

Preposterous Pornography:
Gender Instability in
Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure

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John Cleland's *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* has been commonly regarded as the first pornographic novel written in English. It contains a number of descriptions of sexual organs and of intercourse to incite the reader's erotic desires. If we define pornography only from the viewpoint of sexually explicit contents, this work is irrefutably qualified to be called as such. Such a pornographic dimension of this work has attracted much attention from the government as well as ordinary people. Since the first appearance of the book, *Memoirs* has been censored for over two hundred years, and the bowdlerized version circulated widely until 1985.¹ From then on, gay/lesbian studies have become more influential in the interpretations of the novel. Then, almost in tandem, the definition of "pornography" became controversial. As recent studies of obscene writings show, it is quite difficult to give a categorical definition to pornography. Sexual excitement is not the only criteria for defining its meaning. For example, in *The Invention of Pornography*, Lynn Hunt argues that pornography was always attached to things other than sex in the eighteenth century.² The modern usage of the word, primarily under-

¹ Sabor's edition of *Memoirs* is based on the first-edition text, which includes the homosexual passages. Since 1985, much critical interest has been given to this expurgated episode. For the history of criticism about *Memoirs*, see Savor.

² Wagner, who prefers to use "erotica" as a comprehensive term for lewd,

lining the sexual aspects of the term, became popular in the middle of the nineteenth century. In fact, the word pornography appeared for the first time in the *Oxford English Dictionary* in 1857. Therefore, eighteenth-century readers could not recognize this novel as what is now called, a work of pornography. They might have become excited at the scene of Fanny losing her virginity and find themselves aroused in reading of her sexual indecency. They also might have been astonished at seeing sodomy in the final part of the novel. Yet there is more than sexual excitement about *Memoirs* if it is a *modern* pornography. Indeed Hunt writes as follows:

Pornography did not constitute a wholly separate and distinct category of written or visual representation before the early nineteenth century. If we take pornography to be the explicit depiction of sexual organs and sexual practices with the aim of arousing sexual feelings, then pornography was almost always an adjunct to something else until the middle or end of the eighteenth century. (9-10)

This suggests that, by focusing on the non-sexual parts of *Memoirs*, we can bring out the uniqueness of the novel as pornography. In what follows, I would like to add a new element to the current definition of pornography whose meaning is mostly limited to sexual excitement. Of course, this addition is neither exactly original nor unique at all from the

bawdy, and obscene fictions, writes, "Pornography is difficult to define because both its function and reception are variables changing from one historical period to another. Significantly, pornography has been defined in the past on the basis of its function, with the implication that the principal aim of pornography can only be sexual stimulation. This is definitely not so" (5-6).

eighteenth-century standpoint. Rather, it has been too common to mention. Nevertheless, since we are interested in connecting dissimilar networks of gender, class, race, and sexuality, *Memoirs* is brought once again to the fore. Peter Sabor, drawing attention to Judith Butler's gender criticism, argues that this novel has "no stable sexual identity" and a "polymorphous nature of sexuality" (569). My aim is to analyze this multiplicity of sexual identity for the understanding of eighteenth-century pornography.

I

Memoirs describes the sexual activities of Fanny and other prostitutes a great number of times. The frequent representations of intercourse suggest both her openness to us readers and the total loss of her chastity. Fanny, orphaned at fourteen, comes up to London and experiences lesbianism with Phoebe at Mrs. Brown's brothel.³ At this time, her most private part is described as "the seat of the most insensible innocence" (11) of maidenhood. Fanny would be sold to an old repellent man, but she fights off his attempt at rape, and chooses her own seducer, Charles, a future husband, with whom she escapes from Mrs. Brown's whorehouse. After a sudden separation from Charles, Fanny embarks on her adventure of sexual pleasure as a prostitute. From that moment, her virtue loses its unsullied whiteness as she gets affections from her customers one after another. As a natural consequence, we may regard

³ Moore, pointing out "Phoebe is heterosexual, lesbian, or bisexual; all three categories are invoked" (61), asserts the importance of Sapphic reading of the novel.

Fanny's frequency of sex as an index of corruption of virtue. We see various sexual performances: one-night casual sex, transvestite one, sex with an idiot boy, promiscuous one, sex with flagellations, sodomy, and so on. Fanny's marriage to Charles at the end of the story, therefore, can be read as a contrition or rebirth out of all these moral corruptions. That is the outline of the story on the basis of the opposition between piled-up vices and a virtue recovered.

