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Perception and the Senses

Perception and the Senses in Eighteenth-century England

## The Man of feeling as dupe of desire: John Cleland's *Memoirs of a Coxcomb* (1751)

*L'Homme sensible, dupe du désir : Memoirs of a Coxcomb de John Cleland (1751)*

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### Abstracts

English Français

This essay analyses John Cleland's *Memoirs of a Coxcomb* (1751), his idiosyncratic sequel to the more famous *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* (1749). As Kathleen Lubey has recently shown, sensuality was part of literature's repertoire of moral refinement. Indeed, Lubey has argued that erotica acts as 'a continuous unfolding of epistemology from the details of amorous scenes', providing a key means of understanding the self and its relation to the world. Yet despite its amorous plot, *Memoirs of a Coxcomb* emphasises the limits of sensory knowledge. The novel's comically inadequate narrator is a 'Dupe of his desires': a man misled by feeling. Reading *Coxcomb* as a transmutation of mid-eighteenth-century 'it-narratives', this essay argues that rather than constituting and exercising virile autonomy, sexual passion potentially renders the male subject a mere puppet subjected to the mechanistic demands of feeling. Demonstrating a skeptical approach to the role of the body and sensation in the production of knowledge, the novel also provides an intriguing example of its author's theory of fiction and an exploration of the fate of the author in commodity culture. Challenging the positivist claims of empiricism, the novel's derisive depiction of the pell-mell of lust illuminates the compulsive self-abnegation of desire, and demonstrates the difficulty of parsing an idea of the self and the world from a deluge of sensory data. Cleland's novel thus presents sensuality not as a laboratory of masculine self-fashioning, but as an intractable problem for self-knowledge and understanding.

Cet article propose une analyse de *Memoirs of a Coxcomb* (*Mémoires d'un fat*, 1751) de John Cleland, qui est une suite assez excentrique de son roman plus connu *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* (*Mémoires de Fanny Hill, femme de plaisir*, 1749). Comme l'a récemment montré Kathleen Lubey, la sensualité était l'un des aspects du raffinement moral représenté par la littérature ; Lubey argue que la littérature érotique, à partir des descriptions détaillées de scènes amoureuses, déploie une épistémologie qui contribue à la compréhension du moi et de son rapport au monde. En dépit de son intrigue amoureuse, *Memoirs of a Coxcomb* met en exergue les limites de la connaissance sensorielle. Le narrateur à la gaucherie comique de *Coxcomb* est « dupe de ses désirs », en homme que ses sens égarent. En lisant *Coxcomb* comme une transmutation des *it-narratives* du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle – récits qui décrivent les aventures d'un objet ou d'un animal, qui parfois prend en charge la narration – cet article veut démontrer que la passion sexuelle, loin de constituer et de manifester l'autonomie de l'homme, fait de ce dernier une marionnette soumise aux exigences mécaniques des sens. En ce qu'il est sceptique quant au rôle du corps et de la sensation dans la production de la connaissance, le roman propose un exemple intrigant de la théorie de la fiction de son auteur et une exploration du sort de l'auteur dans une culture marchande. En remettant en cause les prétentions positivistes de l'empirisme, la description satirique du pêle-mêle de la luxure permet de comprendre la négation compulsive intrinsèque au désir et la difficulté qu'il y a à faire surgir une idée du moi et du monde à partir du déluge des données sensorielles. Ainsi, le roman de Cleland présente la sensualité non pas comme un laboratoire de la construction du sujet masculin mais comme un problème insoluble pour la connaissance de soi et pour l'entendement.

### Index terms

**Mots-clés** : épistémologie, masculinité, mécanisme, sensation, sensualité, sensibilité, littérature érotique, John Cleland, *Memoirs of a Coxcomb*

**Keywords** : epistemology, masculinity, mechanism, sensation, sensuality, sensibility, erotica, it-narrative, John Cleland, *Memoirs of a Coxcomb*

### Full text

- 1 Literary scholars have long delighted in pairing John Cleland's baroque descriptions of physical pleasure with a serious philosophical framework. Since Leo Braudy's seminal essay 'Fanny Hill and Materialism', Cleland's erotic oeuvre has been contextualized by moral sense philosophy's investment in sympathy, related to the aspirational effusions of sentimental sensibility, and to the mechanistic materialism of Julien d'Offray La Mettrie's *L'homme machine*. These philosophical contexts have energized interpretations of the politics of erotic representation, the sensual epistemology of erotica, as well as exposing the unnerving effects of 'thinking matter' on novel form.<sup>1</sup> Yet scholarship has generally neglected Cleland's other writing: the 'hack' work that made up the majority of his professional life and through which he eked out an existence.<sup>2</sup> If posterity recalls *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* as his magnum opus, however, it was this work which blighted the author's efforts to reinvent himself for a more respectable reading public: a work he 'disdain[ed] to defend, and wish[ed], from [his] soul, Buried and Forgot'.<sup>3</sup> Written with the ardent inventiveness of youth, Cleland credited his first foray into literary life with hobbling his career. It is little wonder, then, that his subsequent works should be characterized by frustration, by the hectoring tones of neglected talent, and a sense of creative inadequacy.
- 2 Literary criticism has colluded, perhaps unsurprisingly, in enshrining *Woman of Pleasure* as Cleland's masterpiece to the exclusion of his other productions. Yet Cleland continued to write throughout his life. This essay analyses *Memoirs of a Coxcomb* (1751), a peculiar sequel to the more famous erotic picaresque. Though neither as notorious nor as commercially successful as *Woman of Pleasure*, *Coxcomb* nonetheless garnered readers and favourable reviews: Laurence Sterne, the master-ironist of sentiment, owned a copy.<sup>4</sup> While often read as a piece of erotica, *Woman of Pleasure* has also been described as an 'it-novel [...] narrated by an enthusiastic vagina', that is, part of the vivid sub-genre of 'object narratives' in which rambling episodic stories are narrated by random, often quotidian, 'things'.<sup>5</sup> These 'things' – coins, old coats, lap-dogs, paper, pens – provide unusual perspectives on human behaviour, but their stories also illuminate 'the way [in which] objects and subjects animate each other' in the new commodity culture of the eighteenth century.<sup>6</sup> Within such a framework, then, it is no wonder that *Woman of Pleasure* is more invested in impersonal sexual interactions than with 'the psychology of the heroine/narrator': Fanny Hill is no more than a rhetorical figure, a form of prosopopoeia, which 'furnishes the thread on which the various scenes [...] can be strung'.<sup>7</sup> If *Woman of Pleasure* displaces societal anxiety about the voracious capacities of women through its cavalcade of paying punters and comic types, Cleland exploits the satiric potential of the it-narrative further in *Coxcomb*, exploring the power of bodily impressions and sensation to render the subject *an object*. The inadequate male narrator of *Coxcomb* is a droll example of modern masculinity's subjection to sensation, to feminizing feeling, and to the desires of women: a comic inversion of the libertine hero so often presented as master of his own fate. This novel, by contrast, depicts a sexual economy driven by feminine sensuality in which the male is a mere commodity. In its skeptical exploration of the role of the body and of sensation in the production of knowledge, as well as in its reflections on the effects of reading, *Coxcomb* combines the frenetic mobility of the ramble novel with the satiric affordances of the it-narrative; dismantling male pretensions to autonomy and implying, with smirking innuendo, the limitations of libertine self-knowledge.

