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Abstract
If the emerging novel of the mid-eighteenth century developed new means of constructing and manipulating its readership, much may be gained by studying the novel in one of its most blatantly manipulative forms. This essay examines John Cleland's Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure, the first pornographic novel in English, under the hypothesis that on the level of narrative technique its transgressions are not peculiar to pornography, but rather are widely shared by the emerging novelistic discourse as a whole. Central to this novel's manipulating strategy is the development of a voyeuristic narrative that becomes a powerful means of representing and constructing the reader's subjectivity. By exploring the way in which the voyeuristic narrative functions, we can better understand the dynamic nature of voyeuristic distance, and begin to see voyeuristic involvement with the text as the quintessential experience of novel reading. In the case of the pornographic work written by a man, it becomes particularly clear how the voyeuristic narrative can serve as a means of constructing and controlling representations of female subjectivity, in response to male anxieties and desires about sex and power.

John Cleland's *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*: Literary Voyeurism and the Techniques of Novelistic Transgression[1]

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If the emerging novel of the mid-eighteenth century developed new means of constructing and manipulating its readership, much may be gained by studying the novel in one of its most blatantly manipulative forms. This essay examines John Cleland's *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*,[2] the first pornographic novel in English, under the hypothesis that on the level of narrative technique its transgressions are not peculiar to pornography, but rather are widely shared by the emerging novelistic discourse as a whole. Central to this novel's manipulating strategy is the development of a voyeuristic narrative that becomes a powerful means of representing and constructing the reader's subjectivity. By exploring the way in which the voyeuristic narrative functions, we can better understand the dynamic nature of voyeuristic distance, and begin to see voyeuristic involvement with the text as the quintessential experience of novel reading. In the case of the pornographic work written by

1 This essay was awarded a prize in the Avery Hopwood and Jule Hopwood contests of 1989 at the University of Michigan.

2 Published in two volumes in November 1748 and February 1749. A censored version was prepared by Cleland for publication as *The Memoirs of Fanny Hill* in 1750. The novel is popularly known as "Fanny Hill."

a man, it becomes particularly clear how the voyeuristic narrative can serve as a means of constructing and controlling representations of female subjectivity, in response to male anxieties and desires about sex and power.

Hypocritical Readers, Duplicitous Texts

To transgress is to cross a forbidden boundary. In the case of the *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, the boundary to be transgressed is that which separates mid-eighteenth-century conventions of chastity and virtue from the libertine codes of sexual licence. Whereas conventional morality struggles to contain sexuality within the realm of marriage and silence, the mid-eighteenth-century libertine celebrates the escape of sexuality out of marriage and into language. The libertine makes sex speak, and, in Cleland's case, sex speaks the language of male pleasure and mastery from behind the mask of a female narrator.[3] This masquerade and the other narrative strategies by which the author negotiates the distance between the two moral codes are the textual marks of a distance within each reader between the conventional and the libertine. Narrative duplicity must meet and manage the reader's duplicity. The distance between the two moral codes is present in the text as a kind of voltage, a dangerous gap to be crossed against some resistance. The reader's movement across this gap is depicted most succinctly in Cleland's description of the sexual act as "tender hostilities" and "sweet violence," the sort of oxymoronic utterance not only typical of Cleland but essential, I think, to all pornography. We pass through the pleasing mist of "sweet" in order to get to "violence"; "tender" cushions our fall upon the hard ground of "hostilities." Here the leap from adjective to noun *is* transgression; to ask us to read these words is to invite us to trespass, to cross the boundary of conventional morality and sample the pleasures of sexual warfare.

On the level of narrative function these oxymora both call attention to the text's contradictions and allow the narrative to proceed in spite of them. They are one means by which the narrative produces what Levi-Strauss called "an imaginary resolution of real contradictions." Seen another way, the coupling of Venus and Mars within "sweet violence" offers the reader a choice of pleasures. In the instant of flickering moral

3 For a general study of male novelists writing as women see Ann Robinson Taylor, *Male Novelists and Their Female Voices: Literary Masquerades* (Troy, NY: Whitsun, 1981).

self-evaluation that the oxymoron invites, the mere presence of the choice between sweetness and violence is a saving ambiguity, a sort of moral escape hatch, most reassuring when unused. The reader may secretly, perhaps unconsciously, follow Mars, but be ready, if pressed, to swear allegiance to Love. The oxymoron can serve as a figure for the various ways in which Cleland's narrative holds conventional and libertine morality in tension. The oxymoron is a spurious disclaimer, making Cleland's pornography duplicitous in a way that Sade's is not; for where Sade openly celebrates the pleasures of cruelty, Cleland covers women's pain with the mask of pleasure, and affects to recover libertine vice with bourgeois virtue.

Of course the opposition between "conventional" and "libertine" morality is not a simple one. Neither moral code is either universal or stable; both vary from one community of readers to another, and from one time period to another.[4] Nonetheless, each generation of readers brings to Cleland's text its own version of the fundamental tension between what is permissible and impermissible in both sexual and narrative conduct. But the question of the reader's morality is complicated by the assumption that none of Cleland's readers was ever a complete libertine or a prude. The duplicitous reader is never entirely determined by either the "conventional" moral code or the "libertine." Samuel Pepys, though ashamed of reading *L'Ecole des Filles*—that pornographic best-seller of the late seventeenth century—and condemning it as "the most bawdy, lewd book that I ever saw," nevertheless took the time to read it all the way through before burning it.[5] That is, we must think of Cleland's readers as straddling the boundary between libertinism and conventionality and, in their oscillation between pleasure and stricture, trying always to cover their pleasure with a veneer of morality. Cleland's narrative must both heed and control the hypocrisy of his readers, allowing them to indulge in fantasies of male mastery and female submission, while at the same time masking the cruelty essential to those pleasures.

Foucault has argued that such hypocrisy is an essential characteristic of bourgeois sexuality, which is always struggling to contain the contradic-

4 For a discussion of the various ways of defining libertinism in eighteenth-century England and France, see James G. Turner, "The Properties of Libertinism," in *Unauthorized Sexual Behavior during the Enlightenment*, ed. Robert P. Maccubbin, Special Issue, *Eighteenth-Century Life* 9, n.s. 3 (1985), 75–87.