Yet we are gradually discovering that her life of debauchery is not merely an accumulation of vices. She does not go down from bad to worse as the plot develops, nor look worn out in the end. She can oddly preserve her natural fairness and be almost always represented as a virgin figure even in dissipation. In the latter part of *Memoirs*, when Fanny moves into Mrs. Cole's brothel, she undergoes the sexual initiation with four men.⁴ Her body is exposed in the presence of the whole company there as follows:

But in this general survey, you may be sure, the most material spot of me was not excus'd the strictest visitation: nor was it but agreed, that I had not the least reason to be diffident of passing even for a maid, on occasion; so inconsiderable a flaw had my preceding adventures created there, and so soon had the blemish of an over-stretch been repair'd and worn out, at my age, and in my naturally small make in that part. (122)

The claim of her own maidenhood might be explained as a prostitute's

⁴ According to Trumbach, Mrs. Cole's "little Seraglio" (95) is represented as a new type of brothel "that appeared in the second half of the century in which drunkenness and disease were supposedly banished and a domesticated fantasy nourished instead" (271). For a social history of the eighteenth-century English prostitution, see Henderson.

usual trick for amusing customers. Yet we know her “preceding adventures” in details, and if she were overtly in disguise, she would put off the reader’s curiosity. Therefore, in order to create Fanny’s incredible resilience, Cleland here attaches too much importance on the smallness both of her “part” and the previously inflicted “flaw”. Her physical idiosyncrasy enables her to escape from the prostitute’s usual predicaments. In this way, due to her singular body, Fanny can always be an evergreen woman of pleasure in spite of considerable experience.

Such a virginity is, of course, a fantasy device of male sexual arousal in reading pornographic writings. The readers may find something mysterious about her easily-renewable virginity/vagina. What is important here is that Cleland has adhered a cult of virginity inasmuch as it does not erode the plausibility of story. In order to keep the balance of what is changeless, virginity, and what is changeful in sexual pleasures, Cleland has covertly brought a new meaning to the “original”. For Cleland, I think, originality is no longer in its initial state of body. It does not mean the one and only virginity. Rather its first meaning lies in the forgetfulness: initialization of past memories. Taking this reader’s amnesia into consideration, it is no wonder that Fanny is still an ideal woman for Charles in the final reunion. Here, Patricia Meyer Spacks, stating “the more she changes, the more she remains the same” (275), reads the projection of male desires for a mythic woman who is void of any corruptions.

Obviously the reader’s initialization of memory is caused by her bodily uniqueness. However desperately she tries to erase her own memories, the readers would not overlook them. Cleland, then, puts stress on the fact that Fanny’s body is at liberty to be back to the virginity: each time she can receive full pleasure, while surrendering her

naive self to the sexual attacks from the outside. Hence, Fanny's body can be always regarded as a *tabula rasa*, on which male-cultural (sexual) inscriptions act incessantly. How is, then, Fanny's moral and emotional inner life? It is normally conceivable that her mind is back to a blank page whenever her body takes a reset action. This is not the case here. Why not? One reason is, I believe, that the repetitious initialization of her memory would foretell the discrepancy between the past Fanny and the present authorial one, which possibly damages the narrative plausibility. If Fanny's continuity of consciousness about her past experience is put back to a blank page by the initialization, *Memoirs*, her self-reflection will lose the foundation of its identification of a narrator with a character. The claim for the truthfulness of her confession requires the mental coherence; otherwise, disorder or confusion about the distinction of other/self would develop to the point where the story cannot engage our interest. That is exactly what Cleland manages to erase from the surface of the text. That is why we can see Fanny as a person having remained unchanged mentality. The consistent, uniform, and reliable mind is here regarded as a characteristic of human beings. And that is not all. This human nature is what is called femininity for its passivity. In *Memoirs*, the feminine is a unique attribute which obscures the inconsistency between inside (mind) and outside (body).

Before turning our attention to Fanny's sexual aberrations, I would like to point out one more significant characteristic of *Memoirs*, that which makes Cleland a unique inventor of pornography: the authorial concern with fictionality. A renewal of virginity, which is extraordinary in itself, demonstrates his interest in creating a fictional artifact. This pornographic device is not only increasing readers' fictional excitement but also refreshing their sentiments toward reality. The readers move

from the unrealistic world of fiction to that of reality, and stop for a moment to discern the difference between the two. In this way, Cleland makes us highly sensitive to the fictionality of *Memoirs* and its obsession with sex, gender and sexuality. Then, we will examine the unique sense of realism with respect to Cleland's sexual management of fiction.

