Chapter Three

“A Pervasive Masquerade”: Eliza Haywood’s Fantomina (1725)

When eighteenth century reader thought about the novel many of them probably thought first of one writer in particular – Eliza Haywood.¹

In 1725, Eliza Fowler Haywood was arguably the most prolific and popular writer of prose fiction. Her literary output reflects the sweeping changes that the novel was initiating in contemporary print culture. Yet for the average student of the history of English literature today, Haywood is a marginal character ruthlessly dismissed in Pope’s The Dunciad (1728), ridiculed for her sexuality and dullness. What prompted this tremendous barrage of criticism against her and thus relegated her from literary history?

This chapter will explore the extent to which Haywood’s fictions in general and her masquerade text Fantomina (1725) in particular, were deeply problematising the issue of female masquerade as a source of circulation of sexuality and thereby asserting female agency within a deeply ingrained patriarchal system. In doing so, Haywood was also carving out a substantial niche for herself in the contemporary print culture along with the other female writers of amatory fiction.² She was also closely scrutinising the patriarchal assumptions about love, courtship and desire. We would argue how these two prolonged challenges to the patriarchal system prompted the backlash from both moralists and participants of print culture. The event of the masquerade thus became the site where questions of power, authority, representation and subversion were played out. The most important of these textual sites can be located in Fantomina.
Eliza Fowler Haywood’s remarkable career reflects many of the concerns central to her writing. Although she made her reputation through amatory fiction, she was also a deeply engaged political writer, a poet, a journalist, a translator, a literary critic and the author of conduct books and periodical essays. Her career spanned over three decades from *Love in Excess* (1719) to the conduct book *Epistles for the Ladies* (1749). Haywood’s literary output is still being traced, since many of her political writings were published anonymously.

Haywood’s controversial life is yet to be fully charted. She was probably born in 1693 and by 1719, the marriage she described as ‘unfortunate’ was over. Haywood is strangely reticent about this part of her life and she quickly entered the public sphere through stage-performing in minor roles by 1717. She was making useful contacts including William Wilkes, co-manager of Drury Lane Theatre, and William Chetwood who would later print many of her works. By 1730, she had mothered two children fathered by Richard Savage and William Hatchett respectively. Savage was a co-performer and friend initially, but he was to satirise her in *An Author to be Lett*. With Hatchett, her relationship spanned over twenty years and he was closely involved with many of her literary projects. Together they were mentioned for libel and sedition in 1750.

Haywood was a remarkably radical author in her attitude towards the issue of the single mother as indicated in *The Rash Resolve* (1723) and *The Force of Nature* (1724). In *The Rash Resolve* Emanuella emerges as a groundbreaking character managing to attain reasonable respectability and economic independence.

That Haywood was successful a dramatist in Haymarket (and not a scribbling hack writer that she is frequently seen as) is indisputable. On the night before the Licensing Act was introduced in 1737, she played the Muse
in *Eurydice Hiss’d*, Fielding’s play, performed for her benefit. It is on record that Sarah Churchill, the Duchess of Marlborough attended the performance. Her dedications reflect an interesting combination. They include Sarah Churchill (anti-Walpole in her political leaning), Viscount Thomas Gage (a supporter of Walpole), William Young (attorney and friend of Walpole) and Charles Howard (Earl of Suffolk and a groom of the bed chamber of George I). Clearly Haywood was an important literary personality and had friends in the highest political circles.

Haywood’s publishers included Daniel Browne, Samuel Chapman, James Woodman, William Chetwood and Thomas Gardener, all established publishers in the early and mid-eighteenth century. Clearly this now-forgotten author was one of the most published writers of the period. Her periodical *The Female Spectator* (1744-46) was arguably the most popular in its genre in the 1740’s and her novella *The Invisible Spy* (1754) was serialized in the *Novelist’s Magazine* along with Fielding, Richardson, Smollett and Frances Sheridan’s texts. Some of her contemporaries alleged that she had amassed nearly ten thousand pounds at the time of her death on 25 February, 1756. Mysteriously, her burial was delayed till 3 March, and the parish records show her death duties were unpaid. This last anomaly marks the complex mystery of an enigmatic career.

