Trying to write his way out of the jail into which the Woman of Pleasure had landed him, Cleland painted his “present low abject condition” as that of “a writer for Bread” forced by economic necessity into “the meanness of writing for a bookseller.” The bookseller in question, Ralph Griffiths, most likely arranged to settle Cleland’s debts to Thomas Cannon and John Lane, as their complaints were dismissed soon after the Woman of Pleasure’s second volume appeared. Cleland, as a result, was now in debt to Griffiths, and the only way he could pay the debt off was to serve as Griffiths’s writer for hire. The clearest evidence of this comes in Griffiths’s statement the following year to Lovel Stanhope—the same man, law clerk to the secretary of state, to whom Cleland had sent his jailhouse letter—as to his motive for asking Cleland to produce an expurgated version of the novel: “Mr Cleeland owed him a Sum of money & as Cleeland was going abroad he thought it was the only Method to get his Debt paid.”

Much outrage has been vented on Cleland’s behalf concerning the advantage Griffiths took of his “low abject condition,” notably by John Nichols in the obituary notice he wrote on Cleland for the Gentleman’s Magazine. “Being with-
out profession or any settled means of subsistence,” Nichols writes, “he soon fell into difficulties; a prison, and its miseries, were the consequences. In this situation, one of those booksellers who disgrace the profession, offered him a temporary relief for writing the work above alluded to, which brought a stigma on his name, which time has not obliterated, and which will be consigned to his memory whilst its poisonous contents are in circulation.” An asterisk after “the work above alluded to” leads to this footnote: “The sum given for the copy [i.e., copyright] of this work was twenty guineas. The sum received for the sale could not be less than 10,000 L.” The disproportion between those two figures says it all: the predatory bookseller, having taken advantage of an author “condemned to seek relief” by snapping up his work for a pittance, proceeds to rake in five hundred times what he paid for it. Not only that, but despite this staggering profit, he holds the impoverished author in a state of bondage for years after, forcing him, in the case of the expurgated Fanny Hill, to revisit a work that had already brought him humiliation and disgrace.

The odd thing about this complaint is that Cleland, never one to stifle his indignation or sense of injury, does not himself make it. He bemoans his abject state, the “meanness of writing for a bookseller,” not because Griffiths has exploited him but, instead, to affirm his natural rank, that of gentleman, which should by rights preserve him from the necessity of laboring, even writing, “for Bread.” In his first letter written after his arrest for obscenity, written to Andrew Stone, an under-secretary of state to Thomas Pelham-Holles, Duke of Newcastle, he portrays himself as “a weak, ruined, and unfortunate gentleman” and tries to benefit from his status as a fellow alumnus of the elite Westminster School: “I cannot imagine that your humanity, will permit you to refuse an old fellow-collegiate, and above all, a gentleman under most ungentlemanlike oppression, the favour of a private audience.” But this letter—in which he denied what was never in doubt, his authorship of the novel—went unanswered. So in his second letter, to Stanhope, Cleland acknowledges the novel as his, while both apologizing for the tone of the earlier letter and taking offense at Stone’s silence, as treatment unbefitting a man of his rank:

From the Messenger’s House, in the heat of my resentment at being treated like a common malefactor, I wrote a letter to Mr Stone, and probably a very impertinent one, but I take for granted that he must be too much the gentleman to use it against me: Especially since his not vouchsafing me any answer, was, from one of his extream politeness, mortification enough to a gentleman, who measuring other hearts by his own, would pay ten times more tender respect to the natural Jealousy
Cleland himself, with his “tender respect” for the “distrest,” is rather more a gentleman than Stone, who for all his “extream politeness” has behaved as a “vulgar” toady to fortune and power.

Given his readiness to attack Stone in writing to another official from the same department, it is unlikely that Cleland would have hesitated to shift blame onto Griffiths had he really resented his treatment. Instead, all he writes is that as a prisoner in the Fleet he showed the novel “to some whose opinion I unfortunately preferred to my own, and being made to consider it a ressource, I published the first part.” There is no claim of having been forced or even coaxed into publishing, just that “some”—Griffiths, or his brother, or other persons entirely—gave their opinion as to the text’s potential value. Of course he regards the advice as “unfortunate” now he is under arrest, but he never suggests he was bilked or misled. On the contrary, he absolves the others arrested—Ralph Griffiths and Thomas Parker, the book’s printer—of any blame. “It is really little more than Justice,” he writes, “to acquittal, and deliver from longer confinement those poor People now under punishment for my fault: as they certainly were deceived by my avoiding those rank words in the work, which are all that they Judge of obscenity by.” Of course he is making a gesture here, “display[ing] his selflessness,” as Epstein observes, and he might have expected this to weigh in his favor. But Cleland had shown himself, as in the Bombay trials, willing to take risks on others’ behalf, so his statement does not need to be read as disingenuous. Other authors, notably Smollett and Goldsmith, expressed genuine rancor against Griffiths, but Cleland never did.

Almost all of Cleland’s writing for Griffiths came in the five years following his release from the Fleet. Griffiths was just in his late twenties when he published the *Woman of Pleasure*, ten years or so younger than Cleland, and had only set up as a bookseller three or four years before. He first comes to light in 1746, when he got into trouble with the law for two works that portrayed the Young Pretender and the Jacobite cause in a sympathetic light only a few months after the 1745 Jacobite rising had been put down at Culloden. When arrested, he, like Cleland, had written the secretary of state, and like Cleland he pleaded poverty as his excuse: “I am a young Man of no fortune, having a Family to maintain, and no means of subsisting but by my Pen.” In offering Cleland twenty guineas for the copyright to his first novel, he was not driving an especially hard bargain: the bookseller Thomas Lowndes paid the same to
Frances Burney in 1777 for her first novel, *Evelina*, and as James Raven notes, “Lowndes was neither poor nor uncharitable.” As it happens, Lowndes was also the publisher with William Nicoll of Cleland’s third and last novel, *The Woman of Honor* (1768), for which Cleland was paid twenty-five guineas. In that light, Griffiths’s payment two decades earlier of twenty guineas to an unknown first-time novelist—at a time when he was just starting out in the trade, and for a text he knew could land him in more legal trouble—was unexceptionable.

Moreover, the figure of £10,000 put forward by Nichols (ramped up to £20,000 in a later edition of his *Literary Anecdotes*) as “the sum [Griffiths] received for the sale” of the *Woman of Pleasure* is an utter chimera. At a cost of six shillings per two-volume set, he would need to have sold over thirty thousand copies for gross earnings of that order. According to the book’s printer, Thomas Parker, the initial press run was of 750 copies, and even allowing for multiple reprints over the ensuing decades, such vast numbers are simply not credible. As James Basker has noted, editions of the *Woman of Pleasure* “continue[d] to circulate widely” to the end of the century, but “there is no evidence that Griffiths was responsible” for them—or, therefore, that they brought him any money. And the expurgated *Memoirs of Fanny Hill* seems to have been a commercial failure. So while Griffiths likely did profit from sales of the *Woman of Pleasure*, those profits were liable to have been in the realm of hundreds rather than tens of thousands of pounds. And if Cleland only got twenty guineas for his labor, well, as Raven puts it, “Authors were the very last participants to benefit from the eighteenth-century book bonanza.” Indeed “most authors and contributors to best-selling literature remained poor, powerless, and prolific” even as booksellers prospered. Or as Catherine Gallagher expresses it, eighteenth-century authors consistently “portrayed themselves as dispossessed, in debt, and on the brink of disembodiment.”

Charlotte Lennox, for instance, one of Gallagher’s exemplary figures of authorship in the period, “called her steady employment ‘slavery to the booksellers’ . . . and her complaint is typical of ‘independent’ authors in the mid-eighteenth century.” Another writer cited by Gallagher, James Ralph, compared an author “who wrote for the booksellers to ‘the Slave in the Mines’: ‘Both have their tasks assigned them alike: Both must drudge and starve; and neither can hope for Deliverance.’” Intriguingly, Ralph made this comparison in a work published by Griffiths, *The Case of Authors by Profession or Trade, Stated* (1758). Whether or not he meant it as a reflection on his working relationship with Griffiths, it emphasizes the absence of any such personal reflections on Cleland’s part. And while at times Cleland may have been on
an alternating cycle of drudgery and starvation, the evidence suggests that his “tasks” were not mostly “assigned” him, but chosen.

The one task it is certain Griffiths initiated was that of cleaning up the *Woman of Pleasure*, for he said so under questioning after his arrest for having published it. Examined by Stanhope, he declared “that upon the Suppression of a Book Intitled the Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure he applied to Mr. Cleeland the Author of it, & desired him to strike out the offensive parts of it & compile a Novel from it which might be inoffensive, which the said Mr. Cleeland did & called it ‘Memoirs of Fanny Hill’ which the Examinant is the proprietor and publisher of.” Cleland’s lack of relish for the job is legible in the text’s “im-poverished” language and the weirdly pointless formal tinkering that sees the original two letters cut up into eleven, but even so, as Peter Sabor notes, he “took the opportunity . . . to make hundreds of corrections and revisions” to the first-edition text, so displaying a “careful attention . . . to stylistic accuracy” that Sabor calls “surprising” in view of the halfheartedness of his creative investment. He seems, in this instance, to be approaching his work with a professional attention to detail even though he had written just a few weeks earlier that the *Woman of Pleasure* was “a Book I disdain to defend, and wish, from my Soul, buried and forgot.” Indeed he asserted then that for all the fulminations of “my Lords the Bishops,” “they cannot wish [the book] supprest more than I do.” Yet here he is, soon after, checking for “oddities of spelling and punctuation” to make it more presentable.

Cleland’s approach to the uncongenial task of scrubbing up the *Memoirs* reflects not only a professional ethos but a courtesy he felt he owed Griffiths, who had, after all, effected his release from the Fleet. Under questioning, Griffiths characterized the task not as an assignment but as a “Favour” he had “ask[ed] . . . of Mr Cleeland,” as a way of paying off some part of his debt at a time when “Cleeland was going abroad”—which suggests not servitude but mutual obligation. If Cleland was in Griffiths’s debt, he was not in his thrall: he produced work for other booksellers from the start of his career as a “writer for Bread,” and the scraps that survive of their correspondence are amicable and frank. Cleland’s publication history suggests that from the time of his release from prison in March 1749 through November 1751, when Griffiths published *Memoirs of a Coxcomb*, Cleland did write primarily to work off the debt to Griffiths, but that after that they considered the debt paid, allowing Cleland to carry on as an independent author, with the risks as well as the freedom that entailed.

