Fanny Hill in Bombay

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Fanny Hill in Bombay: The Making and Unmaking of John Cleland.

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On a Sunday afternoon in 1778, James Boswell paid a visit to John Cleland, although he had not really meant to. “The day,” he writes—it was late April—“was charming.” After calling on Sir Joshua Reynolds, he had planned to go on an outing with a friend, but “was too late”; he then tried to call on Dr. Johnson, only to find him “not at home.” So he had another thought:

Called on old Cleland. Found him in an old house in the Savoy, just by the waterside. A coarse, ugly old woman for his servant. His room, filled with books in confusion and dust, was like Dupont’s and old Lady Eglinton’s, at least old ideas were suggested to me as if I were in a castle. He was drinking tea and eating biscuits. I joined him. He had a rough cap like Rousseau, and his eyes were black and piercing . . . He had resolutely persisted. There was something *genteel* in his manner amidst this oddity.

Boswell’s sketch of Cleland in an old house by the river, amid “confusion and dust,” served by a “coarse, ugly old woman,” juxtaposes the cozy and the weird,
the mundane and the fantastic, in a curious tableau. “Curious,” in fact, was the word Boswell used to describe Cleland when he met him nine years earlier: “Cleland, curious figure.” Now visiting him at home, Boswell draws Cleland as a “figure” out of time, out of place in the modern world. His repetition of the word “old,” which he uses five times in four sentences, though at first it seems just to refer to Cleland’s age, comes to locate him in an archaic, fantastic other world, like the setting of a fairy tale: “old ideas were suggested to me as if I were in a castle.” Even the ordinary domestic detail—“he was drinking tea and eating biscuits”—contributes to the overall “oddity” of the scene, in which “old Lady Eglinton’s” moldering Scottish castle has been transported to the busy Savoy, complete with a fairy-tale crone whom Boswell initially described in his diary as “a horrible old woman.”

At the center of this scene sits Cleland himself, a visually striking figure with a “rough cap” like that worn by Jean-Jacques Rousseau in the portrait Allan Ramsay painted in 1766 and “black and piercing” eyes. This is the only surviving glimpse of Cleland’s physical appearance, and it seems to fit with Boswell’s otherwise unexplained assertion that “he had resolutely persisted”: there is a kind of fierceness in this old man drinking tea and eating biscuits, a resolve that has enabled him to persist as if beyond his allotted time. Even the “something genteel in his manner” conveys a sense of anachronism. The “oddity” Boswell is struck by is that of a figure at odds with the ways of the late eighteenth-century London world, despite having lived almost his whole life there.

By the time Boswell knew him, John Cleland had largely brought his authorial career to a close, though he continued to haunt the newspapers in the persona of “A Briton,” writing letters on political themes to the Public Advertiser and perhaps other papers until nearly the time of his death in 1789. But while Boswell knew something of Cleland’s political writing and owned at least two of his later fictional works—Memoirs of a Coxcomb and The Surprises of Love—in his accounts of a handful of meetings with Cleland over the years, it is Cleland’s first book that he keeps circling back to. Published under duress in 1748–1749, when Cleland was in prison for debt, his Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure, or Fanny Hill—“that most licentious and inflaming book,” as Boswell called it—was the most scandalous literary debut of that or any period. In its way it was an incredible success; but its notoriety brought Cleland so many legal troubles and so much moral opprobrium that he soon came to dismiss it as “a Book I disdain to defend, and wish, from my Soul, buried and forgot.” Yet Boswell, among many other readers more or less clandestine, refused to forget it: he even got Cleland to tell him how he worked up the story in cahoots with a friend
when they both were young and living in the British East India Company settlement in Bombay.