5 Samuel Pepys, *Diary*, 13 January, 8 and 9 February 1668. *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*, ed. Robert Latham and William Matthews (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1976), vol. 9, 21–22, 57–59.

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tions between public virtue and private vice.[6] A number of writers have called the *Memoirs* bourgeois pornography, for, unlike the more radical, forthright, and aristocratic productions of Sade and earlier anticlerical French pornography, it makes every attempt to mask its transgressions, and to restore the story of Fanny's life to conventional morality and bourgeois values.[7] Despite trials and setbacks, Fanny leads a prosperous life as a prostitute until her marriage, at the age of nineteen, to her beloved Charles, the original "despoiler" of her virginity. Theirs is a union blessed with all the rewards of money, children, and monogamy. For Fanny, marriage is a return to "the bosom of virtue" and it makes possible the production of her text. At the end of her memoir, Fanny extols a chaste marriage bound by love and money as the highest pleasure, and compares the "infamous blandishments" of vice with the "infinitely superior joys of innocence."[8] The virtuous bourgeois marriage is the necessary vantage point for the narrating act, providing, as we shall see, narrative opportunities central to the novel's management of its transgressions.

In his book reviews Cleland expressed his admiration for Fielding, whose work, like Smollett's, demonstrated a superior moral sense, and exemplified a new species of realism, of which Cleland approved. William Epstein has pointed out that the "tail-piece of morality" with which Fanny concludes her narrative has much in common with Cleland's praise of *Amelia* for its effort "to inculcate the superiority of virtuous conjugal love to all other joys."[9] The way in which the transgressions of Cleland's *Memoirs* are circumscribed by a larger conservative

6 Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Volume I: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), pp. 3–13.

7 For example, Robert Markley argues that the descriptions of physical beauty before each sex scene are a cover for illicit behaviour because they appeal to bourgeois ideals; Markley writes that the physical appearance and condition of the prostitutes in the novel make them "testaments to the bourgeois values of order, symmetry, and propriety that they quite literally embody" ("Language, Power and Sexuality in Cleland's *Fanny Hill*," *Philological Quarterly* 63 [1984], 346). Peter Wagner has called *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* a "unique combination of parody, erotic entertainment, and a philosophical concept of human sexuality borrowed from French sources and adapted to the English bourgeois viewpoint" (Introduction to *Fanny Hill, or Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, ed. Peter Wagner [Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1985], p. 28. Nancy K. Miller describes the novel as one of "erotic *bildung*," and notes that Fanny, like Moll Flanders, becomes an autonomous subject only through integration into the bourgeois and Protestant structures of family life (*The Heroine's Text: Readings in the French and English Novel, 1722–1782* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1980], p. 63).

8 John Cleland, *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* , ed. Peter Sabor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 187. References are to this edition.

9 *Monthly Review* 5 (Dec. 1751), 510–14; cited in William H. Epstein, *John Cleland: Images of a Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974), p. 217.

discourse also bears comparison with *Tom Jones*, in which the discovery of Tom's parentage allows the restoration of patriarchal lines of authority and class relations. Tom's union with Sophia, which puts an end to his sexual adventures outside marriage, serves the purpose of directing Tom's sexual energy, so that his sexuality is no longer a threat to the dominant social and economic order. Both novels produce the same comedic response to anxiety about the control of reproduction, an anxiety that Foucault sees as taking a new form in the eighteenth century. With the emergence of the concept of "population" as an object for analysis and a natural resource to be managed, there was a new concern, Foucault argues, over the economic and social consequences of sex.[10] In Cleland's *Memoirs*, Fanny's prodigious sexual activity miraculously results in no offspring; apparently Charles alone has the power to impregnate her. Fanny's first pregnancy is spontaneously aborted when she learns that Charles has gone away, and she does not conceive again until Charles returns. Likewise, Tom Jones's adventures result in no illegitimate children. Part of the process of dismissing Molly Seagrim from the narrative includes our learning that Will Barnes, and not Tom, is the likely father of her child. Despite the fact that these novels violate both sexual and literary codes, they reach very conservative conclusions, which reaffirm the primacy of chastity, heterosexuality, and patriarchal authority. In both novels, the larger system of power relations ultimately contains any radical energy that might be produced by transgressions of the sexual code. The conservatism of the *Memoirs* has led at least one critic to see Cleland as "fundamentally a moralist," a judgment that misses the complex motivations behind Cleland's particular brand of pornography.[11] Cleland is a pornographer and also a moralist in the way that an embezzler may also be an efficient and likeable employee. If Cleland's moralism was indeed heartfelt, it only demonstrates the deep hypocrisy of the ethos out of which he wrote.

Any discussion of the reader's morality in relation to this text of course raises the issue of gender, and so far my account of the reader's transactions with the text would seem to assume that the readership for the *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* was and has always been overwhelmingly male. We can go some way towards addressing the questions raised

10 Foucault, p. 25.

11 Michael Shinagel, "*Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*: Pornography and the Mid-Eighteenth-Century Novel," in *Studies in Change and Revolution: Aspects of English Intellectual History, 1640–1800*, ed. Paul J. Korshin (Menston, Yorkshire: Scolar Press, 1972), p. 218.

by the possibility of the female reader if we remind ourselves of the social fact that the production and consumption of pornography occurs within a male-controlled discourse serving male interests. With the exception of the feminist reader of pornography, to whom my assumptions about reader response may not apply, we can think of the female reader of Cleland's text as having to some degree internalized the conventions of the male discourse and appropriated for herself the functionality of the male gaze. As John Berger writes, "the surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object—and most particularly an object of vision: a sight."[12]

