

Fanny Hill Book

by
John Cleland

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**First
Published**

1746

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Abstract

This essay explores the concept of the bildungsroman in relation to the first pornographic novel, John Cleland's *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*. The main protagonist and her bildung is described through the different roles she takes on as the novel progresses. The writer argues that the bildung she receives is mainly focused on sex and more specifically, that one should achieve pleasure in moderation. The bildung also deals with matters pertaining to love and relationships. A historical perspective is used discussing gender roles, the one-sex model versus the two-sex model, libertine ideology and the language use of the writer. The essay does not solve the multi-faceted mystery that is John Cleland, but does further our understanding of the writer and of pornography in the period.

Introduction

Recently, the usage of the term pornography has entered daily speech to mean things other than culture consumed with the purpose of sexual arousal. Mainstream media and other outlets may speak of food porn, football porn or guitar porn without anyone raising an eyebrow. It has come to be a modifier that represents something raw, unveiled and self indulging. In its essence however, pornography is the portrayal of sexual acts and subjects meant to sexually excite its consumer. As Lena Olsson points out in her study *Vice in the service of virtue: John Cleland's memoirs of a woman of pleasure*, early pornography was bawdy, burlesque, vulgar and comical.

The tone of much earlier erotica and pornography is either disrespectful, concentrating on speaking the unspeakable with no more apparent concern than a discussion about the weather (or alternatively with coarse vulgarity, consciously challenging contemporary mores), or bawdy, presenting situations that are at the same time comic and sexually exciting. (Olsson 1)

It is here the importance of John Cleland's *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, first published in 1748, comes into play, for it is the use of the poetic and evocative imagery within the confines of a traditional novel that sets it apart from its predecessors and peers (Olsson 1f). Cleland has no problems depicting the sexual acts; he just prefers to stay away from the vulgar language. Olsson writes "Cleland extols the beauty of sex, whereas most of his contemporaries represented the sexual act as exciting, yet comic, ridiculous or vulgar" (2). *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, or, as it will be henceforth referred to, *Fanny Hill*, depicts the life of vice in which the female protagonist finds herself after being orphaned. The story is told through her own, older eyes as a retrospective narrative, addressed to an unseen and

unnamed 'Madame'. It is both a bildungsroman, and a work of pornography. The goal of the bildungsroman is maturity and coming of age and while *Fanny Hill* may not fit the thematic template of the bildungsroman perfectly, it has strong likenesses on many points. The initial loss of her parents and the long, gradual change that comes mostly out of necessity squarely groups the character of Fanny together with Tom Sawyer and the young Werther. *Fanny Hill* predates the conceptual birth of the bildungsroman and stands out slightly in that it features the bildung of a female protagonist. While it can be argued that the bildung she receives is oppressive, the book fills a niche in that it offers at least some advice to women on the matters of sexuality, love and marriage in a period where these ideas are swiftly changing.

The aim of this essay is to explore the concept of the bildungsroman in the novel in general and the character of Fanny Hill and her different sexual and narrative roles in particular. The first research question formulated is: What kind of bildung does Fanny receive? In this essay I intend to show that Fanny's bildung mainly pertains to sexuality or as it is mostly euphemistically called, 'pleasure'. Through learning about moderation in the sexual life she also learns about moderation and abstention in other aspects of life. The second research question is: Through what stages can her bildung be illustrated? I intend to structure the body of the essay according to some general stages that represent the gradual change, learning and bildung in Fanny. Hopefully, the answers can further our understanding of the bildungsroman as a concept used within a pornographic work, and the intentions and values of the author.

Background

A lustful and earthy woman was not seen as something strange or immoral in the pre-Enlightenment era. Under what originated in antiquity and was coined the one-sex model by Thomas Laqueur, men and women were believed to be different developmental stages of the same creature, and the differences were explained using a baking analogy. Women were believed to have lacked warmth while they were in the womb and were ‘less done’ versions of males, coming out at birth with their genitals inverted and mirrored. Furthermore, orgasm in both sexes was thought to be crucial for procreation. Since there is no natural pregnancy without the male ejaculation and since women were thought to be ‘almost men’ it was logical to assume that female orgasm too played a role in conception. Female orgasm was thought to be completely necessary for the creation of a child in varying degrees depending on time and place but the idea was never completely abandoned. The pleasure was thought to help combine woman and man to create life (Laqueur “Orgasm” 116).

In the 17th and 18th centuries, the conceptualization of “woman” changed to comprise a more complex personality which included a new sexuality. In the two-sex model, also named by Laqueur, men and women came to be regarded as two essentially different beings. When they were thought to be of different essences rather than different degrees of being “done” the female orgasm’s role in propagation was found to be non-crucial, and orgasm in general, especially the female one, was “moved to the periphery of human physiology” (Laqueur “Orgasm” 112). In this context it is important to make the distinction between the ideas of biological sex and social gender. While the one-sex model assumed one biological mold for all people, there were still two social genders with different privileges. Laqueur further writes: “To be a man or a woman was to hold a social rank, a place in society, to assume a cultural role, not to *be* organically one or the other of two incommensurable sexes. Sex before the seventeenth century, in other words, was still a sociological and not an

ontological category” (“Making Sex” 8). He later also clarifies: “[...]Sex, in both the one-sex and the two-sex worlds, is situational; it is explicable only within the context of battles over gender and power” (“Making sex” 11). Thus, the presence or absence of an external penis (as opposed to the ‘internal penis’, the vagina) is what determined sex and gender in the one-sex model.

Later, the female sexuality was seen as something that needed to be controlled and restricted, through concepts of modesty and chastity in Victorian Western Europe. It was made to take a subordinate role to male sexuality, and male fantasies and desires have always been placed above those of women. Women who exercised their sexual lusts were seen as bad, and women who could contain themselves and their desires were seen as good. It is also in this period of the separation of both gender and sex that the concepts of homosexuality and heterosexuality emerge. European culture was switching from adult males that more or less unproblematically had sexual relations with both women and adult boys without being branded as aberrant to “a world divided between a majority of men and women who desired only the opposite gender and a minority of men and women who desired only the same gender.” (Trumbach “The birth” 162).