However ardently Cleland may have wished it, Fanny Hill’s *Memoirs* have never been “forgot”; indeed, his own name has always been overshadowed by that of his heroine. For all his efforts to disown it or diffuse its impact, his first novel *branded* him as an author, then as now. Where would he be if it had been “buried and forgot”? In an obituary published in the *Gentleman’s Magazine* the month after Cleland’s death, the literary chronicler John Nichols wrote that the book “brought a stigma on his name, which time has not oblitered, and which will be consigned to his memory whilst its poisonous contents are in circulation.” But of course the stigma it brought on his name is the source and sign of his literary immortality, “which time has not oblitered.” If Fanny’s *Memoirs* were “buried and forgot,” the stigma would disappear, but so, Cleland must have known, or feared, would his name itself. Nichols did not need to give the book’s title in his obituary, for it was “too infamous to be particularised,” and his refusal to name it just confirms its fame, while all the other books Cleland wrote in an authorial career of forty years were, by the time of his death, becoming lost in “confusion and dust.” Why then this study, in which I look as closely at the whole range of Cleland’s writing—not just published texts but also letters, private notes, and newly discovered transcripts of his testimony in legal trials—as others have at the work and writing lives of such undeniably major, well-remembered figures as Hume, Johnson or Pope?

The answer, perhaps necessarily, is double sided. On one side, I try over the course of this book to show that the whole corpus of Cleland’s work rewards close attention—that even the forgotten texts are striking, audacious, aesthetically and intellectually daring and complex (but also idiosyncratic, frustrating, bizarre). On the other, it is precisely his marginality and oddness, the unsuccess of his struggle for authorial renown and respectable immortality, that makes him worth studying—not just because the very qualities that have barred his work from the literary canon may be those we find most interesting today, but because his history of failure emphasizes the historicity of authorship itself. Cleland’s writing was enabled and constrained by specific historical conditions, some common to all authors of the period (new print technologies, copyright law, changes in readership and literary fashion), others unique to him (financial pressures, family troubles, his own “history” of travel, work, and reading). But beyond that, his combative relationship to the literary market and to the times in general, and his permanent state of alienation, make him exemplary of the modern author as self-exiled outsider.
Boswell’s “old Cleland” is an almost allegorical figure of failure, a resolute survivor whose literary career was nevertheless undermined by the scandalous success of his own creation, and who was disappearing, even as Boswell visited him, into a kind of oblivion. In that respect, he could be seen as representative of the legions of failed literary aspirants in a period that Samuel Johnson sardonically labeled “the Age of Authors”: dunces, hacks, distressed poets, and neglected visionaries; the marginalized and misunderstood; the outsiders; the maligned. All of these are implicated, Johnson writes, in an “epidemical conspiracy for the destruction of paper” (458); all are contributing to “the depravation of taste and the corruption of language” (461). All, perhaps needless to say, will be forgotten, if indeed they were ever known.

It is true that Cleland made his way through the commercial and ideological battlegrounds of the eighteenth-century literary market with only fitful success: his best-selling work made him a pariah, and some of his most cherished projects, as I discuss in the later chapters of this book, went unfinished, unperformed, or unread. But if his travails were those of everyone who shared his “low abject condition, that of a writer for bread,” Cleland is also a singular figure whose body of work is compelling, extravagant, perverse. From the start the pornographic excess of his first novel rubbed off on the persona of its author. While the equation of authors with whores was a commonplace of the period (as the use of the word “hack” for both suggests), in Cleland’s case this equation was more pointed, as when, in Archibald Campbell’s satire The Sale of Authors (1767), a group of young male “Bucks and Bloods” in a London bawdy house shift their gaze from the women at work there to Cleland, who writes down their lives. “Mr. Cle—d,” the young bucks swoon, “has a most luscious pen, he possesses infinite Powers, he describes the thing so feelingly: in short, we must have him and will give you any money for him.” It is as if Cleland, by writing about whores, becomes a whore himself, the reader’s illicit object of desire.