## From frigid fictions to virile sensation

- 3 *Coxcomb* is told 'in a vein of levity, presumption, and self-conceit', presenting itself as the self-mortifying confession of the amorously-monikered Sir William Delamore.<sup>8</sup> Speaking from the vantage point of supposed reformation, Sir William has been educated with indulgence in the country, where he meets and falls in love with a mysterious young woman whose abrupt disappearance precipitates his amatory career as a serial seducer (and cully) of women. Pursuing dissipated pleasures in London, Sir William nonetheless claims an innate sensibility: a protective delicacy of instinct which is merely overlaid by vicious habit and circumstance. This paradox of sensational folly and natural sense is part of Cleland's distinctive moral equivocation, a style of ironic narration that has led Hal Gladfelder to brand the novel a story of 'failed education'.<sup>9</sup> As the narrator claims at the outset:

I speak experimentally. I never felt so pleasing, so sensible a consolation for the misfortune of having been a coxcomb, and an eminent one, too, as this proof of the sincerity of my conversion, in the courage of coming to a fair and open confession of the follies I drove into, in the course of that character.<sup>10</sup>

- 4 Advertising himself as an embodiment of delightful reformation, Sir William acknowledges while his 'desiring of pleasing the ladies' made him a fool in the first place it was nonetheless 'that pleasing and unaccountable sex' that was responsible for his salvation.<sup>11</sup> His sensual propensities make him a 'Dupe of his Desires' as well as the recipient, ultimately, of their beneficial properties.<sup>12</sup> This posture of ironic self-mockery both licenses the narrator's claims to sincerity and undercuts his authority. Humour – that most elusive and historically contingent quality – is thus part of *Coxcomb*'s uncertain epistemological repertoire: ridicule, central to Cleland's theory of fiction, becomes a means of authenticating novelistic truth claims. Despite lacking the flamboyant experimentalism of Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1759-1767) or Henry Brooke's *Fool of Quality* (1765-1770), where 'structural fragmentation and multiple narrative voices' detract from the authority of individual interior experiences, *Memoirs of a Coxcomb* nonetheless similarly emphasises the limits of sensory knowledge through the comic inadequacy of the narrator.<sup>13</sup> Sir William's self-ironization cocks a snook at the positivist claims of empiricism: his method of 'experimentation with human bodies' suggests the uncertainty of sensation as a means to self-knowledge.<sup>14</sup> As Kathleen Luby and James Turner have recently shown, sensuality was part of literature's repertoire of moral refinement. Indeed, Luby has argued that erotica acts as 'a continuous unfolding of epistemology from the details of amorous scenes', whereby sensuality and sexuality provide a prime means of understanding the self and its relation to the world.<sup>15</sup> Both erotic fictions and those which 'investigate the great doctrines of Christianity under the fashionable guises of an amusement' treat sexual experience as a potential source of knowledge and understanding, rather than expelling it from their purview.<sup>16</sup> Sensual pleasure thus acts as a 'great branch of natural philosophy': a site of 'simultaneous sexual and cognitive instruction'.<sup>17</sup> In his preface to Du Clos's *Memoirs Illustrating the Manners of the Present Age*, published almost coterminously with *Coxcomb*, Cleland praised the French author for exposing the vanity of the 'Gayloves of the world' to pity and censure. Du Clos, he argues, succeeds in 'get[ting] the laugh on the Side of Virtue [...] [as] the most shrewd way of breaking the Heart of Vice [...] [for] when Folly is forced to laugh at itself, it dies, well-pleased, and licking the Knife that cuts its Throat'.<sup>18</sup> As a comic fiction, then, *Coxcomb*'s 'Strain of unaffected Self-Condemnation' can likewise claim both to stimulate and redirect lascivious reading habits, forcing vice 'to confess against itself [...] that not all its most alluring and most sensual Joys are comparable even in Point of Pleasure, to a State of Virtue'; transforming 'false Pleasure [into] true Voluptuousness'.<sup>19</sup> Yet while Cleland's derisive

depiction of the pell-mell of lust illuminates and critiques the compulsive self-abnegation of desire, the difficulty of discriminating the sensory inundation remains. In *Coxcomb*, the self-knowledge available through the senses is undercut both by bathos and the propensity for the sensations to alienate and alter the feeling subject. Rather than a laboratory of masculine self-knowledge, then, *Coxcomb* presents sensuality as an intractable problem: rather than exercising virile autonomy, sexual sensations imbricate the male body with feminine forms and potentially with unfeeling forms. This interpenetration of vital and mechanical undermines what can be reliably known by and through the senses.

5 In Cleland's discussion of the superior power of fiction over the dry maxims of philosophy, 'Reflexions and Instructions take new Force from the Amusement which is the Master-Key'.<sup>20</sup> Fictional examples 'give a sort of Body or Consistence' to abstract thought, thus 'impress[ing] upon the memory' and endowing the moral imagination with a kind of muscular reflexivity to circumstance and stimuli.<sup>21</sup> Yet, Cleland's libertine inclinations grant sensual experience a particular status in the educability of the reader and the authority of the writer. Without the passions, Cleland suggests, moral actions would seldom occur, reason being a paltry spur to human behaviour. Fiction's stimulation of sensuality and its concomitant passions is thus its great power.<sup>22</sup> Even as Cleland seems to concur with Johnson's diagnosis of fiction's capacity to mechanize moral reflexes (and the risk that it might also program *immoral* reactions) he modifies his praise so swiftly that extracting a stable moral from literature seems most unlikely. Despite the 'Examples and Situations' found in novels there are 'Few [...] whom their Passions suffer to benefit by them!', and the 'agreeable and judicious' Marivaux is cited in support of this literary moral pessimism: 'the passions [...] never read; as to them there exists no Experience. They may sometimes wear out, but they are rarely corrigible, and this is the Reason one sees so often the Repetition of the same Events.'<sup>23</sup> Though this is true of some passions, such as avarice and envy, the author's task is to turn serviceable passions such as love to some advantage, Cleland says, by 'develop[ing] the secret Springs of the human Heart'.<sup>24</sup> While Cleland goes on to describe the author as moral cartographer, the author is also a 'Pilot', whose operation of 'secret Springs' resonates with the images of the material body (and the embodied reader) as a clockwork mechanism, a volitionless machine whose activity is directed not by individual agency but by the skillful operations of another's will.<sup>25</sup>

6 If the reader is a kind of feeling machine manipulated by the artful author, the author himself depends on his own empirical knowledge to produce the 'Master-Key' of pleasure that will unlock readers' passionate responses, moral reflexions, and (by extension) their purses. The give and take of author and reader in amatory fiction is thus modeled on sensual transactions, where sensual experience is fundamental to literature's representational and moral abilities. As *Coxcomb's* protagonist informs us:

I naturally hate reflexions [...] Yet, I cannot here refrain from observing that...in vain do [writers] endeavour to warm the head, with what never came from the heart. Those who have really been in love, who have themselves experienced the emotions and symptoms of that passion, indignantly remark that, so far from exaggerating its power and effects, those triflers do not even do it justice. A forced cookery of imaginary beauties, a series of mighty marvellous facts, which, spreading an air of fiction through the whole, all in course weaken that interest and regard never paid but to truth, or the appearances of truth; and are only fit to give a false and adulterated taste of passion, in which a simple sentiment is superior to all their forced productions of artificial flowers. Their works in short give one the idea of a frigid, withered eunuch, representing an Alexander making love to Statira.<sup>26</sup>

7 The aesthetic failings produced by insensibility and inadequate feeling are here metaphorized as sexual impotence: novelists whose senses are 'frigid' and 'withered' are imaginatively sterile, producing risible fictions. Clearly inferior to the virile, worldly literature implied as the novel's provenance, the sensual author/narrator thus becomes an avatar of libertine experience, his fictional stock rising in accordance with his ability to translate the pungency of personally felt desire. Without the authority of sense experience writing traduces not merely its readers but 'truth' itself.<sup>27</sup> The author of fiction, like the mid-century philosopher, must complete the empiricist account of the self by moving inward from reason to the heart, from sensation to sentiment.