From 1749 through 1751 Cleland wrote about two dozen pieces for Griffiths’s *Monthly Review*, starting with its inaugural issue of May 1749; these included
reviews of fiction (Smollett’s *Peregrine Pickle*, Fielding’s *Amelia*, Francis Coventry’s *Pompey the Little*) but also of works on subjects ranging from politics (Bolingbroke’s letters, Montesquieu’s *L’Esprit des Lois*) to medicine (*Observations on the Epidemical Diseases in Minorca*) and history (*Authentic Memoirs of the Christian Church in China*). In these years, Griffiths also published *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* (1748–1749), *Memoirs of Fanny Hill* (1750), and *Memoirs of a Coxcomb* (1751), as well as a short pseudomoral, pseudomedical burlesque, *The Economy of a Winter’s Day*. In this same period Cleland published two works with other booksellers: a polemical tract, *The Case of the Unfortunate Bosavern Penlez* (1749), published under the false imprint of “T. Clement near St. Paul’s,” and a sensational medical narrative, the *Case of Catherine Vizzani* (1751), “printed for W. Meyer.” It is not clear if these were commissioned by the booksellers that issued them or if Cleland sought out publishers after Griffiths had turned them down; both texts were potentially liable to prosecution, and Griffiths may have decided they were not worth the risk. In any case, from late 1751 Cleland stopped being a regular contributor to the *Monthly Review*, and while Griffiths did publish one more important work of Cleland’s, the 1753 *Dictionary of Love*, Cleland could no longer be considered one of Griffiths’s “house authors,” those whom Norman Oakes calls the *Monthly Review*’s “corps.” For the rest of his authorial career Cleland shopped his work from publisher to publisher, trying out new genres, in some cases perhaps writing to commission but typically pursuing his own simultaneously eccentric and representative course.

If Cleland became an author by lucky or unlucky chance, the same could be said of many writers of the period. There were few useful models for an authorial career in the fluctuating and unstable literary marketplace of the mid-eighteenth century. What we tend to see as the golden age of the emerging novel—the years from 1740 to the early 1750s, which saw the publication of most of the major novels of Richardson, the Fieldings, Smollett, Lennox, and Cleland—was actually a period of gradual decline for fiction, in which not only the number of new novel titles but the overall number of novels in print fell rather ominously. As Gallagher observes, “It was not . . . a propitious time to begin a novel-writing career,” and in fact no would-be professional writers could have thought of themselves as novelists in the way that later writers could. All professional authors at midcentury—all who depended on writing for their livelihood—were “miscellaneous writers,” Fielding, Smollett, and Lennox no less than the famously eclectic Johnson, whose publications in his first ten years in London ranged from “London” and the *Life of Savage* to an annotated translation of a French commentary on Pope and, by some estimates, half a
million words of semijournalistic, semifictional parliamentary debates written for the Gentleman’s Magazine. If neither he nor anyone else could rival the avowedly indolent Johnson’s productivity, Cleland adopted a similarly diversified approach in his first decade as a hack, compassing fiction, translations, parodies, reviews, essays on legal and political controversies, medical histories, satirical verse epistles, and plays both comical and tragic. Of course “hack” is not a word that Cleland would have welcomed, seeing it, rightly, as a term of class disparagement, but if insultingly called a hack or “mercenary Scribbler,” as he was by a pundit in a letter to the Public Advertiser, he stood his ground as a professional author:

This term is really so stale so stinking an Oyster-Weed of the literary Billingsgate, that it hurts one the more in a Production of which the Stile would undoubtedly lead one to think the Writer superior to the Use of it either for Argument or Garnish . . . How frequently has not one poor Writer, poor in every Sense, while himself was languishing, under every Circumstance of [Want,] with so much of Wit and Humour as of Reason and Propriety, reproached some other Writer not more miserable than himself, with his white-limed Garret, his Farthing-candle, his Small-beer and his Lack of Credit at the next Chandler’s Shop? [A] Senseless Scheme to raise a Laugh at the Expence of the Honour of Literature. Independently of the Inconsistence of which[,] they do not consider that they are only furnishing Matter of stupid Triumph to the common Enemy, the tasteless worthless Men of Fortune, those wretched Beings who with a Heart all rotten, and a Head all in Rags, affect to look down with great Contempt on Circumstances, which, at the worst, could not be a greater object of it than their own, a Poverty at once of Intellect and of Spirit. Such “Men of Fortune,” Cleland writes later in the same letter, for all their advantages of birth and rank, themselves “never could rise so high as Scribbling, or but to common Orthography.”

Cleland’s defense of professional writers as upholders of “the Honour of Literature” does not try to conceal their material circumstances. Although he complains about “the meanness of writing for a bookseller,” the writer’s poverty becomes a sign of his cultural value in a period when Britain, as he would write at the end of his career, had been “debased and reduced . . . through her own follies, nearly to insignificance and nullity.” The general depravity of taste that Cleland saw all around him might turn one author against another in the hope of pleasing the public, but writers needed to recognize their common enemy and their common cause. Although in much of his private correspondence, as in the letters to Stanhope and Stone, Cleland took pains to portray himself as a
gentleman in distress, his typical stance in his published work of the 1750s was that of an industrious jobbing author. In that respect he, like Johnson, resists fitting in to Alvin Kernan’s claim that “most of the hacks, driven by their pride, tried to pretend that they were still gentleman-authors of the courtly tradition rather than the poorly paid print laborers they in fact were.” A courtly hanger-on was the last creature on earth Cleland would have been tempted to impersonate. Indeed he equates those he calls “the closetteers of St. James’s” to “the Garretteers of St. Giles’s”: neither politicians for hire nor partisan hacks are distinguishable from “a nest of prostitutes.” Cleland himself was vulnerable to charges of being a hireling or “mercenary Scribbler,” notably for his letters on political subjects in the *Public Advertiser*, which he was generally thought to have written at the behest of one or another ministerial faction. And he was often accused, during his lifetime and later, of being “an adept in literary fraud,” a plagiarist, a literary pirate. But in his first decade as a “writer for Bread” he sought ways of engaging with the literary marketplace that let him maintain a stance of independence—neither a supplicant for patronage nor a replaceable content provider, but a new kind of cultural producer, engaged with but not engulfed by the market.

Apart from the *Woman of Pleasure* and the *Memoirs of Fanny Hill*, it is uncertain how or why Cleland wrote what he did in the 1750s. Was he assigned books to review for the *Monthly*, or did he choose what interested him from books received? Probably some mixture of the two, and the degree of his interest probably corresponds to the length at which he comments on, instead of just summarizing or excerpting, the text. By that light, he was strongly invested in Bolingbroke’s *Letters* and Fielding’s *Amelia*, less so in a spurious sequel to *Tom Jones*. Cleland’s translations from the French—of Pinot-Duclos’s *Mémoires* for a consortium of eminent London booksellers, and of J. F. Dreux du Radier’s *Dictionnaire d’amour* for Griffiths—might have been commissioned by the publishers, or Cleland might have initiated them. Either way, both exhibit such strong continuities with the thematic preoccupations and narrative patterns of his first two novels that the translations should be read as no less his own work. Indeed Cleland’s career calls into question the distinction made by Edward Young in his 1759 *Conjectures on Original Composition* between the originality of a true “Author” and the derivative hackwork of “other invaders of the Press,” whose work is “a sort of Manufacture wrought up by those Mechanics, Art, and Labour, out of pre-existent materials not their own.” For Cleland, as also, emphatically, for Johnson—but also Richardson, Smollett, Fielding, Lennox, Eliza Haywood, and so on—the “art” and “labour” of writing, the “mechanics” of
authorship, are not only visible in the text but are in some ways its subject, and their writings, whether they count generically as novels, reviews, burlesques, imitations, translations, essays, commentaries, or prefaces, are openly “wrought up” of “pre-existing materials not their own.” This is not to say that none of these authors is original but that originality—and never more brazenly so than in the eighteenth century—consists precisely in the imagination and energy with which that “pre-existing material” is “altered, added to, transposed, and in short new-cast,” to cite Cleland on how he reworked the lost Carmichael-inspired Woman of Pleasure into the novel whose copyright he sold.39

In the rest of this chapter I focus on two texts from this period of “mercenary Scribbling” in which Cleland brings his art and labor to bear on materials not his own and manages to make of them something new. The first, The Case of the Unfortunate Bosavern Penlez (1749), was stinging enough in its denunciation of the government’s handling of the London uprising that came to be known as the Penlez riots to provoke a defensive jab from none other than Henry Fielding, who as magistrate had examined the rioters, including the hapless Penlez.40 The second text is the Case of Catherine Vizzani (1751), Cleland’s translation of and commentary on an Italian medical case history of a cross-dressing woman who, armed with a “leathern Contrivance, of a cylindrical Figure,” seduced and eloped with a series of young women until her death led to the discovery and publication of her secret.41 As with the Woman of Pleasure and the Coxcomb, intense curiosity about the sources of perverse desire drives Cleland’s “Dissertation” on the Vizzani case, which culminates in a call for the suppression of “scandalous and flagitious books” such as, of course, itself—a call that echoes the ironies and instabilities of the two novel-memoirs.

I conclude with remarks on two other translations from French sources: Dreux du Radier’s Dictionnaire d’amour of 1741 and Louis-François de La Drevetière Delisle’s Arlequin sauvage, a comedy written in 1721 for the Théâtre-Italien of Paris. In turning the Dictionnaire into his 1753 Dictionary of Love, Cleland substantially “altered, added to, transposed, and in short new-cast” the original, in keeping with his understanding of translation as an act of cultural as well as linguistic reimagining. In his translation of Delisle’s play, by contrast, Cleland stays close to the French, even though his title, Tombo-Chiqui; or, The American Savage, seems to offer something remote from the world of commedia dell’arte to which Delisle’s “savage harlequin’ belongs. Yet in strictly adhering to his source, Cleland produced a work that recapitulates many of the thematic concerns of his earlier fiction and anticipates some narrative motifs of his 1765 collection of novellas The Surprises of Love. Fidelity to another’s text
as expression of self: the paradox of the translator. When Cleland, in his re-
view of Peregrine Pickle, assailed the “flood of novels, tales, romances, and other
monsters of the imagination, which have been either wretchedly translated, or
even more unhappily imitated, from the French, whose literary levity we have
not been ashamed to adopt, and to encourage the propagation of so depraved a
taste,” he may have been venting some frustration at the wretched or unhappy
necessity of selling his labor to produce salable English versions of someone
else’s work. But this production is so integral to his literary corpus that it
cannot be treated as marginal or secondary to his “own” or “original” writing.
Instead, it allows us to see that all his work is caught up in networks of rewor-
ing, imitation, critique, pastiche, and translation—or, as he once sourly defined
the last of these, “forced and unnatural transplantation.”