Roland Barthes, having in his most celebrated essay proclaimed “the death of the author,” later admits that “in the text, in a way, I desire the author: I need his figure . . . as he needs mine.” This book grows out of a similar desire (similar insofar as I can untangle Barthes’s). That is, not to put Cleland as capital-A transcendental Author-God or Author-King back on his throne, or, as Barthes put it in “The Death of the Author,” to “impose a limit on [the] text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing” (147), but rather the obverse: to reopen the writing in all its messiness of being written. Such recent theorists of “the author” as Seán Burke and Andrew Bennett have drawn attention to the
playfully (or mournfully) conflicted character of Barthes’s relationship to the author whose death he announced but whose textual presence he continued, as a reader, to desire, even to need. The desire Barthes discloses in *The Pleasure of the Text* is akin to that of the “Bucks and Bloods” in *The Sale of Authors*, who want Cleland not just as a writer of “infinite Powers” whom they wish to claim for their own, but also, metonymically, as a lover or whore, whose “luscious pen . . . describes the thing so feelingly.” What they desire is not a disembodied text but the very body of its author, and this is also, impossibly, the object of biographical desire.

Why do we care about authors’ lives? Biographical desire is driven partly by curiosity and partly by identification, although as Andrew Bennet and Nicholas Royle point out, “the author” with whom the reader identifies is a fiction, a phantom. “Never fully present or fully absent, a figure of fantasy and elusiveness,” they write, “the author only ever haunts.” All the more so in the case of a writer like Cleland, whose material remains are a modest corpus of published texts and a smattering of manuscript traces—“haphazard fragments,” as his first biographer, William H. Epstein, put it, “scattered remnants.” The only “life” such an author can have is as an anthology of texts that have outlived him. Cleland in fact is far more a phantom than his fictional persona Fanny Hill. He has reached that state of attenuation implicit in Barthes’s definition of writing as “the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin . . . that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body writing” (“Death,” 142). In writing this book I was haunted by that image of the text as a “space where our subject slips away . . . where all identity is lost,” for it calls into question the value of looking for the author even as it offers, by negation, a model for doing so. I wanted to follow a line of thought Barthes’s words opened up: that Cleland, in writing, and later writing about, the *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, was plotting multiple points of origin, and that writing leads not to the loss but to an assaying and multiplication of identity. The authorial subject we retrace when as readers and biographers we move back through the skein of archival and published texts linked to the author’s name is far from a fixed point or final signified; biography should if anything make literary texts less stable.

My work on this book was impelled by biographical desire, but it is not a biography in the usual sense of the word. I have not tried to replace Epstein’s *John Cleland: Images of a Life*, on which I have very often relied, but have tried to construct a history or case study of the writer writing. But why Cleland? I suggested above that he could be seen as representative of the conditions of
authorship in the latter half of the eighteenth century, insofar as his authorial
career was a continual struggle to stay afloat financially, to stay out of prison
(for crimes of writing and for debt), and, more ideally, to teach readers
“to pursue good, and to avoid evil, to refine their morals, and to detest vice.”
Cleland’s relationship with his audience, however, was often hostile, at least on
his part, and in the same essay where he declared his aim to teach readers “to
pursue good,” he blamed the “declension of wit and taste” of his own day on
“the public,” absolving “the authors who have been forced to consult, and con-
form to, its vitiated palate.” While literary success required Cleland to please
the paying public, he was more prone to scourge it. In doing so, he set himself,
like Johnson, against “the depravation of taste and the corruption of language”
endemic to “the Age of Authors.” Yet his fascination, over the course of his writ-
ing career, with sexual “deviance” and excess, and with unstable, fluid, or dissi-
dent gender identities, marked him as a renegade even as he pursued the most
conventional sorts of cultural authority and respectability. Despite his patrician
origins and his seeming political conservativism, the audacity of his writings
on sexuality and desire, and his “sarcastical,” even nihilistic treatment of the
monarchy and of whichever political party happened to be in power, led another
author who visited Cleland late in life to remark, “It is no Wonder, in this Age,
that he lost his Place or Pension . . . or that he should pass under the Censure of
being a Sodomite, as he now does.” The coding of Cleland’s authorial persona
as “sodomitical,” in any of the different senses that word could assume in the
eighteenth century, is a measure of his defiance and estrangement, the qualities
that both made and unmade him as an author.

