

# *Fanny Hill*

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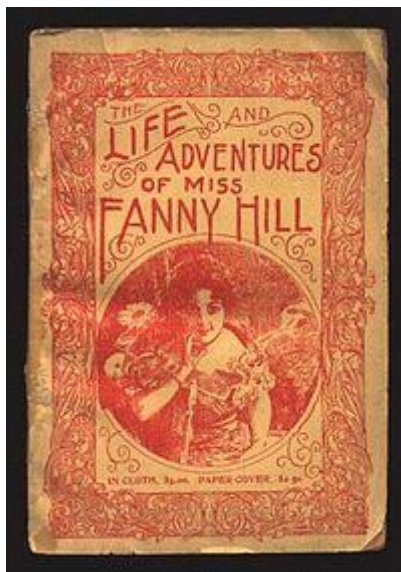


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## *Fanny Hill*



Cover of an undated American edition, c. 1910

<b>Author(s)</b>	<a href="#">John Cleland</a>
<b>Original title</b>	<i>Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure</i>
<b>Country</b>	<a href="#">United Kingdom</a>
<b>Language</b>	<a href="#">English</a>
<b>Genre(s)</b>	<a href="#">Erotic novel</a>
<b>Publication date</b>	November 21, 1748; February 1749
<b>Media type</b>	Print ( <a href="#">Hardback</a> & <a href="#">Paperback</a> )
<b><a href="#">ISBN</a></b>	<a href="#">0-14-043249-3</a>
<b><a href="#">OCLC Number</a></b>	<a href="#">13050889</a>
<b><a href="#">Dewey Decimal</a></b>	823/.6 19
<b><a href="#">LC Classification</a></b>	PR3348.C65 M45 1985b



Illustration by [Édouard-Henri Avril](#).

*Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* (popularly known as *Fanny Hill*) is an [erotic novel](#) by [John Cleland](#) first published in [England](#) in [1748](#). Written while the author was in [debtor's prison](#) in [London](#),<sup>[1][2]</sup> it is considered "the first original English [prose pornography](#), and the first pornography to use the form of the novel."<sup>[3]</sup> One of the most prosecuted and banned books in history,<sup>[4]</sup> it has become a synonym for [obscenity](#).<sup>[5]</sup>

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## [\[edit\]](#) Publishing history

The novel was published in two instalments, on November 21, 1748 and February 1749, respectively, by "G. Fenton", actually Fenton Griffiths and his brother [Ralph](#).<sup>[6]</sup> Initially,

there was no governmental reaction to the novel, and it was only in November 1749, a year after the first instalment was published, that Cleland and Ralph Griffiths were arrested and charged with "corrupting the King's subjects." In court, Cleland renounced the novel and it was officially withdrawn. However, as the book became popular, [pirate editions](#) appeared. It was once suspected that the sodomy scene near the end that Fanny witnesses in disgust was an interpolation made for these pirated editions, but as Peter Sabor states in the introduction to the Oxford edition of *Memoirs* (1985), that scene is present in the first edition (p. xxiii).

In the 19th century, copies of the book were sold "[underground](#)", and it was not until 1963, after the failure of the British obscenity trial of [Lady Chatterley's Lover](#) in 1960 that Mayflower Books, run by Gareth Powell, published an unexpurgated paperback version of *Fanny Hill*.

The police became aware of the book a few days before publication, after spotting a sign in the window of the Magic Shop in Tottenham Court Road in London, run by Ralph Gold. An officer went to the shop and bought a copy and delivered it to the Bow Street magistrate Sir Robert Blundell, who issued a search warrant. At the same time, two officers from the vice squad visited Mayflower Books in Vauxhall Bridge Road to determine if quantities of the book were kept on the premises. They interviewed the publisher, Gareth Powell, and took away the only five copies there. The police returned to the Magic Shop and seized 171 copies of the book, and in December Ralph Gold was summonsed under section 3 of the Obscenity Act. By then, Mayflower had distributed 82,000 copies of the book, but it was Gold rather than Mayflower or *Fanny Hill* who was being tried, although Mayflower covered the legal costs. The trial took place in February 1964. The defence argued that *Fanny Hill* was a historical source book and that it was a joyful celebration of normal non-perverted sex—bawdy rather than pornographic. The prosecution countered by stressing one atypical scene involving flagellation, and won. Mayflower decided not to appeal. However the case had highlighted the growing disconnect between the obscenity laws and the social realities of late 1960s Britain, and was instrumental in shifting views to the point where in 1970 an unexpurgated version of *Fanny Hill* was once again published in Britain.