Before this shift there was no need for the distinction and most adult males were expected to be able to sexually penetrate younger boys (Trumbach “Erotic” 255). After all, both the adult woman and the adolescent boy were seen as the same thing, the ‘unfinished’ man. In the two-sex model “most men were now thought to desire sexually only women and this exclusive desire was largely what gave them masculine status” (Trumbach “Erotic” 255). The period of sexual passivity with older males was removed from the adolescent boy and any man allowing himself to be penetrated started to be seen as effeminate, and this image is still with us to this day. This led to the disappearance from men of the knowledge of what it

was like to desire a man sexually, further setting them apart from women (Trumbach “Erotic” 257).

Female homosexuality was not looked upon with the same enthusiasm. According to M. Hunt, this is because male sodomites played such a big role in the Sodom and Gomorra story they got their name from the city in the story, and the Bible is rather vague on the concept of female homosexual activities (124). Therefore, people were more adamant in rooting out male homosexual tendencies so as to not have a repetition of the catastrophic events in the story. Hunt also describes women living together with women as something that was tolerated if not accepted (126).

The ideas of marriage also changed during this period. The romantic wedding, where husband and wife were supposed to spend time with each other as opposed to the earlier relegation of men and women to different social spheres, replaced the arranged marriage of convenience. The good, asexual woman was now seen as a domestic creature, the ““angel in the house”” (Hall 181). The libertines instead joined the ideas of marriage and eroticism, and Cleland promoted the ideology of linking love and marriage by using the format of the novel for his erotic writing (Trumbach “Modern” 69). This was not a Christian model however, but that of libertines.

As a libertine, Cleland would have been a proponent of pleasure regardless of source. Libertinism is sometimes called the religion of libertinism and stands in contrast to the puritan Christian idea in that it promotes sexual experience as something central to humans, and sexual desire and pleasure as something good and natural (Trumbach “Erotic” 254). Cleland’s treatment of sodomy is excluded from the analysis part of this essay, but Hunt recounts that it is unclear if the sodomy that does appear is an expression of Cleland’s own desires. In 1781 he was rumored to be a sodomite, and people were recommended to stay away from him (Trumbach “Erotic” 269). If he in fact had homosexual tendencies, this could

explain why he, as it appears, places the clitoris inside the vagina and perhaps overestimates the pleasure of being penetrated, and the amount of very large penises described in really minute detail. Still, every male character that the reader is supposed to identify with is exclusively heterosexual (i.e. follows the new model of male sexuality). Regardless of his own sexuality, it is safe to assume that Cleland was catering to his readers.

Every sexual encounter that is described and not just mentioned happens outside of wedlock, so Cleland clearly had a more nuanced view of romance and love than can be gleaned simply from looking at the zeitgeist of both the Enlightenment and the libertinism (Trumbach “Erotic” 269). His view of female homosexuality also reflects the era: it is something that happens, is accepted, but still seen as weird and unfulfilling. Also, the instances of it in *Fanny Hill* do not fulfill Cleland’s basic requirements for true pleasure: love and the fusion of pleasures of the mind and body.

Cleland and the gentlemen who read him were attempting to justify sexual pleasure in a world dominated by Christian asceticism. They could establish their point only by constructing a counterweight to the influence of the Christian church and its rituals. The representation of the penis and of acts of sexual intercourse between 1748, when Cleland published his novel, and 1786 when Richard Payne Knight produced his treatise on the worship of Priapus, were therefore constructed by a group of libertine gentlemen into a religion that worshipped what they would have called the generative force. (272)

This is not to say all libertines worshipped decadence and casual encounters, but rather that they wished to remove some of the artificial constraints on human nature and behavior that was imposed by the church.

Fanny's different roles

Narrator

It is necessary to start with Fanny as a narrator, because she is an unreliable one and a lot of the different possible interpretations depend on her intentions. When taken at face value, the entirety of the book seems to lead up to a moral lesson. It could be that she is merely trying to camouflage all her juicy stories as a warning to others, adding on the final excuses as a mere afterthought. At the same time, when everything is first presented as-is and the warning comes abrupt, the contrast between her life of vice and her life of virtue is starker and the moral lesson comes across as more stringent. In this context it is interesting to note that these considerations of intentions can be applied to the author, who rejected his book after a prosecution and later published a cleaned up version of it. We will never know if he was merely peddling smut and got caught in the act, or genuinely admitted to having made a mistake in making the events that illustrate his moral lesson too saucy.

Fanny constantly switches between two narrative positions; that of the mature Fanny looking back, and that of the younger experiencing girl. The escape with Charles is something that is foolish and dangerous, and mature Fanny knows this. However, she is granting some kindness of interpretation since she knows the situation turns out all right in the end and almost gives praise for the younger Fanny for daring to go where love led her. The evolution of the younger Fanny from the wholly naïve country girl into the mature, experienced woman that is telling the story brings the two variants of Fanny closer to each other, little by little. The voice of the younger Fanny increasingly resembles the voice of older Fanny the further the narrative goes. The shift between older Fanny and the younger Fanny is subtle but in the use of language still not obscured to the reader. However, what parts Fanny chooses to describe in retrospect and what parts through the eyes of her younger self

respectively seem to be largely arbitrary, even though older Fanny reveals in the very end of the book that she actually has an agenda.

The agenda and the moral lesson are, regardless of sincerity, actually quite clear once one has read the full story: To present the life of vice with all its allures and dangers, but to steer the reader onto the path of virtue. Towards the absolute end of the novel, Fanny excuses herself for perhaps painting the life of vice in too bright light, but remarks that the sweeter such a life is, “the worthier, the solemn sacrifice of it to virtue” (270). In a final act of selflessness, Fanny asks ‘Madame’ that she show her story to a friend who might be worried about his son’s virtue: not only has Fanny made a personal journey, she also hopes that exposing everything of it can serve as a lesson to others. Thus, older Fanny is used to deliver the message, or the pretended message, of the author.