II

We have already seen that there are two characteristics of Fanny's body: her vagina's smallness and total passivity in intercourse. How is, then, her first love and future husband, Charles? Charles' physical singularity should be clear now because the heterosexual relationship between Fanny and Charles is regarded as an underlying principle to manage the various components of the whole narrative. As is shown in the following passage, his body's traits are symmetrical to those of Fanny:

I complain'd, but tenderly complain'd; "I could not bear it—" Indeed! he hurt me—still he thought no more than that being so young, the largeness of his machine (for few men could dispute size with him) made all the difficulty, and that possibly I had not been enjoy'd by any so advantageously made in that part as himself; for still, that my virgin-flower was yet uncrop'd, never once enter'd into his head, and he would have thought it idling with time and words to have question'd me upon it. (40)

We can say that Charles prodigious penis makes him a tentative but ideal standard with which Fanny measures other partners' masculinity. According to Leo Braudy, the usage of "machine" as referring to the penis begins with Cleland (29). Here, Fanny cannot be given to sexual pleasure, but soon she comes to think of Charles to be "the absolute disposer"

(41) of her delectation. For Fanny, the ideal is heterosexual intercourse between women and men, and, implicitly, homosexuality (extra-vaginal sex) can be regarded as having a negative implication. The basic structure of masculine dominance over feminine is represented in this way, and the combination of the large and small is highlighted for the heterosexual symmetry.

Since then, Fanny always observes the penis size in each intercourse, but almost every one is large enough to put her in a dazzle. One of the notable exceptions is Mr. Norbert, who, according to David Weed, belongs to the “‘modern’ aristocratic Englishmen” (14). His weakness comes from the “overindulgence in libertine practices, which threatens his fortune, his manhood, his health, and his life” (13), and Fanny cannot come to a climax with him. Mr. Norbert’s “machine, which was one of those sizes that slip in and out without being minded” (133) becomes fair game for Fanny’s prostitution. Mr. Norbert is not a homosexual but an aristocratic libertine whose “machine” is not fit for Fanny’s standard. In this way, the hidden private part can be related to the apparently public standard of social hierarchy. With few exceptions, mostly male characters “could dispute size with” Charles, without whom Fanny’s initialization of virginity would have little impact for the fictional composition.

Therefore, it is not necessarily a size in itself that matters, but rather the degree of aggressiveness in terms of gender and sexuality. The problem of homosexuality in *Memoirs* lies first and foremost in the gender switch: male passivity and female aggressivity. Here we can relate the contemporary class conflict to such a perverse sexuality. Weed discussing *Memoirs* “decries aristocratic men and sodomites for the various ways that they misuse and overuse pleasure” (8). In this respect, Mr. Norbert is a typical character who represents the declining aristoc-

racy. Weed also points out Englishness, that is, national identity is crucial to the negation of homosexual intercourse. In the eighteenth-century England was afraid of the prevalence of sodomy, which could “become equated with foreign influences from the ‘luxurious’ Orient and from the allegedly more ‘effeminate’ European nations, France and Italy” (10). We see here the political association of nation with gender hierarchy, which comes from two relevant value judgments. For one thing, we read the approval of English colonialism: Charles’ sexual assault and penetration are interpreted as colonial intrusions, which bring an ecstatic pleasure to the vanquished. Fanny’s body becomes a colony, and her vagina a pathway for his exploration. For another, we have a negative image of foreign countries: the indecision and incompetence of Italy and France, and the Orient squandering its resources. Womanly passiveness or misapplication of masculine strength is singled out for criticism. Though Fanny is a heroine of this story, male characters and male readers appear to be eventually called to establish their own selves to act on a proper gender/sexuality imperative.

The way of subjection differentiates one man from the other. Mr. H, who belongs to the same upper-class as Mr. Norbert, receives more positive recognition due to his masculine appearance. His “brawny structure, strong made limbs, and rough shaggy breast” (63) suggest the ability to satisfy Fanny’s sexual desire. Indeed, Mr. H’s assault was so strong that Fanny “lost all restraint, and yielding to the force of the emotion, gave down, as mere woman, those effusions of pleasure” (64). Mr. H is almost an ideal. He has no effeminacy, no sexual inadequacy nor indulgence. Yet he has a blemish not to overlook. Fanny complains about Mr. H’s too aggressive and inhumane sexual performance:

Yet oh! what an immense difference did I feel between this impression of a pleasure merely animal, and struck out of the collision of the sexes, by a passive bodily effect, from that sweet fury, that rage of active delight which crowns the enjoyments of a mutual love-passion, where two hearts tenderly and truly united, club to exalt the joy, and give it a spirit and soul that bids defiance to that end, which mere momentary desires generally terminate in, when they die of a surfeit of satisfaction. (64)

The decisive difference between Mr. H and Charles is the availability of re-creating the boundary line of masculinity and femininity. Charles, the incarnation of bourgeois English man, also presupposes the traditional framework of strong male dominance over passive female body in order to establish his own self. Yet, at the same time, he can arrange such a static binary opposition of masculine/feminine into a more dynamic one. Fanny's complaint about total passivity and her demand for mutuality between the sexes are the very expression of the new bourgeois standard of gender and sexuality. Weed insists that this alternative norm emphasizes the masculine "ability to manage these contradictory messages about libertine and domestic sexuality" (17). In this way, *Memoirs*, satirizing or attacking the aristocratic bodily virtues, works up a spirit of bourgeoisies.