The book eventually made its way to the [United States](#), where in 1821 it was [banned](#) for [obscenity](#). In 1963, [Putnam](#) published the book under the title *John Cleland's Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, which also was immediately banned for obscenity, but the publisher challenged the ban in court. In a landmark decision in 1966, the [United States Supreme Court](#) ruled in [Memoirs v. Massachusetts](#) that the banned novel did not meet the [Roth standard](#) for obscenity.

In 1973, the [Miller Test](#) came into effect, and as a result the ban on the novel was lifted because although it appeals to the prurient interest and at points is patently offensive, the work taken as a whole does not lack literary or artistic value. The art historian [Johann Joachim Winckelmann](#) recommended the work in a letter for "its delicate sensitivities and noble ideas" expressed in "an elevated [Pindaric](#) style".<sup>[7]</sup>

## **[[edit](#)] Plot**



This article **may need to be rewritten entirely to comply with Wikipedia's [quality standards](#)**, as it is inaccurate in many places and biased. [You can help](#). The [discussion page](#) may contain suggestions. (*September 2010*)

The book is written as a series of letters from Frances "Fanny" Hill to an unknown woman, with Fanny justifying her life-choices to this individual. Fanny Hill is a 15-year-old girl with a rudimentary education living in a small village near [Liverpool](#). Shortly after she turns 15, both her parents die. Esther Davis, a girl from Fanny's village who has since moved to [London](#), convinces Fanny to move to the city as well, but Esther inexplicably abandons Fanny once they arrive. Fanny meets Mrs. Brown, a short, [obese](#), rich woman who gives Fanny lodging. Fanny must share a bed with fellow lodger Phoebe Ayres, who tricks Fanny into having [lesbian sex](#) the first night. Unfortunately Mrs. Brown runs a [brothel](#) and Fanny is forced to spend an evening with an elderly, impotent, obese man. The man attempts to [rape](#) Fanny but fails. Fanny falls into a fever for several days. Mrs. Brown, realizing to her shock that Fanny was not a [prostitute](#) but rather a [virgin](#)—and that Fanny's virginity is still intact—decides to try to sell Fanny's sexual favors to the exceedingly rich Lord B.

Fanny recovers and spies on Mrs. Brown having sex with a muscular, handsome, wealthy man. Fanny [masturbates](#) while watching them. That night, Phoebe enlightens Fanny about sex, child-bearing, and other sexual practices. The next day, Fanny and Phoebe spy on another girl, Polly Phillips, having sex with a muscular, handsome, exceptionally well-endowed young [Genoese](#) merchant. Afterward, Phoebe and Fanny engage in [mutual masturbation](#). Six days later, Fanny meets Charles, a 19-year-old wealthy [nobleman](#), and they fall in love instantly. Charles helps Fanny escape the brothel the next day. They go to an [inn](#) outside London, where Fanny has sex with Charles for several days. Charles takes Fanny to his [flat](#) at [St. James's](#), London, and introduces her to his landlady, Mrs. Jones. For many months, Charles visits Fanny almost daily to have sex. Fanny works hard to become more educated and urbane. After eight months, Fanny becomes pregnant. Three months later, Charles mysteriously disappears. Mrs. Jones learns that Charles' father has kidnapped Charles and sent him to the [South Seas](#) to win a fortune. Upset by the news that Charles will be gone for at least three years, Fanny miscarries and falls ill. She is nursed back to health by Mrs. Jones, but sinks into a deep depression.

Mrs. Jones tells Fanny that the now-16-year-old girl must work as a prostitute for her. Mrs. Jones introduces Fanny to Mr. H, a tall, rich, muscular, hairy-chested man. Fanny unwittingly drinks an [aphrodisiac](#), and has sex with Mr. H. She concludes that sex can be had for pleasure, not just love. Mr. H puts Fanny up in a new apartment and begins plying her with jewels, clothes, and art. After seven months, Fanny discovers that Mr. H has been having sex with her maid, so she resolves to seduce Will, Mr. H's 19-year-old servant. Will has an extremely large [penis](#): "...not the plaything of a boy, nor the weapon of a man, but a [Maypole](#), of so enormous a standard, that, had proportions been observed, it must have belonged to a young giant. ... In short, it stood an object of terror and delight."<sup>[8]</sup> A month later, Mr. H catches Fanny having sex with Will, and stops supporting her.