The Unfortunate Bosavern Penlez

On Friday, 30 June 1749, a sailor was robbed “of a considerable Sum of Money”
at a bawdy house in the Strand. When he “apply’d to the Keeper of the House
for Satisfaction of his Loss,” in Cleland’s account of events, he was driven away
“with foul Language and Blows.” It is indicative of the murky and conflicted
state of the evidence in the case that while Cleland specifies one sailor, in more
recent historical accounts the number is confidently given as two, or as three,
and even the number of Portuguese moidores allegedly stolen varies from re-
port to report. But in every report, the sailors returned to ship, roused their
mates, and came back en masse the next night for justice or revenge. Cleland,
adapting the nautical jargon that also threads through the Woman of Pleasure,
writes that the sailors “went to work” on the bawdy house “as if they were
breaking up a Ship, and in a Trice unrigg’d the House from Top to Bottom”
(18), throwing featherbeds and all into the street to make a great bonfire. All of
this, Cleland writes, was done “with so much Decency and Order, so little Con-
fusion, that, notwithstanding the Crowd gather’d together on this Occasion, a
Child of five Years old might have crossed the Street in the thickest of them,
without the least Danger.” No surprise, this, given that when they first forced
their way into the house, the sailors, “acting like true brave Fellows, suffer’d
no Injury to be done to the poor Damsels, who got off safe and unhurt.” In
Cleland’s account, the sailors are champions of virtue in distress—not at all the
mob who, according to the Gentleman’s Magazine’s report of the same events,
“turn’d the women naked into the street; then broke all the windows, and con-
siderably damaged an adjacent house.”
Whether the firing of this first bawdy house was an act of popular justice or of insurrection (as the Gentleman’s Magazine and, later, Henry Fielding would assert), by the time soldiers arrived from Somerset House to quell the disorder, it was no longer just one bawdy house but all of them that the sailors and their allies aimed to pull down, and the troubles were to continue over the next two days, leading to the destruction of two more houses and attacks on agents of the police, among them Fielding himself. Bosavern Penlez, who was to give his name to the disorders, was in fact scarcely part of them. The son of an Exeter clergyman, he had lived in London since 1747, working first as a peruke maker and later as a gentleman’s servant. On the second night of disorders, after a day of drinking with friends, he ended up among or around the crowd converging on the Star, a tavern-cum-bawdy-house near his home. He may or may not have joined them, but soon after one in the morning, just as soldiers were arriving at the Star to disperse the crowd and forestall another bonfire, Penlez was arrested a few streets away with what one watchman called “a great Bundle of Linnen” that was later identified as having come from the Star. That link to the scene of the riot led to Penlez’s indictment under the Riot Act of 1715, and despite many questions about the evidence and the eventual guilty verdict—not least from the jurymen themselves—Penlez was executed on 18 October, the sole object of the law’s vengeance for the sailors’ bawdy-house rampage or crusade.

As the passages I have cited suggest, the Penlez Riots, as they came with grim inaptness to be called, provoked bitterly divided responses, most memorably presented in Cleland’s and Fielding’s warring pamphlets: Cleland’s anonymously issued The Case of the Unfortunate Bosavern Penlez, published on 7 November 1749, and Fielding’s avowedly corrective A True State of the Case of Bosavern Penlez, published eleven days later. Fielding being Fielding, his “frankly polemical and self-interested account,” as Peter Linebaugh labels it, is probably the better known of the two, but the two pamphlets were regularly advertised together, and they are equally polemical, even if Cleland tried to put himself above the fray by presenting his as the work of “a Gentleman Not Concern’d.” As the examining magistrate who committed Penlez to Newgate to await trial, Fielding was ineluctably “concern’d,” not to say embroiled, in the extremely unpopular decision to proceed with Penlez’s hanging despite pleas for mercy from the jury that had originally convicted him and from several hundred petitioners from local parishes—pleas even the king was said to favor.47 In his pamphlet, Cleland expresses perplexity, or perhaps mock perplexity, at the refusal of mercy, hypothesizing “that there was some great and mighty latent Cause, that forbad the shewing of Mercy, where Mercy seems so much due,
that it might even deserve the Name of Justice; some Cause above the Reach or Comprehension of those vulgar ordinary Understandings, which compose that common Sense of Mankind, which has not been a little hurt on this Occasion” (44). A few pages later, he concludes that “some deep abstruse Reason of State, in short, prevailed over an Occasion of gratifying large Bodies of Men, and indeed, the whole Town in general” (47), perhaps implying a position like that taken by Linebaugh in his essay on the case: Penlez was hanged, he argues, “so that the Government by the severity of its retribution could lend support to its characterization of the riot and to the decision to rely upon the military to suppress it, as if the seriousness of the punishment determined the gravity of the crime.” Penlez died, the argument runs, that the Pelham administration, to which Fielding owed his magistracy, might live—or at any rate that it might justify its arguably heavy-handed response to the disorders in the Strand by staging the exemplary punishment of Penlez as a symbol of Riot.

But if Cleland’s passing remarks imply suspicion that the decision to proceed with Penlez’s execution, against the express will of the people, was politically motivated, his object in writing the Unfortunate Penlez was not to ask why the government acted as it did but to justify the sailors’ and their supporters’ actions, and to vindicate Penlez as a doubly traduced young man of “unblemish’d Character” (27). The ill-starred Penlez, in Cleland’s account, was the victim, first, of “the Rage and Malice” of “a Wretch fit to taint the Air he breath’d in” (30, 37)—Peter Wood, keeper of the Star, hell-bent on revenge for the breaking of his house—and, second, of an unnamed slanderer who, aiming “to aggravate the Distress, and increase the Danger of a poor Creature under Sentence of Death” (26), spread the story, after Penlez had been convicted of riot, that he had been arrested holding the “great Bundle of Linnen” referred to above, and so was also guilty of theft. As Cleland writes, “No Notice, nor even Shadow of Notice, was taken of this Bundle at the Trial,” so the motive of “whoever . . . made Report of it” was to furnish “great Means of preventing Mercy from being extended to this unhappy young Man” as it had been to the sole other person found guilty of riot, John Wilson, reprieved on the eve of his hanging. What Cleland does not write is that the slanderer in question was Fielding, who interceded, as he admits in his own pamphlet, with “some very noble Persons, in order to make some Distinction between the two condemned Prisoners, in Favour of Wilson, whose Case to me seemed to be the Object of true Compassion.” On the basis of the testimony of the watchmen who arrested Penlez, Fielding clearly believed that Penlez had stolen the bundle of linens from the Star. But Cleland is surely right.
to object that for Fielding to bring this, at the eleventh hour, to the attention of those with power to grant or withhold mercy, in a kind of end run around the broadly based campaign to win Penlez a reprieve—and to do so in private, so that Penlez had no chance to defend himself—was morally indefensible. As he writes, whoever circulated “this Story trumped up of a Bundle found upon Penlez” (28) was “not overloaded with good Nature, or common Humanity” (26). 51

As for Peter Wood—proprietor, with “his Wife, or No-Wife” Jane (31) of the Star, and key witness for the prosecution in placing Penlez at the scene of the riot—Cleland asks, “But where was the Wonder or Improbability of his swearing any Thing, and against any Body?” (30). Nothing that either Wood swears can be taken for true: one witness at the trial, whom Cleland cites, declared that “for my part I would not hang a dog or cat upon their evidence, they keep such a bad house and other things,” and the evidence Cleland marshals against them is damning. 52 Against Benjamin Lander, one of the three alleged rioters (along with Penlez and Wilson) whose cases went to trial, Peter Wood swore that half an hour before the guard came to disperse the crowd, “he was in the Passage of his house, assisting to break the Partition,” and that “he broke the Window of the Bar with his Stick”; while Jane Wood (or as Cleland puts it, “the Woman who passed for Wood’s Wife, and may be might be so”) swore “that Lander knock’d her down, and that she was beaten almost to a Jelly” (32). But Lander is able to prove that he arrived at the Star in the company of a soldier “who told him that they were going to disperse a Mob in the Strand” and whom, on the way there, he treated to a pint in a tavern (32). Providentially, when Lander is “collar’d . . . under the Notion of his being a Straggler left behind, of those concern’d in the Demolition of the House,” it is at the hand of “the very identical Soldier whom he had the Instant before treated with a Pint of Beer,” so that he “could not be guilty of those Facts sworn so positively against him by P. W. and his virtuous Consort” (33). Despite what Cleland rightly calls “this glaring Circumstance” (34)—which of course led to Lander’s acquittal—the Woods’ testimony against Penlez and Wilson was admitted. As Cleland writes, “Now unfortunately for poor Wilson he had treated no Soldier; he had No-body at hand to prove a Negative, against the point-blank Oaths of three thorough-pac’d Evidences [the third being the Woods’ servant], the Weight however of all three of whom put together, one would have thought lighter than Air, in a Case where five Farthings should be at Stake, much more the Lives of honest Men” (35). As this passage reveals, Cleland is anything but neutral; instead, as in his statements before the
Bombay court, his language is by turns inflammatory, sarcastic, and figurally extravagant. Here, for example, is his explanation of Peter Wood’s motives for testifying so positively against Penlez and the others:

> Bloodthirstily determin’d, at any Rate, to fix his grievous Complaint somewhere, and ready to run at every one, like a mad Dog, he was very indifferent who it was he hang’d by his Oath[,] since whoever he hang’d, if he was but an honest Man, stood in the Light of an Enemy to him. To this Keenness of Revenge may be attributed his seizing the first that were offer’d, or laid in the Way of it, whom the staunch hard-mouth’d Hound immediately fastened upon, and hunted some to Death, some to the Gates of it. (30–31)

Throughout the pamphlet, Cleland moves freely between this sort of dramatically colored, “Raw-head and Bloody-bones” (20) language and a more lawyerly, forensic discourse, as when he follows the above passage by writing, of Wood’s bloodthirstiness, that “this will plainly appear on a Review of the Trial itself,” even though no hellhounds can be found coursing through the documents Cleland urges the reader to consult.53

By contrast with the “mad Dog” Peter Wood, Penlez, who first appears in Cleland’s text as “one of those who fell in with the Stream” of the crowd “being a little flustered with Liquor” and so “the more heated and imprudent in his Management” (25), by the end of the pamphlet has been ennobled by suffering—“the Hardships and Terrors of the long Imprisonment in Newgate” (48)—so that he goes to his death “with a Resignation and Composure worthy of a less deplorable End” (55). When his fellow convict Wilson is reprieved at ten o’clock on execution-day eve, Penlez is quoted saying, “He was heartily pleas’d with it, whatever became of himself, and should be glad to be the first to wish him Joy of it” (52). And “if to this is added what is equally true,” Cleland writes, “that, on there being intimated to him some hopes of a Rescue” at the scaffold, “he express’d the warmest Disavowal of it . . . declaring, that though he was to suffer as a Rioted, he had so little of the Principles of one, that he did not even desire to owe his Life to a Riot” (53), Cleland’s vindication of him as a person of “Sentiments that would have done Honour to a higher Condition of Life than his was” links up the personal and political strands of his text. Penlez is not just a person of “unblemish’d Character”; he embodies the “gentle and governable Sentiments” (45) of the “common People of England,” giving the lie to those, like Fielding, responsible for “the Imputation of a riotous seditious Humour . . . among the People, and which had been the Handle made use of to urge the Necessity of this bloody Example” (54–55). It is because “the Condition of this young Man”
was “low” in his lifetime that he can figurally embody the crowd of which he was, even if accidentally, a part. Since “a Lord and the meanest Craftsman are but Men alike, are but Subjects alike, and are, or ought to be, equally dear to the Laws of Society” (4), as Cleland asserts, Penlez is fully worthy of the reader’s interest; and since he acts as a synecdochic figure for the London crowd, they are in turn worthy of justification as demonstrating by their actions “the old British Spirit” (54). So even if the pulling down of houses and destruction of their contents is “not . . . strictly justifiable” (17), the sailors who composed the core of the uprising were clear “of any premeditated Design to offer an Insult to his Majesty’s Government, which their Body had been the greatest Support of, and which some of them had often ventur’d their Lives for” (18). It is they who manifest for Cleland the “antient Manliness” from which “the Spirit of the English is already too much broke, sunk, and declin’d” (46) nowadays.