Along this line of argument, the homosexual episode is thought to be a negative example of Charles-Fanny bourgeois heterosexuality. Weed states that *Memoirs* "inscribes a range of sexual practices only to thwart them in favor of vaginal intercourse between men and women" (11). However, since the management ability to control various contradictions is indeed the characteristic of bourgeois (hetero-)sexuality, the homosexual never disappears from the text as a contrary concept. In this sense, Fanny's demand for a proactive stance in sex is quite important for

redrawing the boundary of female/male, in/out, soul/body, fiction/reality, and so on. Another uniqueness of Cleland's writing is, I argue, to mobilize the axis of symmetry in a subtle way. Focusing on a class or national aspect of male gender-identity, he manages to camouflage the latent ambiguity of Fanny's sexuality. Not changing the basic premise of (hetero)sexuality, *Memoirs* begins to assume the self-reflective attitude toward gender distinction. In the case of male characters, we are not shown such a radical change as with Fanny's recovery of virginity, but a gradation of minor differences among men that is highlighted from Fanny's active point of view. And then, pursuing the *normal end* of ideal, Fanny tries to remove unacceptable choices one after another. How does Charles look in the end when Fanny has accomplished her deviated adventure of pleasure?

III

In the preceding section, we have seen that Fanny criticizes Mr. H's inhumane sexual performance. His machine is described as "merely animal" without conception of mutual love. The problem is, however, not to have animalistic sex, but to go to the extreme of the two poles between nature and art. The penis represented as "man-machine" (163) can mean a half-natural and half-mechanical entity. It is a mixture of nature/art, which involves a contradiction in itself. Mr. H, pursuing the genuine aristocratic libertine, has a too natural and brutal instinct, so that he draws harsh criticism from the bourgeois standpoint. If one took the other side of things, that it is too mechanical, it would be criticized as inhumane, too. Therefore, in *Memoirs*, "man-machine" should represent a bourgeois mixture of machine/animal, intelligence/instinct, and auto-

matic/manual. The ideal penis with a mind of its own is something like a humanoid whose heterogeneity is made the most of for sexual pleasure.

The ideal humanoid emerges near the conclusion of the novel where Fanny and her companion Louisa experiment on “*Good-natur’d Dick*” (160).⁵ They seduce Dick to examine “whether the general rule held good with regard to this changeling and how far nature had made him amends in her best bodily gifts, for her denial of the sublimer intellectual ones” (161). This time, Fanny participates in Louisa’s intercourse on the sideline. When Fanny meddles with Dick for his sexual arousal, “the emotion in short of animal pleasure glar’d distinctly in the simpleton’s countenance” (161). He is literally a natural being, and his machine “positively of so tremendous size” has no meaning in itself at all. Dick is regarded as subhuman and the intercourse as a kind of bestiality. Yet, in the end, he gives Louisa more ecstatic pleasure than any other man. That is because Dick proves to have a heterogeneous *nature* in the appearance of his natural simpleton. For example, his appearance is depicted as follows: “his thighs, the skin of which seem’d the smoother and fairer for the coarseness, and even dirt of his dress; as the teeth of Negroes seem the whiter for the surrounding black” (162). Comparing dirty clothes to black skin and the real white skin to the hidden teeth, Cleland shows us an interracial mixture in one person. In *Torrid Zones*, Felicity A. Nussbaum, pointing out that the idiot is “a kind of parodic inversion of the black eunuch who guards the harem, commonly compared to the brothel” (234), discusses the significance of relations between racial hierarchy and sexuality. Thus Dick can be regarded as an exotic slave

⁵ According to Savor’s notes on the text, “natural” means “[a]n idiot; one whom nature debars from understanding” (Cleland 202).

for sex in the female empire of pleasure. In this way, the two prostitutes, escaping from the ordinary passive state, start working on the colonization of a male body.

