

*Penguin Popular Classics*

FANNY HILL OR  
MEMOIRS OF A WOMAN  
OF PLEASURE

JOHN CLELAND



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# FANNY HILL

BY JOHN CLELAND

JOHN CLELAND (1710-89). Author, playwright, journalist and translator, he is now only remembered as the creator of the erotic masterpiece, *Fanny Hill*.

John Cleland was born in 1710; his father, William, was a friend of Alexander Pope. He was educated at Westminster School, in London, for a short time until 1723. Having acted as consul in Smyrna (Izmir), Turkey, for a time, he joined the East India Company in 1728. His career prospered at first and he rose from soldier to be secretary of the Bombay Council, but he left India abruptly in 1740 and arrived in London in 1741, possibly having toured Europe on the way home. He had not been able to make much money in India and his financial difficulties increased after the death of his father. He became one of the many Grub Street hacks who attempted to scratch a living from writing: he was no stranger to the debtor's prison. He occupied himself during one such confinement in the Fleet Prison (between February 1748 and March 1749) in rewriting his novel *Fanny Hill*. It had already existed in manuscript form for some years: there is a record of the novel having been read at a meeting of the notorious Hell Fire Club in 1737. The book was published, before Cleland's release from prison, in two volumes entitled *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, each costing three shillings. He was paid twenty pounds for the manuscript by his publisher who himself made a fortune from the book. A warrant for the arrest of the author, printer and publisher of the *Memoirs* was issued in 1749 but they were released on the recognizance of £100. An abridged version of the novel appeared in 1750 and again warrants were issued but no other action seems to have been taken. Four more books of erotic fiction, including *Memoirs of a Coxcomb* (1751), met with less success. The plays Cleland wrote were never performed and his poetry received scant critical attention. He then ventured into the realms of research, but his pamphlets on the medical aspects of sexuality were judged by contemporary critics to

be of little value. Finally, he turned to linguistics and tried to prove that Celtic was the original European language. Still impoverished and almost forgotten, John Cleland died in Westminster in 1789.

*Fanny Hill* has been privately enjoyed and publically condemned ever since it first appeared, but it has now taken its rightful place in the English canon as a supreme example of erotic entertainment that combines elements of European literature and philosophy.

## Part I

Madam,

I sit down to give you an undeniable proof of my considering your desires as indispensable orders; ungracious then as the task may be, I shall recall to view those scandalous stages of my life, out of which I emerged, at length, to the enjoyment of every blessing in the power of love, health, and fortune to bestow, whilst yet in the flower of youth, and not too late to employ the leisure afforded me by great ease and affluence, to cultivate an understanding, naturally not a despicable one, and which had, even amidst the whirl of loose pleasures I had been tossed in, exerted more observation on the characters and manners of the world than what is common to those of my unhappy profession, who, looking on all thought or reflection as their capital enemy, keep it at as great a distance as they can, or destroy it without mercy.

Hating, as I mortally do, all long unnecessary preface, I shall give you good quarter in this, and use no farther apology, than to prepare you for seeing the loose part of my life, wrote with the same liberty that I led it.

Truth! stark, naked truth, is the word; and I will not so much as take the pains to bestow the strip of a gauze wrapper on it, but paint situations such as they actually rose to me in nature, careless of violating those laws of decency that were never made for such unreserved intimacies as ours; and you have too much sense, too much knowledge of the ORIGINALS, to snuff prudishly and out of character at the PICTURES of them. The greatest men, those of the first and most leading taste, will not scruple adorning their private closets with nudities, though, in compliance with vulgar prejudices, they may not think them decent decorations of the staircase or saloon.

This, and enough, premised, I go souse into my per-

sonal history. My maiden name was FRANCES HILL. I was born at a small village near Liverpool in Lancashire, of parents extremely poor, and, I piously believe, extremely honest.

My father, who had received a hurt on his limbs that disabled him from following the more laborious branches of country drudgery, got, by making of nets, a scanty subsistence, which was not much enlarged by my mother's keeping a little day-school for the girls in her neighborhood. They had had several children, but none lived to any age except myself, who had received from nature a constitution perfectly healthy.

My education, till past fourteen, was no better than very vulgar; reading, or rather spelling an illegible scrawl, and a little ordinary plain-work composed the whole system of it: and then, all my foundation in virtue was no other than a total ignorance of vice, and the shy timidity general to our sex, in the tender stage of life when objects alarm or frighten more by their novelty than anything else: but then this is a fear too often cured at the expense of innocence, when miss, by degrees, begins no longer to look on a man as a creature of prey that will eat her.