The younger Fanny’s naïve descriptions of the firsthand experiences that she had when she first encountered the events are used as to contrast the more mature writings of older Fanny. This contrasting achieves two things: first, it helps older Fanny to point out the errors of her ways and furthers the delivery of the message from the author. Secondly, it allows the reader to identify with Fanny at a certain stage where one is more susceptible to accepting the author’s message. After all, a reader is likely to be more experienced and mature than the innocent, unsuspecting Fanny that goes to London to find work, but the reader will converge with the character at one point or the other in the story, regardless of the reader’s own experience level, because mature Fanny represents the reaching of full maturity.

Innocence and breaking in

First of all we should establish in what state Fanny is when the book starts. For all intents and purposes the passage with the death of Fanny’s parents seem to serve the narrative role of dislocating Fanny from her childhood locale and catapulting her into the unknown of the big

city rather than to construct any sort of quality inside her that will affect the further story. Fanny herself starts the book by describing the state of total innocence in which she was brought up. She claims that her mother was so busy “she had spared very little of [her time] to my education” (6), and this can be interpreted as referring to the subject of sex, or the very least romance and marriage. This is because in the previous paragraph, the fear of new things is mentioned together with a man as “a creature of prey that will eat you” (6). Her mother, having been guarded against “all ill” (7), had no ability to teach Fanny about the horrors of the world regardless of whether she had time or not. It is easy to imagine a rosy-cheeked Fanny with not a trouble in the world who is then struck by tragedy when her parents die. She, too, falls ill, but manages to get away unaffected. Losing one’s parents at such a young age could probably wreck and change any one of us, and indeed, Fanny is struck with “natural grief and affliction” (7) but brushes it off thanks to “a little time, and that giddiness of my age” (7). The idea of going to London to get a job helps in her consolation, so it is hard to say if the orphaned Fanny really has changed after the death of her parents. It is thus a completely naïve and unsuspecting Fanny that decides to take on the London adventure.

If the reader is not aware of the plot beforehand, nothing really hints at *Fanny Hill* being a pornographic novel up until the very first sex scene. Everything is described through the eyes of the freshly arrived fifteen-year old girl and nothing seems to indicate that things are out of place or that Fanny has ended up in a house of prostitution. She simply assumes that Mrs. Brown, whom she first meets at an intelligence office (an employment agency), is looking for a cheap servant and hopes to train Fanny on the job. Mrs. Brown, who with her red face (13) that later “blushed with nothing but brandy” (38) is an obvious alcoholic but this goes unremarked by Fanny. To, in narrating Fanny’s words, “slip over minutes of no importance to the main of [her] story” (17), at bedtime, the very first indication that there might be something wrong appears: Miss Phoebe, with whom Fanny shares a bedroom, is said

to observe in Fanny a reluctance to undress in front of Phoebe, indicating that Phoebe lacks common courtesy or modesty to look away. This is also the initiation to the first sex scene, because Phoebe walks up to Fanny and undresses her herself. Being an older woman (but not old!), her job in the brothel includes ‘breaking in’ the newer, younger prostitutes of Fanny’s age by engaging in lesbian sex with them (Olsson, 93). To Fanny, this behavior just seems deprived, but later she will realize not only this true purpose of Phoebe’s advances, but also that sexual contact between girls is not “real” and has nothing to do with real love or real pleasure – a point to which I shall return.

The internal, psychological transformation of Fanny is quite subtle. Fanny’s feelings are described as shocked and alarmed at first, which gradually changes into confusion and perplexity. The feelings are said to be too much for her, and she is “heated” (20) and also “inflamed” (19, 21). Clearly, the touches of Phoebe have sexually aroused Fanny, despite her apparent distress. In fact, Fanny’s emotional response may well be part in her arousal, not perhaps because of the strangeness of a lesbian encounter as her first sexual contact, but because of the amplification of the wholly overwhelming set of feelings she has never before encountered, all combined. Instead of jumping out of bed crying for help, the fiery touches of Phoebe lights “a new fire that wantoned through all my veins” (19). Fanny’s arousal can be seen as a result of tactile stimulation (i.e., mechanical touching of her erogenous zones) rather than a visual attraction to Phoebe.

The descriptions of physical appearance are a bit more direct than the emotional, inner characteristics. Fanny easily sees through Phoebe’s lie about her age and described in the words of older Fanny, Phoebe has been through “hackneyship and hot waters” (18). Phoebe’s breasts are described as “hanging loosely down” (18) and her touching of Fanny as “licentious” and “lascivious” (19). Narrating Fanny is humble in her descriptions of her own, younger breasts, “if it is not bold a figure to call so two hard, firm, rising hillocks that just

began to show themselves” (19), which contrasts her against Phoebe. Fanny lies “all tame and passive” (19) while Phoebe explores Fanny’s body and also guides Fanny’s hands to her own, fully female breasts (18). When comparing their external genitalia, we learn that Fanny has “the soft silky down that had but a few months before put and garnished the mount-pleasant [...]” (19) and “the young tendrils of that moss” (19). Phoebe, on the other hand, is described as having a “spreading thicket of bushy curls” (21) that marks “the full-grown, complete woman” (21). Internally, Fanny has never been penetrated and thus, entrance of even Phoebe’s finger is hindered by “the narrowness of the unbroken passage” (20). In contrast, after Phoebe “took my hand, and in a transport carried it where you can easily guess” (21), her genitalia is called “the cavity” (21) and we are told that it “easily received [Fanny’s hand]” (21). Clearly the more experienced and older Phoebe has different genitals than Fanny does, and it is suggested this is a result of her life as a prostitute.

Phoebe uses Fanny’s hand to apparently reach climax – older Fanny seems shy in describing this to Madame: “What pleasure she had found I will not say” (21) – and after this Fanny knows that “the first sparks of kindling nature, the first ideas of pollution, were caught by me that night” (21). After talking about what would be expected of Fanny, Phoebe is calmed down, but Fanny is not. Despite this, the feelings inside her made her weary and she falls asleep, having an erotic dream that relieved that which “had been too warmly stirred and fermented to subside without allaying by some means or the other”. This shows that Cleland thinks that sexual arousal is not something that disappears on its own.

In conclusion, when looking at the very first sex scene with sober and modern eyes it is of course evident that what happens to Fanny is molestation. Cleland passes no such judgment, and, indeed, to make Fanny suffer any physical or psychological discomfort from the scene would be to break the tradition he started by killing her parents. What we would consider personal tragedy is glossed over because it is not the point of the novel.