The one overtly sodomitical passage in Cleland’s work, late in Fanny Hill’s
Memoirs, was suppressed after the book’s first edition and only restored to the
text in Peter Sabor’s and Peter Wagner’s invaluable Oxford and Penguin edi-
tions of 1985. In the intervening years, whenever (rarely) it was mentioned,
it was usually attributed to the curiously named Samuel Drybutter, a shop-
keeper who was perhaps one of Cleland’s friends, and who was later killed by a
mob as a sodomite; Cleland’s authorship was only put beyond doubt by David
Foxon in 1965. But even excised, the passage lingered like a kind of phan-
tom limb, shadowing Cleland’s authorial reputation. So if Cleland is exemplary
of the problems and opportunities would-be authors had to negotiate in the
period—from censorship and political pressures to shifts in cultural vogues
and audiences’ tastes—his willful “perversity” often set him against prevailing
commercial norms and canons of taste. This could provide him, as with the
semi-underground success of Fanny’s Memoirs, with a commercial edge, for no
one else of his day was daring enough to risk such a publication. But it could also mark him as another eccentric in an age of eccentrics: Boswell’s “Cleland, curious figure.”

Rather than harmless eccentricity, Cleland’s “strangeness” as an author can be seen as a form of dissidence or defiance, not just in terms of the work’s overtly sexual or political content, but also in terms of its language and form. Reviewing Cleland’s *Memoirs of a Coxcomb*, Tobias Smollett wrote that “certain French idioms have crept into the language; a trespass for which the author is the less excusable, because he seems to be a master of the *English* tongue . . . nor is the performance free from stiff, compounded epithets, quaint terms of expression, that debase the stile, and new words affectedly coined.”

A decade later, William Rider agreed that “Mr. Cleland has been not unjustly censured for the Affectation of his Stile, in particular for adopting too many foreign Idioms.” Such criticisms of Cleland for allowing too many foreign idioms to “cre[ep] into” his language or for “affectedly coin[ing]” too many new words are interesting both for the anxiety they reveal about the contamination of “the *English* tongue” and for drawing our attention to the traits that make his writing distinctive. There is a foreignness to Cleland’s sentences, a figural complexity, lexical inventiveness, and rococo profusion that draw attention to themselves and that do often suggest the influence of French or Italian models. But foreignness is also integral to his work in another way: many of his most important texts are translations, while others, including *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* and *Memoirs of a Coxcomb*, freely adapt plot lines and narrative strategies from continental, especially libertine writing, whose skeptical self-reflexivity became the keynote of Cleland’s own fiction.

Cleland engaged with the literary, scientific, and philosophical innovations reshaping the intellectual contours of continental Europe, from Crébillon’s experimentation with open-ended narrative forms to the atheist materialism of La Mettrie’s *L’Homme machine*, at the same time as he sought, using the authorial persona of “A Briton,” to found a radical critique of the present political order on his own semihistorical, semimythic ideal of an original, uncorrupted ancient Britain. His work positioned him as both foreigner and native, but even as native he was out of step with the world he inhabited. He was also out of step with himself: in his later work he attempts to reclaim his authorial self by repudiating the book that brought down scandal and shame on his head. Fanny Hill’s *Memoirs* not only made him—won him lasting fame, showed off his stylistic virtuosity, gave him an entrée into the profession of author—but also unmade him: set him against the law, overshadowed his later work, reduced
him to a parasite on his own fictional “creature.” He is only remembered, after all, as the ghost author of Fanny’s autobiography.