8 As Lubej has argued, the novel itself functions self-consciously as a technology designed to elicit and modulate sensation, exploiting the 'volatile interplay between books, imaginative impressions, and bodies.'<sup>28</sup> Accounts of that volatile interplay, both eighteenth-century and otherwise, have often figured the impressionable reader as female, with embodied susceptibility to fiction being gendered as feminine. Novel encounters, like their erotic counterparts, exemplify the potential for sensual dispossession – sensation's uncanny ability to move between objects, transmitting effects. Yet recent accounts acknowledge that novels, though indeed read by women, were consumed by a predominantly male audience.<sup>29</sup> Imagining the narrator as female assisted in buffering the potential for sensory overload by gendering imaginative and physical impressionability as feminine. Thus, *Woman of Pleasure* imprints materialist effects upon the passive female body of the protagonist. Fanny Hill describes an early encounter with the manly and attentive Mr. H -, whose exertions in the boudoir successfully cause her 'animal spirits' to rush 'mechanically to that center of attraction'. Thus 'inly warmed, and stirred...beyond bearing', the logical consequence of their coupling is a powerful kinetic pleasure; 'the force of this emotion' producing Fanny's 'effusion'. Yet this paroxysm of delight is punctuated by narratorial animadversion:

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!<sup>30</sup>

9 Fanny's phenomenology of passion distinguishes mechanical sensation from its more elevated counterparts: emotion as a 'passive bodily effect' inferior to the 'active delight' of reciprocal affection. Yet such distinction is lost on Mr. H— : he 'scarce gave himself or me breathing time from the last encounter [...] in a few minutes he was in a condition for renewing the onset...he drove the same course as before, with unbated fervour; and thus, in repeated engagements, kept me constantly in exercise.' Such sexual pleasure 'is represented as the mere effect of mechanical forces': a physical process of a different order to the spiritual union of 'two hearts'.<sup>31</sup> While Mr. H— is a kind of 'man-machine', Fanny, by contrast, can 'couple bodily pleasures with mental reflection', her responsiveness allowing her access to the perpetual pleasures of mutual love.<sup>32</sup> As a sex worker, Fanny is more machine than agent, aware that the mechanistic passion she produces and experiences is subject to repetition and entropy. It is only the shared affective state of sensibility, she suggests, that enables agency.

10 Fanny's description of the mechanistic effect of impressions raises the issue of sexual difference. During the eighteenth century women's bodies and minds were thought to be more susceptible of permanent impressions, and therefore more prone to corruption and degeneration. Yet the protagonists of both *Woman of Pleasure* and *Coxcomb*

confirm first impressions as the template for sensible union in both sexes, with sensual encounter credited with formative qualities. Fanny Hill's entire erotic career is predicated on the loss, and ultimate recuperation, of her first love whose return restores her native sensibility. Likewise, Sir William's adventures are initiated by the loss of his first love. Yet if Fanny is driven to prostitution by a mixture of curiosity and necessity, *Coxcomb's* presentation of sexual experience is ambivalent. Sir William's authoritative stance seems to advertise the educative effects of his encounters – learning through experience – adhering to the conventional wisdom of the double standard in which women are ineluctably marked by the manner of their first sexual encounter, whereas men require a multiplicity of erotic encounters to acquire maturity and manly self-control. Certainly, some of Sir William's statements seem to confirm the differing effects between the sexes of sensation and self-knowledge.

It is generally said of women, that the pleasure procured them by their first engagements is the most lively, and the most delicious: that it makes, too, the most lasting impression. Thence their fidelity and grateful kindness to the first author of its acquisition to them. Not so with men, and the young especially. Their first introduction is commonly effectuated in such a hurry, and disorder of the senses, that it robs them of the attention necessary to dwell upon the joys of their present fruition. Overwhelmed and bewildered they enjoy indeed, but it is in a confusion of sensations which resembles the delirious dozing induced by opium, in which the soul is out of itself, and awakens when the agency is over, as from a dream, which the memory scarce preserves the traces of. A just maturity is the only true age of consistence, and delight. Impetuous youth worries its pleasures too voraciously, and impotent age mumbles them, even to palling.<sup>33</sup>

11 Women's innate softness makes first impressions more durable, with the female sexual consciousness figured as a *tabula rasa* permanently marked by those who 'procure' their first pleasure. If female sexual pleasure is a product of male desire and action, the force of gauche male desire obliterates consciousness and continence. Male passions are characterized by precipitate motion: they must learn amorous delay in order to master their sensations and savour them. Gentlemanly autonomy, self-containment, and bodily control are thus posited as aspirational goals for the male reader. Sir William's description of passion here echoes that of Frances Hutcheson: it is 'a *confused Sensation* [...] occasioned or attended by some violent bodily Motions, which keeps the Mind much employed upon the Present Affair, to the exclusion of every thing else, and prolongs of strengthens the Affection sometimes to such a degree, as to prevent all *deliberate Reasoning* about our Conduct.'<sup>34</sup> Sir William's description of the baffled excesses of youthful sensation confirms, as Alexandra Shepherd has argued, that 'self-mastery was the defining feature of manhood, and youthful deviations from this rational ideal were stigmatized': 'maturity' is the desirable masculine state because its pleasures are properties to be possessed, sensual signs of power and status.<sup>35</sup> Yet, as we will see, *Coxcomb's* narrative problematizes the very possibility of such self-mastery: demonstrating the incorrigibility of bodily passions through a sequence of sensual repetition void of the benefits of experience.