My poor mother had divided her time so entirely between her scholars and her little domestic cares that she had spared very little to my instruction, having, from her own innocence from all ill, no hint or thought of guarding me against any.

I was now entering on my fifteenth year, when the worst of ills befell me in the loss of my fond tender parents, who were both carried off by the smallpox, within a few days of each other; my father dying first, and thereby hastening the death of my mother, so that I was now left an unhappy friendless orphan: (for my father's coming to settle there was accidental, he being originally a Kentishman). That cruel distemper which had proved so fatal to them had indeed seized me, but with such mild and favourable symptoms that I was presently out of danger, and, what I then did not know the value of, was entirely unmarked. I skip over here an account of the natural grief and affliction which I felt on this melancholy occasion. A little time, and the giddiness of that age, dissipated too soon my reflections on that

irreparable loss; but nothing contributed more to reconcile me to it than the notions that were immediately put into my head of going to London and looking out for a service, in which I was promised all assistance and advice from one Esther Davis, a young woman that had been down to see her friends and who, after the stay of a few days, was to return to her place.

As I had now nobody left alive in the village who had concern enough about what should become of me to start any objections to this scheme, and the woman who took care of me after my parents' death rather encouraged me to pursue it, I soon came to a resolution of making this launch into the wide world by repairing to London in order to SEEK MY FORTUNE, a phrase which, by the by, has ruined more adventurers of both sexes, from the country, than ever it made or advanced.

Nor did Esther Davis a little comfort and inspirit me to venture with her, by piquing my childish curiosity with the fine sights that were to be seen in London: the Tombs, the Lions, the King, the Royal Family, the fine Plays and Operas, and in short all the diversions which fell within her sphere of life to come at; the detail of all which perfectly turned the little head of me.

Nor can I remember, without laughing, the innocent admiration, not without a spice of envy, with which we poor girls, whose church-going clothes did not rise above dowlass shifts and stuff gowns, beheld Esther's scowred satin gowns, caps bordered with an inch of lace, tawdry ribbons, and shoes belaced with silver; all which we imagined grew in London, and entered for a great deal into my determination of trying to come in for my share of them.

The idea, however, of having the company of a townswoman with her was the trivial, and all the motives that engaged Esther to take charge of me during my journey to town, where she told me, after her manner and style: "as how several maids out of the country had made themselves and their kin forever, that by preserving their VIRTUE, some had taken so with their masters that they had married them, and kept them coaches, and lived vastly grand, and happy, and some, mayhap, came to be duchesses: Luck was all, and why not I as well as another:"



with other almanacs to this purpose, which set me a-tiptoe to begin this promising journey, and to leave a place which, though my native one, contained no relations that I had reason to regret, and was grown insupportable to me, from the change of the tenderest usage, into a cold air of charity, with which I was entertained even at the only friend's house that I had the least expectation of care and protection from. She was, however, so just to me, as to manage the turning into money the little matters that remained to me after the debts and burial charges were allowed for, and at my departure put my whole fortune into my hands; which consisted of a very slender wardrobe, packed up in a very portable box, and eight guineas, with seventeen shillings in silver, stowed up in a spring-pouch, which was a greater treasure than ever I had yet seen together, and which I could not conceive there was a possibility of running out: and indeed I was so entirely taken up with the joy of seeing myself mistress of such an immense sum that I gave very little attention to a world of good advice which was given me with it.

Places then being taken for Esther and me in the Chester waggon, I pass over a very immaterial scene of leave taking, at which I dropped a few tears betwixt grief and joy; and, for the same reasons of insignificance, skip over all that happened to me on the road, such as the waggoner's looking liquorish on me, the schemes laid for me by some of the passengers, which were defeated by the vigilance of my guardian Esther; who, to do her justice, took a motherly care of me, at the same time that she taxed me for her protection, by making me bear all travelling charges, which I defrayed with the utmost cheerfulness, and thought myself much obliged to her into the bargain. She took indeed great care that we were not overrated, or imposed on, as well as of managing as frugally as possible: expensiveness was not her vice.

It was pretty late in a summer evening when we reached the town, in our slow conveyance, though drawn by six at length. As we passed through the greatest streets that led to our inn, the noise of the coaches, the hurry, the crowds of foot passengers, in short, the new scenery of the shops and houses, at once pleased and amazed me.