Fanny is taken in by Mrs. Cole, the mistress of one of Mr. H's friends, who also happens to run a brothel in the [Covent Garden](#) neighborhood of London. Fanny meets three other prostitutes, who are also living in the house:

- Emily, a blonde girl in her early 20s who ran away at the age of 14 from her country home to London. She met a 15-year-old boy who, being sexually experienced, engaged in sexual intercourse with virgin Emily. Although the two lived together a short time, Emily became a street prostitute for several years before being taken in by Mrs. Cole.

- Harriet, a brunette and an orphan raised by her aunt, had her first sexual experience with the son of Lord N., a nobleman whose estate adjoined her relative's.
- Louisa, the [bastard](#) daughter of a cabinetmaker and a [maid](#) who entered [puberty](#) at a very young age and began engaging in extensive masturbation. While visiting her mother in London, Louisa began masturbating in her mother's bedroom. The landlady's 19-year-old son caught her and made love to the 13-year-old girl. Louisa [spent the next few years having sex with as many men as she could](#) and turned to prostitution as a means of satisfying her lust.

A short time later, Fanny participates in an [orgy](#) with the three girls and four rich noblemen. Fanny and her young nobleman begin a relationship, but it ends after a few months because the young man moves to [Ireland](#). Mrs. Cole next introduces Fanny to Mr. Norbert, an [impotent alcoholic](#) and [drug addict](#) who engages in [rape fantasies](#) with prostitutes. Unhappy with Mr. Norbert's impotence, Fanny engages in anonymous sex with a sailor in the [Royal Navy](#). However, Mr. Norbert soon dies. Mrs. Cole then introduces Fanny to Mr. Barville, a rich, young [masochist](#) who requires whipping to enjoy sex. After a short affair, Fanny begins a sexual relationship with an elderly customer who becomes sexually aroused by caressing her hair and biting the fingertips off of her gloves. After this ends, Fanny enters a period of [celibacy](#).

Emily and Louisa go to a [drag ball](#), where Emily meets a [bisexual](#) young man who believes Emily is a male. When he finds out that she is actually a female, he has sex with Emily in his carriage. Fanny is confused by her first encounter with male [homosexuality](#). Shortly after this incident, Fanny takes a ride in the country and ends up paying for a room at a public tavern after her carriage breaks down. She spies on two young men engaging in [anal sex](#) in the next room. Startled, she falls off a stool and knocks herself unconscious. Although the two men have left, she still rouses the villagers to try to hunt the two men down and punish them.

Some weeks later, Fanny watches as Louisa seduces the teenage son of a local woman. Fanny believes that the boy's erect penis is even larger than Will's. The boy, clearly a virgin, engages in somewhat violent, brutal sex several times with Louisa. Louisa leaves Mrs. Cole's brothel a short time later after falling in love with another young man. Emily and Fanny are then invited by two gentleman to a country estate. They swim in a stream, and the two men have sex with the girls for several hours. Emily's parents soon find their daughter, and (unaware of her career as a prostitute) ask her to come home again. She accepts.

Mrs. Cole retires, and Fanny starts living off of her savings. One day she encounters a middle-aged man of 45 who looks 60 due to his very poor health. The man falls in love with Fanny but treats her like his daughter. He dies and leaves his small fortune to her. Now 18 years old, Fanny uses her new wealth to try to locate Charles. She learns that he disappeared two and a half years ago after reaching the South Seas. Several months later, a despondent Fanny takes a trip to see Mrs. Cole (who had retired to Liverpool), but a storm forces her to stop at an inn along the way, where she runs into Charles: He had come back to England but was [shipwrecked](#) on the Irish coast. Fanny and Charles get a room together and make love several times. Fanny tells Charles everything about her life of [vice](#), but he forgives her and asks Fanny to marry him, which she does.

**[[edit](#)] Extract**





Illustration to *Fanny Hill* by [Édouard-Henri Avril](#).

"...and now, disengag'd from the shirt, I saw, with wonder and surprise, what? not the plaything of a boy, not the weapon of a man, but a maypole of so enormous a standard, that had proportions been observ'd, it must have belong'd to a young giant. Its prodigious size made me shrink again; yet I could not, without pleasure, behold, and even ventur'd to feel, such a length, such a breadth of animated ivory! perfectly well turn'd and fashion'd, the proud stiffness of which distended its skin, whose smooth polish and velvet softness might vie with that of the most delicate of our sex, and whose exquisite whiteness was not a little set off by a sprout of black curling hair round the root, through the jetty sprigs of which the fair skin shew'd as in a fine evening you may have remark'd the clear light ether through the branchwork of distant trees over-topping the summit of a hill: then the broad and blueish-cast incarnate of the head, and blue serpentines of its veins, altogether compos'd the most striking assemblage of figure and colours in nature. In short, it stood an object of terror and delight.