Cleland makes the case for the sailors and those who joined them by narrating their actions so as to affirm their essential orderliness and restraint—as when, in a passage already cited, he asserts that the first bawdy house was dismantled “with so much Decency and Order, so little Confusion,” that “a Child of five Years old might have crossed the Street in the thickest of [the crowd] without the least Danger” (18)—but also, rather contrarily, by presenting the uprising as a boisterous, carnivalesque spectacle, “which it is not easy not to look on in a ludicrous light” (41). This last phrase seems to have particularly rankled Fielding, who writes in the final part of his True State that “the Riot here under Consideration, was of a very high and dangerous Nature, and far from deserving those light or ludicrous Colours which have been cast upon it.”

Cleland, however, repeatedly refers to the disorder as a “Frolic,” asking why, if the riot was as “horrid” (20) as the authorities tried to make it appear, none of its ringleaders was seized early on. “But no!” he writes, “the Impunity or Neglect they met with in their first Attempt, begot a fresh one; The jovial Sailors imagin’d probably the Government look’d on their Frolic with the same Eyes that they did; and having got too high a Relish of the Fun, as they call’d it, the Demolition of one of these Dens was not sufficient to stay their Stomach, now it was well up” (21).

The local residents watching the action unfold are also moved by the spirit of fun, as Cleland portrays in a scene from the first night, mocking the lexicon of moralistic outrage that came to be attached to the events:

The Neighbours too, though their Houses were not absolutely free from Danger of Fire, by the Sparks flying from the Bonfire, were so little alarm’d at this most
bloody outrageous Riot, this terrible Breach of the public Peace, that they stood at
their Doors, and look’d out of their Windows, with as little Concern, and perhaps
more Glee and Mirth, than if they had been at a Droll in Bartholomew Fair, seeing
the painted Scene of the renown’d Troy Town in Flames. (19)

The neighbors’ glee, however, is not simply a childish delight in the theatric-
ical spectacle of mayhem and flames; it is also an expression of solidarity with
the rioters’ aims. Cleland offers an anecdote of one Mrs. L——, “who kept a
Cheesemonger’s Shop hard by, and who being a married Woman, had perhaps
often seen with an evil Eye the Trade of those Houses” (19). Looking on the
bonfire, she “happen’d to clap her Hands, and express her Joy too vociferously;
which gave such Offence to some of the Runners, Imps, or Supports of these
Houses, that she had an Action brought against her for encouraging the Riot-
ers, which it is said she is not yet clear of.” The neighbors share in the sailors’
antipathy to “those obnoxious Houses” (23), whose keepers “not only live in a
constant State of Elusion, or Contempt of the Law, but also in a Sort of State of
Warfare with Mankind, preying on one Sex, and oppressing the other, and the
weakest” (15–16). The rioters, Cleland suggests, were animated by the spirit of
justice, even if the spirit of mirth at times overruns it.

As an instance of the former, Cleland offers the anecdote of “a little Boy,
who perhaps thought [it] no great Harm to save a gilt Cage out of the Fire, for
his Bird at Home, [and who] was discover’d carrying it off; when the Leaders
of the Mob took it from him, and threw it into the Fire, and his Age alone
prevented him from severer Punishment. Nothing in short,” he offers by way
of moral, “was imbezzled or diverted” (22)—and so confirms the ethical basis
of the crowd’s actions. Cleland acknowledges that there were also, among the
hangers-on, “Numbers of thoughtless giddy People, young and old, with more
Mirth in their Heads than Malice in their Hearts” (25); these, he surmises,
were “probably taken with the Humour of the Thing, and thought demolish-
ing a Bawdy-House was no such bad Joke.” The spirits of justice and mirth,
order and disorder, sit together uneasily here and throughout the pamphlet,
but underlying even the most unruly of the mob’s actions is a moral economy
that held bawdy houses as legitimate targets of popular violence and mirthful
demolition as a fitting expression of the “Odium and Contempt” (15) in which
they were held. Even the soldiers sent to protect the besieged bawdy houses
and disperse the crowds are in sympathy with the riot:

One might see their Countenances, by the Light of the unexpir’d Bonfire, a little
cast down and abash’d, at the Nature of the Service they were order’d upon: And
indeed their Behaviour shew’d yet more, that they were not much in Earnest about
the Matter; for instead of making any Bustle, to apprehend or secure the Ringlead-
ers of the Riot, than which by the Way nothing was less difficult, they loiter’d about,
rang’d themselves on both Sides the Street, or stood very compos’d round the Re-
 mains of the Bonfire, as if that had been what they were sent to Guard, and not the
Bawdy-Houses. (20)⁷

This unanimity of aversion to the bawdy houses and their owners—but not
to the “poor Damsels” confined within them—is, for Cleland, at the heart of
the popular support of the sailors’ crusade of destruction, and the Unfortunate
Penlez is structured to impress that sentiment on the reader from the start, so
that everything that follows has to be understood in light of it. For that reason,
the first quarter of the pamphlet is devoted to an impassioned denunciation of
“that Set of Men, vulgarly called Cock-Bawds” (4), by way of a somber exemplary
tale of the fall and wretched end of “one of those poor, young, tender Cre-a-
tures” who has been “noosed, and intangled in [the bawd’s] hellish Snares” (8).
If Cleland assumes here a stance remote from that of Fanny Hill’s idealizing
portrayal of Mrs. Cole’s “little family of love,” his graphic account of the cock
bawd’s corruption of one who was “once, probably, the Pride and Delight of a
fond Parent’s Eye” (9) recalls certain elements of Fanny’s own corruption at
Mrs. Brown’s, but with no compensating pleasure. Like Mrs. Brown—and the
wicked landlady Mrs. Jones, who presents Fanny “with a bill for arrears of rent,
diet, apothecary’s charges, nurse, &c.” (57) in order to compel her into the arms
of Mr. H—— the cock bawd, modeled on the vicious Peter Wood, “indul[ges]
and humour[s] the giddy, wild, thoughtless Turn, natural to that Age, till he
runs her up a competent Score, at any Rate, true or false, till he fixes a good
round Debt upon her; the imaginary Terrors of which, keep her in a State of
Slavery to him, scarce less cruel, and much more infamous, than that of a Capt-
tive in Barbary.” From then on, she is endlessly exploitable, and “nothing, no,
not her own Person, is her own Property, or at her own Disposal” (9).

The consequence of the young woman’s economic abjection is corruption
both bodily and moral. The captives of the cock bawd’s “Hackney-Seraglio of
wretched Women” (7) are “given up, at Discretion, to the Lust of every Ruffian
who can afford the Price he sets upon her, let his Person be never so loathsome
and infectious, to be touzed, and rumpled, like a Bit of dirty Paper”: an image
in which venereal and other forms of infection are figured as the crumpling
or soiling of the woman’s once spotless, unspoiled “tender delicate Person”
(9). Inwardly, she undergoes a similar transformation: “through the Ductility
and Aptness of that Age to take all Impressions, especially those which flatter the Senses, her Mind soon becomes tainted, and shares Corruption with her Person. Spirituous Liquors are resorted to, and employed to keep her Head hot, and indisposed to any Returns to Reason or Virtue; thus drowning all Memory of her former Condition, or Sense of her present one, in perhaps no better than the Gin-Lethe” (10). The young woman’s ductility and aptness to take “impressions” again evokes paper, a surface that can be imprinted or stained, and conveys a sexual double entendre that links physical and moral “tainting.”

Intoxication, too, at first a sort of sensory “flattery” or pleasure, leads in time to oblivion and a loss of self. That loss is also figured in a passage portraying the “poor young Women” as the “Spunges of an imperious Task-Master, who, if they have soaked up any Trifle, through the Generosity or Fondness of those they call so significantly their Cullies, are presently squeez’d, and oblig’d to give it up again, to the Cravings and insatiate Demands of the rapacious Pandar” (7–8). The obscene double meanings are closer to the surface here, “Spunges” evoking the vaginal sponges secreted in every bedpost of Mrs. Cole’s house in the Woman of Pleasure for the purposes of counterfeiting hymeneal ruptures (by squeezing “a prepar’d fluid blood” between the thighs at the right moment) and of contraception (as was common practice in the period). The sexual and financial are intertwined, from the use of “soaked up” to characterize the women’s receiving of “trifles” from their “cullies”—victims or dupes but, etymologically, also testicles (Fr. couillons, It. coglioni), as Cleland well knew—to the “cravings” and “insatiate demands” of the bawd, exacting payment both in cash and in kind. It all ends badly, with the “amiable Creature,” once “in pass to be a virtuous Wife, a happy Mother, and a Blessing and Ornament of Society,” reduced to “an infected gangreen’d Member,” ending “her miserable Life, either by public Justice, the Rottenness of Diseases, or the intrail-burning Fire of Spirits in a Gin-Shop” (14–15). There is symbolic justice, then, in the firing of the cock bawd’s possessions, and in the sailors’ chivalrous freeing of “the poor Damsels, who got off safe and unhurt” (18) from their house of captivity. By prefacing his account of the Strand riots and Penlez trial with the graphic tale of a young woman’s destruction at the hand of one of these “Enemies to Mankind” (8), the bawdy-house keepers, Cleland endeavors to enlist us sentimentally, and thus politically, on the side of those the government denounced as seditious.
The Case of Catherine Vizzani

One might have expected that his arrests on charges of obscenity, in 1749 and 1750, would have deterred Cleland from undertaking as his next project an explicit account of female same-sex seduction involving cross-dressing, dildos, and detailed examinations of its protagonist’s clitoris and hymen, but in March 1751, a year after his arrest for the *Memoirs of Fanny Hill*, the publisher W. Meyer issued Cleland’s latest work, on this very subject. Titled *Historical and Physical Dissertation on the Case of Catherine Vizzani*, the sixty-six-page booklet was provided with an elaborate subtitle (probably devised, as was normal, by the bookseller) to attract potential buyers. It was said to contain “the Adventures of a young Woman, born at Rome, who for eight Years passed in the Habit of a Man, was killed for an Amour with a young Lady; and being found, on Dissection, a true Virgin, narrowly escaped being treated as a Saint by the Populace.” Cleland’s booklet, first attributed to him by Roger Lonsdale in 1979, is a translation of an Italian text of 1744 by Giovanni Bianchi, professor of anatomy at Siena, with extensive emendations and commentary by Cleland. Bianchi’s text, the *Breve storia della vita di Catterina Vizzani*, had been published, after some difficulties with papal censors, by Simone Occhi in Florence (albeit with the false imprint of Venice); it is not known how Cleland came across it or why he decided to translate it, but there are many connections with his other writing of the period. As Cleland presents it, the Vizzani case resonates especially with the notion of “unsexed bodies” I have located in the *Woman of Pleasure*, a vision of eros as a force that unsettles and remakes the desiring subject.