At odds with their expectation, Louisa and Fanny arrive at an opposite conclusion. Indeed, due to the lack of intelligence, Dick has occupied his position at the bottom or out of social class system. However, during the intercourse, he begins to assume the high and noble personage:

[H]e seem'd at this juncture greater than himself; his countenance, before so void of meaning, or expression, now grew big with the importance of the act he was upon. In short, it was not now that he was to be play'd the fool with: but what is pleasant enough, I myself was aw'd into a sort of respect for him, by the comely terrors his emotions drest him in: his eyes shooting sparks of fire, his face glowing with ardours that gave all another life to it. (163-64)

Fanny, observing this transfiguration of Dick, marvels at seeing Louisa become "meer a machine" (165) in an ecstasy of joy. This female machine probably means the passive medium which automatically keeps in tune of the other movements. Female colonial entrepreneurs reaches the bottom, and a noble savage lands the victory. Up to this point, we have seen a shuffling and reshuffling of their status.

Soon after the event, Dick has a demeanor of "sad, repining foolishness, superadded to his natural one of no meaning, and idiotism" (165). Once again, he falls upside down to the original state of being. The wheel comes full circle in the end, as it were, but, through this upside-down world, we feel a temporal reversal of class, gender, and race as a haunting pull. Though Dick has "retain'd only a confus'd memory of the

transaction” (166), we cannot forget this feminine performance to bring about a gender subversion. The point is not success or failure of the reversal, but Cleland’s very sensibility to the contradiction between outside (appearance) and inside (essence).⁶ Dick’s outermost appearance (his clothes) means black Turkish homosexual, but his inside (his body) is just a white English masculine. At the same time, from the different point of view, we can say that his outside appearance (his body) is masculine, but his essential inside (the mind) is non-human being.⁷ In this way, Cleland makes up a complex structure of gender identity: the inner mode of gender can be altered into the outer one, which often shows the discrepancy of the two modes. Thus the episode of *Good-natur’d Dick* reveals the indeterminacy of gender, class, and race. And the humanoid image of Dick—the two in one body—is reminiscent of masquerade, that is one of the most popular topsy-turvy performance of gender in the eighteenth century.

In her *Masquerade and Civilization*, Terry Castle states that “[I]ike the world of satire, the masquerade projected an anti-nature, a world upside-down, an intoxicating reversal of ordinary sexual, social, and metaphysical hierarchies” (6). In fact, *Memoirs* has a masquerade scene a few pages before the Dick’s episode. It is not Fanny who attends the masquerade, but Louisa and Emily, two of her companions. Here again, the point is two modes of gender, or exactly the inconsistency between out

⁶ Braudy insists that this episode shows clearly the unity of outside/inside: “Both Fanny and Cleland believe that in the ideal sexual relationship the mind and body have equal share” (35). Yet, as we shall see later, the point is rather the inconsistency of mind/body and the management of contradictions.

⁷ The framework that underlies this explanation is based on Butler’s brilliant argument on gender performatives (137).

(appearance) and in (essence). Moreover, because masquerading is an activity in which people enjoy the two contradictory modes, they are freely permitted to laugh at what is thought to be *natural* gender. Thus the indeterminacy of gender or, to put it more precisely, the artificiality of a naturalness of gender is presupposed here from the start. Interestingly, this artificiality is revealed by a gentleman's homosexual attempt. We see here a comical competition between heterosexual and homosexual for the initiative in the unnatural world.

One day, Louisa and Emily, as shepherdess and shepherd respectively, attend the masquerade. Seeing their disguises, Fanny states her impression as follows: "nothing in nature could represent a prettier boy than" (154) Emily did. This remark shows the precedence of art over nature, and, at the same time, suggests the precariousness of masquerade of its own destruction by effacing the distinction between nature and art. Then, at the masquerade, a gentleman assumes Emily a real boy and takes her to a bagnio. We are shown that the incident is occurred by their "double error":

He took her really for what she appear'd to be, a smock-fac'd boy, and she forgetting her dress, and of course ranging quite wide of his ideas, took all those addresses to be paid to herself as a woman, which she precisely ow'd to his not thinking her one: however this double error was push'd to such a height on both sides, that Emily . . . suffer'd herself to be perswaded to go to a bagnio with him. (154)