But guess at my mortification and surprise when we

came to the inn, and our things were landed and delivered to us, when my fellow-traveller and protectress, Esther Davis, who had used me with the utmost tenderness during the journey, and prepared me by no preceding signs for the stunning blow I was to receive, when, I say, my only dependence and friend, in this strange place, all of a sudden assumed a strange and cool air towards me, as if she dreaded my becoming a burden to her.

Instead, then, of proffering me the continuance of her assistance and good offices, which I relied upon, and never more wanted, she thought herself, it seems, abundantly acquitted of her engagements to me, by having brought me safe to my journey's end; and seeing nothing in her procedure towards me but what was natural and in order, began to embrace me by way of taking leave, whilst I was so confounded, so struck, that I had not spirit and sense enough so much as to mention my hopes or expectations from her experience and knowledge of the place she had brought me to.

Whilst I stood thus stupid and mute, which she doubtless attributed to nothing more than a concern at parting, this idea procured me perhaps a slight alleviation of it, in the following harangue: that now we were got safe to London, and that she was obliged to go to her place, she advised me by all means to get into one as soon as possible; that I need not fear getting one—there were more places than parish churches; that she advised me to go to an intelligence office; that if she heard of anything stirring, she would find me out and let me know; that in the meantime, I should take a private lodging, and acquaint her where to send to me; that she wished me good luck, and hoped I should always have the grace to keep myself honest, and not bring a disgrace on my parentage. With this she took her leave of me, and left me, as it were, on my own hands, full as lightly as I had been put into hers.

Left thus alone, absolutely destitute and friendless, I began then to feel most bitterly the severity of this separation, the scene of which had passed in a little room in the inn; and no sooner was her back turned, but the affliction I felt at my helpless strange circumstances burst out into a flood of tears, which infinitely relieved the

oppression of my heart; though I still remained stupefied, and most perfectly perplexed how to dispose of myself.

One of the drawers coming in added yet more to my uncertainty by asking me, in a short way, if I called for anything? to which I replied innocently: "No." But I wished him to tell me where I might get a lodging for that night. He said he would go and speak to his mistress, who accordingly came, and told me drily, without entering in the least into the distress she saw me in, that I might have a bed for a shilling, and that, as she supposed I had some friends in town (here I fetched a deep sigh in vain!) I might provide for myself in the morning.

It is incredible what trifling consolations the human mind will seize in its greatest afflictions. The assurance of nothing more than a bed to lie on that night calmed my agonies; and being ashamed to acquaint the mistress of the inn that I had no friends to apply to in town, I proposed to myself to proceed, the very next morning, to an intelligence office, to which I was furnished with written directions on the back of a ballad Esther had given me. There I counted on getting information of any place that such a country girl as I might be fit for, and where I could get into any sort of being, before my little stock should be consumed; and as to a character, Esther had often repeated to me that I might depend on her managing me one; nor, however affected I was at her leaving me thus, did I entirely cease to rely on her, as I began to think good-naturedly that her procedure was all in course, and that it was only my ignorance in life that had made me take it in the light I at first did.

Accordingly, the next morning I dressed myself as clean and as neat as my rustic wardrobe would permit me; and having left my box, with special recommendation, to the landlady, I ventured out by myself, and without any more difficulty than can be supposed of a young country girl, barely fifteen, and to whom every sign and shop was a gazing trap, I got to the wished-for intelligence office.

It was kept by an elderly woman, who sat at the receipt of custom, with a book before her in great form and order, and several scrolls made out of directions for places.

I made up then to this important personage, without lifting up my eyes or observing any of the people round me, who were attending there on the same errand as myself, and dropping her curtsies nine deep, just made a shift to stammer out my business to her.

Madam heard me out, with all the gravity and brow of a petty minister of state, and seeing at one glance over my figure what I was, made me no answer but to ask me the preliminary shilling, on receipt of which she told me places for women were exceeding scarce, especially as I seemed so slight built for hard work; but that she would look over her book, and see what was to be done for me, desiring me to stay a little till she had dispatched some other customers.

On this, I drew back a little, most heartily mortified at a declaration which carried with it a killing uncertainty that my circumstances could not well endure.

Presently, assuming more courage, and seeking some diversion from my uneasy thoughts, I ventured to lift up my head a little, and sent my eyes on a course round the room, where they met full tilt with those of a lady (for such my extreme innocence pronounced her) sitting in a corner of the room, dressed in a velvet mantle (in the midst of summer) with her bonnet off; squab-fat, red-faced, and at least fifty.