12 The *coxcomb's* claims to literary and moral authority are made, then, on the dubious grounds of his having acquired knowledge through sensual experience. The narrator is able to diagnose the difference between the symptoms of mere lust and the emotional complexities of 'the heart' that his career in *coxcombry* reveal in retrospect. However, the backward glance is more productive of irony than of moral certainty. Like Fanny Hill, Sir William's desires find a worthy object early. Thus his capacity for sensible love is *almost* coterminous with physical desire. But, as he admits, his constitutional passions are already astir before his first encounter with the young Lydia. On their first meeting the young woman's voice produces a vibration in his youthful being, which modifies the purely carnal impulses of desire: 'such a sweetness of sound, as made every string of my heart vibrate again with the most delicious impression [...] its impression carried too much of virtue in it, for my reason to refuse it possession of me. All my native fierceness was now utterly melted away into diffidence and tenderness.'<sup>36</sup> Vibrations seldom occur in Cleland's fiction: only once in *Woman of Pleasure*; in *Coxcomb* just twice, both in the presence of the beloved Lydia. Its usage here resonates with the moral sense philosophy of David Hartley, whose *Observations on Man* (1748) postulated that all physical bodies demonstrated attraction or repulsion through nervous vibration, signals of interpersonal sympathy. Sir William's emotional vibration is a hallmark of 'virtuous' pleasure, a sign of the subtle ether connecting supposedly disparate bodies: a spiritual symptom in the physical machine. Conceived in primarily aural and visual terms, this moment of harmonious rapport is credited with the ability to mollify animal instinct into acquiescent openness, unifying sensation with sentiment. Moreover, sensibility's moral mechanism closely resembles the sensational dispossessions of passion. From the outset, the hairline fracture between visceral urgings and moral sympathy makes the reader doubt not merely the narrator's claims to the virtues of sensibility and to moral reform but also the moral status of sensibility itself. Both have corporeal causes. Though instantaneously besotted by the lovely and unavailable Lydia, the narrator informs us that, 'by the bye', this conversion to love only just prevents him from 'consummating an impure treaty' with his aunt's maidservant.<sup>37</sup> He even admits that Lydia's guardian, the middle-aged but attractive Mrs Bernard, only escapes becoming the focus for his youthful desire thanks to the distracting proximity of her teenage ward. The slippage between the indiscriminate passions of the 'experiencing self' and the narrator's aesthetic legitimization of love undermines the narrator's avowed reformation – the incipient leer in his retrospection creating a frisson of moral dissonance. *Coxcomb* flirts knowingly with sensual possibilities.

13 Sir William does attempt to distinguish the quality of his feeling for Lydia from the purely sensational: it is a prompting of 'the heart' rather than purely animal energies he insists. When she 'deserts' him, the loss makes 'such a sensible gap, so irreparable a void' that he persuades himself that pursuing carnal affairs is no betrayal since they bear so little resemblance to his virtuous affections. Once it appears that Lydia is lost to him, Sir William barely pauses to mourn her absence before he has engaged in his first consummated love affair. This is an erotic dalliance with the young widow Mrs Rivers, whose amorous appetites stimulate his own. Again, Sir William's mature and reflective self animadverts on the lesson to be learnt from his rapid re-entry into the vortex of desires:

Our passions are but loose casuists, and what is worse, our reason is often too bribed over to their side [...] Thus it was pleasant enough that the more virtuous, the more respectful light I placed my passion in to Lydia, the less I conceived myself guilty towards her, from my not confounding it with those sentiments of a coarser nature, which composed the foundation of my commerce with Mrs. Rivers, whom I considered merely as a woman; but Lydia, purely as a superior being, with whose worship it would have been a profanation to mix ideas of flesh and blood.<sup>38</sup>

14 Reminding the reader that genuine sentiment participates in sensuality but also that the senses themselves are an unreliable guide, the impetuous youth is shown to have fallen prey to a facile dualism which licenses sexual permissiveness under the cover of a moral distinction. Such 'commodious sophistry' claims a categorical separation between the higher functions by separating those distracting notions of 'flesh and blood' from the immaterial soul.<sup>39</sup> This 'plan of latitude and distinction', with its epistemological misrecognition of the material interconnection between sentiment and sensuality, renders Sir William's heart a 'thoroughfare for the whole sex'.<sup>40</sup>



## Impressionable Youth

- 15 If the narrator's meditations advertise a materialist sensibility where the senses convey reliable impressions which can be consolidated by repetition and reflection, the episodic structure undermines claims for the body as a reliable producer or repository of knowledge. The repetition of sensual diversions proves that effervescent sense impressions can interrupt the durable delights of sensibility. It is not merely the disjunctions of time and space that weaken the fervor of Sir William's initial impressions of Lydia, but sensation itself that intervenes:

Lydia, present to my memory, always engrossed my heart: but time, that great comforter in ordinary, introduced intervals of insensibility, which other objects, other passions seized the advantage of. I still did not love Lydia less, but now I did not think of her so often, or with that continuity as at first. The number of things that made impression on me, augmented in proportion as that of my grief grew fainter and fainter. I was of a constitution, too, which began to interfere powerfully with that system of constancy and Platonics.<sup>41</sup>

- 16 The demands of heterogeneous sense impressions compete with – and even supersede – moral knowledge of the heart. The language of time, disjunction, and continuity employed here recalls Hume's discussion of identity in his *Treatise*, where he contends that personal identity is 'nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity [...] in perpetual flux and movement'.<sup>42</sup> Though Sir William figures his innermost self as essentially unchanging, the stream of experience from other organs of sense fragments any sense of constancy. 'Intervals of insensibility' interrupt his coherence and make Sir William's self 'variable and interrupted' rather than consistent and continual.<sup>43</sup> Such subjective lack renders his character minimal. The residue of subjectivity found in his paltry 'heart' fails to convince the reader that he possesses what Hume calls the 'fiction' of identity, a self 'invariable and uninterrupted [...] mysterious and inexplicable'.<sup>44</sup> As he explains, 'Lydia then still reigned at the bottom of my heart, but the surface of my imagination, played upon by numberless objects of splendour and gaiety, passively took the shallow, volatile impressions.'<sup>45</sup> Imaginative 'langor' also allows fleeting perceptions of inferior objects to dominate over the elusive love object: Lydia recedes into an idea whose power is weak when compared with the forceful (if cognitively inferior) impressions that beset Sir William's sensorium.

- 17 If Sir William's passivity and vanity are standard satiric symptoms of the effeminate degeneration of his 'natural' manliness, his apparently volitionless movement through society at the whim of others aligns *Coxcomb* with the it-novels of the period. It-novels attacked the superficiality and irrational desires of eighteenth-century commodity culture, whilst themselves being a quintessential product of that culture: disposable pleasures of print culture without the pretense of literary aspiration. Reading *Coxcomb* as a transmutation of the it-novel allows us to register its full satirical effect: representing an elite masculine subject – that most privileged of British products – reduced to an object in an economy of feminine desires. The vaunted self-mastery that Sir William advertises as desirable is severely impaired by subjection to the desires of others. Articulate, yet lacking agency, Sir William circulates through society in a series of sexual exchanges in a similar fashion to the lap dogs, coins, quires of paper etc. that populate object narratives. *Coxcomb*, like mid-century it-narratives, deploys an episodic form that has repercussions on its moral claims, dissipating its claims to experiential knowledge. As Barbara Benedict has noted, eighteenth-century novels' claims to promote morality are often reliant on 'a mental process of reflection and a formal sequence of causal connections', but *Coxcomb* weakens such cognitive and formal links through its 'narrative and the thematic modes', in which events follow one another in a repetitious and unconnected fashion, with moments of reflection more like arch asides than genuine counsel.<sup>46</sup> Further illustrating the inefficacy of reason is the tasteful Merville, a manly foil to Sir William whose advice to reform is unheeded and whose superior qualities go unrewarded throughout the novel. Indeed, the conventionally masculine wisdom of Merville is strangely impotent. Warning Sir William to access 'manly' voluptuousness via moderation rather than 'brutish' mechanism or the anemia of the 'sheer Platonics', his worthy advice is recognized but causes only the briefest of pauses:

The delicate and dear distinction between all the sensual gratifications, in which I had indulged myself, and my unextinguished passion for my ever adorable Lydia. Lydia! to whom I had first owed all the rapturous feelings of an innocent, virtuous love: Lydia! to whom I owed all the little checks I felt in the career of that worthless coxcombry, which consisted in my seeking to reduce women to my point for the sake of my pleasure as well as my vanity, which last came cruelly in for its share, with my libertine taste for variety in leaving them. But these sentiments had only their reign of a moment. The excuse I framed to myself, out of the uncertainty of ever seeing Lydia again, and present objects prevailed over these protests of love and reason, and soon re-subjected me to the misrule of an imagination too easily inflamed, and too indelicate of appetite, to refuse its subsistence on the feast at hand, in preference to much higher out of reach, or placed at too discouraging a distance of perspective.<sup>47</sup>

- 18 The inefficacy of Merville's philosophical advice seems only to prove the force of Marivaux's assertion that 'the passions do not read': reason has no sway over the powerful exigency of desire. Just as Sir William 'naturally hates reflexion', Cleland's plot avoids sentimental pause. Incapable even of transitory repentance, its narrator swept up by the momentum of daily-life, the novel's dynamic is deliberately libertine: a merry-go-round of erotic dalliance, sometime conquest and sometime humiliation, at the whim of female attention. Yet even compared to Fanny Hill's heterogeneous couplings, there is a curious sameness to the coxcomb's exploits; what Smollett identified as 'a want of episodes', the adventures 'not enough diversified'.<sup>48</sup> The similarity of encounter and rapid succession of amours exemplify what Christopher Tilmouth calls 'hedonistic repetition-compulsion': a libertine materialism 'which equates felicity with corporeal pleasure, and corporeal pleasure with a constant momentum for change'.<sup>49</sup> The incorrigibility of such 'kinetic pleasures' confirms Sir William's obdurate imbecility in matters of the breeches and the heart, but also suggests that sensual pleasures are under the governance of the imagination.<sup>50</sup> It is the 'misrule' of an inflamed imagination is responsible for the degradation of sense.

- 19 If imaginative disorder leads to compulsive behavior, Sir William is not merely a flat character or 'it', but also a bad reader. His appetite for amatory sensation and incapacity to read his experience is akin to a reader conditioned by a poor diet of romance, the outmoded sensationalist trash which Cleland dismisses under the motto '*Lis et oublie*' in his preface to *Manners of the Present Age*.<sup>51</sup> Not merely does Sir William misinterpret his own feelings but, more importantly for the novel's comic goals, he often fails to accurately interpret the female characters around him. Though he claims a rakish power over women, in which his 'libertine taste for variety' causes him to discard the co-called victims of his passion, the narrative exposes this as an embarrassing misreading of his obvious exploitation by female characters. The superior understanding of the passions evinced by female characters renders the coxcomb's claims to self-knowledge ridiculous. Making the protagonist a target for female mockery (both by characters within the text and as by its imagined readers) has powerful satiric force, and, as Anu Korhonen observes of early-modern cuckold jests, derision can be harnessed to drive 'demands for [sexual] decency and conformity [...] held as

constitutive of masculinity and patriarchal authority'.<sup>52</sup> If such satire has a normative power, it is generally latent in Cleland's work. Sir William's inability to properly interpret his own desires and their relation to the desires of others leads to increasingly humiliating relationships with women. Confused sensations cause the youthful coxcomb to overestimate his autonomy and insight into the way in which passions can be produced through mechanical manipulation both of bodies and circumstance.

- 20 Such comic misprision can be seen in Sir William's botched seduction of a beautiful young woman named Agnes, whose aged guardian Lady Oldborough has designs upon *him*. Agnes's astonishing perfection produces desire mechanistically:

Nothing could be more engaging than her face, nothing more correct than her shape, and all together composed a system of attraction, more powerful and more naturally accounted for, than any in all Sir Isaac Newton's works. It was not that I felt that sort of emotion which was reserved for Lydia alone to inspire me, but I felt that quick and sensible desire, which sets all the powers of the mind in action to obtain its satisfaction, and which made me, on that instant, conceive and form designs of pleasure upon her.<sup>53</sup>

- 21 The magnetic 'system of attraction' works upon the protagonist's body, setting off a chain reaction which activates the will but not the 'emotion' privileged by Descartes. Yet while in *Woman of Pleasure* Agnes's ductile and limpid youth might supply a lascivious scene, *Coxcomb* diverts both Sir William's frenzied desire and the reader's attention to a scene of misogynist ridicule and humiliation. In *Coxcomb*, as in Hogarth's prints, a potential moment of 'sexual titillation [...] is diverted by comic devices'.<sup>54</sup> Agnes is constitutionally insensible: a lifeless, unfeeling 'pantin', or puppet, used by her guardian as a form of sexual bait.<sup>55</sup> She is 'a piece of fine still life without passions, by which to work or be worked upon. If she repulsed any attempts on her person [...] this repulse was as mechanical, and as sure, as the effects of clock-work, wound up to strike exactly at certain determined touches or movements.'<sup>56</sup> An erotic automaton, Agnes's lack of responsiveness correlates to a lack of subjective depth: correspondingly, her insensibility can produce only mechanical lust. Julie Park has shown that the eighteenth-century craze for puppetry was symptomatic of a fascination with the 'artificial' desires of luxury and the ways in which natural forms could be imitated without vitality or humanity. Park rightly stresses the ways in which femininity is paradigmatic of the emulative tendencies of eighteenth-century commodity culture as 'a project of artificial reproduction' exemplified by the 'mute, artefactual and inanimate exemplar' of the puppet. However the puppet also acts as a cultural trope for the loss of masculine autonomy.<sup>57</sup> In Hogarth's 1748 print, 'Pantin a la Mode', puppet-life's mimicry and mechanical loss of agency is characteristic of both sexes.<sup>58</sup> Set in a fashionable and luxurious interior, 'Pantin a la Mode' depicts vacuous individuals conversing, taking tea, and toying delightedly with miniaturized human effigies. Yet the print shows that they are themselves toyed with. While the females on the right of the print are pretty fools, entranced by the dolls they resemble, their slumped and prone bodies are prone to the leer of a black servant in the background, whose lascivious grin is echoed in the stone satyr above him. Passive impressionability leaves the women open to sexual exploitation. At the centre of the image is a fop, leaning toward the women as if engaged in avid conversation. Yet the print exposes the machinery of his flirtatious attitude. The young fop is manipulated by a smirking puppet-master, a man of fashion at the far left of the image, who controls his protégé with a marionette bar. The passivity and ridiculous malleability of the fop is mocked by the figures who flank him: a grinning monkey and a cleric who stares out, bemused and impudent, at the viewer. Courtship between such modern men and women, the print implies, is a mechanical operation: devoid of animating agency, these figures are infantilized playthings of more corrupt individuals.