This perspective lessens the difficulties raised by any strict classification of texts according to "male" and "female" readerships. The similarities between the *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* and sentimental "women's" fiction of the period are instructive in this regard. As Peter Wagner has pointed out, the *Memoirs*, despite its markedly different attitude, has much in common in structure and subject matter with novels such as Eliza Haywood's *Love in Excess* and *The Fatal Enquiry*, which are not without erotic content.[13] Cleland himself, his reputation permanently damaged by the scandal of the *Memoirs*, turned in his later literary career to writing "chaste" and "innocent" sentimental romances such as *The Surprises of Love* (1764) and *Woman of Honor* (1768).[14] To the extent that a mid-eighteenth-century female reader *could* accommodate herself to the viewpoint of the *Memoirs*, we can attribute her accommodation not simply to an internalized male gaze, but also in part to her familiarity with and acceptance of those narrative conventions of "women's" novels that provided moral sanction for the treatment of erotic material—conventions which themselves were helping to construct the functionality of the male gaze. Because the changing narrative conventions of the period were part of the dynamic process of constructing both male and female subjectivity, we should see the "female reader" and the "male reader" not as static entities but as zones of conflict. In a male-authored work such as the *Memoirs*, Cleland's imitation of sentimental

12 John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: BBC/Penguin, 1972), p. 47.

13 Peter Wagner, *Eros Revived: Erotica of the Enlightenment in England and America* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1988), p. 219.

14 James G. Basker describes the tales in *Surprises of Love* as "perfect little bourgeois fantasies," and quotes a review which held that "the reading of them may prove a very innocent and diverting amusement, during the holidays; the father on one side of the fire, the mother on t'other, and the children just come from boarding school round them, may read it by turns" ("'The Wages of Sin': The Later Career of John Cleland," *Etudes Anglaises: Grande-Bretagne–Etats-Unis* 40 [April–June 1987], 178–94).

"women's" writing, even—indeed, especially—when such imitation becomes parodic, can be seen as one more salvo in the battle for control over representations of female subjectivity.

Thus, although it is not my purpose here to determine how many women actually read *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, it is relevant to the gender dynamics of the text's production that in the pornographic tradition the female reader is a conventional male fantasy. Cleland's novel itself poses as correspondence from Fanny Hill to an unnamed female reader (addressed as "Madam"), so that in addition to the pretence of female production of the text, we have the fantasy of female consumption. In Fielding's *Shamela* we learn that Shamela's collection of books contains "*Venus in the Cloyster: Or, the Nun in her Smock*,"[15] a work of French pornography attributed to Jean Barrin (1683) that had been translated into English in 1692 and in 1724. Fielding uses this work of pornography as one more proof of Shamela's licentiousness and duplicity, just as the rest of her library shows that she is without taste or discrimination. Of course we cannot take Fielding's attitude towards pornography as purely censorious, given his own penchant for bawdy, and considering that the catalogue of Shamela's library is placed in a satirical context that creates instabilities of meaning. On the simplest level, however, we can see how such a book in Shamela's possession served as a readily identifiable mark of her loose morals. *Thérèse Philosophe*, by the Marquis d'Argens, was published in the same year as Cleland's *Memoirs* (1748) and, like Cleland's novel, takes the form of a memoir written by the heroine. In this case, however, the memoir is addressed to the heroine's seducer, an unnamed Count, and the female consumer of pornography is Thérèse herself. In the climactic chapter, Thérèse agrees to be locked up alone for two weeks with the Count's collection of erotic books and paintings, and agrees that she will surrender her virginity to him if during that time she succumbs to the temptation to masturbate. The books and images succeed where the Count has failed, and it is through the consumption of erotica that Thérèse has her "conversion" to libertine philosophy. An 1801 engraving by Isaac Cruikshank provides a later example: it shows a woman warming her backside by the fire, masturbating with one hand while holding a copy of Lewis's *The Monk* in the other.[16]

Nancy K. Miller has argued that the male impersonation of female authors provides the narcissistic pleasure of constituting an Other by whom

15 Henry Fielding, *An Apology for the Life of Mrs. Shamela Andrews* in *Joseph Andrews and Shamela*, ed. Martin C. Battestin (London: Methuen, 1961), p. 327.

16 Reproduced in Wagner, *Eros Revived*, p. 248.

one is desired.[17] But the construction in these texts of the female *reader* of pornography adds a further twist, for the author thus projects the additional fantasy of an Other by whom not only one's body is desired, but one's text. This ideal female reader has, of course, so internalized the pornographic conventions of female surrender to male pleasure that she becomes little more than a male reader in drag. The result is that such a text becomes, as Miller writes, "a self-congratulatory and self-addressed performance destined to be celebrated by other men; an anxious simulation of alterity that would rewrite otherness as sameness."[18] By seeking to rewrite the female reader's desire in its own image, the male-authored pornographic discourse attempts to bring yet another dimension of female subjectivity within the cast of its net. James G. Turner finds in the concern with female subjectivity "the most striking paradox to emerge from libertine literature: that virtually all the hard-core texts produced and consumed in Europe from Aretino's *Ragionamenti* to Cleland's *Fanny Hill*, as well as genteel erotica like the 'Tale,' are male attempts to image, fictionalize, expropriate and control *female* sexuality. Control over representations, once again."[19] By constructing the ideal female reader, pornographic discourse achieves two effects simultaneously: it brings women's relationship to texts within the domain of female sexuality that it seeks to control, and it depicts its *male* readership as the reader in drag who is both producer and consumer of fantasies. We shall see that Cleland pursues both of these effects in more than one way; a good deal of the work's ingenuity lies in the variety of means by which it sexualizes the relationship between reader and text, and represents (and constructs) within the text the reader's own subjectivity.

Genres of Intimacy

Just as Cleland's novel must be seen within a context of particular social relations, so too must it be seen in the context of the particular literary

17 Nancy K. Miller, *Heroine's Text*, p. 150 (see n. 7); see also Nancy K. Miller, "'I's' in Drag: The Sex of Recollection," *Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation* 22 (1981), 45–57.