The most controversial moment of her literary career was her arrest for seditious libel. Haywood had earlier commented on political issues and her stance was stridently anti-Walpole. One of her most pointedly anti-Walpole pieces, *The Adventures of Eovaai* (1736), was reprinted in 1741 as *The Unfortunate Princess, or the Ambitious Statesman*; one scholar calls it “as complete and as savage as anything to be found in the opposition press”. Her 1746 periodical titled *The Parrot*, specifically addressed the political and topical concerns following the 1745 Jacobite Rebellion and depended on the political context for its force. The successive appearance of
these publications, perhaps combined with political texts we still have not yet attributed to Haywood, might have caused her to be seen by the government as a decidedly political writer and prompted the official inquiry and arrest. Haywood was never prosecuted, although the reasons for the dismissal have not yet emerged. Clearly, Haywood was conscious of the political journalism of her period and was an active participant in the public sphere.\(^5\)

With *Love in Excess* (1719-20), Haywood marked her first major entry into the market of prose fiction. Only *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) could ever come close to it in terms of sales. Haywood moved away from the implicitly political amatory fiction of Manley and Behn to situate her novels primarily in the domain of private desire. One of the reasons for this shift might have been the strength of the Whig ministry and the absence of any Tory resistance till 1726, when the Scribblerians published in full force. Haywood situated her novels primarily in the cities, especially London and reoriented the amatory mode towards claim of factuality. Thus, the “Romance” was replaced by the “secret intrigue” or the “secret history” and female desire becomes the most important category in the text. A characteristic authorial interjection in Haywood’s *The Agreeable Caledonian* (1728) thus states:

‘tis destiny alone rules love: Reason, Religion and even the will is subservient to that all powerful Passion which forces us sometimes to Actions our Natures most detest: Mother against Daughter, Father against Son, contrives: all obligations of Blood and interest are no more remembered: over every Bound we leap, to gratify the wild desire, and Conscience but vainly interposes its Remonstrance.\(^6\)
Haywood was also drawing upon the contemporary vogue of factuality (a discourse shared with Defoe):

I am obliged to inform my reader, that I have not inserted one incident which was not related to me by a person nearly concerned in the family of that unfortunate Gentleman, who had no other Consideration in the choice of a wife, than to gratify a present passion for the enjoyment of her Beauty.\(^7\)

Thus, Ros Ballaster argues:

Haywood’s greatest innovation in the field of amatory fiction was to revitalize the representation of a desiring conflict onto social rather than party political, myth … Haywood was unequivocal in her address to a female audience and her commitment to the discourse of love. Female desire is no longer a ruling metaphor in her fiction, but rather the subject and generating ground of its plot.\(^8\)

The equation of the text and the body thus found a new zenith in Haywood. She justified her choice of subject vociferously:

As I am a woman, and consequently depriv’d of those advantages of education … I cannot flatter so my desires, as to imagine it is in my power to soar to any subject higher than that which nature is not ignorant to teach us. Love is a Topick, which I believe few, are ignorant of; there requires no Aids of Learning, no general conversation, no Application: This is a theme, therefore while I make choice to write of, free me from the Imputation of vain or self-sufficient – None can tax me with having too great an
opinion of my genius, when I am at nothing but what the meanest may perform.\(^9\)

This is a very clever rhetorical masquerading. Haywood, unlike Behn and Manley, distances herself from any claims of equality or superiority over masculinity and therefore claims Passion rather than Reason as a subject. At the same time she is as an equal with her female reader, thereby claiming a bond of interiority with them. While she claims a position of female passivity, she however retains the power of writing – thus her surrender is a clever masquerade through which she effectively neutralises criticism and gains a position of empowerment.

At the same time, Haywood was shrewdly aware of the market demand for the fiction of passion to a wide readership. As Ballaster points out:

> The business of Haywood’s amatory plots is to engage the female readers’ sympathy and erotic pleasure, rather than stimulate intellectual judgement. These texts explicitly call upon the female reader to identify with the troubled heroine.\(^{10}\)

Placing the amatory woman at the centre of fiction, Haywood was trying to explore the sexual and the psychological complexities a woman could encounter. The private history in Haywood was far more pointedly guided towards the erotic. Richetti points out:

> Thus the voyeuristic thrill is an exclusive view of what is otherwise secret and hidden. The effect is not scandalous exposure of a corrupt social order as in Manley, but rather the effacement of the public realm and the restriction of amatory narrative to the personal, private, secret transactions
... Haywood’s novels discard the lingering resonances of romances … and ironic disparagement of the present such as Behn and Manley exploit are exchanged for the focused immediacy of sex and suffering.11

Haywood was also revolutionising print culture by what Warner suggests was a fundamental shift in the culture’s understanding of reading purely for pleasure:

If an earlier reverential practice of reading was grounded in the claim that books represented (some kind of Truth), Haywood’s novels seemed ready to deliver nothing more than pleasure … (they) promoted the liberation of the reader as the subject of pleasure … to teach readers, men as well as women, to articulate their desire and put the self first in the same way their characters do. 12