- 22 'Foppery', the text of 'Pantin a la Mode' tells us, is a youthful symptom of '*Luxury and Wealth*'. Gilded youth's enervation and comic insensibility to their exploitation is similarly found in *Coxcomb*. While Sir William is absorbed by his plans for Agnes, the decrepit Lady Oldborough correctly reads his passions, and then uses the promise of intervention with her ward to groom, manipulate, and ultimately extort sexual favours from the youth. His failure to assume manly authority in his dealings with the widow makes him as much a puppet as the insensible Agnes. The 'amorous veteran' engineers a scenario where the young man willingly plays 'fob-love' to her in the hopes of gaining her support for his campaign on Agnes.<sup>59</sup> Groomed to gallantly pay court to Lady Oldborough, Sir William is led by degrees of politeness and sexual politicking to make love to her aged and libidinous person in misguided hopes of accessing the insensate young woman in her care. A grotesque and heavily painted parody of a fifteen-year-old virgin, the elderly widow so disgusts the coxcomb that in order to proceed he must 'force his imagination, where the springs of pleasure so sensibly depend'.<sup>60</sup> The resulting sexual union between the handsome youth and lascivious hag is an object lesson in the potential for fantasmatic desire to replace the 'real' object of yearning with a perverse substitute:

Her person, spread before me like a desert of dried fruit, exhibited such a picture of amorous fondness, as was even more ridiculous than distasteful, and had nigh quelled my best of man. But as I was now in the pride of my spring, well-bottomed, and my blood fermented strongly in my veins as to threaten the bursting its turgid and distended channels, so that love was rather a natural want in me, than merely a debauch of imagination. The sympathy of organs established between the two sexes, sensibly exerted itself, and drove all delicacy or distinction of persons out of my head [...] I [then] repeated a ceremony, which in some respects resembled that of the doge of Venice, when he weds the gulf by way of asserting his dominion.<sup>61</sup>

- 23 What in *Woman of Pleasure* is the fleshly byproduct of an 'impression of a pleasure merely animal [...] a passive bodily effect' becomes in *Coxcomb*'s male counterpart the active prostitution of the imagination: mental debauch allows a hilariously ritualistic performance of sensual pleasure, emptied of the multi-dimensional delights of emotional connection. Sir William's modish automatism confirms his self-alienation and the commodification of his senses. Performing the role of paramour, his movements are choreographed by the more experienced Lady Oldborough, his agency willingly given over in service of her desire. If the protagonist's copulation is a comic parody of the Venetian ritual of mastery, his foolishness is exacerbated by Lady Oldborough's second deceit, where she disengages his interest in Agnes by deceiving him into believing that the young woman is embroiled with another man. If by 'pressing Desire into the service of Sensuality' Sir William has enslaved his higher functions, the novel's logic of misogynist disgust condemns him primarily for subserviating himself to a woman.<sup>62</sup> This craven lack of self-mastery is apotheosized in his final, most baroque, affair. Effeminized by passion for the aristocratic lady Bell Travers, he becomes a play-thing 'driven by unremitting gust' to obey her pleasures.<sup>63</sup> It is only when he witnesses the female libertine staging a perverse scene of an adult man being breast-fed does he realize his role as a puppet. Even then, his horror at the scene, which externalizes his own abject dependency, causes a break in his affections for the lady libertine rather than a reflective reformation. Sir William's indulgence in the pleasures of the flesh finally becomes a disrelish: 'the frequency of indulging, benumbed my sensations, and I was suddenly taken torpid [...] it

was reserved for love alone to secure to me the benefit of this disgust'.<sup>64</sup> Only as hedonic intensity diminishes can change occur, prohibiting repetition: nonetheless, it is feeling, rather than reflection, that saves him.

## Conclusion

<sup>24</sup> If Sir William's gauche susceptibility to sensation 'serves as a surprising pretext for the exploration of female sexuality' it equally exposes a destabilizing 'homology between the object-narrator and the sexually exploited female body.'<sup>65</sup> Like the modern subjects Park describes as 'striving to objectify and construct [their] qualities of presence and experience', Sir William's desire to mortify himself and amuse the reader 'leaves the self both pleasingly and distressingly "a thing"'.<sup>66</sup> Written before the hey-day of it-narratives, *Coxcomb* has not been included in their ranks because its 'thing' is a male human: Sir William fails to provide the insight into economics, empire, law or society afforded by the entirely impersonal objects in later works such as Charles Johnstone's *Chrysal, or the Adventures of a Guinea* (1760-165). His alienation has not been sublimed into an object and remains a bathetic instance of self-delusion of the would-be rake. Yet not merely does the narrator reveal himself as a mere toy at the mercy of lascivious women, but the book too, by analogy, becomes a 'thing': a self-consciously ephemeral pleasure for an indiscriminate reading public. As Smollett observed, *Coxcomb's* aim to 'entertain the public' in a market super-saturated with similar novels risks it 'being condemned to [...] the gulph of oblivion'.<sup>67</sup> Sir William and Cleland's work are both commodities 'animated by the life of the market' and its consumers: without their desire there can be no narrative.<sup>68</sup> The novel conveys a sense of 'reduced agency' for its reader and narrator through the sheer superficial hurry of farcical episodes, its deflated conclusion suggesting creative resignation in the face of its own limited shelf-life: who would ever re-read this slight volume?<sup>69</sup> In this manner, the alienated protagonist of *Coxcomb* symbolizes the book's fate in a labile market: like the professional author, Sir William's moralizing is desultory and defeated, crippled by irony yet bound to serve a reading public whose passions do not read.

<sup>25</sup> Thus while this novel, like many it-narratives, conveys 'male anxiety about women's ability, as objectified possessions, to retain preferences and prejudices that ultimately render them consumers of men' it also displays a deep skepticism about the ability of sensibility to stabilize volatile sensation.<sup>70</sup> The body remains a wry cipher: deriving a stable moral position from quivering physiology is ludicrous. Sir William's harmonious vibration at Lydia's mere presence may well signal a fundamental compatibility, a pleasurable sympathy. But as we have seen, such sentimental certainty can be swiftly overlaid by 'inferior' novel sensations that impose the amnesia of an eternal present upon a subject whose sense of identity is fragile at best. Cleland's comedy circumscribes sensibility's claims by ridiculing the limited self-awareness residing in the man of feeling.

<sup>26</sup> Sensibility's claims to moral reform are thrown into doubt by the pragmatic consideration of spatial proximity. Sir William, after all, persists in coxcombry due to Lydia's absence, as 'present objects' prevail over the 'protests of love and reason'.<sup>71</sup> Sensibility, as well as sensation, must be understood in terms of 'dynamics [...] [as] a principle of motility, communication and exchange, of matter and spirit, as well as thought and feeling'.<sup>72</sup> This principle of contiguity condemns the protagonist to a moral and personal passivity incompatible with the principles of manly individualism. Nothing but the return of the original love object redeems the coxcomb. Revisiting the cottage where he first became enamoured of Lydia, Sir William describes a form of romantic re-enchantment: 'every thing I saw round me, to which my remembrance could annex any relation to her, wore [...] an aspect of joy, that seemed to hail the momentary presence of her to my enchanted imagination'.<sup>73</sup> Shuttling between the dissipations of desire and the absorptive recursiveness of memory, Sir William is a parodic version of Hartleyian mechanism, divided between 'the despotism of outward impressions and that of senseless and passive memory'.<sup>74</sup> Such men of feeling are inherently ridiculous, as the coxcomb's reunion scene suggests:

I stood in a trance of surprise and joy, unable to command any motion, or exert one power of free agency, under the oppression of such sudden sensations acting united upon me and keeping every other faculty of my soul suspended [...]. But the vivacity of my ideas kept down the burst of expressions with which it heaved [...] the instant of my recovering my natural liberty of motion, I precipitated myself at her feet, I seized her hand before she could draw it away from my grasp, and could not but disconcert her with an impetuosity, of which I was not in these moments of transport the master. I tried in vain to speak, but my emotions still overpowered me. And when at length my sentiments forced a passage, it was only in an exclamation of the name of Lydia, in inarticulate breaks and heart-fetched sighs. Lydia herself appeared to me, as soon as I was capable of remarking her situation, if less surprised, not less confounded or agitated than myself: yet the quickness of discernment so peculiar to the love-passion, that it may be called its instinct, made me feel a somewhat, if not dry or reserved in her reception of me, at least wanting much of that warmth of welcome, which I should have wished in such a re-meeting [...]. The violence of my sentiments expunged all memory or reflection on every thing but the present object. I saw Lydia, and that was enough.<sup>75</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Even though it is 'emotion' rather than passion that overwhelms the protagonist, his disorder and paralysis closely resemble the 'confusion of sensations' caused by sexual pleasure. Transported, impetuous, inarticulate: the rapture of love sees Sir William once more the slave of his feelings – albeit legitimate ones. Indeed, this ecstasy seems merely a variant of his impressionability: his action a repetition of convulsive passionate states found in romances more usually associated with female readers and protagonists. Cleland packs this climatic scene with comic effect: the nonplussed Lydia greeting her would-be paramour's effusions with baffled coldness while an elderly female onlooker declares drolly that the young man 'should not make a "bad actor" given such a performance'.<sup>76</sup> While eighteenth-century novels increasingly deployed the sympathetic body to convince readers of the force of moral sympathy, Cleland's fiction emphasizes the possibility of skeptical distance, encouraging the reader to mistrust idealistic claims made for bodily knowledge and sensory data. The 'tension between the [...] sentimental eloquence of the body and the knowing, ironic play of the mind' renders Sir William's passions risible: encouraging readers to assess his show of feeling skeptically, as a mere physical performance by an individual 'more responsive than responsible'.<sup>77</sup> Once Lydia re-enters the narrative the novel winds down abruptly, sputtering to an ignominious halt. The coxcomb's love-rival, the urbane and superior Merville, politely relinquishes his claims to the young woman and the novel leaves both narrator and reader in a state of 'not displeasing inquietude', awaiting a response to his underwhelming and apparently unwelcome proposal of marriage.<sup>78</sup> This state of suspended anticipation allows the novel to avoid affirming the lessons of experience since the consistent delights of adulthood are beyond its protagonist's reach. Sir William is still, after all, dependent on a woman's will and pleasure. His sensibility attests more to feminine impressionability (his joy at Lydia's return recalls his description of women's 'fond gratitude' to the first author of their pleasure) than to masculine maturity.

28     Mistrusting 'ideas of flesh and blood', the novel modulates the erotic and the sentimental properties of its vignettes through humour. Comedy and ridicule thus short-circuit both mechanical desire and the overblown claims of sensibility. Yet the arsenal of laughter and derision proposed by Cleland as a solution to the vicious tendencies of novels is peculiarly self-annihilating. Like Du Clos, Cleland's ridicule is ultimately self-reflexive: the novel's levity facilitating its own demise – 'forced to laugh at itself, it dies, well-pleased, and licking the Knife that cuts its Throat'. In his willingness to offer himself as public amusement, to court approval through a glib espousal of his own foolishness, Sir William degrades himself and discounts the epistemological value of experience. The narrative entropy of Sir William's picaresque suggests that sensibility cannot resolve the disorder of sensuality: the man of feeling is little more than a fool whose paeans to true love mask sensual incontinence and the cognitive *cul-de-sac* of desire.

## Notes

1 Leo Braudy, "Fanny Hill and Materialism," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 4.1, 1970, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2737611> (last accessed 23 September 2016), p. 21-40. For recent scholarship in which materialism underpins explorations of gender, sexual politics and the mid-eighteenth century novel see Hal Gladfelder, "Machines in Love: Bodies, Souls, and Sexes in the Age of La Mettrie," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 27.1, Fall 2014, p. 55-81; Andrea Haslanger, "What Happens When Pornography Ends in Marriage: the Uniformity of Pleasure in *Fanny Hill*," *ELH*, 78. 1, Spring 2011, p. 163-188; Kathleen Lubey, *Excitable Imaginations: Eroticism and Reading in Britain, 1660-1760*, Lewisburg, Bucknell University Press, 2012; Thomas Keymer, 'Materialism, Mechanism, and the Novel', in David Womersley and Richard McCabe (eds), *Literary Milieux: Essays in Text and Context Presented to Howard Erskine-Hill*, Newark, University of Delaware Press, 2008, p. 307-333.

2 The exception is Hal Gladfelder's *Fanny Hill in Bombay*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012, which is as comprehensive a literary biography as is possible for Cleland and includes perspicuous readings of all the author's extant works.

3 J. Cleland to Lovel Stanhope, quoted in H. Gladfelder, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

4 *A Facsimile Reproduction of a Unique Catalogue of Laurence Sterne's Library*, with a preface by Charles Whibley, London, James Tregaskis, 1930: *Memoirs of a Coxcomb* is item 1590, a 'neat' duodecimo, p. 61.

5 Bonnie Blackwell, 'Corkscrews and Courtesans: Sex and Death in Circulation Novels', in Mark Blackwell (ed.), *The Secret Life of Things: Animals, Objects, and It-Narratives in Eighteenth-Century England*, Lewisburg, Bucknell University Press, 2007, p. 265-291, p. 289.

6 Bill Brown, *A Sense of Things: The Object Matter of American Literature*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2003, p. 16.

7 B. Blackwell, *op. cit.*, p. 289; Lynn Festa, 'It-Narratives and Spy Novels', in Pater Garside and Karen O'Brien (eds), *The Oxford History of the Novel in English: Volume 2, English and British Fiction 1750-1820*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015, p. 335-352n p. 337.

8 Tobias Smollett, Review of *Memoirs of a Coxcomb*, *The Monthly Review*, October 1751, p. 385-387, p. 385.

9 H. Gladfelder, *op. cit.*, p. 130.

10 John Cleland, *Memoirs of a Coxcomb*, ed. Hal Gladfelder, Ontario, Broadview Press, 2005, p. 39.

11 *Ibid.* p. 40.

12 J. Cleland, 'Translator's Preface', *op. cit.*, p. ix.

13 Barbara Benedict, *Framing Feeling: Sentiment and Style in English Prose, 1745-1800*, New York, AMS Press, 1998, p. 12.

14 K. Lubey, *op. cit.*, p. 174.

15 K. Lubey, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

16 Samuel Richardson, 1751 Postscript to *Clarissa*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, *Published Commentary on 'Clarissa'*, 1747-1753, 3 vols, ed. Thomas Keymer, London, Pickering and Chatto, 1998, vol. 1, p. 255.

17 J. Cleland, *Coxcomb*, *op. cit.*, p. 80; Lubey, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

18 John Cleland, 'The Translator's Preface', in [Charles Pinot] Du Clos, *Memoirs Illustrating the Manners of the Present Age*, 2 vol., vol. 2, London, 1752, p. x.

