdh.2019.46>.
- Fleming, David. "Public Attitudes to Prostitution in Eighteenth-Century Ireland." *Irish Economic and Social History*, vol. 32, 2005, pp. 1–18.
- Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality*. 1st American ed, Pantheon Books, 1978.
- Foyster, Elizabeth. "At the Limits of Liberty: Married Women and Confinement in Eighteenth-Century England." *Continuity and Change*, vol. 17, no. 1, May 2002, pp. 39–62. *Cambridge University Press*, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0268416002004058>.
- Gautier, Gary. "Fanny Hill's Mapping of Sexuality, Female Identity, and Maternity." *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, vol. 35, no. 3, 1995, pp. 473–91. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/450893>.
- Gladfelder, Hal. "'By the Author of Fanny Hill': Selling John Cleland." *Eighteenth-Century Life*, vol. 43, no. 2, Apr. 2019, pp. 38–57. *Silverchair*, <https://doi.org/10.1215/00982601-7492887>.
- . *Fanny Hill in Bombay: The Making & Unmaking of John Cleland*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012.
- Gwilliam, Tassie. "Female Fraud: Counterfeit Maidenheads in the Eighteenth Century." *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, vol. 6, no. 4, 1996, pp. 518–48.

- Haslanger, Andrea. "Fanny Hill in Bombay: The Making and Unmaking of John Cleland by Hal Gladfelder (Review)." *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, vol. 26, no. 1, 2013, pp. 160–63.
- Butler, Judith. *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*. Stanford University Press, 1997.
- Juengel, Scott J. "Doing Things with Fanny Hill." *ELH*, vol. 76, no. 2, 2009, pp. 419–46. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27742942>.
- Logan, Deborah Anna. *Fallenness in Victorian Women's Writing: Marry, Stitch, Die, Or Do Worse*. University of Missouri Press, 1998.
- McAllister, Marie E. "Stories of the Origin of Syphilis in Eighteenth-Century England: Science, Myth, and Prejudice." *Eighteenth-Century Life*, vol. 24 no. 1, 2000, p. 22-44. *Project MUSE* muse.jhu.edu/article/10508.
- Nicholas D. Nace, "Fanny Hill Now: A Half Century of Liberty." *Eighteenth-Century Life* 1 April 2019; 43 (2): 1–7. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1215/00982601-7492832>.
- Oben, Freda Mary. "Review of Women's Friendship in Literature." *Comparative Literature Studies*, vol. 20, no. 4, 1983, pp. 458–60.
- Rosenthal, Laura J. "Fanny's Feelings: Social Mobility and Emotions in *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*." *Eighteenth-Century Life*, vol. 43 no. 2, 2019, p. 76-104. *Project MUSE* muse.jhu.edu/article/724589.
- Rosenthal, Laura J. *Infamous Commerce: Prostitution in Eighteenth-Century British Literature and Culture*. Cornell University Press, 2015. *Project MUSE*, <https://muse.jhu.edu/book/40858>.
- Sauerteig, Lutz D. H. "Loss of Innocence: Albert Moll, Sigmund Freud and the Invention of Childhood Sexuality Around 1900." *Medical History*, vol. 56, no. 2, Apr. 2012, pp. 156–83. *PubMed Central*, <https://doi.org/10.1017/mdh.2011.31>.

- Smith, Jad. "How Fanny Comes to Know: Sensation, Sexuality, and the Epistemology of the Closet in Cleland's 'Memoirs.'" *The Eighteenth Century*, vol. 44, no. 2/3, 2003, pp. 183–202.
- Steinberg, Jessica. "She was "a comon night walker abusing him & being of ill behaviour": Violence and Prostitution in Eighteenth-Century London." *Canadian Journal of History*, vol. 50 no. 2, 2015, p. 239-261. *Project MUSE* muse.jhu.edu/article/588566.
- Trouille, Mary. "Review of Writing the Female Voice: Essays on Epistolary Fiction." *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, vol. 25, no. 1, 1991, pp. 106–10. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2739192>.
- Turner, Daniel. *Syphilis : A Practical Dissertation on the Venereal Disease. In Which, after a Short Account of Its Nature and Original; the Diagnostick and Prognostick Signs, with the Best Ways of Curing the Several Degrees of That Distemper, Together with Some Historical Observations Relating to the Same, Are Candidly and without Reserve, Communicated. In Two Parts*. London : Printed for R. Bonwicke, Tim. Goodwin, J. Walthoe, M. Wotton, S. Manship, Richard Wilkin, Benj. Tooke, R. Smith and Tho. Ward, 1717. *Internet Archive*, <http://archive.org/details/syphilispractica00turn>.
- Wendy, Moore. "Love and Marriage in 18th-Century Britain." *Historically Speaking*, vol. 10, no. 3, 2009, pp. 8–10. *DOI.org (Crossref)*, <https://doi.org/10.1353/hsp.0.0038>