Characteristically, numerous texts of Haywood present the woman as vulnerable, beguiled by the corrupt practices of aristocratic society and often seduced and raped by predatory rakes. Thus, Haywood uses the erotic fantasy by encapsulating a heterosexual fantasy of apparent subjugation and self-abandonment. Once introduced to the world of passion, the female body is seen to enter a spin of erotic sequences. Hence, Haywood enters into a characteristic feature of the erotic female body on display in a moment of innocence and relaxation. Here is a symbolic passage in Love In Excess where Count D’Elmont views the unaware heroine Amena in her chamber:

She had only a silk Nightgown on, which flying open as he caught her in her Arms, he found her Panting heart beat Measures of Consent, her heaving Breast swell to be press’d by his and every pulse confess a wish to yield: her spirits all
dissolv’d, such in a Lethargy of love, his snowy Arms, unknowing, grasp’d his neck, her lips met his halfway and trembled at the touch.\footnote{13}

Haywood seems to play upon the male gaze of viewing the woman and even satisfies this fantasy of the rape of the woman, who is transfixed in a dream. This is a complex narrative strategy – foxed by love, the woman is in a dream – therefore in a state of lack of control. Thus, she can be morally exonerated and yet every drop of erotic pleasure can be squeezed for the male reader in the fantasy of conquest and for the female reader in the fantasy of erotic fulfilment. Thus in The City Jilt (1726) Glicera is surprised in an “unguarded hour” by the artful rake Melladore:

In an unguarded hour, when most he found her melted by his Pressures, and wholly incapable of repelling his amorous Efforts, did he attack her with all the ruinous Force of fatal passion … was she at last subdued, and fell the Victim of his lawless Flame.\footnote{14}

To suit her erotic subject, Haywood also devised a staccato, breathless and yet awkward style that could capture the turbulence of the erotic moment and the haphazardness of the emotions. This style offered a glimpse into the state of hysterical interiority of the female subject. Commenting on this “tumbling and turbulent melodramatic style” that is entirely and deliberately formulaic, a breathless run of erotic and pathetic clichés, John Richetti comments that this;

bypasses anything like thoughtful or critical distance from the process of representation and its conventions in order to concentrate on rendering something like actual passion and real distress. Literary language, along with the aesthetic, moral and representation issue it raises, is exchanged in
Haywood’s amatory fiction for a purely functional expressive rendition of passionate distress.\textsuperscript{15}

Richard Savage had noted this earlier in his tribute prefixed to \textit{The Rash Resolve} when he commented that Eliza possesses “a strong, a glorious, a luxurious Fire \ Which warms cold wisdom into wild desire”.\textsuperscript{16}

The question that arises then is – if Haywood locates the woman purely into the realm of passion, a subject of erotic delight and erotic submission, whose desire is subsequently limitless, is she submitting almost totally to the patriarchal vision of the woman as an object of display? Has she moved away from the sense of agency and control that Behn and Manley depict? Is her subject then the masquerade dish that is merely for male consumption? Or do the erotic possibilities locate a situation of power that can resist patriarchal control? Does it conceal a latent political interest? These are the challenges that the masquerade texts of Haywood throw up.

One must note here that Haywood’s fictions very subtly raise political possibilities through the erotic. It is true that barring individual texts, Haywood does not engage in direct political commentary like her predecessors Behn and Manley. But she notes the inequality of the woman within the sphere of desire and her reversal of this structure introduces a political undertone to her texts.

Before moving on to \textit{Fantomina} it is useful to look at Haywood’s first masquerade text, \textit{The Masqueraders; or Fatal Curiosity} (1724-25). The beginning of this text fetishizes the female body, describing the prone form of Dalinda masquerading as a shepherdess. In her fainted state her entire features are exposed as a silent feast for the “Crowd of Gentlemen, who had gathered round her”.\textsuperscript{17} She is taken notice of by the rake Dorimenus who intends to make her his “Victim”. As he seduces her the text falls upon the rapturous breathless language of amatory fiction, “His looks – his melting
Pressures – his ardours – His Impatiences – His Extasies – his Languishments”. The situation is made more complicated by Dalinda’s friend Philecta who refuses to trust Dorimenus for “she had suff’red much by Love, and the Ingratitude of a Man who had deceiv’d her with Professions of much the same nature with those her friend seemed now so certain were sincere …”.  

Confident of this detached and superior intelligence Philecta pursues Dalinda to invite Dorimenus to a masquerade where she is supposed to dress as an Indian slave. Philecta visits the masquerade startling Dorimenus (the Spaniard in the masquerade): within this span, Philecta has herself been besotted by Dorimenus. Instead of the “curious gaze” that she erstwhile possessed, she now longs to be the subject of his gaze leaving “nothing undone that she would to the advantage of her appearing well in the eyes of Dorimenus”.