19 *Ibid.*, p. x, p. xi.

20 *Ibid.*, p. xvii.

21 *Ibid.*, p. xviii. Much of Cleland's analysis of literature's representational efficacy resembles Samuel Johnson's famous analysis in the *Rambler*, No. 4. Saturday, 31 March 1750, in which he worries over fiction's ability to take 'possession of the memory by a kind of violence, and produce effects almost without the intervention of the will'. However Cleland diverges significantly in his espousal of mixed characters and his positive emphasis on ridicule as a moral force.

22 J. Cleland, 'Translator's Preface', *op. cit.*, p. xviii.

23 *Ibid.* p. xix.

24 *Ibid.*

25 See, for example, Samuel Richardson's comparison of Sarah Fielding's understanding of the human heart to that of her brother Henry: 'His was but as the knowledge of a clock-work machine, while your's was that of all the finer springs and movements of the inside', quoted in T. C. Duncan Eaves and Ben D. Kimpel, *Samuel Richardson: A Biography*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1971, p. 305. For a discussion of clockwork metaphor and mechanism in the period see T. Keymer, 'Materialism, Mechanism, and the Novel', *op. cit.*

26 J. Cleland, *Coxcomb*, *op. cit.*, p. 47-48.

27 *Ibid.*

28 K. Lubey, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

29 For works challenging the assumption that the novel's readership was primarily female see Barbara M. Benedict, "'Male" and "Female" Novels?: Gendered Fictions and the Reading Public, 1770-1832', in J. A. Downie (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Eighteenth-Century Novel*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2016, p. 355-371; Patricia Crawford, 'Women's Published Writings, 1600-1700', in Mary Prior (ed.), *Women in English Society, 1500-1800*, London, Methuen, 1985, p. 202-274; Jan Fergus, *Provincial Readers in Eighteenth-Century England*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007, especially 'Audiences for Novels: Gendered Reading'; William St. Clair, *Reading Nation in the Romantic Period*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004.

30 John Cleland, *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, ed. Peter Wagner, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1995, p. 167.

31 Dalia Judowitz, *The Culture of the Body: Genealogies of Modernity*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 2001, p. 143.

32 K. Lubey, *op. cit.*, p.2.

33 J. Cleland, *Coxcomb*, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

34 Frances Hutcheson, *An Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections, with Illustrations on the Moral Sense* [1727], ed. Aaron Garrett, Indianapolis, Liberty Fund, 2002, p. 31.

35 Alexandra Shepherd, *Meanings of Manhood in Early-Modern England*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 28.

36 J. Cleland, *Coxcomb*, *op. cit.*, p. 46-47.



- 37 *Ibid.* p. 49.
- 38 *Ibid.*, p. 81.
- 39 *Ibid.*
- 40 *Ibid.*
- 41 J. Cleland, *Coxcomb*, *op. cit.*, p. 73-74.
- 42 David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge, revised P. H. Nidditch, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1978, p. 252.
- 43 D. Hume, *Treatise*, *op. cit.*, p. 254.
- 44 *Ibid.*, p. 255.
- 45 J. Cleland, *Coxcomb*, *op. cit.*, p. 95.
- 46 Barbara Benedict, 'The Spirit of Things', in M. Blackwell (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 19-42: p. 29.
- 47 J. Cleland, *Coxcomb*, *op. cit.*, p. 170.
- 48 T. Smollett, *Review*, *op. cit.*, p. 387.
- 49 Christopher Tilmouth, *Passion's Triumph Over Reason: A History of the Moral Imagination from Spencer to Rochester*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 322.
- 50 *Ibid.*, p. 278.
- 51 T. Cleland, 'Translator's Preface', *op. cit.*, p. xiii.
- 52 Anu Korhonen, 'Laughter, Sex, and Violence', in Anna Foka and Jonas Liliequist (eds), *Laughter and the (Un)Making of Gender*, London, Palgrave, 2015, p. 133-151, p.139.
- 53 J. Cleland, *Coxcomb*, *op. cit.*, p. 119.
- 54 Frédéric Ogée, 'The Flesh of Theory: The Erotics of Hogarth's Lines', in Bernadette Fort and Angela Rosenthal (eds.), *The Other Hogarth: Aesthetics of Difference*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2001, p. 62-77, p. 67-68.
- 55 J. Cleland, *Coxcomb*, *op. cit.*, p. 118.
- 56 *Ibid.* p. 123.
- 57 Julie Park, *The Self and It: Novel Objects in Eighteenth-Century England*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2010, p. 103, p. 105.
- 58 'Pantin a la Mode', etching, published by J. Wakelin, London, 1748, British Museum.
- 59 J. Cleland, *Coxcomb*, *op. cit.*, p. 126.
- 60 *Ibid.*, p. 134.
- 61 *Ibid.*, p. 135.
- 62 *Ibid.*, p. 134.
- 63 *Ibid.*, p. 187. For discussion of this sexually charged scene of 'Roman piety' see H. Gladfelder *Fanny Hill in Bombay*, *op. cit.*, p. 122-129. I discuss this scene in detail in 'Desire, disgust, and indigestion in John Cleland's *Memoirs of a Coxcomb*,' in a forthcoming volume provisionally entitled *Entrails and Digestion in the Eighteenth Century*, co-edited with Sylvie Kleiman-Lafon and Sophie Vasset.
- 64 J. Cleland, *Coxcomb*, *op. cit.*, p.194-5.
- 65 B. Blackwell, 'Corkscrews and Courtesans', *op. cit.*, p. 266, p. 268.
- 66 J. Park, *op. cit.*, p. xv.
- 67 T. Smollett, *op. cit.*, p. 385.
- 68 Christina Lupton, *Knowing Books: The Consciousness of Mediation in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012, p. 51.
- 69 *Ibid.*
- 70 B. Blackwell, 'Corkscrews and Courtesans', *op.cit.*, p. 280.
- 71 J. Cleland, *Coxcomb*, *op. cit.*, p. 170.
- 72 Seth Lobis, *Magic, Philosophy, and Literature in Seventeenth-Century England*, Yale, Yale University Press, 2015, p. 4.
- 73 J. Cleland, *Coxcomb*, *op. cit.*, p. 202.
- 74 Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. James Engell and W. Jackson Bate, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1983, vol. 7, p. 111.
- 75 J. Cleland, *Coxcomb*, *op. cit.*, p. 208.
- 76 *Ibid.*
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## About the author

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Rebecca Anne Barr is lecturer in English at the National University of Ireland, Galway. Her research explores eighteenth-century literature and visual culture, with particular reference to the connections between gender, genre, and sexuality. Recent work has focused on representations of men, masculinity, and the body in mid-century novels. Published articles include 'Richardson's *Sir Charles Grandison* and the Symptoms of Subjectivity' in *The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation* (2010), 'Pathological Laughter and the Response to Ridicule', in *Revue de la Société d'Études Anglo-Américaines des XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles* (2013), and 'Barren Deserts of Arbitrary Words': Language and Communication in Collier and Fielding's *The Cry* in *Women's Writing* (2016). With Sylvie Kleiman-Lafon (Université Paris 8) and Sophie Vasset (Paris Diderot), she is co-editing a volume entitled *Entrails and Digestion in the Eighteenth Century*.

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