18 Miller, *Heroine's Text*, p. 150. I borrow the cross-dressing image from her essay "I's' in Drag" (see n. 17).

19 James Grantham Turner, "Sex and Consequence," *Review* 11 (forthcoming 1989). By the "Tale" Turner refers to the type of octosyllabic tale initiated from La Fontaine's *Contes*, popular from 1720, often about a pubescent girl's discovery of the genitals. Three examples of the genre, all authored by Hildebrand Jacob, are: *The Curious Maid, a Tale* (London 1720); *The Bauble, a Tale* (London 1721); *A Chinese Tale ... or Chamyam with Her Leg Upon a Table* (London 1740).

resources on which Cleland drew. Placing Cleland's transgressive text within the matrix of discourses out of which the novel emerged helps us to see the transgressive potential inherent in the genre as a whole. The generic affinities that most concern us in this regard have to do with those conventions of narrative address that establish an intimacy between narrator and narratee as a condition of the text's production.

In the *Memoirs* Cleland's manipulation of narrative address begins with the trope of the text, the epistolary memoir. The novel was published in two volumes in 1748 and 1749, and each volume takes the form of a letter written by Fanny Hill to a friend addressed only as "Madam." The pretence of non-fiction, the memoir form, and the epistolary form have their immediate precursors in Defoe and Richardson. As numerous critics have pointed out, Cleland's conscious relationship to Richardson is clear; the *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* is one of many anti-Pamelas of the 1740s.[20]

To understand the novel's generic affinities, however, we must also see it within a substantial pornographic literary tradition, largely French, but with classical antecedents. The adoption of the female narrator is a standard pornographic convention, and Cleland's use of the epistolary form can be seen as an extension of the tradition of the whore's dialogue, of which we have the first early modern example in Aretino's *Ragionamenti*, published in 1534 and reprinted in London in 1584. We have the evidence of Boswell's journal that Cleland was familiar with the more recent *L'Ecole des filles* (1655), which consists of two dialogues between the young initiate, Fanchon, and her older mentor, Suzanne.[21] The dialogues are prefaced by a sort of advertisement addressed to the "lovely ladies," promising instruction in the arts of love, something needed most acutely by those "who have come to the practice of love with no knowledge of the theory." Another prominent example is Nicolas Chorier's *Satyra Satodica de Arcanis Veneris et Amoris*, published in Latin between 1665 and 1678, which pretended to be the work of a sixteenth-century woman intellectual from Toledo, translated into Latin by the Dutch scholar Jan Meursius. In these dialogues the part of the young initiate is taken by Ottavia, and that of the mentor by Tullia. Yet another example is *Vénus dans*

20 For a helpful discussion of *Memoirs* ' place within the anti-Pamela movement, see William H. Epstein, *John Cleland: Images of a Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974), pp. 99–101. Peter Sabor, in the introduction to his edition of *Memoirs* (see n. 8), argues persuasively that Fanny is both anti-Pamela and anti-Shamela, for though she treads the path of vice to great reward, she does so honestly, rejecting Shamela's ethic of deception.

21 13 April 1779, *Boswell, Laird of Auchinleck, 1778–1782*, ed. Joseph W. Reed and Frederick A. Pottle (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1977), pp. 76–77.

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la Cloître, ou la Religieuse en Chemise (1682), which, as we have noticed, Shamela possessed in an English translation. Once again the text consists of a dialogue between a young student (Agnes), and an older mentor (Angelica). In so far as it pretends to be addressed by one woman to another, detailing among other things the narrator's initiation into a life of prostitution, Cleland's *Memoirs* takes up a form and theme central to the pornographic tradition.

A fuller account of Cleland's literary precedents would have to include such sources as pornographic trial accounts, the popular "chronique scandaleuses" that took the form of secret memoirs and histories, and other French works such as *Histoire de Dom B... portier des Chartreux* (1742), which Peter Wagner sees as representing the first full-fledged pornographic novel.[22] Of course no such account can provide a sufficient cause for the particular narrative form that Cleland constructed, but at the very least one can say that, given the long history of the whore's dialogue and Richardson's successes in the epistolary form, it would have seemed natural enough for Cleland to write Fanny Hill's erotic history in the form of an intimate epistolary memoir addressed by a woman to a female confidante. As in the earlier dialogue form, Cleland's narrator addresses another sexually experienced woman, a friend whose own history of sexual adventures qualifies her to be the reader of Fanny's. As Fanny explains, her correspondent is a reader with "too much knowledge of the *originals* themselves, to snuff prudishly, and out of character,

22 See Wagner, *Eros Revived*, pp. 234–37. However, Wagner makes his claim for the importance of *Dom B* on the basis of slight critical analysis. Critical discussion of literary precedents for and possible influences on Cleland's *Memoirs* has been fairly extensive. The genre of the whore's dialogue receives lengthy treatment in David Foxon, *Libertine Literature in England, 1660–1745* (New Hyde Park, NY: University Books, 1965), and in chap. 2 of Peter Naumann's dissertation *Keyhole und Candle: John Cleland's "Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure" und die Entstehung des pornographischen Romans in England* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, Universitätsverlag, 1976). Peter Wagner criticizes Naumann for underestimating the influence that pornographic trial reports may have had on Cleland; see Wagner, "Review Essay: Researching the Taboo: Sexuality and Eighteenth- Century English Erotica," *Eighteenth-Century Life* 8 (1983), 108–15. For further discussion of the relationship between the *Memoirs* and French erotica, see Wagner's introduction to his edition of the *Memoirs*, pp. 23– 27. For another discussion of literary sources as well as a discussion of the influence that popular contemporary visual representations may have had on Cleland's approach to this subject matter, see William Epstein's *John Cleland*, pp. 92–96. Epstein discusses the evidence for Cleland's basing three of the characters in the *Memoirs* on figures depicted in Hogarth's *Harlot's Progress*. Peter Sabor briefly points out the affinities between Cleland's metaphors and those of Jacobean and Caroline erotic poetry (Introduction to the *Memoirs*, p. xix). James Turner discusses the "erotic sublime" in Restoration drama and Augustan poetry, and traces its development from the context of "the heroic ideology of the Restoration lover" to the "new cult of Sensibility and the new aesthetics of the Sublime," the latter being manifested in Cleland's *Memoirs* and other mid-eighteenth-century writings (James Grantham Turner, "'Illustrious Depravity' and the Erotic Sublime," *Age of Johnson* 2 (forthcoming).

at the *pictures* of them" (p. 1). Fanny claims that she is writing at her correspondent's wish, thus placing a measure of responsibility for the transgression on the curiosity of her unseen friend. The reader, eavesdropping on this conversation (as it were), is drawn into the circle of friendship, within which one need not worry about "violating those laws of decency, that were never made for such unreserved intimacies as ours" (p. 1).[23] The trope of the text is a female version of the locker room. Only in saying this we must be aware of an even more fundamental level of disguise: the female narrator is, after all, ventriloquized by a male author. What we have, in fact, is a men's locker room; these jocks are in drag.