Philecta engages in a second masquerade that underlines her feminine status, impersonating Dalinda’s handwriting to invite Dorimenus to another masquerade. It is here that Philecta replicates Dalinda’s passion for Dorimenus, losing all her faculty, and submitting to the dictates of passion:

she remained unfix’d in Determination, how she should Look, or Speak, or Act … not all her Good sense, not all her former experience of the Passion she was now again possess’d of, had yet once reminded her, that she took all this pains for anything more, than to Triumph over The Tenaciousness of Dalinda.

Philecta thus revalidates the patriarchal ideology that imposes female rivalry as a cover for male control.
It is at this point that the classic trope of amatory fiction is used in the seduction of Philecta as she awakes from sleep. Philecta is prone, silent vulnerable, exposed and fetishized for the “adventurous gazer, … feasting his impatient eyes with every naked charm about her … the agreeable Posture in which she lay … disclos’d to him Beauties, which her dress had conceal’d”. As the story moves forward, Dorimenus abandons both women to marry a wealthy heiress Lysimena. Philecta is found pregnant and the second part of the novel ignores her altogether, instead dealing with the interactions of Philomenus, Lysimena and Briscilla. As Ballaster points out:

Pregnancy, in this novel, marks the final defeat of the masquerading woman in her attempt to control the significatory capacities of the female body. All the heroine’s artifice and facility with disguise cannot, in the end, conceal this final corporeal and evident sign of her secret sexual desires.

Shamed, derided by society, Philecta simply vanishes. Instead, Lysimena enters another masquerade dressed as a nun submitting almost mechanically to the advances of the males:

She spoke not a word, nor offer’d to oppose either Dorimenus when he attempted to take her from these two gentlemen, nor to draw back from them … In that Confusion of her Thoughts, either Party or if they had interfer’d, might have done what they pleas’d with her, or carried her wherever they had a mind.

Interestingly, in this masquerade Philomenus is dressed as a friar replaying the authority of the male religious head (friar) to whom the nun must submit unquestioningly. Clearly then, a system of patriarchal authority is stamped
within this episode. The predatory male gaze of Philomenus entraps all susceptible female victims.

*The Masqueraders* as a text raises several crucial issues here. Haywood seems to locate the masquerade as a zone of patriarchal power where the woman is the subject of the relentless male gaze, the ‘masquerade dish’ that is fetishized and enjoyed. Thus, Philecta seems to revert to Irigaray’s concept of the masquerade as a deliberate state of femininity that compensates for her lapse into subjectivity (that is masculinity) and to attract the male gaze. Thus, from the spectator, she lapses into the spectacle. Interestingly, Philecta claims to possess wit (intelligence) as opposed to the passion of Dalinda. Yet, in her submission to Dorimenus and her final pregnancy it is the female body and hysterical submission that she ends up with. By the end of Haywood’s text each of the heroines is left to lament the state of metamorphoses that result in passions “fatal to … virtue … Reputation … Peace of mind; and … Life”.25

The masquerade thus emerges as a patriarchal zone, reinforcing male hegemony; a state where the woman must enter by underlining her femininity that is then put up for display. It brings with it threat of seduction, ruin and submission. Any deviation from it is seen as impossible. As a space it is gendered and almost held static despite the surge of erotic desire. As Catherine Craft-Fairchild elucidates:

In *The Masqueraders; or Fatal Curiosity*, Haywood exploits the sexual license allowed by eighteenth century masquerade assemblies to analyse the dynamics of desire. Her representations of female disguise conform very closely to the negative view of the masquerade as the painful submission of women to the dominant economy of male desire … exposes female victimization and at the same time,
repeats it. Her narrative reinforces the patriarchal structures that it also subverts through enactment.\(^{26}\)

It is in the context of this submission that the problematic quality of *Fantomina* must be placed. *Fantomina or Love in a Maze* (1725) is defined within the amatory fiction tradition “being a Secret History of an Amour Between two Persons of Condition”.\(^{27}\) Interestingly, Fantomina remains an unknown character swapping identities whose real existence remains hidden in the text – in a way she gets away with refusing to reveal her real self. She is merely described as “A Young lady of Distinguished Birth, beauty, wit and Spirit”. (p. 226) The terms “wit” and “spirit” continue to dominate the text as she turns the seduction novel inside out.