Catterina Vizzani was born around 1719 in Rome “of ordinary Parentage, her Father being a Carpenter” (3). When she turns fourteen, “the Age of Love in our forward Climate,” Catherine, as Cleland calls her, shows no interest in boys “but would be continually romping with her own Sex, and some she caressed with all the Eagerness and Transport of a male Lover” (3). One in particular, named Margaret, she falls in love with, and while she courts her during the days “under Pretence of learning Embroidery . . . scarce a Night passed, but she appeared in Man’s Cloaths, under her Charmer’s Window” for the sake of “viewing Margaret’s captivating Charms, and saying soft Things to her” (3–4). Discovered there one night by Margaret’s father, who threatens “that the Governor of the City should learn of her Pranks,” Catherine, now sixteen, is scared into running off to Viterbo “in a Man’s Disguise,” under the name Giovanni Bordoni. So begins the narrative of cross-dressing adventures and restless movement that Susan Lanser has affiliated with the “sapphic picaresque,” a constellation of texts in-
cluding work by Daniel Defoe, Eliza Haywood, Delarivier Manley, Jane Barker, Charlotte Charke, and others from the first half of the eighteenth century. In these texts, Lanser writes, “homo-affectional or homo-erotic behaviour is bound up with some form of adventuring: the women move out of their home spaces into a public space, a borrowed space, or a space of movement such as the road, as if no domestic frame can contain or sustain them.”

Certainly Catherine’s continual wanderings, taking in Rome, Viterbo, Perugia, Arezzo, San Sepolcro, Montepulciano, Anghiari, Librafatta, Florence, Lucca, Poggibonsi, and Siena, suggest an unwillingness ever to settle down, and when she is finally stopped, age twenty-four, she is on the lam with two runaway sisters.

For the most part, Cleland’s English version stays close to the Italian original, but his style is both more discursive and more colloquial than Bianchi’s. For example, if Bianchi writes “Costei essendo d’età di quattordici anni” (she, being fourteen years of age), Cleland adds, as an aside, “the Age of Love in our forward Climate,” which draws attention to her precocity and plays on English notions of the erotic glamour of Italy. Bianchi’s Catterina “tenea dietro [alle fanciulle] ardentemente” (followed [the girls] ardently); Cleland’s is “continually romping” with them. Bianchi’s “amandole non come Fanciulla, ma come uomo stata fosse” (loving them not as a girl, but as if she were a man) becomes Cleland’s “and some she caressed with all the Eagerness and Transport of a male Lover,” making the physical expression of love explicit. When Catterina visits her beloved at night, Bianchi simply notes that she wishes to be near her (“vicino a lei si stava”), whereas Cleland presents her “viewing Margaret’s captivating Charms.” But Cleland is also more prone than Bianchi to moralize, if often lightheartedly, as when he translates “amore” as “whimsical Amour,” or when Bianchi’s claim that the story of Catterina will serve to show “quanto mai strani sieno gli appetiti umani” (just how strange are human desires) is rhetorically pumped up so that the story becomes “a pregnant Example of the shocking Ebullition of human Passions” (2).

On the other hand, in a later scene Cleland both draws out the comic potential that Bianchi passes over and calls into question the idea that Catherine’s conduct is against nature. A canon who recommended Giovanni for a post as gentleman’s servant is informed that he has proved to be “a young Vagabond, and the most abandoned Whoremaster that ever seduced Woman” (12). Summoning Giovanni/Catherine’s father to his house, the canon “con lui fortemente del difetto del figliuolo si lagnò” (complained strongly to him about his son’s fault), to which “il Padre allora non molto turbato mostrandosi freddamente rispose, che il suo figliuolo era stato sempre a quell modo donnajuolo” (the
father, not appearing to be very bothered, coolly replied that his son had always
been a lady’s man). In Cleland’s much-expanded version of this exchange, the
canon begins,

with the most serious Concern, to lay open to him the Particulars of his Son’s scan-
dalous Dissoluteness, charging it upon the Want of timely Instruction and Chastise-
ment, if not the Influence of a vicious Example. The Carpenter, who could hardly
keep his Countenance during a Remonstrance delivered with a dictatorial Solem-
nity, calmly answered, that, to his and his dear Wife’s inexpressible Grief, their Son
was a Prodigy of Nature, and that, in his very Childhood, they had observed some
astonishing Motions of Lust, which had unhappily gathered Vehemence with the
Growth of his Body; that, however, since such was the Case, and the Vigour of his
Constitution was not to be repressed by Words or Blows, Nature must e’en take its
Course; and, as for the vicious Example you are pleased to insinuate, I hope I am no
worse than my Neighbours. (13–14; phrases in boldface added by JC)

Cleland uses Bianchi’s report, which he translates more or less literally, as the
jumping-off point for a duel between the two speakers: the canon accuses Viz-
zani not just of bad parenting but of having set a vicious example, while Vizzani
can barely keep a straight face at the canon’s misplaced remonstrance or his
gullibility in taking Catterina for Giovanni in the first place. But in a way both
speakers are objects of Cleland’s irony, for while Vizzani enjoys playing off the
canon’s mistaken belief that Giovanni is a wicked lothario intent on ruining as
many girls as he can, his answer—dramatically revealed later in the scene—is
that “this same Child of mine, whose Irregularities have made such a Noise, is
no Male, but as truly, in all Respects, a Female, as the Woman who bore her”
(15). But this revelation, far from wiping away the accusation of sexual immoral-
ity, only makes it the more shocking (a Lesbian lothario!), although this seems
not to have entered Vizzani’s mind.65

Or perhaps it has: perhaps he is well aware that Catherine is a tireless se-
ducer of women and, “vicious” as he is, takes pleasure in this. That could be
in keeping with his mock expressions of grief at the child being “a Prodigy of
Nature”—always an ambiguous phrase, hovering between monster and won-
der, the unnatural and the perfection of nature. It is ambiguous, too, whether in
referring to Catherine as “he” Vizzani is simply deceiving the canon or is iden-
tifying her nature as masculine. Were her/his childhood “Motions of Lust” as-
tonishing tout court or only astonishing because of his/her real sex? Whatever
he thinks Catherine “is,” and whatever he feels about it, he links the vehemence
or unruliness of his/her desires to the “Growth of his Body” and “Vigour of his
Constitution,” suggesting that they are physiologically innate and that “Nature must e’en take its Course.” Is Catherine’s “Man’s Disguise,” then, a part of her nature? If so, it is not a disguise at all, but an expression of her inmost self. With its dramatic ironies and ambiguities, the scene Cleland elaborates from Bianchi’s original is both more comic and more provocative in its foregrounding of questions of gender and sex, eros and the body. Even such phrases as “as truly . . . a Female as the Woman who bore her” or “I hope I am no worse than my Neighbours” raise unsettling questions: how female is the woman who bore her, then? And what other “prodigies” await discovery in his neighbors’ houses? Through his expansion of such passages in Bianchi, Cleland raises questions about the origins of Catherine’s desire and accentuates the erotic potential of the situations Bianchi renders in more neutral terms.

After leaving home, Catherine-as-Giovanni becomes servant to a series of gentlemen, and while none can fault her for her work—“for, besides Reading, making of Chocolate, and Cookery, she was very dextrous at Pen, Comb, and Razor”—all reprove her “for incessantly following the Wenches, and being so barefaced and insatiable in her Amours” (8). She not only courts them as before, but “She had Recourse to several delusive Impudicities, not only to establish the Certainty, but raise the Reputation of her Manhood.” And it is here, just when he has aroused our curiosity, that Cleland cuts, for the first and only time, something significant from Bianchi’s text: symbolically enough, the description of a phallus. Here is the passage in Italian:

Anzi per parere uomo da vero un bel Piuolo di Cuojo ripieno di Cenci s’era fatto, che sotto la camiscia teneva, e talora, ma sempre coperto a suoi Compagni per baldanza di soppiatto mostrava, per cui in Anghiari in poca d’ora corse fama che Giovanni nel fatto delle femmine più d’ogni altro valesse, la qual fama egli a caro grandemente avea che si spargesse.

In my translation:

Indeed, in order to seem like a real man, she had made herself a nice leather dildo stuffed with rags, which she wore under her shirt, and sometimes she dared to show it stealthily to her companions, though always half concealed, so that in a short time the rumor spread throughout Anghiari that when it came to pleasing women Giovanni had it over every other man, a rumor it was his dearest wish to have spread around.

Instead of translating this, Cleland launches into a rant, which has been the object of some critical attention, mostly negative. “The Doctor,” he writes indig-
nantly of Bianchi, “enters into a nauseous Detail of her Impostures, which is the more inexcusable, they not being essential to the main Scope of the Narrative. These, if agreeable to the Italian Goût, would shock the Delicacy of our Nation” (8–9). Coming from an author who, the same month The Case of Catherine Vizzani was published, deplored the “vitiated palate” and “depraved . . . taste” of the English reading public in the pages of the Monthly Review, this appeal to “the Delicacy of our Nation” might ring some irony-alarm bells, and this editorial comment indeed proves disingenuous when checked against what Cleland has let into his own text, for he has left nothing material out.69 It is true that he cuts this scene of Giovanni letting his friends have a look at his apparently impressive phallus, but since he describes the dildo in some detail later—“a leathern Contrivance, of a cylindrical Figure, which was fastened below the Abdomen, and had been the chief Instrument of her detestable Imposture” (34)—he cannot be said to have removed it from the text, only to have deferred its explicit portrayal. Cleland’s cut here is not an expression of moral outrage but a ploy to fire the reader’s imagination. He doesn’t simply excise the passage, he thunders against it as nauseous, inexcusable, and shocking for a full page: who could resist the temptation to fill in such a blank? Feigning to spare us from details too obscene to translate, but translating them just the same, Cleland plays the part of zealous moralist even as he incites us to wonder about the “nauseous Details” he for the moment denies us. The effect is to produce a more dramatic scene of revelation when Giovanni is finally exposed and so actually to stress the importance of the “leathern Machine” (37) in the overall narrative economy, as the crucial marker of Catherine’s masculine identity and desires.

