



Fanny Hill: with illustrations

By John Cleland

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Fanny Hill: with illustrations By John Cleland Bibliography

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Editorial Review

Review

Throughout history and down the centuries, erotic literature about women, men, their sexuality and the choices they make, has been available in print. Some books have been published to great acclaim, others have attracted scandal and controversy, but many have been bestsellers.

Erotic fiction offers the reader a very personal outlet in which they can rejoice in and reflect on the complex workings of human sexuality. The notorious novel 'Fanny Hill', published in 1749, is seen by many as the first modern 'erotic novel' in English, but the literary exploration of human sexuality has been sustained with a great array of captivating and eloquent novels throughout time.

John Cleland's infamous 18th-century novel - first published as *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* in 1749 - became the epitome of a battle against erotica censorship in literature. This saucy story tells the tale of a young country girl who falls into prostitution and, although Fanny eventually rises to respectability, it is not before she has enjoyed her string of lovers, utterly hooked on sexual pleasure. --Sacha Markin, November 2, 2009

In the long, complicated history of literary censorship in the United States, no one event or period can be singled out as indisputably pivotal, but a case can be made that in 1963 a decisive turn was made. That was the year in which Grove Press published a five-volume unexpurgated edition of Frank Harris's highly fictionalized erotic memoir, "My Life and Loves," and in which Putnam brought out the first trade American edition in more than two centuries of John Cleland's "Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure," more commonly known as "Fanny Hill."

Both books remain in print in various editions from various publishers, and their widespread acceptance as works of legitimate literary interest undoubtedly has contributed to the high degree of tolerance now accorded to the treatment of sexual subjects in books (and everything else) in this country. They are indeed candid about sex, but similarities pretty much end there. Originally published in the 1920s, "My Life and Loves" is fiction masquerading as fact, filled with chest-thumping by an egomaniacal albeit influential British editor and writer. "Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure," which first appeared in London in 1748 and 1749, is something else altogether, a work of real if limited literary merit, a fascinating depiction of the demimonde in Georgian England, and an exceedingly amusing book that may, or may not, have been written as a spoof.

Its origins are just about as mysterious as the life of its author. Cleland (1710-1789) worked for a while for the East India Co. as a young man and enjoyed temporary success in Bombay, but by the early 1740s he was back in England and working, according to Peter Wagner's introduction to the Penguin Classics edition of "Fanny Hill," as "a literary hack, Grub Street writer, and journalist." He seems to have been perpetually short of funds and spent some time in debtors' prison. Apparently it was during one of these jail terms that he completed the manuscript of "Fanny Hill," which at times over the years has been seen as a satire of Samuel Richardson's "Pamela" (1740-41), beloved by readers for its moralizing but ridiculed by the literati as priggish humbug. Henry Fielding satirized it brutally in "Shamela" (1741) and Cleland may well have had similar intentions, though so little is known about him that one can only guess.

The novel appeared off and on in this country, mostly in bowdlerized editions or in bits and pieces. No doubt Putnam was encouraged to bring it out, in a \$6 hardcover edition, in 1963 because of a legal decision four

years earlier that permitted publication in the States of D.H. Lawrence's "Lady Chatterley's Lover," as well as by the many legal actions in 1961 and thereafter on behalf of Henry Miller's "Tropic of Cancer." New York authorities immediately sought to ban "Fanny Hill" as obscene, but publication was upheld in New York's Supreme Court by Justice Arthur G. Klein, who wrote: "While the saga of Fanny Hill will undoubtedly never replace 'Little Red Riding Hood' as a popular bedtime story, it is quite possible that were Fanny to be transposed from her mid-18th-century Georgian surroundings to our present day society, she might conceivably encounter many things which would cause her to blush."