The next step in the evolution of Fanny's sexuality comes when she accidentally peeps on the soldier and Mrs. Brown. The language is not as harsh with Mrs. Brown's looks as it is with the obese man from the previous scene, but still far from flattering. Thus, Fanny's eyes are easily turned away when the soldier has got his breeches undone: "[he] had now unbuttoned, and produced naked, stiff and erect, that wonderful machine which I had never seen before" (39). Fanny is now aroused, but it is not the same mechanical arousal of the body she felt with Phoebe but a more curious arousal of the mind directed at the sight of the male sexual organ. "The instinct of nature" (39) tells her that this "instrument" (39) will give her "that supreme pleasure" (39) when it meets her parts. The soldier wastes no time however, and thus Fanny's realization of her arousal and the implications of it take just a few seconds. Fanny does not see the actual penetration but she realizes it must have taken place, judging by their bodily positions, Phoebe's descriptions, and the impossibility of missing "so staring a mark" (39) all combined. This exact moment marks a significant change in Fanny, and she says that "such a sight gave the last dying blow to my native innocence" (39). She has now understood how sex actually works, even though she has never experienced it herself, and probably not realized all the circumstances that surround it just yet.

As was mentioned, Fanny is severely aroused and while Mrs. Brown and the soldier do what they do, she starts to masturbate. She has trouble breathing and her heart beats as if it was trying to get out of her chest (40). She gets so inflamed that she loses focus of what the couple is doing, and at first curiously exploring, later more furiously, she brings herself to climax "following mechanically the example of Phoebe's manual operation on [her genitals]" (40). She is relieved, not only because she has alleviated her bodily distress and gets to calm down, but also that she finally gets to feel what she observed Phoebe feeling that first night. She regains focus as the soldier dismounts Mrs. Brown so we do not know if Mrs. Brown also climaxes, but the soldier evidently does because he goes flaccid.

When they leave, something very interesting happens: Mrs. Brown pays the man. This is significant in several ways. With the description of Mrs. Brown's appearance, behavior and payment, Cleland has finished establishing the bodily changes of the prostitute woman in three steps: Fanny and her peers in the new, untouched state, Phoebe in her intermediate stage of being lustful and worn but not yet fully destroyed, and Mrs. Brown, who is in such a state that her lusts are so great and her body so repulsive that she has to resort to paying men for sex. For Cleland, this represents the ultimate decline, a state you only reach if you are hardy enough to survive the hardships and diseases of the occupation. The fact that Mrs. Brown's genitals are described as a beggar's wallet brings together two related images: one concrete, that of the dried, warped leather and one abstract, that of the act of begging. As the beggar needs coin in his purse to buy food, Mrs. Brown needs sex to satiate her hunger. Her genitals may be begging, but whereas people give to beggars out of pity, nothing is given to her without her paying them in return, making her state, the final stage of the prostitute, even worse than that of a beggar in the eyes of Cleland.

The next step in Fanny's evolution and *bildung* comes when she is led by Phoebe to peep on another prostitute named Polly engaging in prostitution with a Genoese merchant. The Genoese undresses himself, and Polly herself, and they kiss and start having sex. Polly, clearly enjoying herself, starts echoing the things that Phoebe says during her first encounter with Fanny, such as "I can't bear it... it is too much" and they both climax. After their intercourse Fanny is aroused. We are only made aware of this after Phoebe, "not [...] unmoved by such a scene" (49), drags Fanny away from the hole through which they have been looking so that they cannot be heard. Phoebe then lifts Fanny's petticoats and touches her genitals, and here the full extent of Fanny's arousal is made known to the reader and, it seems, even to Fanny herself. Phoebe only brings Fanny, not herself, to climax and seems satisfied "with her success" and they go back to the crevice in the wall to keep watching. The

Genoese and Polly finish up once again, and Fanny is “so overcome, so inflamed” (51) that she pulls Phoebe, as if she was the only one who could relieve the excitement, back to their room. There, Fanny lies down on the bed and can hardly breathe. Phoebe asks if she, now that she has seen “the enemy” (51), is still afraid of him, or if she thinks she can handle a closer encounter. Fanny is too affected by her feelings to talk and only sighs. Phoebe then rolls up her own petticoats and guides Fanny’s hand to her crotch. Fanny, being more confident about what to expect after her experiences, now is not disgusted, but instead, disappointed. She finds “not even the shadow of what I wanted, where everything was so flat” (51) and withdraws her hand – she simply cannot stand the fact that there is no penis there. Phoebe instead brings herself to climax but it is now Fanny shows what insight she has gleaned – in her eyes, Phoebe “procure[s] herself rather the shadow than the substance of any pleasure” (52). Fanny now knows what she wants, and eagerly awaits Lord B – the next man Mrs. Brown sold Fanny’s virginity to – who is expected within a few days. She “now pined for more solid food” (52) and promises herself that she will not keep fooling around with encounters woman to woman.

Deflowering and live-in mistress

Lord B’s arrival is however not quick enough. Two days after the scene with Polly and the Genoese, Fanny meets Charles and is taken for a prostitute, sent down to take care of him since he fell asleep before he could get a hold of one the night before, while all his friends did as is evident by their absence. Fanny “told him then, in a tone set me by love itself, that for reasons I had not time to explain to him, I could not stay with him, and might not ever see him again” (54). Charles, also struck with infatuation, suggests that he should take Fanny away from the brothel, to be “kept by him” (55). He would house her and relieve her of any commitments she had to the brothel. Fanny, “blinded to every objection”, agrees. Later, she

often wonders if the man did not think her too cheap for so easily accepting his offer, but figures that he had for some time been looking for a girl to take as his own and happened to fancy Fanny so much it was “by one of those miracles reserved to love that we struck the bargain in that instant” (55).