After this deviation from Bianchi’s text, Cleland falls back into line, recounting some of the other stratagems Catherine adopts: calling on surgeons “to buy Medicaments for the Removal of Disorders, which she pretended to have caught from infectious Women” (10), and deflecting her laundress’s suspicions about the stains that appear on her shirt “at certain Times” of each month by saying these also result from venereal disease. Cleland goes Bianchi one better by having Catherine drop a hint to the laundress that the reason the girls won’t let him alone is that they have heard “that Nature had been very liberal to him”—and one hint is enough to ensure “that within a short Time, it was whispered about that Giovanni was the best Woman’s Man, and the most addicted to that alluring Sex of all the Men in that Part of the Country” (11). Such whisperings lead to a series of amorous adventures, culminating in Giovanni’s elopement with “a very lovely young Gentlewoman, Niece to the Minister” of Librafatta. He, “knowing the Temptation of Beauty, and the Lubricity of Youth,
kept a strict Guard over his Niece” (21). Weary of his vigilance, she plots to escape with Giovanni but cannot resist telling her sister. “This mettlesome Girl commended the Project to the Skies,” Cleland writes, “but added, that she also, having long been tired of living with such an old Cuff, would take this charming Opportunity of freeing herself from him” (23). She threatens, in fact, to tell their uncle if she is not allowed to go with them—“and then, where is your Journey to Rome?” (24). Giovanni, when he learns he is to elope with two sisters, is delighted, and says, “It were Pity a Girl of so much Mercury should stay behind” (25), so they set out. Pursued by the uncle’s chaplain and servants, the trio are soon run to earth, and the chaplain, to whom Cleland ascribes motives of jealousy (of Giovanni’s erotic appeal) and greed (for monetary reward), orders the servants to fire on him:

The Servants, pursuant to their Leader’s Command, presented their Pieces at Giovanni, who having a masculine Spirit, as well as masculine Desires, not at all daunted at such a threatening Sight, drew a Pistol which hung at her Belt, and presented it towards the Chaplain. This unexpected Resolution put them to a Stand, and both Sides continued watching each other’s Motions, whilst the poor Girls were shrieking, and wringing their Hands. (28; phrases in boldface added by JC)

The details Cleland adds to the scene heighten its tension—and its comedy. While in the original Giovanni aims his pistol at the servants, here he turns it on the chaplain, producing a more dangerously unpredictable crisscross standoff; accordingly, everyone freezes, watching and waiting for the least flicker of motion from the others. But in the background he adds the sisters’ handwringing and shrieking, which can be read as comic or pathetic but in either case ratchets up the noise level and so the volatility of the scene. In the midst of it Cleland locates the undaunted Giovanni, characterized by “a masculine Spirit, as well as masculine Desires,” thus returning to the questions of gender and nature, and of the origins of desire, that run through the text in its English reworking.

The spell of the armed standoff is broken when Giovanni, “considering that her Sex would secure her from any very bad Consequence of this Affair, and that one Girl’s running away with two others might . . . be slightly passed over as a Frolick, rather than severely animadverted upon as a Crime” (29), decides to turn herself in, and lowers her pistol. Instead of defusing the threat of violence, however, her action only shifts its focus, for the chaplain, now safe from
danger, compels one of the servants not to arrest Giovanni but to shoot him. Wishing to do as little hurt as possible, the servant aims at Giovanni’s thigh and fires, but the gunshot unleashes havoc, not only wounding Catherine but killing a nearby hunting dog “and fracturing a Leg of a Boy of about twelve Years of Age, who happening to come by, had stopt, as it was very natural, to see what was the Matter” (30). Catherine and the boy are taken to a hospital in Siena, where, by chance, Bianchi’s manservant happens to see her and “recognizes” her as Giovanni, whom he had met when they were both lodged in the same inn in Florence “for above forty Days, and Bed-fellows the greatest Part of that Time” (33). This servant tells Bianchi that Giovanni “desired, above all things, that I would be so good as to come and see him,” which Bianchi promises to do, but as he admits, it slips his mind. Catherine develops a fever and an infection in her lungs and, anticipating the possibility of death, tells her secret to a kind nun: “that she was not only a Female but a Virgin, conjuring her . . . to let no Person whatever know it till her Death, and then to declare it publicly, that she might be buried in a Woman’s Habit, and with the Garland on her Head, an honorary Ceremony observed among us in the Burial of Virgins” (35). It is a curious and poignant request, on which neither Bianchi nor Cleland offers any comment: that Catherine, who in life aimed at public fame as a cocksman, wishes in death to be publicly displayed as a virginal maid, her two gendered selves kept apart by the boundary between death and life.

It is only now, with his protagonist on the brink of dying, that Cleland reveals her “leathern Contrivance” to the reader, as it “became so troublesome, that she loosened it, and laid it under her Pillow” (35). The “nauseous Detail” of Catherine’s “Impostures,” which Cleland has withheld, acquires the status of a transcendental signifier, the phallus by which Giovanni’s masculine identity was secured. But as is the fate of all such signifiers, it proves to be hollow. After Catherine’s death, “the leathern Machine, which was hid under the Pillow, fell into the Hands of the Surgeon’s Mates in the Hospital, who immediately were for ripping it up, concluding that it contained Money, or something else of Value, but they found it stuffed only with old Rags” (37). It is almost too perfect a symbol: the sign by which Catherine established her sexual, and thus social, status as a male, with all the prerogatives attending that status (freedom of movement and the like), is a simulacrum that exposes the illusory basis of all phallic authority. But illusory as it may have been, Giovanni’s phallic glamour and prowess bought Catherine eight years of sapphic-picaresque freedom, to adapt Lanser’s term—or at least relative freedom, for Giovanni, of course, is
always a servant and a dependent. The phallus acts as a kind of passport; indeed it is not clear in either Bianchi’s or Cleland’s text whether Catherine/Giovanni puts it to sexual use or merely shows it off to sustain her vagabond-whoremaster persona.

In any case, its discovery after her death by the hospital attendants, coinciding with that of “her prominent Breasts” when they begin to remove her body, leads to a closer scrutiny, and one of the surgeon’s mates comes to Bianchi to tell him, “with a Blush” (38), that Giovanni has, “upon the Denudation of her Body, proved to be a Woman, with a fine sound Hymen, and other Tokens of an untouched Virginity.” “Incited [by] Curiosity,” Bianchi finally goes to the hospital to see her, and in due course conducts a postmortem. He verifies that “the Entireness of the Hymen incontestably proved her being actually a Virgin” (39), but this occasions a delay in the proceedings, for the news of her virginity leads the local religious leaders and townspeople to wish to proclaim Catherine “nothing less than a Saint, having preserved her Chastity inviolate, amidst the strongest Temptations” (40): the many times she shared her bed with male servants. But for Bianchi, the physiological fact of her intact hymen, while medically significant—he was engaged in a dispute with other Sienese doctors as to the existence of the hymen and had amassed a collection of them, to which in turn he would add Catterina Vizzani’s—was morally insignificant. He argues, rather, in Cleland’s translation, “that her making Love, and with uncommon Protervity, to Women, wherever she came, and her seducing at last two young Women to run away from their Uncle, were flagrant Instances of a libidinous Disposition; Proceedings incompatible with any virtuous Principle, or so much as Decency” (41). There is no correspondence between literal virginity and feminine virtue.

After “the People’s Ferment” (42), provoked by rumors of Catherine’s sanctity, has calmed down, Bianchi returns to the hospital “and caused an Incision to be made in the Body, and the Parts of Generation to be disvered with the nicest Exactness, which were carried to my House to be thoroughly examined by a regular Dissection.” Having verified that her hymen is intact, Bianchi turns to the clitoris, as if to put to the test the early modern consensus that excessive female sexual desire, and especially desire for other women, is connected to bodily, specifically clitoral, excess—a consensus whose emblem was the monstrous and unruly figure of the tribade. What Bianchi finds undermines the received medical wisdom: “The Clitoris of this young Woman was not pendulous, nor of any extraordinary Size, as the Account from Rome made it, and as is said, to be that of all those Females, who, among the Greeks, were called Trib-
ades, or who followed the Practices of Sappho; on the contrary, her’s was so far from any unusual Magnitude, that it was not to be ranked among the middle-sized, but the smaller” (43–44). Again, there is no correspondence between the truth of the body and the identity of the desiring subject: bodily excess is not the origin of excessive or unruly desire.

And that is where Bianchi leaves the question of sexual or gender identity: it cannot be located in or mapped onto the body. The Breve storia continues for another half dozen pages, all scrupulously translated by Cleland, in which Bianchi examines Catherine’s internal organs and takes issue with other scholars of anatomy. He assigns a cause of death—an infection of the lungs produced by gangrene—and ends with a brief account of the boy whose leg was shattered by the shot that killed Catherine. He too dies, and Bianchi concludes with a call for Italian surgeons to trust their manual skills rather than potions or drugs, suggesting that the boy’s life might have been saved by “a timely and proper Amputation” (50). Nothing, it seems, could have saved Catherine’s.

Having brought his translation to a close, Cleland now appends fifteen pages of “Remarks upon the Foregoing Dissertation” to the fifty pages of Bianchi’s narrative. He begins by backhandedly defending Bianchi against charges of “bad Habits or vitiated Inclinations” (52) for writing on such a subject: it is, rather, Italy that is to blame. As before, when he contrasted the Italian Goût to “the Delicacy of our Nation” (8), Cleland offers a defensive model of national/cultural difference to account for the supposed immorality of Italian literature: “The Wits, and even the learned Men of Italy, have been long distinguished for their Inclination to Discourses of this Nature, which are frequently interpreted in such a Manner as to do no great Honour . . . to their Morals” (51). But this may be unjust, he suggests, “since, in a warm Country like theirs, where Impurities of all Sorts are but too frequent, it may very well happen that such strange Accidents may . . . arise as highly to excite both their Wonder and their Attention” (51–52). A text such as Bianchi’s original case history, then, simply reflects the “Impurities” endemic to such a “warm” country as Italy and indeed demonstrates the author’s “Skill in Anatomy” and “Acquaintance with human Nature” (52). Cleland’s defense of Bianchi is genuine, but is also, of course, a preemptive justification for translating him into English. Yet the clichéd contrast between Italian “impurity” and English “delicacy” is at odds with Cleland’s contemporaneous attacks on the vitiated and depraved tastes of his countrymen and, of course, with his own professional investment in bringing Italian, as well as French, works to the British reading public. If Italy is a place of impurity, should we not set up a system of quarantine to prevent infection from its cul-
tural products? Such was the logic of the antisodomite texts quoted in chapter 3, whose authors advocated prohibiting such practices as that of “Mens Kissing each other,” a “Fashion brought over from Italy (the Mother and Nurse of Sodomy).” By invoking the nationalist moralism of such texts, Cleland both hides behind its protective cover—a reaction to his practical experience of the dangers of flouting censorial authority—and undermines it from within, twitting the smug parochialism of English audiences and authors.

But if “the Case of this young Woman,” Cleland writes, “is certainly very extraordinary, and may therefore justify . . . the Pains which this learned and industrious Man has taken about her” (52), he irritably notes that “it does not appear that he has assigned any Cause whatever, or so much as advanced any probable Conjecture on this extravagant Turn of her lewdness, notwithstanding it surprized him so much” (52–53). It is to make up for this deficiency that Cleland adds his concluding “Remarks” on Bianchi’s text. The “irregular and violent Inclination” by which Vizzani “render’d herself infamous,” he states, “must either proceed from some Error in Nature”—that is, some bodily malformation—or “some Disorder or Perversion in the Imagination” (53). Bianchi’s detailed account of the dissection of Catherine’s body has ruled out the first, so we ought “to acquit Nature of any Fault in this strange Creature, and to look for the Source of so odious and so unnatural a Vice, only in her Mind” (54). The logic of this is clear enough, but the distinction he posits between nature on the one hand and mind on the other is starker and more straightforward than emerges from what follows, or than Cleland implies in his comments in the text itself, as when he declares that Vizzani’s story shows “that the Wantonness of Fancy, and the Depravity of Nature, are at as great a Height as ever” (2). Here, wanton fancy and depraved nature go together; no either/or is necessary or even possible. And so it proves from Cleland’s speculative reconstruction of the origins of Catherine’s perverse desires.