But there are other ghosts haunting her text. In some ways they are the key to retracing not only how that first book came to be written but Cleland’s practice of authorship throughout his career. When he was arrested for obscenity eight months after his first novel appeared, Cleland wrote a letter to an official in the secretary of state’s office, part confession and part disavowal. In a passage that provides the jumping-off point for this study’s first chapter, he writes that “the plan of the [novel’s] first Part was originally given me by a young Gentleman of the greatest hopes that ever I knew . . . above eighteen years ago, on an occasion immaterial to mention here.” Thirty years later he told Boswell the young gentleman’s name: Charles Carmichael, Cleland’s friend when they both lived in Bombay. Of course in part he was trying to shift blame for the offending book onto another: as the phrase “of the greatest hopes that ever I knew” suggests, Carmichael had died young, in 1733, and who better to blame than a ghost? But actually what is interesting about Cleland’s letter and his later remarks to Boswell is that he does not simply shift responsibility for the work onto Carmichael; rather, he insists on the text’s collaborative origins, in a challenge Carmichael set him, to write “about a woman of the town without resorting to the coarseness of L’École des Filles,” a notorious erotic dialogue they had been reading together. The text Cleland sold for publication did not originate with him but took form dialogically: not just in conversation with Carmichael but in answer to the “coarseness” of its precursors. Read in this light, the novel is thick with half-hidden allusions to the scenes of its own origins. The search for an author, far from reducing or closing off the text, leads to a proliferation of intertexts, for Cleland is not only himself but a medium who transmits the voices of the dead.

Hauntings, ghosts, and the spectral are useful figural resources for literary study because they evoke the ways in which the absent—the dead, the past, the imagined—nevertheless live on, in some way, in texts. So, for Cleland, with the dead Charles Carmichael. And so, in a very different but equally impassioned way, with another ghost in the text, that of Thomas Cannon, author of a work even more scandalous than Cleland’s novel, a paean to same-sex desire titled Ancient and Modern Pederasty Investigated and Exemplify’d. In the same jailhouse letter that invoked Carmichael as coauthor, Cleland, trying to evade prosecution for his book, denounces Cannon, without naming him, as one who “was mad and wicked enough to Publish a Pamphlet evidently in defence of Sodomy.” The tactic must have worked: Cleland was never prosecuted but
Cannon was, or rather was forced to flee the country on the eve of prosecution. But what makes Cleland’s invocation of Cannon so interesting in this context is that he too had been one of Cleland’s intimates. It was Cannon who had him arrested for an £800 debt, and it was only after he had been rotting in prison for nearly a year that Cleland sold his copyright to the text of Fanny’s Memoirs. My search for Cleland led in turn to a search for Cannon and to the discovery both of the text of Ancient and Modern Pederasty and of archival evidence that the two had for some time been collaborators and friends, though their friendship had been volatile, verging on murderous. It’s no coincidence that they simultaneously produced the only two explicit accounts of male same-sex desire in English before the late nineteenth century, published just a month apart in 1749. Indeed relations between the two, authors and texts, form the crux of my reading of Cleland’s career, for collaboration is just the most overt instance of the ways in which all writing is caught in webs of personal and textual relatedness: translation, imitation, parody, repudiation, attack.

Calling on old Cleland on a spring afternoon in 1778, Boswell found someone other than the author of the “licentious and enflaming” book he had most likely read at about the same age Cleland and Carmichael had been when they dreamed it up in a burst of adolescent bravado and excitement. (When Cleland told him of the novel’s origins, Boswell said that he “wondered he kept it so long; that it did not burst out.”)26 Over thirty years Cleland had experimented with, or conjured up, a variety of authorial personae, and these personae—memoirist, sodomite, hack, man of feeling, Briton—are the focus of this book’s chapters. Cleland, Boswell wrote, had “resolutely persisted.” The figure who lived “with books in confusion and dust” was of course dust himself and returned to dust not long after, but he loiters, or persists, as a guest (to use another of Barthes’s terms) in the writing into which his identity long ago “slip[ped] away.”27