The key word "double error", which causes a stir in masquerade performers, has another significance for the novelistic composition. Cameron McFarlane argues that through this "double error" Cleland encourages the readers to take a double reading of the episode: in a

straight way or homosexually. The former reading tells us that there happened no sodomitical performance between Emily and the gentleman. Indeed, the gentleman, disappointed to know the “truth” of her sex (“By heavens a woman!”), nevertheless tries to satisfy his lust: “the double-way between the double rising behind, presented the choice fair to him, and he was so fiercely set on a mis-direction, as to give the girl no small alarms for fear of loosing a maiden-head she had not dreamt of” (155). Yet Emily’s “complaints” and “resistance” prevent him from pursuing his homosexual desire. Therefore, at this point, we can safely say that straight reading becomes dominant at the end of the masquerade. Contrary to this reading, the latter’s homosexual reading reveals the imaginative sodomite was exercised between the two masqueraders. The gentleman who resignedly takes the straight way, “in which his imagination having probably made the most of those resemblances that flatter’d his taste” (155), achieves the purpose. On a superficial level of the deed, we can only read the heterosexual intercourse, but behind or within the surface homosexuality is *really* imagined. In this way, the masquerade episode tells us that the artificiality of gender raises an issue of sexuality. Both of the readings about hetero/homo sexuality mentioned above are plausible enough, and we cannot regard either one as true.

I would like to add one other significance about the double error and reading. At the masquerade, a sodomite just judges Emily’s sex on her outward appearance. That is thought to be one error. Another is Emily’s undervaluation of the outside. The double error, therefore, suggests that sodomitical reading is biased toward the outside, while a straight one is dominated by inside. Yet, at the scene of their real intercourse, the sodomite closes his eyes, as it were, and reads exclusively

the imaginative feeling of inside for his pleasure. On the other hand, the dominant straight reading demands literal interpretation of this physical contact in their intercourse. Thus the heterosexual involves a homosexual misreading, and vice versa. The point is where one draws the boundary between outside and inside, and we are free to make a line at least in a fictional world. A different point of view makes us readers pursue a homosexual, heterosexual, or bisexual path.

IV

The mixed-up of gender at the masquerade leads us to a near-miss incident of anal sex, which McFarlane calls “pseudo-sodomitical” (166), and it is followed by the *real* one.⁸ This is an incident at a “publick-house of a tolerably handsome appearance, on the road”, in which Fanny happens to see “two young gentlemen” having sex (156). Here we can see that Fanny’s voyeurism represents two contradictory feelings—sympathy and antipathy—towards male homosexuality. First of all, Fanny, introducing the sodomite episode to the readers, expresses a deep repugnance for the male-male intercourse. She states the following episode as “so disagreeable a subject” (156) that readers can easily have a prejudice toward sodomitical intercourse. In order to “command the [next] room perfectly”, she pierced the “peep-hole” with a needle (157). Fanny’s voyeuristic attitude, generally specific for men, enables the detailed

⁸ Rousseau points out the semantic ambiguity of sodomite: it is “an extreme and opprobrious form of condemnation designating religious blasphemy, political sedition, and even satanic activities including demonism, shamanism, and witchcraft” (136), so that this word is not necessary a synonym for homosexual.

descriptions of male homosexual intercourse, which turn out to be the proof for the guilt of “so criminal a scene” (159). Hence, Fanny gives us a negative atmosphere towards male-male sex throughout the episode. In fact, her closing statement, “here washing my hands of them, I replunge into the stream of my history” (160) represents Fanny’s distaste for moral and fictional digressions from the *straight* line of [hi]story.

Yet, behind the heterosexual reading of the episode, we can find Fanny’s longing for what she attacks severely. Fanny’s antipathy can be changed into the opposite feelings, and then, male homosexuality is regarded as energetic, seductive and attractive. Nancy K. Miller argues that Fanny as a narrator is indeed the “I in drag” (51), that is, Cleland’s female persona. Miller maintains from this insight that the sodomite episode represents a male author’s “phallic pride of place, a wish-fulfillment that ultimately translates into structures of masculine dominance and authority” (54). Similarly, McFarlane takes notice of Cleland’s female personification: it is used for the male readers’ “masturbatory pleasures of erotic reading” (162). Unlike Miller, McFarlane underscores the voyeuristic gaze through the peep-hole and regards Fanny as an “I/eye in drag” (171). Indeed Fanny’s singular gaze is worthy of attention. Through the peeping hole, Fanny takes a close look at what has happened in the next room:

But after a look of circumspection which I saw the eldest cast every way round the room, probably in too much hurry and heat not to overlook the very small opening I was posted at, especially at the height it was, whilst my eye too close to it, kept the light from shining through, and betraying it; he said something to his companion that presently chang’d the face of things. (157)

The setting of this scene seems to me interesting because it is reminiscent of Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, in which we find the eighteenth century craze for visibility. Fanny, purposefully standing on a chair, spies on the male couple from behind up above. She puts her eyes closely to the small hole in order to shut out light from outside. In this way, she manages to take an all-seeing position without being watched at all. Fanny's voyeurism, therefore, represents the excessive preoccupation with gaze in the eighteenth century.⁹