Echoing the canon’s charge against Peter Vizzani that his son’s dissoluteness was owing to “the Influence of a vicious Example” (13), Cleland writes that as “there was nothing amiss” (52) with Catherine’s body, “it seems therefore most likely that this unfortunate and scandalous Creature had her Imagination corrupted early in her Youth, either by obscene Tales that were voluntarily told in her Hearing, or by privately listening to the Discourses of the Women, who are too generally corrupt in that Country” (54). Her “extravagant” desires were implanted or elicited not by seduction but by “obscene tales,” by women’s gossip—that is, by literature. “Her Head being thus filled with vicious Inclinations, perhaps before she received any Incitements from her Constitution,”
Cleland speculates, “might prompt her to those vile Practices” (55). Sexual desires, and the gender identity Catherine constructs in order to satisfy them, are products of cultural contagion, stories overheard, and are as unfixed by nature as a body that can “be” male or female at will. Cleland goes on to suggest that once perverse desire takes hold in the imagination, “this might occasion a preternatural Change in the animal Spirits, and a Kind of venereal Fury, very remote, and even repugnant to that of her Sex” (55)—unsexing the physical frame. He seems to be thinking along similar lines to those of the materialist Doctor Bordeu in Diderot’s 1769 *Le Rêve de d’Alembert (D’Alembert’s Dream)*, who observes that “les organes produisent les besoins, et réciproquement les besoins produisent les organes” (our organs produce desires, and, conversely, our desires [or needs] produce organs). Catherine prosthetically supplies the organ her needs or desires dictate, and this altered body is what her female lovers see, feel, and experience—or at any rate imagine—as well. After her death, that unsexed body is dismembered by the surgeon’s mates, who tear apart the “leathern Machine,” and by Bianchi, who “dissevers” her “Parts of Generation” from the rest of her body “with the nicest Exactness,” and it appears that her “extravagant” actions left no imprint on the body. “Venereal Fury” is a fever of the imagination, not an organic disorder, but this does not make it any less real in its effects.

As Cleland presents it, the Vizzani case is ultimately about the circulation of perverse desire as fantasy, as communal narrative, as moral contagion—not about deficient, excessive, or otherwise remarkable bodies. It is only when we become aware of what others want, by way of stories inciting desire, that we begin to conceive what we want ourselves. Certainly the reader’s imagination is full, by the end of the text, of “flagrant Instances of a libidinous Disposition” (41), so that like the young Catherine—“her Head . . . thus filled with vicious Inclinations”—we come away from reading with “Incitements” that “might prompt [us] to those vile Practices” (55). Those “Incitements” have been lodged in our English-reading heads by Cleland’s writing. Yet he maintains that the Vizzani case affords (if that were at all necessary) a new Argument for suppressing those scandalous and flagitious Books, that are not only privately but publickly handed about for the worst Purposes, as well as Prints and Pictures calculated to inflame the Passions, to banish all Sense of Shame, and to make the World, if possible, more corrupt and profligate than it is already. We are very certain that all Things of this Sort must have a very bad Tendency. (63–64)
But as Emma Donoghue asks, sensibly enough, “Is Catherine Vizzani not one of these ‘scandalous books’?” It is, and of course Cleland knows that it is. A writer as rhetorically supple and insidious as he shows himself to be in the Woman of Pleasure could hardly be unaware of how this book would be read. In fact, in the same issue of the Monthly Review to which Cleland contributed his review of Peregrine Pickle, The Case of Catherine Vizzani was duly noted (by Cleland? or by Griffiths?), but the work itself deemed unworthy of review: “We beg leave to decline any further mention of this article, for a reason that our readers will easily guess at; and we are sure that the female part of them will as easily pardon the omission.” Such a silence cannot help but provoke any potential reader’s curiosity, and Cleland (or whoever wrote this notice) seems slyly to suggest that female readers in particular might find the book inflaming. Far be any such intention from the author’s mind, of course. Indeed “the only Reason that can justify the making Things of this Sort public,” Cleland writes, “is to facilitate their Discovery, and thereby prevent their ill Consequences, which indeed can scarce be prevented any other Way” (62). As was also true of the sodomitical scene in the Woman of Pleasure, the “making Things of this Sort public” is both an incitement and a warning, or more precisely a warning against the very incitement it provides. It is not only among Italian women but everywhere in this “corrupt and profligate” world that disorders and perversions of the imagination are liable to take root. And not only perverse desire, but desire itself, is secondhand, provoked as an involuntary effect of reading, listening, watching. A susceptibility to deviance is implicit in the capacity to desire at all.

Forced and Unnatural Transplantation

Cleland’s “Remarks” on the Vizzani case end with a grouchy diatribe against what he alleges to be a common practice in his time, “that of Women appearing in public Places in Mens Cloaths; a Thing that manifests an extreme Assurance, and which may have many ill Consequences” (65)—none of which he specifies. Given the ironies and ambiguities of the whole work, it is unclear if cross-dressing is one of Cleland’s bêtes noires or if he is mocking the moralism of antimasquerade and other reformers of manners, but in either case, he concludes by describing the practice as one of “those Alterations in our Policy and Manners, which have arisen from our Politeness, and our Desire to copy Foreigners in every Thing” (66). Cultural imitation was weighing on Cleland’s mind, as in the complaint quoted before about the “flood of novels, tales, romances, and other monsters of the imagination, which have been ei-
ther wretchedly translated, or even more unhappily imitated, from the French,” and he may have meant to incriminate himself for his part in unleashing this flood. For translations were a substantial part of his literary output in the 1750s. From the Italian came Catherine Vizzani and Titus Vespasian: A Tragedy (1755), based on Metastasio’s melodrama La Clemenza di Tito (later adapted as the libretto for Mozart’s opera); from the French, Pinot-Duclos’s Memoirs, the 1753 Dictionary of Love, and Tombo-Chiqui; or, The American Savage (1758). The last, a three-act comedy, may have been written with David Garrick in mind, as Titus Vespasian was, but neither was ever produced, and they might be considered more or less complete failures—though he seems to wish to save face in his “Advertisement” to Tombo-Chiqui, writing that readers “may be assured it is not published under the disgrace of rejection from our theatres, since it was never offered to them.”

The Dictionary, by contrast, was probably, after the Woman of Pleasure, Cleland’s most commercially successful text, reprinted and adapted numerous times over the following several decades by booksellers not only in London but Edinburgh and Philadelphia as well. It seems to have crossed over the gulf of what Cleland calls “the difference of language and idiom” more successfully than Tombo-Chiqui, whose French original had been “received in France with the highest applause,” but whose English version sank without a trace.

The reason for their contrasting fortunes has less to do with any difference in quality of the translations, both of which are spirited and clear, than with the different approaches Cleland took to the problem not of linguistic but of cultural difference: how to cross that other gulf of “the Difference of Manners betwixt his own Nation and that of the French; a Difference which must naturally render some Passages less interesting, less susceptible of Application than a thorough Conformity would have admitted.” The reason for Tombo-Chiqui’s failure to repeat Arlequin sauvage’s success may be Cleland’s fidelity to the original, whose mixture of commedia dell’arte foolery and proto-enlightenment philosophizing was alien to the tastes of English audiences and actors. With the Dictionary, on the other hand, Cleland was freer in his approach, cutting extensively, rewriting dialogues, adding significant new entries of his own, thus recognizing, in tackling a work whose subject is the unreliability of language and the difficulties of interpretation, that “too servile and stiff an Attachment to the Letter of the Original” risked betraying its “just Sense” and “utility” to an English readership, and so making it less marketable a commodity.

The premise of the Dictionary of Love is that love itself is a language, whose terms require translation into a more transparent idiom. On one level, as Cle-
land writes in his preface, this means that love, “having lost its plain unso-
phisticate nature, and being now reduced into an art, has, like other arts, had
recourse to particular words and expressions” (v); like “physic” or heraldry, love
has its own “hard technical nomenclature . . . of which it no more behooves
lovers to be ignorant, than for seamen to be unacquainted with the terms of
navigation” (iv–v). Nature is no longer a valid guide and indeed has been trans-
muted into a mere simulacrum of itself: “All the tribute that is now paid to Na-
ture,” Cleland writes, “is only a preservation of the appearances of it, to hinder
Art from defeating its Ends by being too transparent” (vi). But as this last point
suggests, the problem Cleland confronts in creating a dictionary of love is not
primarily lexical—not a matter of defining unfamiliar terms, as it might be in
heraldry or medicine—but forensic: the challenge of unmasking the essentially
criminal aims underlying the cant of professed lovers, whom he equates with
counterfeiters. The counterfeit language of love is not only false but malicious,
meant to entrap. The dictionary’s target audience—“young people, and espe-
cially of the fair sex, whose mistakes are the most dangerous” (x–xi)—will be
“taught to distinguish the Birmingham-trash, so often palmed upon them, for
the true lawful coin of the kingdom of Love, in which nothing is commoner
than false coiners” (xi). At least this last sentence holds open the possibility
that there is a “true lawful coin” of love, a transparent language whose words
correspond to things, and in which there is no difference between real and “ap-
parent signification” (ix). But if that true coin exists somewhere, there is no sign
of it in the Dictionary, whose entries are concerned rather to expose truths that
the language of everyday social life obscures. Here, for example, is the entry for
slave—not translated from the French, but original:

SLAVE. I am your slave; you use your slave too cruelly; signifies, “The more power I can
make you believe you have over me, the more I shall gain over you.”

Many of the entries have a similar structure: the word is followed by a defini-
tion, or an example of common or hackneyed usage, and then a translation
laying bare the real meaning of the clichéd phrase, usually the inverse of its
apparent sense.

In other entries, the translation or unmasking is more fully elaborated, cre-
ating a miniature narrative of amorous intrigue or deceit. In “To Love,” for
example, based on the original’s “Aimer,” Cleland offers three tiny stories to
illustrate the broad claim that “most of the present Love is what our blunt an-
cestors called by another very coarse name [most likely ‘whoredom’], or what is
infinitely coarser yet, though unblushingly pronounced, Sordid Interest.” The third of these stories, radically revamped from the French, runs as follows:

When young Sharply says to old liquorish Lady Wishfort, I love you, the true English of this is, “I am a younger born [i.e., the younger of two sons], unfortunately born under a star that gave me the soul of a prince, and the fortune of a beggar. No man had ever a stronger passion for pleasures and expence than I have: but I am ruined at play; I am over head and ears in debt. As you have then a fortune that may stop all my leaks, and set me on float, let us supply one another’s wants.” And ‘tis ten to one but he carries his point with the fond dotard, who never considers that she is making a bubble’s bargain, for one of those few things which money can never purchase.