Cleland has now presented the starting point for a very popular romantic idea: that of the two lovers who find each other by happenstance and later end up marrying because by some miracle, they are perfect for each other. He hints at Charles being Fanny’s ‘one perfect man’ and that we are indeed going to be seeing them together some time or the other as older Fanny remembers: “heavens! What a sight! No! No term of years, no turn of fortune could ever erase the lightning-like impression his form made on me... yes! Dearest object of my earliest passion, I command for ever the remembrance of thy first appearance to my ravished eyes... it calls thee up, present; and I see thee now!” (53). Charles also later tells Fanny that he “had been struck with [her] appearance, and liked [her] as much as he could think of liking anyone in [her] supposed way of life” (54-55). Despite her being a supposed prostitute, Charles has fallen for Fanny and wants to take her away to be his.

The transformation from naïve country girl via almost fully baked prostitute, to in the end a ‘saved’, virtuous married woman, represents a change characteristic of the bildungsroman. Fanny never falls – the only male customer she meets before leaving ejaculates during her struggle to free herself from his embrace. We are however given some very disturbing images of how she could have ended up if she had not been saved by Charles and instead remained in the bawdy house, deflowered by the unseen Lord B and then starting to take on regular customers. If she would not become a ‘Mrs. Brown’, then she would very likely become a ‘Phoebe’. Even though it is not explicitly stated, it is likely that Fanny took more from the sight of Polly and the Genoese than a desire to be penetrated. They represent something she relates to and also desires, Polly only has one man and is as close to a

monogamous woman you get in a brothel. Polly's expressions of lust are also very modest, but her outcries when nearing climax hint at Phoebe ever so slightly. Her pleasure while having intercourse is intense, and together with the apparently awesome sight of a large penis, it shows Fanny the appeal of sexual contact with a man. Here, Cleland clearly shows that he is a proponent of the two-sex model and most that it entails. Pleasure should be kept inside a heterosexual relationship, preferably marriage, and even though Cleland's views represent a less strict view of sex, there is still clear gender role separation between men and women.

After having been deflowered by Charles at the inn, they move in to his flat and have a life together. The exact specifics of this life are vague, Charles is gone large parts of the day and Fanny plays the part of the housewife in waiting. They presumably have intercourse several more times, but Cleland only describes the encounters at the inn, when Fanny is sore and still does not enjoy sex beyond as an idea. Instead we learn that after eleven months, she is three months pregnant. The narrative does not specify if Fanny has started to orgasm or not, and whether or not this affects her ability to become pregnant. While later academics such as Laqueur and Trumbach have discussed the ideas and preconceptions of people in the historical time before the narrative in *Fanny Hill*, Cleland, or narrating Fanny, seem to make no reflections on the subject and indeed this further enhances the view of Fanny as uneducated. The pivotal moment of a budding pregnancy is chosen to, again, sever Fanny from something she holds dear: Charles suddenly disappears and with badly hidden glee their landlady, Mrs. Jones, tells Fanny that he will be gone for at least three years: his father has kidnapped him and sent him abroad for him to make money.

Fanny then miscarries, sinks into a long-lasting depression and is nursed back to health by Mrs. Jones. To pay for outstanding rent, medical bills and medicine, Mrs. Jones tells Fanny she must prostitute herself to a Mr. H, leading to a split in Fanny. At first, she is crushed, and cries and begs to be allowed to sell her clothes and repay whatever remains as

soon as she can – clearly she does not desire the life of a prostitute. Mrs. Jones threatens to send Fanny to debtor’s prison and this affects Fanny greatly. She is terrified and “wounded to death by the idea of going to a prison, and from a principle of self-preservation, snatching at every glimpse of redemption from it” (86) and she sees Mrs. Jones demand as a possibility, even at great discomfort.

When Fanny first meets Mr. H, he offers to pay her bill right away and give the receipt to Fanny, and that she after that can choose what to do regarding his advances. Is this really prostitution then? After the transaction, Mr. H and Fanny are left alone, but Fanny is not afraid, in fact, has no feelings at all: “I observed it, and then I observed it without alarm, for I was now lifeless, and indifferent to everything”. Mr. H starts his advances on Fanny and her internal struggle is evident: “I sat stock-still; and now looking on myself as bought by the payment that had been transacted before me, I did not care what became of my wretched body” (89). Fanny now considers herself a prostitute, and this realization makes her completely passive: “I suffered, tamely, whatever the gentleman pleased [...] he took me in his arms, and bore me, without life or motion to the bed” (89). At this point, Fanny’s mind blanks out and she, “recovering from a trance of lifeless insensibility” (89) finds him “buried in me, whilst I lay passive and innocent of the least sensation of pleasure” (89). She compares herself to a “death-cold corpse” (89) and it is clear that something inside her has died. As the gentleman finishes, he changes from a man who is, without respect, having sex with a woman in apparent distress, into someone gentle and tries to comfort her. She is beyond relief however: “I tore my hair, wrung my hands, and beat my breast like a madwoman” (89-90) and asks to be left alone. The man refuses because he fears Fanny will “do [her]self a mischief” (90). Fanny calms down and goes back to her previous passive, almost vegetative, state. She ponders how she would have reacted if someone would have told her that she would have sex with a stranger, for payment no less, when she was still happy with Charles.

Because of this unexpected and controversial change, she starts making excuses for herself: “unexpectedly beset as I was, betrayed by a mind weakened by a long severe affliction (90)” and that her actions are more excusable because “I certainly was not present at, or a party in any sense to it” (90). She has by now given up, and “endured his kisses and embraces without affecting struggles or anger” – she thinks she no longer has the right to refuse because she has already complied once. Fanny feels no pleasure from any of the encounters: she does not love Mr. H, and her view at this stage is that without love, there can be no pleasure.

This first venture into prostitution tells us a lot: losing your beloved is a worse predicament than losing your parents, judging by Fanny’s reaction. Both examples also represent a loss of financial security. Here, Cleland allows Fanny to live through her sorrow with a marked difference inflicted upon her, whereas the death of her parents only served the narrative purpose of getting her to London. We also learn that in Fanny’s eyes, going to debtor’s prison is worse than being a prostitute, perhaps an echo of Cleland’s own position when writing the book. Fanny’s mind is slowly warming up to the idea of being a prostitute, even if it is from self pity. After Fanny has been served dinner she is warmed up in another way: She is slipped an aphrodisiac. The next time Mr. H approaches her, she is no longer frigid and cold, but instead feels pleasure. From this, she learns that you can indeed have pleasure without love – but it is not the same:

Yet oh! What an immense difference did I feel between this impression of a pleasure merely animal, and struck out of the collision of the sexes by a passive bodily effect, from that sweet fury, that rage of active delight which crowns the enjoyment of a mutual love-passion” (95).