It might be argued that the trope of the epistolary memoir was a transparent convention that fooled no one, and therefore it cannot be considered a very effective means of sanctioning transgression. Certainly it is true that, except at the opening and closing of each of the two letters, all signs of Fanny's correspondent disappear from the text. The fact that the narrative pretends to be a letter ceases to be of much importance. Though the marks of the text's status as intimate letter may fade, however, the conventions of the pornographic dialogue are once again reasserted in the character of Phoebe, an older prostitute who serves as Fanny's bed-mate, instructor, and sexual partner before Fanny is introduced to the "more substantial" joys of heterosexuality. Phoebe thus occupies the post of the mentor from the dialogue tradition, and the dialogical relationship is preserved.

The mentor role appears again when, later in her career, Fanny gains the friendship of three prostitutes, Emily, Harriet, and Louisa, her colleagues at the house of Mrs Cole. The form of the erotic dialogue is enacted once more when Mrs Cole suggests that each of Fanny's three friends "entertain the company with that critical period of her personal history, in which she first exchanged the maiden state for womanhood" (p. 96). This is an intimate circle of women, telling stories to pass the time until the evening's clients arrive. The three set-piece stories are related in the first person, each introduced by a paragraph in which Fanny describes the physical charms of the teller. The stories are memoirs in miniature, as each woman relates not merely a sexual act, but the circumstances of her birth, and the sequence of events leading to her fall. At the same time as these stories re-enact the pornographic dialogue,

23 For a discussion of the role of female friendship and mentorship in Cleland's *Memoirs*, see the chapter on "Erotic Friendship" in Janet Todd, *Women's Friendship in Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), pp. 69–95.

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they just as clearly belong to the tradition of the confessional memoir and spiritual autobiography.[24]

There can be no final resolution of the multiple generic affinities of this text. That critics have made a variety of claims for the *Memoirs*' generic antecedents accords with the emergent condition of novelistic discourse in the mid-eighteenth century. Epistolary, confessional, whore's dialogue, criminal report, memoir—all of these forms are part of the matrix of discourses out of which the novel emerges. What one must keep sight of is that each of these forms has the particular ideological function of sanctioning the narration of conventionally immoral episodes. Given access to letters, confessions, a dialogue between friends, the reader enters into a sphere of privileged intimacy, and thus into a new kind of relationship with the characters that is essential to the development of novelistic discourse.

Point of View: Memory, Text, and the Body

We have seen how the text creates in various ways the illusion of intimacy as the condition of its production. Another key to the manipulative potential of the memoir form is of course the narrator's location in time: Fanny looks back on her career as a prostitute and kept woman from the vantage point of the virtue and chastity of her later years. At the end of the novel, Fanny offers what she punningly calls a "tail-piece of morality," in which she extols the virtues of temperance, which "makes men lords over those pleasures that intemperance enslaves them to: the one, parent of health, vigour, fertility, chearfulness, and every other desirable good in life, the other, of diseases, debility, barrenness, self-loathing, with only every evil incident to human nature" (p. 187). The obvious duplicity here is that Fanny's own career of vice has left her remarkably free of disease, debility, barrenness, and so forth, while indulging her own and her male clients' intemperance has left her healthy, vigorous, fertile, and cheerful.

Fanny's happy condition has consequences for her narrative posture, for though she affects to condemn the vices of her youth, she is not above recalling them with pleasure and enjoying the narration of them. In fact, as a narrator Fanny is unrehabilitated: the act of writing is a return to

24 Miller claims that the spiritual autobiography "officially underwrites the English memorial novel as genre" (*Heroine's Text*, p. 63). Peter Wagner also describes Cleland's *Memoirs* as "a secularized parody of the Christian confession," and claims its affinity with spiritual autobiography (Introduction to *Memoirs*, pp. 14, 21).

the transgressions of her life as a prostitute. She offers her life's story to her friend without apology as "wrote with the same liberty that I led it" (p. 1). For Fanny, the narrator, the experience of writing becomes conflated with the sexual act itself. The second letter of the book begins by depicting the textual gap between letters as a respite between sexual episodes: "If I have delayed the sequel of my history, it has been purely to afford myself a little breathing time, not without some hopes that, instead of pressing me to a continuation, you would have acquitted me of the task of pursuing a confession in the course of which my self-esteem has so many wounds to sustain" (p. 91). To the reader who has just finished the first volume of the book, the *double entendre* of such expressions as "breathing time," "pressing me to a continuation," and "wounds" is perfectly clear. The passage is a piece of narrative *coquetterie* whose humour sanctions the equation of the narration with the sexual act, and invites the reader to take pleasure in the text as a substitute for sex.

Another example of the strategic value of the memoirist's point of view comes in the scene immediately after the extremely painful loss of her virginity to Charles, whom she calls, again oxymoronically, "the sweet relenting murderer of my virginity" (p. 41). After some food and wine, Charles gets into bed with her again and in his embrace Fanny finds that her pain begins to give way to the anticipation of pleasure. Just before intercourse, however, Fanny stops the action for this piece of narrative business: "Yes even at this time, that all the tiranny of the passions is fully over, and that my veins roll no longer but a cold tranquil stream, the remembrance of those passages that most affected me in my youth, still chears, and refreshes me: Let me proceed, then—" (p. 42). This retreat to the memoirist's perspective draws the reader into sharing the memoirist's point of view as voyeur of her own story. By acknowledging the pleasure she gets from recalling her past life, the narrator invites the reader's complicity in the pleasure of the voyeuristic act; this invitation serves to sanction the transgression.[25]

Cleland takes this technique a step further when towards the end of the novel he has Fanny tell of her sexual reunion with Charles after years of separation. As we approach the climactic moment of penetration,

25 In discussing first-person narratives, Gérard Genette cites a similar moment in Rousseau's *Confessions*: "In writing this I feel my pulse quicken yet," and notes that such proleptic leaps to the time of the telling are common in Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu*. Genette rightly observes that such narrative moments "are testimonies to the intensity of the present memory, and to some extent authenticate the narrative of the past" (*Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, trans. Jane E. Lewin [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980], pp. 67–69).