She looked as if she would devour me with her eyes, staring at me from head to foot, without the least regard to the confusion and blushes her eyeing me so fixedly put me to, and which were to her, no doubt, the strongest recommendation and marks of my being fit for her purpose. After a little time, in which my air, person, and whole figure had undergone a strict examination, which I had on my part tried to render favourable to me, by primming, drawing up my neck, and setting my best looks, she advanced and spoke to me with the greatest demureness:

"Sweetheart, do you want a place?"

"Yes, and please you" (with a curtsy down to the ground).

Upon this she acquainted me that she was actually come to the office herself to look out for a servant; that she believed I might do, with a little of her instructions;

that she could take my very looks for a sufficient character; that London was a very wicked, vile place; that she hoped I would be tractable, and keep out of bad company. In short, she said all to me that an old experienced practitioner in town could think of, and which was much more than was necessary to take in an artless inexperienced country maid, who was even afraid of becoming a wanderer about the streets, and therefore gladly jumped at the first offer of a shelter, especially from so grave and matron-like a lady, for such my flattering fancy assured me this new mistress of mine was; I being actually hired under the nose of the good woman that kept the office, whose shrewd smiles and shrugs I could not help observing, and innocently interpreted them as marks of her being pleased at my getting into place so soon: but, as I afterwards came to know, these BELDAMS understood one another very well, and this was a market where Mrs. Brown, my mistress, frequently attended, on the watch for any fresh goods that might offer there, for the use of her customers, and her own profit.

Madam was, however, so well pleased with her bargain that, fearing, I might presume, lest better advice, or some accident, might occasion my slipping through her fingers, she would officiously take me in a coach to my inn, where, calling herself for my box, it was, I being present, delivered without the least scruple or explanation as to where I was going.

This being over, she bid the coachman drive to a shop in St. Paul's Churchyard, where she bought a pair of gloves, which she gave me, and thence renewed her directions to the coachman to drive to her house in ——— street, who accordingly landed us at the door, after I had been cheered up and entertained by the way with the most plausible flams, without one syllable from which I could conclude anything but that I was by the greatest good luck fallen into the hands of the kindest mistress, not to say friend, that the varsal world could afford; and accordingly I entered her doors with most complete confidence and exultation, promising myself that, as soon as I should be a little settled, I would acquaint Esther Davis with my rare good fortune.

You may be sure the good opinion of my place was

not lessened by the appearance of a very handsome back parlour, into which I was led, and which seemed to me magnificently furnished, who had never seen better rooms than the ordinary ones in inns upon the road. There were two gilt pierglasses, and a buffet, in which a few pieces of plate, set out to the most show, dazzled, and altogether persuaded me that I must be got into a very reputable family.

Here my mistress first began her part with telling me that I must have good spirits, and learn to be free with her; that she had not taken me to be a common servant, to do domestic drudgery, but to be a kind of companion to her; and that if I would be a good girl, she would do more than twenty mothers for me; to all which I answered only by the profoundest and the awkwardest curtsies, and a few monosyllables, such as "yes! no! to be sure!"

Presently my mistress touched the bell, and in came a strapping maid-servant, who had let us in. "Here, Martha," said Mrs. Brown, "I have just hired this young woman to look after my linen, so step up and show her her chamber; and I charge you to use her with as much respect as you would myself, for I have taken a prodigious liking to her, and I do not know what I shall do for her."

Martha, who was an arch jade, and being used to this decoy, had her cue perfect, made me a kind of half-curtsy, and asked me to walk up with her, and accordingly showed me a neat room two pair of stairs backwards, in which there was a handsome bed, where Martha told me I was to lie with a young gentlewoman, a cousin of my mistress, who she was sure would be vastly good to me. Then she ran out into such affected encomiums on her good mistress! her sweet mistress! and how happy I was to light upon her! that I could not have bespoke a better—with other the like gross stuff, such as would itself have started suspicions in any but such an unpracticed simpleton, who was perfectly new in life, and who took every word she said in the very sense she laid out for me to take it; but she readily saw what a penetration she had to deal with, and measured me very rightly

in her manner of whistling to me, so as to make me pleased with my cage, and blind to the wires.

In the midst of these false explanations of the nature of my future service, we were rung for down again, and I was reintroduced into the same parlour, where there was a table laid with three covers; and my mistress had now got with her one of her favourite girls, a notable manager of her house, and whose business it was to prepare and break such young fillies as I was to the mounting block; and she was accordingly, in that view, allotted me for a bedfellow; and to give her the more authority, she had the title of cousin conferred on her by the venerable president of this college.

Here I underwent a second survey, which ended in the full approbation of Mrs. Phœbe Ayres, the name of my tutoress elect, to whose care and instruction I was affectionately recommended.