From this prerogative standpoint, Fanny finds the younger gentleman looking like "a girl in disguise" (157), and his appearance is described as "ten times more alluring than repulsive" (158) in spite of his abnormal sexual inclination. Fanny's detailed observations are obviously sympathetic to the couple, especially the young man, despite her open hostility to male-homosexuality. If we think of Fanny as a female personification of the readers as well as the author, the sexual penetration from backward is superimposed on her piercing gaze which enables the spectators sexual excitement. During the intercourse we are shown the gender ambiguity of the young man who is "like his mother behind . . . like his father before" (158). Describing him as such, Fanny compares his buttocks to his mother's vagina. According to Lee Edelman, the "equation of the young man's anus and the mother's vagina" is not quite simple. We usually read "behind" as "from the back", but "his mother" is discern-

⁹ Friedli argues the influence of Henry Fielding's *Female Husband* on this novel: "The pleasures of surveillance through the 'peepholes' in Cleland's classic are matched by the pleasures of the imagination evoked by Fielding. The secrecy of his text invites the reader to speculate endlessly on 'transactions not fit to be mentioned' and must imply that, far from being surprising, such examples of 'unnatural lusts' will be very familiar to readers" (240). On the literary influence of Samuel Richardson on *Memoirs*, see Kibbie.

ible only “from the front”. Here we can see Fanny’s double reading of his buttocks: a posterior/anterior (preposterous) nature of sodomite. Edelman calls the sodomite as a “moebius loop” which causes “a troubling resistance to the binary logic of before and behind, constituting himself as a single-sided surface whose front and back are never completely distinguishable as such” (105). Moreover, though Fanny tries to despise their “preposterous” (157) pleasure, she is indeed overwhelmed by the fascination. At the end of the scene, she falls from chair and has a fainting spell as if she reached orgasm. Now that the noise of her fall allows the two men to escape from the scene, Fanny becomes a *reluctant* life-saver of the criminals.

In sum, on a superficial level of the narrative, Fanny’s attempt to initialize her memory (“washing my hands of them”) seems to present a bourgeois ideology of heterosexuality. Yet her voyeurism, taking a male-dominant position, reveals both the gender ambiguity and the homosexual power of attraction. Fanny’s powerful gaze oddly resembles the male penetration from behind. It is not difficult for us to read beneath the fictional appearance of *Memoirs* the inside-homoerotic desire. In fact, we have a detailed description of homosexual intercourse in the text. However strongly Fanny as a narrator (or the author) criticizes the sodomy as an unnatural deed, she/he cannot erase its enticement from the text. *Memoirs* provides a homosexual wish-fulfillment in its singular way. However, our history has pushed this episode into oblivion. Nobody knows whether Cleland had expected its effacement in advance, but the fact is that for more than two hundred years the straight (mis-)reading has been dominant.

In all of three famous episodes, Fanny has experienced unusual events which reveal the ambiguity of gender, sexuality, class, and so on.

More precisely, she has not directly experienced, but only reported somebody else's experience. Now she is an active viewer to write a graphic account of others' experience. Here is raised a significant problem of narrative mode. If we recall a virgin figure of Fanny, we will find that she is not what she was anymore. Fanny, detaching herself from the real intercourse, can take the outside position from which she can observe the character's interior world. If she were to participate in the affairs, she would be a passive medium as she was. In this sense, she has to change her figure from inactive character to authoritative narrator in order to give an objective description of these three incidents. At this moment, Fanny exhibits keen interest in the panoptic gaze, which is a visionary insight of seeing all without being watched. Thus the change in the direction of transparency and the subversion of gender distinction are closely related to each other.¹⁰

Of course, this thrust-forward transparency cannot be completed in *Memoirs*. As we have seen in the sodomitical scene, Fanny does not present a perfect subversion of gender, but only the ambiguous nature of its distinction. This ambiguity is illustrated vividly by Fanny's self-contradiction: she is strongly against male feminization, while masculinizing her own sex. And it is this ambiguous termination that makes the transparency a more ideal object.

The basic claim of *Discipline and Punish* is not that visibility has become overwhelmingly powerful since the eighteenth-century on, but rather that nobody could take an all-seeing position at all. Although

¹⁰ From a new historical perspective, Bender discusses the relationship between literary transparency and social transformation of the eighteenth-century England.

Foucault stresses anonymous control over individuals or a self-supervision, he never claims victory of the panoptic gaze. He makes a point of stating the reciprocal influence of both watching and being watched. If someone were to possess a perfectly omniscient point of view, that person couldn't be recognized by anyone in reality. No recognition at all because of its invisibility. Here we should pay attention to a possible reversal of positions: a supervisor would be an object to be supervised at any time. A supervisor is controlled in propria persona. Therefore, the panopticon effects its control over both the watching and the being watched. At this point, we know Foucault is not reductionistic about visibility. The simultaneity of two opposite dispositions in one person regards what is all-seeing as totally utopian. Its infeasibility, therefore, makes us continue to explore the possibility. In any case, we cannot abandon another possibility to be seen in the fictional world.