My account of Cleland’s authorship comprises seven chapters, broadly corresponding to stages of his writing career, though these are not always chronologically discrete. Particularly in the later chapters, the personae I have identified—the hack, the man of feeling, “A Briton”—do not follow each other in dutiful succession but come and go, overlapping, jostling for preeminence. Because this is not a strictly linear chronicle of Cleland’s life, I’ve placed a skeletal chronology at the start, including the titles of all the known works. In the chapter summaries that follow, I have not provided references for the passages I cite from Cleland’s texts, as these can be found in the chapters themselves.
In my first chapter, “Fanny Hill in Bombay,” I explore the colonial origins of the text that both established and tainted Cleland’s name. His years in the East India Company’s Bombay colony, where he worked from the ages of eighteen to thirty and wrote the first draft of the *Woman of Pleasure*, constitute an exemplary colonalist success story, as he advanced from foot soldier to attorney to the Mayor’s Court and secretary of the Bombay Council. His skill in writing and mastery of languages allowed him to rise rapidly through the ranks, but there is no evidence he had any plans for a literary career. Yet some traces of his life in Bombay reveal a flamboyant, contrarian authorial persona—above all when he speaks in the public forum of the Bombay courts. In one case, he had to defend himself from accusations of acting against the company’s interest for his too-zealous representation of a Hindu client, “notwithstanding Personall Revilings and Insults . . . and being hooted at in open Court.” In a second case, which I discovered in the India Office archive, he was accused of persuading a slave woman to leave her master’s house—the implication being that he had done so to make her his sexual slave. The case exhibits striking parallels with the *Woman of Pleasure’s* focus on sexual objectification, economic inequality, and male violence—indeed the London-set novel locates the sexual morality of the slave market in the heart of the middle-class home. Cleland in Bombay was both colonialist slave owner and renegade champion of those whom the colonials cheated, raped, and enslaved, and the writing self that began to emerge in those years is similarly divided. Fanny Hill’s voice is simultaneously female and male, hetero- and homoerotic, moralistic and obscene, just as the Cleland on trial in the Bombay public records is simultaneously colonialist and anticolonial.

When Cleland set off for London in 1740, he meant just to settle some family business before resuming his career as a Bombay merchant, but his father’s death led to a radical change of plan, and he resettled in the metropolis. The period between his return and the publication of his first novel is sparsely documented, but the betrayals and frustrations of those years forced him into authorship and infused his later works. In my second chapter, “Down and Out in Lisbon and London,” I focus on two episodes from an unsettled decade, each linked to a long-lost text. The first was an abortive scheme to set up a Portuguese East India company to rival that of the British, which led to secret meetings with King João V’s highest ministers in Lisbon. His clandestine plot of treason and mercantile espionage was an act of revolt against his former masters and prefigures his political and cultural estrangement in later works. The second episode, to which I have already referred, was Cleland’s friendship with a fellow
would-be writer, Thomas Cannon. Everything we know of this dates from the bitter aftermath of their falling out, when Cleland was imprisoned in the Fleet for debt and mounted a campaign of libel and harassment against Cannon and his mother. In one handwritten note Cleland called Cannon an “execrable white-faced, rotten catamite, who joined with his own mother to consummate the murder of an unfortunate gentleman who had saved his life, and whom, in return, he poisoned five times with common arsenic.” Accusing Cannon of sodomy and murder, Cleland signals that they were intimates—indeed betrays that they had once been collaborators. When affection turned to hatred and Cannon threw the friend “who had saved his life” into prison, the destitute Cleland was driven to sell the *Memoirs*, and so became an author by accident.