Dinner was now set on the table, and, in pursuance of treating me as a companion, Mrs. Brown, with a tone to cut off all dispute, soon over-ruled my most humble and most confused protestations against sitting down with her LADYSHIP, which my very short breeding just suggested to me could not be right, or in the order of things.

At table, the conversation was chiefly kept up by the two madams, and carried on in double-meaning expressions, interrupted every now and then by kind assurances to me, all tending to confirm and fix my satisfaction with my present condition; augment it they could not, so very a novice was I then.

It was here agreed that I should keep myself up and out of sight for a few days, till such clothes could be procured for me as were fit for the character I was to appear in, of my mistress's companion, observing, withal, that on the first impressions of my figure much might depend; and, as they rightly judged, the prospect of exchanging my country clothes for London finery made the clause of confinement digest perfectly well with me. But the truth was, Mrs. Brown did not care that I should be seen or talked to by any, either of her customers, or her DOES (as they called the girls provided for them), till she had secured a good market for my maidenhead, which I

had at least all the appearances of having brought into her LADYSHIP's service.

To slip over minutes of no importance to the main of my story, I pass the interval to bedtime, in which I was more and more pleased with the views that opened to me of an easy service under these good people; and after supper being showed to bed, Miss Phoebe, who observed a kind of reluctance in me to strip, and go to bed in my shift before her, now the maid was withdrawn, came up to me, and beginning with unpinning my handkerchief and gown, soon encouraged me to go on with undressing myself; and, still blushing at now seeing myself naked to my shift, I hurried to get under the bedclothes out of sight. Phoebe laughed, and was not long before she placed herself by my side. She was about five and twenty, by her most suspicious accounts, in which, according to all appearances, she must have sunk at least ten good years: allowance too being made for the havoc which a long course of hackneyship and hot waters must have made of her constitution, and which had already brought on, upon the spur, that stale stage in which those of her profession are reduced to think of **SHOWING** company instead of **SEEING** it.

No sooner then was this precious substitute of my mistress's lain down, but she, who was never out of her way when any occasion of lewdness presented itself, turned to me, embraced and kissed me with great eagerness.

This was new, this was odd; but imputing it to nothing but pure kindness, which, for aught I knew, it might be the London way to express in that matter, I was determined not to be behind-hand with her, and returned her the kiss and embrace, with all the fervour that perfect innocence knew.

Encouraged by this, her hands became extremely free, and wandered over my whole body, with touches, squeezes, pressures, that rather warmed and surprised me with their novelty, than they either shocked or alarmed me.

The flattering praises she intermingled with these invasions contributed also not a little to bribe my passiveness, and knowing no ill, I feared none; especially from one who had prevented all doubts of her womanhood by con-



ducting my hands to a pair of breasts that hung loosely down, in a size and volume that full sufficiently distinguished her sex, to me at least, who had never made any comparison.

I lay then all tame and passive as she could wish, whilst her freedom raised no other emotion but those of a strange, and, till then, unfelt pleasure. Every part of me was open, and exposed to the licentious courses of her hands, which, like a lambent fire, ran over all my body, and thawed all coldness as they went.

My breasts, if it is not too bold a figure to call so two hard, firm, rising hillocks, that just began to show themselves, or signify anything to the touch, employed and amused her hands awhile, till slipping down lower, over a smooth track, she could just feel the soft silky down that had but a few months before put forth and garnished the mount-pleasant of those parts, and promised to spread a grateful shelter over the sweet seat of the most exquisite sensation, and which had been, till that instant, the seat of the most insensible innocence. Her fingers played and strove to twine in the young tendrils of that moss, which nature has contrived at once for use and ornament.

But not contented with these outer posts, she now attempts the main spot, and began to twitch, to insinuate, and at length to force an introduction of a finger into the quick itself, in such a manner that, had she not proceeded by insensible gradations that inflamed me beyond the power of modesty to oppose its resistance to their progress, I should have jumped out of bed, and cried for help against such strange assaults.

Instead of which, her lascivious touches had lighted up a new fire that wantoned through all my veins, but fixed with violence in that center appointed them by nature, where the first strange hands were now busied in feeling, squeezing, compressing the lips, then opening them again, with a finger between, till an "Oh!" expressed her hurting me, where the narrowness of the unbroken passage refused its entrance to any depth.

In the meantime the extension of my limbs, languid stretchings, sighs, short heavings, all conspire to assure that experienced wanton that I was more pleased than offended at her proceedings, which she seasoned with