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the narrative switches to the present tense: "I see! I feel! the delicious velvet tip!—he enters might and main with—oh!—my pen drops from me here in the ecstasy now present to my faithful memory!" (p. 183). In this parody of Richardson's technique of writing-to-the-moment, the pleasure of sex, memory, and writing are conjoined. Not only do we have a voyeuristic complicity with Fanny the narrator, but through this we gain an empathetic connection: we move from "I see!" to "I feel!," from voyeur to participant. The collapse of Fanny's voyeuristic distance from her past can be seen as a paradigm of the collapse of the reader's own distance from the text as the reader's imaginative, if not hormonal, participation is invited.

The corresponding moment in *Shamela* is found in the exclamation made by Parson Tickletext, whose name conjoins bodily and textual pleasure. Describing his experience in reading Richardson's *Pamela*, he writes: "—Oh! I feel an emotion even while I am relating this: methinks I see Pamela at this instant, with all the pride of ornament cast off."[26] Both Fielding's and Cleland's parodies of Richardson draw the parallel between a writer's relationship to memory and the reader's relationship to the text, seeing in both relationships the possibility for sexual excitation. For Tickletext as reader, *Pamela* the book becomes conflated with Pamela the woman; he sees both the text and the body with its "ornament cast off." The joke springs from the semantic and ontological shift from *Pamela* to Pamela. The humour depends precisely on this confusion of categories, and helps us to see both laughter and orgasm as moments in which such distinctions can dissolve.

Thus it is under the cover of humour that the reader's relation to the text becomes explicitly sexual. The pleasure of this relationship must compensate for the absence of the woman's body that the text represents. At the start of the second volume, Fanny apologizes to the reader, complaining that it is difficult to find fresh language for a subject matter that is by its nature repetitive. She entrusts to her readers' "imagination and sensibility the pleasing task of repairing it, by their supplements, where my descriptions flag or fail: the one [imagination] will readily place the pictures I present before your eyes, the other [sensibility] give life to the colours where they are dull, or worn with too frequent handling" (p. 91). Language, like the body, can be "worn with too frequent handling," and must be renewed through the reader's activity.

26. Fielding, *Shamela*, p. 305.

It is often noted that Cleland's *Memoirs* is written without a single obscene word. Cleland's use of metaphor and euphemism is especially inventive in the restless display of signification forever circling the penis: "restless inmate," "blind favourite," "the peculiar idol" in its "obvious niche," "sensitive plant," "proud conqueror" are just a few examples among dozens. Boswell records a conversation in which Cleland claimed to have written the *Memoirs* to show that "one could write so freely about a woman of the town without resorting to the coarseness of *L'Ecole des filles*, which had quite plain words." Sabor, Wagner, and others have commented on Cleland's criticism of Sterne for making his "bawdy too plain." But what is not often noted is that to Cleland the problem with Sterne's plain language was not only that it was offensive, but that it "gives no sensations." To this charge Sterne is said to have replied: "You have given me a vindication. It can do no harm."[27] In the *Memoirs*, Cleland sought a language that would give sensations but not offence, hence Fanny's concern about finding the mean "between the revoltingness of gross, rank, and vulgar expressions, and the ridicule of mincing metaphors and affected circumlocutions" (p. 91). Fanny's concern about diction finds expression in somewhat different form in Cleland's later writings on linguistics. In *The Way to Things by Words, and to Words by Things* (1766), a haphazard collection of often fanciful etymologies, which attempts to establish ancient Celtic as the original universal language of Europe, Cleland writes that "the words we at present make use of, and understand only by common agreement, assume a new air and life in the understanding, when you trace them to their radicals, where you find every work strongly stamped with nature; full of energy, meaning, character, painting, and Poetry."[28] Noting "the necessarily poetical turn, of all languages in their infancy," Cleland sees in the recovery of the concrete, metaphorical nature of language the means of greater directness and energy in its effects. From this perspective, Cleland's avoidance of obscene language in the *Memoirs*, his use of metaphor and euphemism for sexual organs and acts, can be seen as an attempt not to conceal the referents and reduce the impact of sexually explicit scenes, but rather to increase their force. The key ingredient for Cleland seems to be precisely the sort of imaginative participation that the voyeuristic relation calls for: Fanny's metaphoric description of her past is an invitation to her correspondent to make pictures of her own, and to give them life through

27 13 April 1779, *Boswell, Laird of Auchinleck.*

28 John Cleland, *The Way to Things by Words, and to Words by Things* (London: L. Davis and C. Reymers, 1766, reprinted in facsimile: Scolar Press, 1968), p. 23.

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the activity of her sensibility. The male reader who inscribes himself in "Madam's" place is thus invited by Cleland into a sympathetic and imaginative participation in the voyeuristic narrative.