Indeed, Fanny's possibility of being seen is closed-up again at the end of the story. This time, she detaches herself from her own self. Fanny as a letter writer can observe the previous self objectively, and stands outside of [her]story:

You laugh perhaps at this tail-piece of morality, express'd from me by the force, of truth, resulting from compar'd experiences: you think it, no doubt, out of place; out of character: possibly too you may look on it as the poultry finesse of one who seeks to mask a devotee to Vice under a rag of a veil, impudently smuggled from the shrine of Virtue; just as if one was to fancy one's self compleatly disguis'd at a masquerade (187)

In the passage quoted here, Fanny as a narrator has slyly incorporated potential criticism into her text, and thus the narratee, "Madam", cannot put up resistance to the narrator's defense of her composition. The

reference to “mask” or “masquerade” reminds us of her “double error” recognition, and we *really* laugh at this “tail-piece of morality” addressed to “Madam” who has also a double face: a lady of high rank and a brothel keeper.

At the final stage, Fanny insists that she can express the truth by looking backward over her own past. The “stark naked truth” (1) is almost unveiled to Madam. But under this *final* truth, we can see another new one. Uncovered truth is not naked at all. And the readers of *Memoirs* don’t care anymore about truth-oriented story. In short, Cleland, trying to depict the naked truth explicitly in various ways, shows us the impossibility to access the final nudity. That open ending of the story anticipates the later invention of pornography. Cleland is indeed a pioneer of modern pornography.

V

Memoirs, as Savor claims, is a novel that has “resisted cogent interpretation of any kind” (573) for a long time. Yet this elusiveness or a rejection against traditional readings has attracted innumerable attempts to explore a mystery. As we have seen in this essay, the myth of *Memoirs* is a historical-cultural artifice which, by deviating from the conventional way of seeing reality, would have critical importance for our own identities. Today we are thinking more and more about gender, sex, and sexual identity, and we also regard the category of gender as a mere artifact socially constructed, which in turn leads to the naturalness of sexual differences. This sort of binarism is the target for criticism by Butler who puts stress on the parodic performance of gender.

Since gender is neither true nor false, Fanny’s fluid body is perform-

ing the parody of the faith in originality. Here we should not regard gender as an unrealistic notion. Gender has a historical reality. Through the reading of *Memoirs*, I have so far tried to explicate how gender is reproducible for other social identity to have significance. Fanny's body which causes the reader's initialization of mind has an excellent durability performance. Even though her easily recovered virginity is quite unrealistic, Fanny's body attracts more curiosity from the readers. And then we have been gradually sensitive to the fictionality of gender performance in *Memoirs*. The description of penis as machine suggests the fictionality as well as the reality of sexual organs. It seems to me that the ambiguous nature of "machine" in *Memoirs* anticipates the later Gothic novel, such as Horace Walpole's *Castle Otranto* or Mary Shelly's *Frankenstein*. At the episode of *Good-natur'd Dick*, we have seen the complex interrelations of sex, class, race, and nationality. We have also seen that a twist structure is represented in the masquerade scene of the novel. Here the point is also the arbitrariness of gender performance. However, if we put too much stress on its fictionality, we erroneously tend to think that we are born with natural sex(uality). That is the main target of my essay. Proceeding to the later part of the novel, we found another of Fanny's façades. She no longer plays the role of showing gender's arbitrariness to the readers. Instead, she renders the play of other characters such as Louisa, Emily, and the sodomites. Her vivid awareness of narrative stance makes us notice the indeterminacy of homo/hetero sexuality of the readers as well as the characters. The readers' *straight* reading is almost always susceptible to criticism, and that is the very thrust of Butler's argument.

In consequence, gender, as well as making its own references to gender-free identity, becomes itself the reference point for other gender-

free beings. Thus, it is impossible to grasp the stable foundation or original condition for gender/sex(ual) identity. To put this another way, gender is the deconstruction of itself. Does this happen inside? Or from the outside? Now we can answer this question in a positive way. Gender is always on the boundary line so that we cannot identify its figure. If we displace our point of view, we are getting into trouble again. Yet, I think it is inevitable and imperative. The point is how we can assume a trouble-taking attitude in order to deepen our understanding of the story about ourselves. Fanny is indeed a parodic figure of our own existence. That is because modern pornography is still new enough to attract our critical attention.

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