"But what was yet more surprising, the owner of this natural curiosity, through the want of occasions in the strictness of his home-breeding, and the little time he had been in town not having afforded him one, was hitherto an absolute stranger, in practice at least, to the use of all that manhood he was so nobly stock'd with; and it now fell to my lot to stand his first trial of it, if I could resolve to run the risks of its disproportion to that tender part of me, which such an oversiz'd machine was very fit to lay in ruins."

## **[[edit](#)] Literary and film adaptations**

Further information: [Fanny Hill \(film\)](#)

Because of the book's notoriety (and [public domain](#) status), numerous adaptations have been produced. Some of them are:

- *Fanny, Being the True History of the Adventures of Fanny Hackabout-Jones* (1980) (a retelling of 'Fanny Hill' by [Erica Jong](#) purports to tell the story from Fanny's point of view, with Cleland as a character she complains fictionalized her life).

- *Fanny Hill* (USA/West Germany, 1964), starring [Letícia Román](#), [Miriam Hopkins](#), [Ulli Lommel](#), [Chris Howland](#); directed by [Russ Meyer](#), [Albert Zugsmith](#) (uncredited)<sup>[9]</sup>
- *The Notorious Daughter of Fanny Hill* (USA, 1966), starring Stacy Walker, Ginger Hale; directed by Peter Perry (Arthur Stootsbury).
- *Fanny Hill* (Sweden, 1968), starring [Diana Kjør](#), [Hans Ernbäck](#), [Keve Hjelm](#), [Oscar Ljung](#); directed by [Mac Ahlberg](#)<sup>[10]</sup>
- *Fanny Hill* (West Germany/UK, 1983), starring [Lisa Foster](#), [Oliver Reed](#), [Wilfrid Hyde-White](#), [Shelley Winters](#); directed by [Gerry O'Hara](#)<sup>[11]</sup>
- *Paprika* (Italy, 1991), starring [Deborah Caprioglio](#), [Stéphane Bonnet](#), [Stéphane Ferrara](#), [Luigi Laezza](#), [Rossana Gavinel](#), [Martine Brochard](#) and [John Steiner](#); directed by [Tinto Brass](#).<sup>[12]</sup>
- *Fanny Hill* (USA, 1995), directed by [Valentine Palmer](#).<sup>[13]</sup>
- *Fanny Hill* (Off-Broadway Musical, 2006), libretto and score by [Ed Dixon](#), starring [Nancy Anderson](#) as Fanny.
- *Fanny Hill* (UK, 2007), written by [Andrew Davies](#) for the [BBC](#) and starring [Rebecca Night](#).<sup>[14]</sup>

## **[[edit](#)] References in popular culture**

### **[[edit](#)] References in literary works**

- In a portrait that appears in the [first volume](#) of [Alan Moore](#)'s *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*, Fanny Hill is depicted as a member of the 18th century version of the League. She also appears more prominently in "[The Black Dossier](#)" as a member of Gulliver's League, as well as a "sequel" to the original Hill novel, complete with illustrations by [Kevin O'Neill](#). The setting of her involvement with the League begins with her divorce from Charles after he is caught in the act in a brothel kept by former League member [Amber St. Clare](#), and is shown to have been sexually involved with both [Gulliver](#) and [Captain Clegg](#) nearly 40 years before the second League was founded. She doesn't age as an effect of her stay at [Horselberg](#). This version has apparently pursued a lesbian relationship with a character named Venus (who seems to be an amalgamation of the various versions of the Goddess of love in literature) for at least a century and a half as of the Black Dossier and in contrast to the novel's relationships this one seems to be enduring.
- In the book *Frost at Christmas* by [R. D. Wingfield](#), the vicar has a copy of *Fanny Hill* hidden in his trunk amongst other dirty books.
- In [Harry Harrison](#)'s novel *Bill, the Galactic Hero*, the titular character is stationed on a [starship](#) named *Fanny Hill*.
- In [Lita Grey](#)'s book, *My Life With Chaplin*, she claims that [Charlie Chaplin](#) "whispered references to some of Fanny Hill's episodes" to arouse her before making love.

### **[[edit](#)] References in film, television, musical theatre and song**

- The novel is mentioned in [Tom Lehrer](#)'s song "Smut".
- A tongue-in-cheek reference to *Fanny Hill* appears in the 1968 David Niven, Lola Albright film *The Impossible Years*. In one scene the younger daughter of Niven's

character is seen reading *Fanny Hill*, whereas his older daughter, Linda, has apparently graduated from Cleland's sensationalism and is seen reading [Sartre](#) instead.