In my third chapter, “Sodomites,” I offer close readings of Cannon’s *Ancient and Modern Pederasty* and Cleland’s *Woman of Pleasure*. All copies of Cannon’s pamphlet vanished after his arrest (thanks to Cleland’s denunciation), while Fanny’s account of a sodomitical romp in the *Memoirs* was suppressed after the first edition. I discovered the sole surviving transcription of Cannon’s lost text in the King’s Bench records at the National Archives, so it is possible for the first time to compare the two works. Both authors break with the moralistic discourse of eighteenth-century antisodomite and anti-molly writing but make ironic use of its rhetorical conventions, allowing them to produce their own double discourse, conveying contrasting messages to different potential readerships. Cannon’s “Wicked Lewd Nasty Filthy Bawdy Impious and Obscene” pamphlet is a miscellany of Latin translations, scraps of gossip, philosophical debates on natural versus unnatural desire, dirty jokes, misogynist asides, and an amatory fiction of cross-dressing and seduction set in contemporary London. The text’s formal variegation corresponds to the varied meanings of “pederasty” itself, which becomes a figure for the undermining of any fixed category or role. Cleland too is at odds with the antisodomitical stance his narrator Fanny assumes. When she, in her rage to denounce the youths she has spied on, trips on a floorboard and knocks herself out, she earns our laughter and contempt and calls down mockery on the law she invokes. Asserting that sodomy is “a taste, not only universally odious, but absurd, and impossible to gratify, since . . . it was not in nature to force such immense disproportions,” she actually subsumes all desire under the title of sodomy, for “disproportion” is also the keynote of her accounts of other-sex desire. Confounding any distinction between natural and unnatural, possible and impossible desires, Fanny’s sodomitical encounter forms part of a larger pattern in the text of *unsexing* the body, unmooring it from any single sexual identity, female or male.
The success of Cleland’s first novel created a commercial opportunity, and it was followed by Memoirs of a Coxcomb, whose title signals its claim to be a masculine partner to its precursor. Like Fanny’s memoirs, Sir William Delamore’s constitute a novel of education, and their plots are structurally the same: the narrator falls in love with an idealized partner of the other sex; the beloved disappears; the narrator is prevented from seeking out the beloved; (s)he enters into a life of wanton but unfulfilling sexual indulgence; the beloved is accidentally found; the lovers are reunited. But if both narrators move from innocence to experience, naïveté to worldliness, the country to the city, virginal singleness to heterosexual union, in social terms they are antithetical, as different as male from female or plain Fanny from Sir William. In my fourth chapter, “Three Memoirs,” I read the texts comparatively, arguing for their importance to the history of the new, open-ended, self-critical, and self-reflexive form of the novel. Cleland took energetic part in debates on the moral and aesthetic aims of fiction, and in both Memoirs he experiments with narrative form, constructing the Woman of Pleasure as a set of variations and the Coxcomb as a suspended romance that frustrates the very expectations it instills. In this it owes a debt to the libertine novelist Crébillon, whose Égarements du coeur et de l’esprit also withholds the resolution its plot demands, and to Charles Pinot-Duclos, whose fictional Mémoires Cleland translated. Like Pinot-Duclos, Cleland uses the first-person history of moral education to challenge both narrative form and readers’ expectations. Writing their own stories, Fanny and William fashion themselves as literary, as well as moral and social, subjects. But they are no less constrained in this than they are in terms of their social position: both have to insert themselves into preexisting narrative roles and forms, to narrate their experience in keeping with familiar forms of life story.

In my fifth chapter, “The Hack,” I explore the work Cleland produced in his first decade as a “writer for bread,” compassing fiction, translations, parodies, reviews, essays on legal and political controversies, medical histories, satirical verse epistles, and plays both comic and tragic. In the fluctuating and unstable literary marketplace of the mid-eighteenth century, he sought to maintain a stance of independence, neither a supplicant for patronage nor a hack for hire but a new kind of cultural producer, engaged with but not engulfed by the market. Of the work Cleland produced in this decade, I focus on his account of three days of bawdy-house riots in the Strand, The Case of the Unfortunate Bosavern Penlez (1749), an antigovernment polemic stinging enough to prompt Henry Fielding, who as magistrate had examined the rioters, to issue his own defensive riposte, and the lurid Case of Catherine Vizzani, Cleland’s version of
an Italian medical history of a cross-dressing “Lesbian” seducer who, armed with “a leathern Contrivance, of a cylindrical Figure,” eloped with a series of young women until she was gunned down and anatomized to seek the origins of her willful and perverse desires. Along with his other translations, from Pinot-Duclos’s *Mémoires* to Dreux du Radier’s *Dictionnaire d’amour* (which as the *Dictionary of Love* was one of Cleland’s greatest successes), the Vizzani text exhibits such strong continuities with his “own” or original writing as to call into question Edward Young’s distinction between the originality of a true author and the hackwork of “other invaders of the Press” whose work is “a sort of *Manufacture* wrought up . . . out of pre-existent materials not their own.” All of Cleland’s work is caught up in networks of rewriting, imitation, and translation. Its originality consists precisely in the imagination and energy with which “pre-existent materials” are adapted to new occasions for writing.