The above quote show a clear separation of the pleasures of body and mind, and it seems this is where Fanny consciously recognizes it as such.

While Fanny is alone, she ponders her love for Charles and her “first launch into vice” (96). She reaches the conclusion that despite having not been swept away by Mr. H the same way she was by Charles, she is starting to like him, even if it is only because he is distracting her from “black corroding thoughts my head had been a prey to ever since the absence of my dear Charles” (97). If she had not felt about Charles as she does, she may have liked Mr. H deeper, but “[her heart] was full, and the force of conjuncture alone had made him the possessor of my person”. Regardless, she agrees to Mr. H’s offer and she is showed to her new lodgings where she is “installed mistress” (97), appointed a maid and an allowance, and served dinner. Fanny is put to bed but “found no quarter, nor remission from him” (98) – still, she seems to dislike the idea of having sex with him but it seems more out of weariness than anything else; she has made up her mind to stay with him and accept his terms, after all. The next day, “ice now broken, my heart, no longer engrossed by love, began to take ease, and to please itself on such trifles as Mr. H’s liking” (98). Even though she is showered in gifts and being treated well by Mr. H she is not happy: “I wanted more society, more dissipation” (98). Mr. H tries to oblige and starts hosting dinner parties at Fanny’s lodgings, to which he “brought several companions of his pleasures, with their mistresses; and by this means I got into a circle of acquaintances that soon stripped me of all the remains of bashfulness and modesty which might be yet left of my country education, and were, to a just taste, perhaps the greatest of my charms” (99). Fanny thus acknowledges that her personality has changed into more of that of a city girl. She spends times with the other mistresses that all detest their keepers – Fanny however has found a “habitual liking” (100) for Mr. H.

Teacher of Will

Soon, her situation as live-in mistress changes. Fanny discovers Mr. H having sex with her maid and is overcome with jealousy and desire for revenge. She plans to get back at him by having sex with a stable-boy from the country, Will, on the very same couch where she saw Mr. H and “the wench” (102). In this exchange she plays the role of the experienced city-dweller, and he that of the naïve person from the country, an interesting reversal. Indeed, while at first alluring and seductive, when the sexual nature of their previously completely platonic relationship is initiated, Fanny is the active person and Will is abashed. In her early interactions with him, she ‘accidentally’ leaves herself in different stages of undress and squeezes his hand when he hands over messages to her. She further inflames him by asking calculated questions about her looks and really gets into acting the part.

When she later “thought I had sufficiently ripened him for the laudable point I had in view” (105), she makes sure the coast is clear by sending her maid out on an errand. He ends up in her room, where she is lying on that ominous couch, and she escalates from her previous level. Finally, she presses his hand against her breasts and uses her own to release and caress his penis – a stark parallel to Phoebe’s actions – and places herself so that he can enter her. He is not slow to follow but can only penetrate a little way because his penis is “not the plaything of a boy, not the weapon of a man, but a maypole of so enormous standard that, had proportions been observed, it must have belonged to a giant” (107). Fanny cannot bear being penetrated any further, but she also does not want him to withdraw. Finally, she says “My dear, you hurt me!” and he exits, afraid that he has damaged her. Here Fanny again gives example of how she has no problem suffering to satisfy a man – she calls the boy “too much a novice not to be afraid of my withholding his relief on account of the pain he had put me to”. The implication is, as discussed in the background section of this essay, that not only does male pleasure take precedence over female, it also takes precedence in the event of female

discomfort, or, as in this case, pain. However, Fanny, now inflamed by “the object before me” (109), gives an “encouraging kiss” (109) and they make a new attempt. Will now manages to penetrate halfway but is there absolutely stopped in much the same way Charles was stopped when trying to enter her at all before her deflowering. In this regard, the final act of penetrating Fanny past this halfway point to the very bottom represents in a way the taking of a second virginity while she takes that of Will. Charles surely also bottomed in Fanny, so it is not the physical but rather mental virginity that now has gone: Fanny has on her own accord, truly and for her own sake, albeit with ulterior motives, desired another man sexually. At first she does it for revenge, but after discovering his enormous penis, she keeps it going to keep having access to the immense pleasure he brings her – in Cleland’s world, bigger is always better.

Fanny acts much upon Will as she herself has been acted upon, and she is the initiator and active party. It is however implied by narrating Fanny that this is not how it should be – the boy is inactive and needs encouragement because he is inexperienced, and had he been more experienced, he would have disregarded Fanny’s pain and focused on gaining pleasure for himself. Instead he has to be shown all the ropes and taught how everything works by the guiding actions of Fanny. The teaching role of a female in the sexual relation is thus presented as an anomaly. The perception of Fanny’s genitalia has also changed – after the intercourse, Will plays with Fanny, and she now has a “deep flesh-wound” (113) covered in “overgrowing moss” (114). While both he and Fanny are eager for another go, he has to leave because time is running away. They exchange vows of secrecy and discretion, and right before the boy leaves, Fanny does something quite remarkable: she gives him one guinea. She didn’t want to give the boy too much money because that could arouse suspicion, but even such a small sum is, intended or not, payment for services rendered. Later in Fanny’s and Will’s relationship, they engage in intercourse in bed and afterwards Fanny yet again gives

Will money, this time enough to buy a silver watch. Fanny does not mention that she gave it to him out of kindness but since any other motive probably would have warranted an explanation it can be assumed that such is the case. Perhaps she identifies with his feelings and reactions and feels pity. Will would have no reason to betray their secret, since that would necessitate the end of their affair, so she is not shelling out her spending money for him to keep his mouth shut. Nor is Fanny a Mrs. Brown, she does not *have* to pay him for the privilege of getting pleased, and yet she does. It is also a way for Cleland to strengthen and clarify the power relation, or to cultivate a pornographic dream state through Will, who gains both sexual pleasure and monetary riches. Identification is in this case more with the idea of having sex with someone of higher stature and getting paid rather than supposing that Cleland's intended readers would be of the same socioeconomic standing as Will.