*Fantomina* as a text situates the woman in the public sphere right at the beginning. She happens to be “in a Box at the Playhouse” and is fascinatingly drawn towards a common prostitute; “a woman who sat in a Corner of the Pit, and, by her Air and Manner of receiving them, might easily be known to be one of those who came there for no other purpose than to create acquaintance with as many as seem desirous of it”. (p. 227) Drawn by the “other” woman at the extreme end of the social spectrum, Fantomina is afflicted with curiosity:

This excited a curiosity in her to know in what manner these creatures were addressed: – she was a Young, a stranger to the world, and consequently to the dangers of it, and having no body in town at the time to whom she was obliged to be accountable for her Actions did in everything as her Inclinations or Humours rendered most agreeable to her. (p. 227)

Fantomina is initially placed as strangely vulnerable (and even foolish) woman. Another factor that Haywood emphasises is her existing alone in
the city without a guardian and therefore bereft of any patriarchal guidance. This is significant because the vulnerable Fantomina quickly transforms herself into a shrewd manipulator of situations and takes control over her own destiny. In a way, Haywood is falling back upon the stereotype of the political amatory woman in the public sphere popularised by Behn and Manley.

The disguise of the prostitute was a frequently used strategy by the single unmarried woman to step into the public sphere. Thus, even later in Frances Burney’s *Wanderer* (1814) the heroine, Juliet disguises herself as the lower class Debbe Dyson in order to acquaint herself with the public sphere.

The idea of female curiosity recurs in Haywood’s later fictions most notably in *A Spy upon the Conjuror* (1724). In a valuable account of the struggle over the meaning of the “inquisitive attitude” in the eighteenth century, Kathryn R. King demonstrates that curiosity was a marker of a whole set of differences between traditional and modern notions of culture, society and knowledge. For traditionalists, the term signalled disapprobation of those practices and attitudes that threatened to erode ways of knowing and acting. For moderns it applauded the orientation of the mind that welcomed inquiry, innovation and experimentation.28 The novel too, was marked by this outward desire of curiosity. In locating *Fantomina* within this grid of curiosity, Haywood is looking in many ways at the new woman, the new reader and the new female author. As the new woman experimenting with the public sphere, Fantomina is an unstable entity (her being guardianless underlines this unstable nature). The new reader similarly participating in this journey shares and questions the old patriarchal order. The most radical, curious character is of course the new woman in print culture who lays down a challenge to the patriarchal authority through the very act of writing and who seeks to create a
community of female readers with a different set of reading practices purely for pleasure.

The erotic liberation of the reader as subject of pleasure and what Warner calls, “the whole system of print entertainment, the whole mis-en-scène of the ego securing its ends within a masquerade of the social, the whole possibility of a carefree absorption of the reader in novel reading”, was seen as a radical shift by anxious guardians of society. Hence, Fantomina’s wit, beauty, spirit, her guardianless, independent situation and her forays into the public sphere remain factors of concern as well as the opportunity to explore new areas of experience for the woman.

Fantomina ventures into her first masquerade as a prostitute, “to dress herself as near as she could in the Fashion of those women who make sale of their Favours”. (p. 227) It is to be noted here that Fantomina is probably the most sustained masquerade text of the eighteenth century, yet masquerade is used as a motif rather than a location. Thus, there are no masquerade balls in Fantomina but the text is marked by a sequence of real masquerades that Fantomina performs in society. We make this point to underline that for this text masquerade no longer remains that licensed, controlled space defined by certain limitations of space and time. Fantomina transforms her entire society as her space for masquerade and raises the possibility of examining what a woman masqueraded can do to the prevalent codes of love and seduction in society. Interestingly, the choice of the prostitute as a subject of the masquerade underlines Fantomina’s radical nature as well. As Mary Anne Schofield points out the implications of the characters’ choice of costume are enormous:

Disguise functions in two ways in Haywood’s works. First we find … heroines (Such as nuns, shepherdesses and courtesans) who adopt conventional masks that further
emphasize the secondary, submissive nature of the female. The disguised women do nothing to counteract this exploitation. A second and larger group of masquerading women is represented by heroines whose disguises are chosen so that they can articulate the unspoken ideologies of the women themselves; their masks denote the desire for power that women have. They discard the typical, submissive role and choose, instead, to mask themselves in disguises of aggression as the gypsy, the demon or prostitute.  

Mellisa Mowry also makes an important point that Fantomina’s disguise is a significant critique of the woman’s restrictions in terms of entry into the public sphere:

Haywood argues that the problem lies in a public sphere that defines any woman who chooses to enter as a whore. Indeed, the emphasis in Haywood’s novella initially falls upon the “Gentlemen” in the pit, who contest and abhor the title character’s efforts to create a public sphere free of social status because it weakens their own self-appointed prerogative to define others. So calcified is their sense of their interpretative authority that the sparks disbelieve even their own supposition that Fantomina is, indeed, who she appears to be: “she is mighty like my fine Lady Such-a-one, – naming her own Name”.  