On the evidence of a newly unearthed cache of letters, the middle to late 1750s was the most distressing period of Cleland’s life. The combination of financial insecurity, verging on penury, and family antagonisms, verging on hatred, spilled out in his correspondence, in which his emotions are laid barer than in any of his other writing. Violent, excessive, extravagant, his language in these letters conveys Cleland’s emotional volatility while narrating the Cleland family’s breakdown in the style of melodrama. In my sixth chapter, “The Man of Feeling,” I set the late fiction—*The Surprises of Love*, a collection of romances, and *The Woman of Honor*, a three-volume epistolary novel—against the private correspondence to explore the different registers of feeling in his private and public writing and the role of sentiment in his later work. If Cleland’s trajectory as a novelist is understood as a movement from satirical and enflaming to sentimental and chaste portrayals of love, such a trajectory ignores the defiant oddness of the *Woman of Honor*, which shows him pushing against the boundaries of romance in a wittily alienating way, as if to expose “the imaginary spaces of fiction and chimæra.” The late fiction bristles with the spirit of what Edward Said has called “late style”: a “nonharmonious, nonserene tension . . . a sort of deliberately unproductive productiveness going against.”28 In the “pretty tale[s], prettily told” of *The Surprises of Love*, as in the almost paralyzed romance of *The Woman of Honor*, Cleland continually worries away at his own fictional inventions, producing a sense of estrangement that aims by turns to unsettle and amuse.29

In his later authorial career, Cleland turned from presenting himself as a writer for bread to adopt the persona of gentleman-amateur, as he shifted from fiction to three other areas of enquiry: politics, physiology, and language. Dis-
avowing all interest in fame, he issued his work in a deliberately rough state. As he writes in the first of three studies on the origins of language, *The Way to Things by Words*, “In order to sound the opinion of competent judges, on the probability of my ideas . . . I threw them together in the loose undigested manner in which they now appear”—his nonchalance signaling that he had left behind the anxieties of professional authorship. Cleland’s approach to his three fields of inquiry took the form of a search for origins: the foundations of bodily health, national identity, and the true meanings of words. His concern with the vigor and integrity of the body parallels his call to revive the integrity of the political constitution. He appeals in his political essays to the myth of an original, uncorrupted Britain, an appeal embodied in the pseudonym he adopted as their author: *A Briton*. And it is clear from his works on language—the “Ancient Celtic” he took to be the “primitive” or original “language of Europe,” coextensive with “the ancient Laws of Britain”—that the word “Briton” denoted not just a political but a cultural ideal counter to the degeneracy of his own time. The emblem of that ideal is the maypole, an image of phallic authority that was also, he insists, the symbolic center of the ancient British government. Cleland’s linguistic texts bring his authorial career full circle, evoking the same idealized past as Fanny does in her portrait of the virile Mr. H——, whose body incarnates “a system of manliness, that might pass for no bad image of our antient sturdy barons . . . whose race is now so thoroughly refn’d and fritter’d away into the more delicate modern-built frame of our pap-nerv’d softlings, who are as pale, as pretty, and almost as masculine as their sisters.” In the search for origins of his late work, Cleland returns to his own origins, to the imaginative world of the book that first unmade him.