Regardless, Fanny is slowly taking on characteristics of Polly, Phoebe and even Mrs. Brown – she does not reflect on it herself, but she has started on the prostitute's path more willingly and eagerly than while living at the bawdy house.

When Mr. H comes around, Fanny is still bodily affected by the encounter and is afraid he might find out. She employs a weapon that still sees use and parody in our time: “here the woman saved me: I pretended a violent disorder of my head” (115). The next day, Fanny examines her nether regions to make sure nothing has been damaged, but she is pleased to notice no permanent damage and that everything is as before. This leads her to draw the conclusion that she is blessed with “soft springy flesh” (116) that “soon recovers” (117). This, together with her satisfaction in succeeding so smartly with her “double achievement of pleasure and revenge” (117), enacts a change in Fanny's psyche: “I abandoned myself entirely to the ideas of all the delight I had swam in” (117). She has now become, as the title suggests, a woman of pleasure, but not in the full meaning of the expression: she is a woman of her own pleasures, not someone else's (i.e., a prostitute). Fanny's realization that it is possible to

experience pleasure without love leads to her to also realize that pleasure can be had for other reasons, including for its own sake. This attitude mirrors Cleland and his libertinism. She goes into a period in which she takes pleasure at any point she can get it from Will and they gradually become careless. She remarks: “and why should I here suppress the delight I received from this amiable creature” (118) and when pointing out that he might be too ‘lowly’ for her, she also remarks “had I really been much above him, did not his capacity of giving such exquisite pleasure sufficiently ennoble him, to *me*, at least?” (118). Fanny, earlier so accepting of any concepts, rules and events, has started to question the order of things. She can also be seen to having stopped accepting the course of actions she experiences and taking her fate in her own hands when she decides to enact revenge.

All good things must come to an end however, and Mr. H soon discovers their affair first hand. He sends Will back to his father and kicks Fanny out, however he does so quite gently, finding her new lodgings and leaving her a sum of money. Fanny’s reflections on the experience is that since they were caught, the best thing that could happen was that Will was sent home before she had a chance to see him again because it would have stirred too many feelings. Her venture into the world of pleasure has also made her cope better with loss of something she desires, perhaps because she now knows that she can easily get access to it again.

Promiscuity with the Three and meeting the rational pleasurer

Going into the second letter, Fanny is in a state where she is mainly guided by impulse and feelings. She has learned a thing or two about the world and the social workings – she judges the more subtle characters of the companion mistresses far more accurately than she managed to judge Mrs. Brown. Fanny has ended up with a woman that teaches her ‘the economics of her person and purse’ and while running a bawdy house also has some pretenses of education.

Mrs. Cole is presented as a mother figure and a teacher, and indeed, Fanny learns a lot during her stay. Moderation and keeping one's health are key points that she takes to heart. However, Fanny fails to judge Mrs. Cole, her new landlady, completely correctly, and gives her far too much credit considering her true nature. Mrs. Cole is quite a bit more sympathetic than the previous encounters Fanny has had with women who sell little girls, though.

The continued bildungsroman themes are present in the second letter as much as in the first; however it is far more subtle and implied than before. Further education is passively introduced to Fanny via her 'sisters'; they all possess stereotypical traits of prostitutes, with one or more unique flaws that hints at what Fanny could have become. They also mirror characteristics currently (and to some degree, previously) belonging to Fanny. There is Emily, the good-natured, far-too-trusting girl who escaped the barbarity of her parents. When her parents later come to bring her home, Fanny describes in her an inclination towards judging by first impressions (247), a characteristic Fanny herself exhibited earlier but has grown out of. There is Louisa, the overly sexually active girl who has masturbated from a young age. She suffers from impulsiveness and often lets her lusts get the better of her. After having seduced a retarded boy, she escapes abroad with him, never to be seen or heard from again. This is a reflection of Fanny's behavior and quickness to accept Charles as her only man, disappearing from Mrs. Brown's without a word. Finally, there is Harriet, a complex, almost perfect mirror image of Fanny herself, who possesses more of Fanny's characteristics than the other two. Harriet shares a background with Fanny but is ever so slightly more sensitive to sudden impacts of emotion. Both Fanny and Harriet faint at some point, and both are taken advantage of during their unconsciousness. If Fanny had remained as receptive to shock as Harriet, she would have ended up like her: helpless and wholly inexperienced in the desires and behavior of men, exposed and weak.

After Fanny moves out of Mrs. Cole's and gets herself a house of her own, she comes into contact with a "rational pleurist [...]" too wise to be ashamed of the pleasures of humanity" (252) and from him, she learns more about temperance and modesty. Indeed, their relationship starts out perfectly platonic and evolves into a deep friendship. There are no scenes described in which they engage in sexual conduct, but that could be an expression of Cleland's reluctance to grant the older characters of the book sexual pleasure. It is however heavily implied that he receives, or has received, pleasure elsewhere but in moderation.

When the rational pleurist dies, Fanny's changes as a person stop. Her learning is complete, both spiritually and physically. Her great wealth, slowly accumulated through different means – both by her own work and inheritance – allow her the freedom of a woman of stature. With nothing to take up her time, she turns to brooding and realizes that "the absolute disposer of my happiness" (63) is what she is lacking: she sees herself as "poisoned by the regret of an absent one!" (253). She thus really has only one regret, and it is a "mighty and just one, since I had my only truly beloved Charles for its object" (253). Older Fanny recounts that he sent several letters that got lost, but that despite never hearing from him "forgotten him [she] never had" (253). She takes to the natural course of action, trying to find Charles, with vigor, but yields bad results. She finds out that his father is dead and that when he got to the South Seas, the estate he was to take over was in disrepair and the money he was to earn had been lost in shipwreck. However, "according to the best advice" (254), he is expected back to England within a few months.