There are a couple of things that also need to be scrutinised and debated here. Is not the prostitute the most available and displayed form of male erotic fantasy? In choosing this costume, is Fantomina thus submitting to the patriarchal model of female spectacle of beauty and the body,
available at one’s bidding? This is made problematic and we realise that Fantomina is engaged in role-playing. We further note that she is deliberately subverting notions of class (the aristocrat travelling down the other spectrum) and challenging social order. It is as the prostitute, that Fantomina chooses the name for herself and it is this name that sticks to her to form the title of the novella. In a way then, Haywood is probably suggesting that the basic subversive tendencies of her protagonist can be best analysed in her disguise as Fantomina.

A further point to be noted is her expertise and ability in perfecting her histrionic skill. She immediately attracts “a crowd of purchasers” and “received no small Pleasure in hearing herself prais’d tho’ in the Person of another and a suppos’d prostitute”. (p. 227) Thus, Fantomina has successfully impersonated another identity. As Catherine Craft-Fairchild points out:

> When she poses as a prostitute Fantomina not only maintains an ironic distance between herself and her created image but also, by the very nature of her disguise undoes and undermines those invisible commonsense hierarchical oppositions that constitute the ideology of the feminine … The ambiguity of Fantomina’s temporary transformation unites the two parts of binary oppositions such as ‘mistress’ and ‘heiress’, ‘prostitute’ and ‘virgin’. By conflating with the tramp, Fantomina challenges the underlying terms of representation itself.³²

It is here that Fantomina first encounters Beauplaisir the rake, and revelling in her newfound freedom of discourse, she “found a vast deal of Pleasure in conversing in this free and unrestrained manner”. (p. 228) Much as she contrives, she is faced with a crucial dilemma here. This moment is a rite of
passage for Fantomina – if she sustains this disguise and control she is threatened with the loss of her chastity and reputation. The ethical pitfall of the choice of free subversion is a threatening transformation and collapse of social identity. At the same time, the pervasive temptation and transport of the motif of pleasure seem to impel her further towards Beauplaisir:

All the charms of Beauplaisir came fresh to her mind; she languished, she almost died for another opportunity of conversing with him; and not all the admonitions of her Discretion were effectual to oblige her to deny laying hold of that which offered itself the next night … Strange and unaccountable were the whimsies she was Possess’d of, – wild and incoherent were her desires – unfixed and undetermined her resolutions … (p. 229)

This moment of choice in Fantomina crystallises around itself a host of questions about both the masquerade and the novel. The primary impulse of the masquerade was towards pleasure, a loss of control, a release from identity. As a cultural trope it must have exercised a very powerful pull upon the young woman. The novel too, as a mode of apprehending reality was primarily being impelled towards the impulse of pleasure. The dichotomy must have been even more powerful for a woman novelist facing the wrath of patriarchy. We locate here the anxieties of the woman writer of amatory fiction – pleasure brings her popularity, offers her a situation of plot and readership, yet pleasure must necessarily be condemned in terms of immorality.

Interestingly, Haywood is here falling back upon the breathless, syntactically disorganised pattern of language so traditional of amatory fiction. In doing so this state of desire is seen as a site of the loss of rational analysis and control, the first state of vulnerability to which the woman is
subjected. It is in this state that Fantomina will face the threat of rape and loss of virginity; “In fine, she was undone; and he gained a Victory so rapturous, that had he known over whom, scarce could he have triumphed more.” (p. 230)

This moment of loss is potentially the most threatening moment in the text where the woman is almost wholly at the mercy of the seducer. We note that Haywood employs here her characteristic rhetoric of victim and victor to describe the scene and it appears that Fantomina will go the way of her sisters – seduced, abandoned and fallen into hysteria. Beauplaisir is already writing Fantomina’s future plot expecting her to become a hardened prostitute. He “did not doubt by the Beginning of her conduct but that in the end, she would be in Reality, the thing she had so artfully counterfeited”. (p. 231) Beauplaisir now offers her gold attempting to possess her body, whereas passively, Fantomina requests for everlasting constancy although aware that it is elusive:

No my dear Beauplaisir (added she), your love alone can compensate for the shame you have involved me in; be you sincere and constant, and I hereafter shall, perhaps, be satisfied with my fate and forgive myself the Folly that betrayed me to you. (p. 231)