The Voyeur's Unsafe Distance and the Dangers of Novel Reading

We may now reconsider the familiar view that the role of voyeurism in pornography is to allow the voyeur to take his pleasure at a safe distance from the action. As with the developing concept of aesthetic distance in mid-eighteenth-century critical discourse, pornography's voyeuristic distance allowed the observer to watch and imagine with impunity what it would be immoral actually to perform. Edmund Burke had the insight to recognize this duplicity when, in trying to explain the pleasure found in scenes of suffering in tragedy, he pointed out that "we delight in seeing things, which so far from doing, our heartiest wishes would be to see redressed."[29] On the one hand, it is true that the distance at which we take our "delight in seeing things" is essential to the reader's moral recovery of his or her experience with the pornographic text. But, on the other hand, the foregoing discussion of Cleland's text shows how the voyeuristic narrative actually invites an intense imaginative and even sexual participation that compromises the reader's virtuous position. The importance to this text of a voyeuristic involvement that overcomes distance confirms George Bataille's intuition that eroticism involves "a conscious refusal to limit ourselves within our own personalities."[30] Essential to the voyeur's erotic drive is the desire to construct and occupy the other's subjectivity, and the author of the pornographic text must attempt to provide the reader with the conditions necessary for this voyeuristic relation. In *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* Cleland not only structures the reader's sexual and imaginative relation to the text but, because he depicts the reader and voyeur as ostensibly female, he at the same time images the female readership for the mid-eighteenth-century novel.

Lennard Davis and other writers on the origins of the novel have discussed the way in which the decreased perceptual distance between the reader and represented event is characteristic of the emerging novelis-

29 Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, ed. James T. Boulton (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1958), p. 47.

30 George S. Bataille, *L'Erotisme* [1957], trans. Mary Dalewood as *Erotism: Death and Sensuality* (San Francisco: City Lights, 1986), p. 24.

tic discourse and assists in distinguishing the novel from the romance.[31] Davis's reproductions of seventeenth-century ballad woodcuts are a striking visualization of some aspects of voyeuristic narrative. One of these, "The Knight and the Beggar-Wench," shows a couple in a sexual encounter on the ground overseen by a man in a tree. Because the accompanying ballad is narrated by the Knight himself, we have the possibility that the Knight is depicted as both a participant in and the observer/narrator of the sexual act (as Fanny is both participant in and the observer/narrator of the episodes of her past). In addition, the reader also puts him or herself in the position of the man in the tree, so that reader and narrator share the voyeur's point of view. Finding that the image of a couple watched by a voyeur appeared frequently in ballad woodcuts, Davis argues that "this scene seemed so apt because it embodies the essence of ballad-reading—a voyeurism which decreased perceptual distance between the reader/narrator and the event, including the reader as a subject within the text."[32]

In the case of *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, we have seen how narrative address and point of view work to include the reader as a subject within the text in a variety of ways. But Cleland also more explicitly makes repeated use of voyeurism as a motif within the novel. We have not only the narrator as voyeur of her own story, but also numerous episodes in which characters watch others having sex, their voyeurism conducted either openly or through a variety of peep-holes and secret contrivances. Cleland's varied use of the motif of voyeurism can be read as a particularly rich means of rendering the variable and dynamic relationship of reader to represented event.

Voyeurism plays an important role in Fanny's education and initiation into the life of the prostitute. To the uninitiated Fanny, newly arrived in London and confined to what she does not yet realize is a house of prostitution, the sight of sexual activity stimulates previously unknown desires. After watching through a peep-hole a couple having sexual intercourse, she is drawn into a lesbian encounter with Phoebe, her mentor. Fanny is keenly aware of what Phoebe lacks, however, for upon having her hand guided beneath Phoebe's petticoats she expresses her frustration at "finding not even the shadow of what I wanted, where every thing was so flat! or so hollow!" (p. 34). Though Phoebe satisfies herself with what Fanny regards as "rather the shadow than the substance of

31 Lennard J. Davis, *Factual Fictions: The Origins of the English Novel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).

32 Davis, p. 63.

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any pleasure," Fanny now pines for "more solid food," and repeated incidents of voyeurism do succeed in stimulating Fanny's desire to imitate what she sees.

After the sexual initiation, voyeurism serves as a means of enhancing pleasure. In a passage that takes us into the realm of what Steven Marcus has called "pornotopia," four couples take turns engaging in sexual intercourse while the other three watch. Fanny and her partner are the last to perform, and we are given this description of the effect of voyeurism on sexual desire: "all the impressions of burning desire, from the lively scenes I had been spectatress of, ripen'd by the heat of this exercise, and collecting to a head, throb'd and agitated me with insupportable irritations: I perfectly fevered and madden'd with their excess: I did not now enjoy a calm of reason enough to perceive, but I, extatically indeed! *felt* the policy and power of such rare and exquisite provocatives as the examples of the night had proved towards thus exalting our pleasures" (p. 123). The "policy and power" of the voyeuristic experience lies in its ability to make the external into the internal; not only what is seen, but a particular relationship between one who sees and the one who is seen, becomes a part of the voyeur's subjectivity. The episode just described gets its fit ending when we learn that all four couples had been watched through a peep-hole by Mrs Cole, the madam of the brothel. The addition of Mrs Cole's point of view merely provides textual confirmation and a sort of parody of the voyeuristic excess that the reader has already experienced. The removal to a third point of view that is neither that of Fanny the narrator nor Fanny the character is an option that the reader has already imaginatively constructed. The promiscuous movement between the various possible points of view is one of the pleasures of the text.

As Fanny matures and gains experience, voyeurism also provides an opportunity to exercise moral judgment. While staying alone at an inn, Fanny watches through a peep-hole as two men have a homosexual encounter. The scene is graphically described and, though burning with "rage, and indignation," Fanny explains that "all this, so criminal a scene, I had the patience to see to an end, purely that I might gather more facts" (p. 159). She relates what she has witnessed as a cautionary tale, in the hope that young men will know "the extent of their danger, for nothing is more certain than, that ignorance of a vice, is by no means a guard against it" (p. 158). This moment of moral judgment, however, is then undercut; she tells us that on her way to "raise the house" against the two men, "some nail or other ruggedness in the floor caught my foot,

and flung me on my face with such violence, that I fell senseless on the ground" (p. 159). By the time she recovers, the two men have escaped. This bit of seemingly gratuitous violence against Fanny raises the possibility that Cleland's sympathies actually lie with the two men, though in its ambiguity the scene also preserves the conventional sanction against homosexuality.[33] In combining flagrant transgression (this scene more than any other drew condemnation from the church and the courts) with an attempt to limit and control the transgression, Cleland's procedure supports George Bataille's view that "often the transgression of a taboo is no less subject to rules than the taboo itself. ... Concern over a rule is sometimes at its most acute when that rule is being broken."[34]