- In the 1968 version of [Yours, Mine, and Ours](#), [Henry Fonda](#)'s character, Frank Beardsley, refers to "Fanny Hill" when giving some fatherly advice to his stepdaughter. Her boyfriend is pressuring her for sex and Frank says boys tried the same thing when he was her age. When she tries to tell him that things are different now he observes, "I don't know, they wrote 'Fanny Hill' in 1742 [sic] and they haven't found anything new since."
- The 2006-07 [Broadway](#) musical [Grey Gardens](#) has a comedic reference to *Fanny Hill* in the first act. Young Edith Bouvier Beale (aka 'little Edie') has just been confronted about a rumour of promiscuity that her mother, Mrs. Edith Bouvier Beale (aka 'Big Edie') told her fiancé. 'Little Edie' was allegedly engaged to [Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr.](#) in 1941 until he discovered that 'Little Edie' may have been sexually acquainted with other men before him. 'Little Edie' implores Joe Kennedy not to break off the engagement and to wait for her father to come home and rectify the situation, vouching for her reputation. The musical line that 'Little Edie' sings in reference to *Fanny Hill* is: "Girls who smoke and read *Fanny Hill* / Well I was reading [De - Toc - que - ville](#)"
- In an episode of [M\\*A\\*S\\*H](#), [Radar O'Reilly](#) thanks Sparky for sending the book *Fanny Hill* but says the last chapter was missing and asks "Who did it?" He repeats back Sparky's answer: "Everybody."
- In a segment in the film [The Groove Tube](#) (1974), children's TV show host Koko the Clown (Ken Shapiro) asks the children in his audience to send their parents out of the room during "make believe time." He then proceeds to secretly read an excerpt from page 47 of *Fanny Hill* in response to a viewer's request.<sup>[15]</sup>

## [\[edit\]](#) References

- <sup>^</sup> Wagner, "Introduction," in Cleland, *Fanny Hill*, 1985, p. 7.
- <sup>^</sup> Lane, *Obscene Profits: The Entrepreneurs of Pornography in the Cyber Age*, 2000, p. 11.
- <sup>^</sup> Foxon, *Libertine Literature in England, 1660-1745*, 1965, p. 45.
- <sup>^</sup> Browne, *The Guide to United States Popular Culture*, 2001, p. 273, [ISBN 0-87972-821-3](#); Sutherland, *Offensive Literature: Decensorship in Britain, 1960-1982*, 1983, p. 32, [ISBN 0-389-20354-8](#).
- <sup>^</sup> Kendrick, *The Secret Museum: Pornography in Modern Culture*, 1996, p. 209, [ISBN 0-520-20729-7](#).
- <sup>^</sup> Roger Lonsdale, "New attributions to John Cleland", *The Review of English Studies* 1979 XXX(119):268-290 [doi:10.1093/res/XXX.119.268](#)
- <sup>^</sup> Winckelmann, *Briefe*, H. Diepolder and W. Rehm, eds., (1952-57) vol. II:111 (no. 380) noted in Thomas Pelzel, "Winckelmann, Mengs and Casanova: A Reappraisal of a Famous Eighteenth-Century Forger" *The Art Bulletin*, **54.3** (September 1972:300-315) p. 306 and note.
- <sup>^</sup> Cleland, *Fanny Hill*, reprint ed., 1985, p. 109.
- <sup>^</sup> [Fanny Hill \(1964\)](#) at the [Internet Movie Database](#)
- <sup>^</sup> [Fanny Hill \(1968\)](#) at the [Internet Movie Database](#)
- <sup>^</sup> [Fanny Hill \(1983\)](#) at the [Internet Movie Database](#)
- <sup>^</sup> [Paprika](#) at the [Internet Movie Database](#)
- <sup>^</sup> [Fanny Hill \(1995\)](#) at the [Internet Movie Database](#)
- <sup>^</sup> [Article from The Guardian](#)





15. <sup>^</sup> Fédération française des ciné-clubs (1975). *Cinéma*. **200-202**. Fédération française des ciné-clubs. p. 300.

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## **[[edit](#)]** External links

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- *Fanny Hill: Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* at [Project Gutenberg](#)
- [Charles Dickens's Themes](#) A surprising allusion to *Fanny Hill* in *Dombey and Son*.
- [BBC TV Adaptation](#) First Broadcast October 2007
- *The Notorious Daughter of Fanny Hill (1966)* at [DBCult Film Institute](#)