Married

While Fanny is resting during her journey home and goes to talk to her coachman, she hears a familiar voice that fills her with joy. Charles is left speechless in his happiness to see her after being confronted. Fanny is doubtful that it is actually him and "trembled now with fear of it

being no more than a dream” (256-257). They compose themselves and have dinner together, accompanied by their respective companions. Afterwards, they are shown to the room with the best bed in the inn and proceed, as a premarital ritual, to have sex. The experience for young Fanny is so intense, and garners such emotion, that older Fanny’s pen “drops from me here in the ecstasy now present to my faithful memory” (264). Descriptions beyond “that sweetest noblest of all sensations” (264) escape her, and will have to suffice. While Fanny has fused her parts with other men, she now experiences the fusion of their hearts as well: “affecting me infinitely more with my distinction of the person than of the sex, now brought my conscious heart deliciously into play: my heart, eternally constant to Charles, had never taken any part in my occasional sacrifices to the calls of constitution” (262). The separation of mind and body is reversed and the pleasure she feels is fully real. In the middle of a description of physical pleasure, Fanny changes gears: “and oh, that touch! How delicious!... how poignantly luscious! And now! Now I felt, to the heart of me! I felt the prodigious keen edge, with which love, presiding over this act, points the pleasure: love!” (265). Without love, any pleasure is “great as it is [...] still a vulgar one, whether a king or beggar; for it is, undoubtedly, love alone that refines, ennobles and exalts it” (265).

Fanny has through this consummation with Charles reverted to the stage she was in earlier when they lived together. For the very first time, ‘virtuous’ is used to describe Fanny. Her sexuality is what it once was, but she is now a grown woman thanks to everything else she has learned, and her personality has matured. Indeed, it is true virtue that Fanny exhibits. She is now, through all her experiences, educated in both the ways of virtue and of debauchery, and her decision to chose the virtuous way is an informed one, making her in the eyes of Cleland even more virtuous than a virtuous woman that has never known anything but virtue.

The marriage symbolizes the end of a very long journey: Fanny has now given up the independence she earned to be controlled by a man. This represents an ideal state for Cleland, where women are withdrawn and their lusts are kept in check. Fanny leaves us with a metaphor: “The paths of vice are sometimes strewn with roses, but then they are forever infamous for many a thorn, for many a canker-worm: those of virtue are strewn with roses purely, and those eternally unfading ones” (270). We have seen the moths and thorns (and the odd rose) Fanny encounters in her life of vice throughout the novel as part of her learning, and when she starts walking the path of virtue, only unfading roses show up.

So, in the end, what is the book really about? Is it about the deviant sexual practises not discussed in this essay, such as sodomy and flagellation? Is it about teaching young women a lesson about the profession of prostitution, or the virtues of love and marriage? Is it to promote the libertine lifestyle? Does it perhaps document a historical account of prostitution? To some extent, all these questions can be answered in the affirmative. The last question, however, is explored by Trumbach in Rousseau, where the author compares our modern view of historical prostitution with the notions in *Fanny Hill*. The largest discrepancy is that prostitution in *Fanny Hill* is largely done in private, and the main problem people in the 18th century had with prostitutes was that they conducted their trade out in the open. Cleland did not want to perpetuate the image of sex as suspicious and therefore embellished the prostitution of his narrative. Christian morals could otherwise suggest that since prostitutes are deplorable, and prostitutes have sex, these two things are connected. This is probably why he chose a less than realistic depiction of prostitution.

The question of gender roles in pornography is always complicated. The narrative depicts a fantasy, something that is not real. Furthermore, we do not know a lot about Cleland, his intentions (only as he wanted to represent them), his relationship with libertinism or sexuality. The novel does seem to have a moral vein though: he promotes pleasure, but

presents a stark image of prostitutes and the downfalls of pleasure having been 'set loose'. In the end, throughout *Fanny Hill* there is a very strong theme of control. A person that is in control does not risk getting dragged down. Lusts that are controlled are good and should be embraced, and lusts *must* also be controlled and moderated. Fanny takes her fate in her own hands by getting out of the first bawdy house and instead places it with Charles. When Charles disappears, Fanny is controlled by other people. When she has free reign over her own life, she chooses to seek out Charles to yet again abandon this control to someone else.

Conclusion

I have now shown the different roles Fanny takes on during the narrative. They represent distinct stages of her development. The changes to her character and personality are gradual, but come at climactic stages of critical events or conflicts. She goes to London to find sustenance, she leaves prostitution out of love, she goes into being a mistress out of economic necessity, and she finds pleasure when looking for revenge. In the concept of the bildungsroman it does not matter if the characters are in control of their choices or not, the important thing is what they learn and take away from the events. For Fanny, there is a fairly even mix and there is no linearity regarding what type is available when. This furthers the image of Fanny as a multifaceted character and makes her bildung more believable, and makes the delivery of the author's message that more powerful.

Fanny reflects on her learning, and the theme of education follows her throughout the book. The reflections mostly come from the older Fanny, much in the same way any person can look back on their life to see when a certain characteristic was first obtained and included in their personality. This should not be surprising however, seeing the very strong bildungsroman characteristics of the novel. After all, while definitions differ, the bildungsroman is at its core about learning and experiencing change of character, and to teach

the reader something, and that is very evident in *Fanny Hill*. The fact that Fanny thinks that since she has been conquered by Mr. H once she has to keep complying is a scary parallel to rape cases of our time: If the girl is known for being sexually adventurous or having sexual relations with the rapist before the rape, it is less likely that the court will find him guilty. The notion that if you say yes once you can never after say no has survived many other notions that otherwise disappeared before our age.

In conclusion, *Fanny Hill* is a very interesting work of its time that lends itself very well to analysis due to the large number of unknowns and the multiple layers of author, narrative voice, internal reader and external reader. The inherent self-contradictions make it a prime target for literary study. With certainty, it is a groundbreaking work of pornography, not perhaps because of its qualities as one, but because of the way promiscuity is used to tell a tale of morals. Cleland himself, being quoted in Olsson, will be allowed to conclude this essay: “The chief and capital purport of this work is to inculcate the superiority of virtuous, conjugal, love, to all other joys to prove that virtue chastens our pleasure, only to augment them; that the paths of vice, are always those of misery, and that virtue, even in distress, is still happier bargain to its votaries, than vice, attended with all the splendor of fortune” (Olsson 268). As such, he has, in Lena Olssons words, enlisted ““vice in the service of virtue””.

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