One of the most striking things about these scenes is that Cleland has, in a sense, constructed in his voyeurs the readership for the mid-eighteenth-century novel. In the three passages just discussed, Cleland's voyeurs get the same benefits from watching sexual acts that readers get from reading novels: education, pleasure, and practice in making moral judgments. It is fitting, then, that the moral position of Cleland's voyeurs is ambiguous in the same way that the morality of reading novels was ambiguous. And it is also fitting, given the feminine associations of novel reading, that all of Cleland's voyeurs are *women*. Cleland's female voyeurs can be seen as male-constructed images of the real female readership for the new novel. The voyeuristic narrative, by including the reader as a subject within the text, becomes a powerful means of constructing new forms of subjectivity, particularly those forms of "female" subjectivity designed for male consumption in response to male anxieties and desires. The "policy and power" that Fanny ascribes to the voyeuristic experience make explicit the political dimensions of this process. In the debate over the morality of reading novels, it is precisely the control over the evolving subjectivity that was at stake.

Voyeurism and the "Literary"

It is no accident, then, that Cleland's manipulation of point of view

33 Cleland's own putative homosexuality retains the status of an unconfirmed rumour. We have the negative evidence provided by Epstein, whose research turns up no evidence of Cleland ever having married (*John Cleland*, p. 178). We also have Josiah Beckwith's testimony that Cleland in his later years lived "under the Censure of being a Sodomite" (Henry Merritt, "A Biographical Note on John Cleland," *Notes and Queries* n.s. 28 [August 1981], 305–6). Without stronger evidence, there remains the possibility that the homosexual scene in the *Memoirs*, rather than any behaviour of his own, was the origin of the rumour about Cleland

34 Bataille, *Erotism*, p. 65.

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and his complex figuration of the voyeur are not simply techinques for managing transgression, but are also responsible for what we have come to recognize as the marks of this novel's "literary" quality. It is only from the perspective of the mature Fanny, who is both narrator and voyeur, secure in wealth and happiness, that we could get the deft touch of the following lines describing Fanny's recovery from dejection after her first sexual encounter with Mr. H—: "There are not, on earth at least, eternal griefs; mine were, if not at an end, at least suspended" (p. 62). The manipulation of the two points of view—the naïve Fanny's and the mature Fanny's—makes for much of the novel's complexity of character and subtlety of feeling. The moral resonance achieved by the distance between mature narrator and immature character is our heritage from the tradition of spiritual autobiography, and has made this narrative technique an enduring one. When a writer in the 1980s begins a short story with the line, "All of this happened years ago when I was the son-of-a-bitch I am not now," the humour lies in our recognizing in such a brusque form a situation that is central to our narrative tradition.[35]

On the other hand, the manipulation of point of view is a technique that at times eludes Cleland's control, as the narrator is caught in contradictions that reveal the ideology of male mastery for which she is the vehicle. The first attempt on Fanny's virginity occurs in the house of prostitution run by Mrs Brown, by whom Fanny is essentially kept prisoner. (Mrs Brown is the "bad" madam of the first volume, in contrast to the "good" madam, Mrs Cole, of the second volume. Mrs Brown keeps Fanny in a penniless state of super-exploitation, whereas Mrs Cole allows and encourages Fanny to develop economic independence.) In a meeting contrived by Mrs Brown without the naïve Fanny's knowledge or consent, Fanny suffers a violent attack from a man whom she finds both morally and physically repugnant (the two qualities are always conjoined in this book). She is finally rescued from her attacker with her virginity intact by the intervention of one of the other women in the house. Bleeding, pale, and dishevelled, Fanny fears the wrath of Mrs Brown: "Such too, and so cruel was my fate, that I dreaded the sight of Mrs Brown, as if I had been the criminal, and she the person injur'd: a mistake which you will not think so strange, on distinguishing that neither virtue, or principles, had the least share in the defence I had made; but only the particular aversion I had conceiv'd against this brutal and frightful invader of my tender innocence" (p. 21). But we may note that Fanny

35 Lee K. Abbott, *Love is the Crooked Thing* (Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books, 1986), p. 83.

the narrator claims that the young Fanny resisted the man, not on the basis of any "principles," but rather as an instinctive animal-like reaction, a "particular aversion." That is, Fanny resisted not out of any pretence of virtue, but rather because the man was ugly and lacked civility. Despite Fanny the narrator's tenderness towards her younger self, she seems to share the naïve Fanny's view that Mrs Brown's primary offence was not in arranging the sale of Fanny's virginity for the price of fifty guineas, but in choosing the wrong customer. Not only is there an inconsistency in the narrator's attitude towards Fanny's predicament, but this mercantile view clearly contradicts the moral view which the narrator assumes at the end of the book, when she claims to have become an enemy of vice (p. 187). Thus, the same narrative moment that adds resonance to the depiction of Fanny's character also reveals the narrator's duplicity. This is a narrator who, during the description of the violent struggle between Fanny and her attacker, takes care to point out the man's sexual deficiencies: "The brute had, it seems, as I afterwards understood, brought on, by his eagerness, and struggle, the ultimate period of his hot fit of lust, which his power was too short-liv'd to carry him through the full execution of; of which my thighs and linnen received the effusion" (p. 19). Never mind that this premature ejaculation probably saved the young Fanny from the completion of the rape, it remains a physical defect that the narrator asks us to find contemptible. The contradiction reveals the presence of the male author behind the female narrator, as the male author's anxieties of performance are at cross-purposes with the logic of character and situation.

Attempts to include *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* within the mainstream of the mid-eighteenth-century novel typically argue for the novel's literary merit *despite* its pornographic character. In this essay I have argued that the *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* achieves its literary quality largely *because* of the means by which it structures the reader response essential to pornography. The ways in which Cleland's voyeuristic narrative invites the reader's complicity in both narrative act and represented event are central to the novelistic tradition, and play an important role in those constructions of the reader's subjectivity that make the novel a vehicle for ideology. Rather than identify the literary potential within pornography, we might study further the pornographic potential within the literary.

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