Exactly. Justice Klein understood what the novel's critics too often have not, that it is in its own fashion a morality tale and that Fanny herself is in some respects as innocent as she is worldly. Whether I was smart enough to grasp that when I first read it, I do not recall, but probably not. I glommed onto the 95-cent paperback that Putnam rushed out on the heels of Klein's decision, and no doubt I was vastly more interested in the exquisitely detailed accounts of her amatory adventures than in Fanny's concluding apologia: "if I have painted vice in all its gayest colours, if I have decked it with flowers, it has been solely in order to make the worthier, the solemn, sacrifice of it to virtue."

This is true. Fanny ends her tale "in the bosom of virtue," happily married to Charles, with whom several years before she had fallen in love -- "He was the universe to me, and all that was not him was nothing to me" -- but who had been lost to her for several years due to circumstances beyond their control. Charles's absence, though, does not prevent her from going about discovering the delights "of a pleasure merely animal" with other men and then setting herself up as a woman of pleasure. As she nicely puts it, while succumbing to the advances of a gentleman to whom she is introduced shortly after Charles's disappearance:

"Had anyone, but a few instants before, told me that I should have ever known any man but Charles, I would have spat in his face, or had I been offered infinitely a greater sum of money than that I saw paid for me, I had spurned the proposal in cold blood. But our virtues and our vices depend too much on our circumstances. . . . I considered myself as so much in his power that I endured his kisses and embraces without affecting struggles or anger; not that they as yet gave me any pleasure, or prevailed over the aversion of my soul to give myself up to any sensation of that sort; what I suffered, I suffered out of a kind of gratitude, and as a matter of course after what had passed."

Fanny, in other words, is something of a situational ethicist, and this situation soon leads her to become "a kept mistress in form, well lodged, with a very sufficient allowance and lighted up with all the lustre of dress." This lasts until she accidentally discovers "Mr. H__" (the only name by which we know him) in flagrante with the maid. Her pride hurt, she takes revenge by coupling with "a very handsome young lad, scarce turned of nineteen, fresh as a rose, well shaped and clever-limbed: in short, a very good excuse for any woman's liking," and has a splendid time for which she pays a pretty price: She's tossed off the payroll and out of the house.

But this self-described "artless inexperienced country maid" picks herself up, dusts herself off and starts all over again. Mrs. Cole, "a middle-aged discreet sort of woman, . . . came to offer her cordial advice and service to me," and Fanny's world continues to expand, "because keeping a house of conveniency, there were no lengths in lewdness she would not advise me to go" and, for that matter, just about none that Fanny herself is unwilling to go. Rather than a rapacious madam, Mrs. Cole is a good-hearted gentlewoman who just happened to fall into a spot of bad luck, and before long it becomes plain that Mrs. Cole's loss is Fanny's gain -- and Mrs. Cole's, too.

In no time she's off and running, though that's not precisely the right verb. It is at this point that writing about "Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure" in a family newspaper becomes tricky, for what Fanny is up to, or down to, can scarcely be described as vividly here as it is in Cleland's spirited prose. Suffice it to say that

gentlemen of a sporting inclination are serviced regularly and to the enjoyment of all -- Fanny herself most emphatically included -- and that some of these fellows sport equipment that leaves Fanny on the edge of speechlessness; okay, I'll mention that one of them presents himself complete with "a maypole" and leave it at that. There's a most amusing scene in which an unattractive man -- "gentleman" won't do for this one -- pays extravagantly for the privilege of separating Fanny from her maidenhead; having long since surrendered it elsewhere, she, with Mrs. Cole's help, devises an ingenious strategy for fooling him into thinking himself a success.