Turning love into “true English,” Cleland gives us the germ of a narrative of sexual and economic predation, one of those “terrible quid-pro-quo’s” of which “modern gallantry” (x) consists: Lady Wishfort’s wealth for young Sharply’s sexual favors. Even though their relationship at this stage is mutually exploitative, in the longer term it is she, not he, who is making “a bubble’s bargain,” as once he has (by marriage) his hands on her money, he will have no more need to “supply [her] wants” or repeat the delusive phrase “I love you.” Cleland adapts one of his favorite metaphors, of life as a ship’s voyage, and “new-casts” it, so that the gambling debts of the profligate younger son of a rich father are rendered as “leaks” in the ship of self, which Lady Wishfort’s (liquid) wealth, like pitch, will “stop.” He adapts the same metaphor in his entry on rakes—not translated from French—writing that a “reformed Rake . . . is a being worn out, and unfit to proceed on so great a voyage as that of matrimony” and continuing, “a woman who ventures upon him is like one who would choose to put to sea in a shattered, leaky, worm-eaten vessel, that is sure to founder before half the voyage is over.” The metaphor, again, is anything but original, but the adjectives “shattered, leaky, worm-eaten” evoke the ravages of venereal disease, another instance of new-casting old materials and so confounding the distinction between originality and imitation.

Cleland soft-pedals his debt to the Dictionnaire in his own Dictionary’s preface, writing that “the following work then owes its existence to an idea taken from one of their [French] authors” but not pointing out that much of it is merely translated. Yet some of the most interesting entries in his text are not taken from Dreux du Radier, among them a group of entries addressing errant or failed forms of masculinity: beau, coxcomb, fop, fribble, and rake. Of these,
the most striking for its resonances with Cleland’s other work is the entry on *fribble*, an unfamiliar term today. Here, too, Cleland is working with “materials not [his] own,” for his entry is prompted by one of David Garrick’s comic roles, the simpering, effeminate fop Mr. Fribble, from his 1747 comedy *Miss in Her Teens*. According to the play’s heroine, Biddy, “he speaks like a Lady for all the World, and never swears . . . but wears nice white Gloves, and tells me what Ribbons become my Complexion.” In the *Dictionary*, the fribble is a species, not only an individual, and while Cleland’s fribbles share Garrick’s Fribble’s “unmanly” interest in fashion and sewing, they act out much more explicitly the potential sodomitical implications of such effeminacy. When Mrs. Cole, in *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, “explained” sodomy to Fanny, she portrayed the sodomites as

stript of all the manly virtues of their own sex, and fill’d up with only the very worst vices and follies of ours . . . they were scarce less execrable than ridiculous in their monstrous inconsistency, of loathing and contemning women, and all at the same time, apeing their manners, airs, lisp, skuttle, and, in general, all their little modes of affectation, which become them at least better, than they do these unsex’d male misses. (159–160)

The definition of *fribble* in the *Dictionary* repeats much of Mrs. Cole’s harangue:

*Fribble*. This word signifies one of those ambiguous animals, who are neither male nor female; disclaimed by his own sex, and the scorn of both . . . Without any of the good qualities of their own sex, they affect all the bad ones, all the impertinencies and follies of the other; whilst what is no more than ridiculous, and sometimes even a grace in the women, is nauseous and shocking in them . . . One would think, in short, that these equivocall animals imitated the women, out of complaisance to them, that they might have the higher opinion of their own sex, from seeing that there were men who endeavoured to come as near it as possible. But so far are they from succeeding, that they disfigure the graces, caricature the faults, and have none of the virtues of that amiable sex.

In another passage from this entry, Cleland imports the “plague-spots” that in Mrs. Cole’s account are “visibly imprinted on all that are tainted” with the “infamous passion” (159). But in the *Dictionary* these are not only not bodily marks, they are signs of the absence of any such marks: “the muff, the ermin-facing, a cluster-ring, the stone-buckle, and now and then a patch, that on them does not always suppose a pimple, are the plague-spots, in which the folly of these less than butterflies breaks out.” The plague spot is just a bauble that can be put on
Tombo-Chiqui, too, is concerned with the gap between apparent and real meanings, words and things. Cleland shifts the action of Delisle’s *Arlequin sauvage* from Marseille to London and renames the characters so as to move them away from their commedia dell’arte sources: Scapin (It. *Scapino*), the hero’s servant, becomes Tom; the rich merchant Pantalon (It. *Pantalone*), father of the hero’s inamorata, becomes Golding; and, most notably, Arlequin (It. *Arlecchino*), the cunning fool, becomes Tombo-chiqui. Cleland may, as Thomas Altherr has suggested, have drawn this last name from the historical Tomochichi, a Creek headman whose friendship with the British general James Oglethorpe led him to visit England, meeting George II among others, in 1734, or he may just have chosen it for its play on “cheeky.” By contrast, Cleland sticks closely to Delisle’s text, and despite the weight he gives the Native American origins of the play’s central character by subtitling it *The American Savage*, he does not expand on the original’s generic Arcadia, as in Tombo-chiqui’s reply to the question, “of what country are you”:

*Tombo-chiqui.* Me? I came out of a vast great wood, where there grow none but such ignorant creatures as myself, who do not know a tittle of the laws, and yet are naturally honest. Hah, hah, hah, we want no lessons, not we, to know our duty. We are so innocent, that our reason alone is sufficient for us. (14)

“America” functions as a place-name given to the philosophical abstraction “nature,” in a kind of thought experiment going back at least as far as Montaigne’s
essay “Of Cannibals” from about 1570: what happens if, instead of judging the “savage” or “natural” from the perspective of the “civilized,” we reverse the positions of observer and observed? As Tombo-chiqui’s patron or friend Clerimont puts it in the play’s opening scene:

’twas to procure myself the pleasure of this surprize of his, that I took care he should not be instructed in our manners: the quickness of his perception, and the native shreudness of his answers, gave me the first idea of bringing him to Europe in all his ignorance. I had a notion it would divert me to observe pure simple nature working in him, in comparison with the laws, arts, and sciences amongst us. The contrast will doubtless be singular. (6)

Of course, the positions of observer and observed are not really reversed here—Tombo-chiqui’s naïve or natural reactions to what he sees are themselves the object of Clerimont’s amused, if also admiring, observation. But at one moment of crisis, when Clerimont and his friend Mirabel are on the verge of a duel, Tombo-chiqui’s quick perception and natural reason do prevail over the rivals’ rash violence, and it is he who engineers the play’s happy resolution, so earning the right to pronounce its moral lesson:

Hence-forward let Nature and Reason be your Pilot-stars: they are surer lights than all your laws put together. The most these [laws] can do for you, is to supply imperfectly your want of natural Reason, with an artificial or a forced one. In short, you are Men in nothing, but so far as you resemble us, whom you call savages. (55; phrases in boldface added by JC)

This speech is one of the very few Cleland has enlarged, the additions making Tombo-chiqui more clearly the author’s mouthpiece (as a sign of which he sneaks in the metaphor of life as a voyage, with nature and reason the sailor-self’s “Pilot-stars”). The final phrase also underlines one of the work’s key themes: uses and misuses of language, or the problem of what to call things.

This theme is articulated around a number of antitheses: ignorance and sense, law (or art) and nature, reason and folly, riches and poverty, slavery and freedom, sanity and madness, civilized and savage. In the single day the action occupies, Tombo-chiqui has a number of chance encounters: first, with a group comprising a young woman (Sylvia), her father (Golding), and her maid (Violetta), with the last of whom Tombo-chiqui falls immediately in love; second, with a “Jew Pedlar,” whose intentions Tombo-chiqui misconstrues, not having any notion of buying and selling or of money; third, with a “Stranger” in distress who mistakes him for a highwayman. These scenes alternate with
others in which Clerimont “explains” civilized institutions and customs to his friend—among them laws, compliments, private property, and money—these lessons invariably ending with Tombo-chiqui more convinced than before of the folly of the civilized. As with his lessons, so with his observations of the Londoners he meets: all lead Tombo-chiqui to reverse the terms of the play’s organizing antitheses, expressed by way of a paradox. For example, told there is a place called Bedlam, “where they put mad people, and those who are out of their senses,” he replies, “I will be sworn that I have not been out of Bedlam since I landed” (49–50). When Clerimont tells him that “the poor work only to get the necessaries of life, but the rich labor to obtain superfluities, which with them have no bounds,” Tombo-chiqui replies, “But if this be so, the rich are poorer than the poor, since their wants are more numerous.” In sum, as he tells Clerimont, “I think you are fools, who believe yourselves wise; ignorant, who believe yourselves knowing, poor, who believe yourselves rich, and slaves, who believe yourselves free” (31). It may be that such paradoxes have come to seem trite; perhaps they seemed so even in 1758. But cumulatively, they unsettle the taken-for-granted meanings of ideologically encrusted keywords and expose civilized language itself as complicit with the corruptions of the social order.

At Tombo-chiqui’s lowest point, when he has been arrested and threatened with hanging following his run-in with the Jewish peddler, Clerimont tells him that money “is more worth than all the words in the world,” to which he replies, “Your words then are not worth much; and I do not wonder now you have told me so many lies” (29). In contrast to Clerimont, whom he insults in this scene as “a man of words, and nothing more,” Tombo-chiqui offers his own “outlandishness” or estrangement from civilized customs as a mark of integrity: “I am a man of sense, though a very ignorant one: I pass here for an ass, a brute, a savage, that does not know the laws; in other respects, I am a very honest man; a man of merit” (13–14). Golding, hearing this, laughs at the evident contradictions: “A man of sense, though ignorant, an ass, a brute, and yet a man of merit. Hah, hah, hah!” (14). But the contradictions are only apparent, and when using such a duplicitous language, the only way to truth is by paradox and metaphor, for they don’t pretend to transparency. While conventional uses of language aim to mask the truth behind “apparent significations,” mystifications of the real, as Cleland suggests in both Tombo-Chiqui and the Dictionary of Love, paradox and metaphor draw attention to their own eccentricity or artifice and thus, perhaps, allow a reader to work out the truth that everyday language lulls us into taking for granted. In a similar way, translation, the “forced and unnatural transplantation” of foreign idioms and outlandish manners into “true English,” might
decenter familiar language and customs just enough to give the translator/author a critical purchase on the everyday, on home, London, the English, and the words everyone uses without thinking. Of course, this is all only hackwork: as Young put it, “a sort of Manufacture wrought up by those Mechanics, Art, and Labour, out of pre-existent materials not their own.” But as Bertolt Brecht, who had good reason to know, wrote a couple of centuries later, “Anyone can be creative, it’s re-writing other people that’s a challenge.” Brecht’s paradox can serve as the epigraph to Cleland’s career: all writing is rewriting.