Along the way Fanny is invariably cheerful, and enters into every -- well, almost every -- new encounter with boundless enthusiasm. To say that she's a woman of pleasure is complete understatement: She is the original Happy Hooker. Her heart may belong to Charles, but the rest of her belongs to anyone who can pay the rent. Many can, and do, and no one has more fun than Fanny. She also learns a few things about men, and women, and life:

"[I]f I may judge from my own experience, none are better paid or better treated during their reign than the mistresses of those who, enervated by nature, debaucheries, or age, have the least employment for the sex: sensible that a woman must be satisfied some way, they ply her with a thousand little tender attentions, presents, caresses, confidences, and exhaust their invention in means and devices to make up for the capital deficiency . . . But here is their misfortune, that, when by a course of teasing, worrying, handling, wanton postures, lascivious motions, they have at length accomplished a flashy enervated enjoyment, they have at the same time lighted up a flame in the object of their passion that, not having the means themselves to quench, drives her for relief into the next person's arms, who can finish their work."

Hard-earned wisdom, but wisdom all the same. "Fanny Hill" is more than 2 1/2 centuries old, and at times its language is a trifle dated, but in matters of the human heart and body it is as up to date as anything you'll find in "The Playboy Advisor," and a whole lot more fun. Fanny's story tells us that morality is a far more slippery business than most moralists would have us believe, and that the road to happiness and virtue is not necessarily either straight or narrow. No, "Fanny Hill" will never supplant "Little Red Riding Hood," but it's a splendid bedtime story for grown-ups.

"Fanny Hill, or, Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure" is available in many editions, most of them inexpensive. The complete text is also posted online on numerous Web sites. --The Washington Post, August 3, 2006

From the Publisher

Newly printed with fun-filled illustrations modeled on the classic "Tijuana Bible" style of erotica, this enjoyable edition of the *Fanny Hill* book is a must have for literary fans and art collectors alike.

About the Author

John Cleland (1709? - 1789) was an English novelist most famous and infamous as the author of *Fanny Hill*; or, the *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*. He was the oldest son of William Cleland (1673/4 - 1741) and Lucy Cleland. He was born in Kingston upon Thames in Surrey but grew up in London, where his father was first an officer in the British Army and then a civil servant. William Cleland was a friend to Alexander Pope, and Lucy Cleland was a friend or acquaintance of both Pope, Viscount Bolingbroke, Chesterfield, and Horace Walpole. The family possessed good finances and moved among the finest literary and artistic circles of London.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Marie Heidelberg:

The book Fanny Hill: with illustrations gives you the sense of being enjoy for your spare time. You can utilize to make your capable considerably more increase. Book can to get your best friend when you getting anxiety or having big problem using your subject. If you can make examining a book Fanny Hill: with illustrations to become your habit, you can get considerably more advantages, like add your personal capable, increase your knowledge about a few or all subjects. You are able to know everything if you like wide open and read a reserve Fanny Hill: with illustrations. Kinds of book are several. It means that, science reserve or encyclopedia or other individuals. So , how do you think about this reserve?

Paul Heisler:

Spent a free a chance to be fun activity to perform! A lot of people spent their down time with their family, or their own friends. Usually they performing activity like watching television, about to beach, or picnic in the park. They actually doing same every week. Do you feel it? Will you something different to fill your free time/ holiday? Can be reading a book might be option to fill your free of charge time/ holiday. The first thing that you ask may be what kinds of book that you should read. If you want to consider look for book, may be the reserve untitled Fanny Hill: with illustrations can be excellent book to read. May be it is usually best activity to you.

Charles Valentine:

The particular book Fanny Hill: with illustrations has a lot of knowledge on it. So when you make sure to read this book you can get a lot of gain. The book was written by the very famous author. The author makes some research ahead of write this book. This specific book very easy to read you can obtain the point easily after reading this book.

Lawrence Sawyer:

What is your hobby? Have you heard which question when you got learners? We believe that that question was given by teacher to the students. Many kinds of hobby, Every individual has different hobby. And also you know that little person like reading or as reading become their hobby. You should know that reading is very important and also book as to be the matter. Book is important thing to include you knowledge, except your current teacher or lecturer. You see good news or update about something by book. Amount types of books that can you decide to try be your object. One of them is this Fanny Hill: with illustrations.

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