The language of exchange is to be noticed here – for the rake desire is something to be necessarily circulated and one body exchanged for the other. Thus, masculine identity remained fixed, only the target of female sexuality changes. For the woman on the other hand, the object of desire remains the same – therefore the capacity for exchange remains limited. What such a passage thus reveals is the loss of control of Fantomina as she enters into a plea for constancy.
Yet, it is in the masquerade that Fantomina retains her control to a certain extent. Having lost her virginity, she is unwilling to “discover her true name and quality” so that Beauplaisir would “not have it in his power to touch her character”. (p. 232) She adopts the name of Fantomina, at once highlighting the illusory and protean nature of her existence. The masquerade motif, the existence in the phantom state where identity is concealed and suspended, provides her with a degree of control. Once this masquerading is established, she proceeds to wrest a degree of social and erotic leverage for herself. For a moment, the loss of virginity had thrust her into a state of passivity. From that point she regains control over her situation. Haywood here provides a moral gloss warning of the consequences:

Thus did this Lady’s Wit and Vivacity assist her in all but where it was most needful – she had the discernment to foresee and avoid all those ills which might attend the loss of her Reputation but was wholly blind to those of the ruin of her Virtue. (p. 232)

Yet in the language of exchange, Fantomina is at a stronger position – having entered into the realm of desire, she has accumulated pleasure that she can repeat, but has not revealed her identity. Hence, the masquerade becomes a location of power, one motif that affords her entry into a forbidden zone of pleasure and control without being the subject of gossip and ridicule. She is here free of the patriarchal censure that such conduct would normally have attracted. Haywood’s depiction of Fantomina’s deepest thoughts is revealing:

If he is really (said she, to herself) the faithful, the constant lover he has sworn to be, how charming would be our Amour? … And if he should be false, grow satiated, like
other Men, I shall but, at the worst, have the private vexation of knowing I have lost him … The odious word Forsaken will never Wound my ears, nor will my Wrongs Excite either the Mirth or the pity of the talking world – it will not be even in the power of my Undoer himself to triumph over me, and while he laughs at, and perhaps despises the fond, yielding Fantomina, he will revere and esteem, the virtuous, the reserved Lady. (pp. 232-33)

Here Haywood’s rhetoric seems to identify and sympathise with Fantomina’s endeavour:

It must be confessed indeed that she preserved an economy in the Management of this intrigue beyond what almost any Woman but herself ever did. (p. 233)

Masquerading apparently becomes a trope through which a degree of power and freedom is wrested – a form of eluding the patriarchal superstructures. Interestingly, at each point the details of the disguises are carefully worked out. Thus, Fantomina chooses for herself, “slippers and a Night Gown loosely flowing” (p. 233) whereas as the lady she is dressed in “blazing Jewels”. (p. 233) The effect is to confound Beauplaisir who “stood amazed at the prodigious Likeness between his little mistress and this Court beauty”. (p. 233)

As the attention of the rake wavers, Fantomina’s sexuality faces a new threat of rejection and loss. Yet it is to be noticed that Fantomina does not circulate her desire freely, but restricts it to Beauplaisir only:

She had not thrown off another Virtue equally valuable tho’ generally unfortunate, Constancy: she loved Beauplaisir; it
was only he whose Solicitations could give her pleasure.
(p. 234)

Unlike many of the amatory heroines, Fantomina’s sexuality is not dissipated – the keyword here being love. She partially seeks to threaten patriarchy by taking control over the process of courtship and seduction of Beauplaisir only. This is unlike Behn’s or Manley’s heroines whose aggressive sexuality freely circulated to threaten havoc in society.

Why does Haywood restrict Fantomina’s sexuality here, especially, where the masquerade motif is involved? The masquerade, as we have seen, encouraged a free exchange of sexuality, the swapping of sexual partners and uninhibited license. We would like to point out here that Haywood’s intent is not to foreground Fantomina’s sexual pleasure but to fix the male gaze and wrest control over the amatory relationship. In a sense this is more radical because it creates her as free agent, yet one who seeks to tame and restrict the male gaze of desire. In doing so Fantomina is also holding up female erotic desire as constant as against a rapacious and roving male rakish behaviour. Helen Thompson provides a rather radical explanation of this phenomenon when she argues:

Feminine constancy is not, for Haywood, simply devotion to an object: it signals a desire for repetition of the unrepeatable. Her heroine wants not simple fidelity, but the repetition of a “Transport” whose pleasure derives from its strict inimitability. For by surrendering “her Sex’s Modesty,” she now yearns for the very thing that she can no longer elicit from Beauplaisir, “sweet force.” Thus, Haywood's claim for her heroine's capacity to put “a Thousand in that Condition Beauplaisir had been” asserts, in its hyperbolic
seriality, the reciprocal impossibility of rendering the “same again”. ³³

Fantomina’s second masquerade is even more interesting because it violates another category of identity – that of class. She now dresses as Celia the maid. Once again, Haywood pays careful attention to the sartorial exchange, detailing her disguise:

The Dress that she was in, was a round eared cap, a short Red Petticoat and a little Jacket of grey stuff; all the Rest of her accoutrements were answerable to these and joined with a broad country Dialect, a rude unpolished air … made it impossible for her to be known. (p. 234)

As Paula R. Backscheider points out, the sartorial code is revealing:

Her clothes would be read by her contemporaries. The cap was shaped to curve around the face to the cans or below … this style was usually associated with the country … Jackets were close fitting, buttoned tightly at the waist, and deep cut, which emphasized the woman’s shape and also revealed the front of her dress or cleavage. ³⁴

Fantomina deliberately underlines her sexuality, tempting Beauplaisir into another conquest. As Richardson explores in Pamela, working maids were easy prey for their masters, chastity being a luxury for the working classes. This sexual encounter is fundamentally different from the earlier one and Fantomina plays on her innocence, thereby prodding Beauplaisir into amorous fury:

His wild desires burst out in all his words and Actions … till he had ravaged all and glutted each rapacious sense with the sweet Beauties of the pretty Celia. (p. 235)
The irony here is delicious. In the earlier disguise, curiosity had been the dominant motif and accidentally led to sexuality and desire. Here the sexually initiated Fantomina has deliberately transgressed class identity to engage Beauplaisir into the game of seduction. At every point, Beauplaisir is made to feel the thrill of the seducer; he is apparently the active agent possessing and deflowering the maid. Yet, it is actually Fantomina who has planned, executed and taken pleasure in the seduction to perfection. The thrill of the seduction is not merely in the enjoyment of sexual pleasure, it is also in the transformation of identity and the perfect planning that goes into it. For the first time, control has passed on to Fantomina – her masquerade makes her the actual “master” of the situation.

Fantomina’s second self-fashioning has a degree of proximity with the first. As Nickie Roberts points out, in the eighteenth century economic conditions and few jobs for women meant that the positions of the maid and the prostitute were often interchangeable. Margaret Case Croskery disagrees with this opinion and points out:

The second seduction scene is no “reenactment” of the first. The political dynamics of seduction have altered considerably. In the first seduction, the heroine struggled against the strenuous “Pressure of eager Arms” because she had failed to recognize the social ramifications inherent in masking herself as a sexual object. In the next seduction however, Beauplaisir’s mastery becomes the fantasy created by the fiction of a disguise ... Completely in control of both the role she is playing and her own ironic assessment of the situation the heroine made a joke ostensibly at her own expense.
So far, Fantomina has chosen guises of femininity that could provide easy prey for Beauplaisir. In her third guise she moves to an entirely different plane of femininity. Her identity as Widow Bloomer is created with a significant attention to details:

The dress she had ordered to be made was such as Widows wear in the first morning ... To add to this, her hair, which she was accustomed to wear very loose, both when Fantomina and Celia, was now tied back so strait, and her Pinners coming so very forward, that there was none of it to be seen. In fine her Habit and her Air were so much changed.

(p. 236)

Fantomina’s disguises show an interesting movement of power up the hierarchies of femininity. In the guises of the prostitute and the maid, Fantomina is only in a state of marginal control. As Widow Bloomer, her agency is more significant. As Froide points out:

widows have more alternatives (than single women) from which to choose ... she became the head of the deceased husband’s household. Widows enjoyed the most extensive economic right and privileges of any waking women in the early modern period.37

As the grieving coy widow, Fantomina throws herself to Beauplaisir’s chivalry and challenges his rakish abilities to the extreme, using a counterfeited excess of melancholy. It is as it were Fantomina is progressively extending the limits of difficulty of the seduction for Beauplaisir. Characteristically, he now thinks of his new conquest in terms of the Ephesian matron, “it came into his Head to make Trial, she who seemed equally susceptible of Sorrow might not also be so too of Love.”

(p. 237) Beauplaisir’s use of the allusion of the Ephesian matron is
illuminating. In the submission of the matron (famed for fidelity) to the soldier and the replacement of the husband’s body, Petronius articulates a deep patriarchal prejudice of the woman as a body of desire. Thus, the male seduction of the female body is a possibility, since he must impose his will and guile onto the desiring nature of the woman. Here the irony rebounds on Beauplaisir at every point – Fantomina’s grief is a masquerade and as he supposedly takes control of her; she manipulates the sexual encounter silently laughing at his folly.

At every point Beauplaisir thinks of the seduction as a conquest while the irony remains that it is Fantomina who chooses the guise of femininity and even the forms and extent of seduction that she desires. It is not merely that she seeks sexual gratification; here it is also the joy of the control of the masquerade – the self fashioning of identity and in doing so, altering the strategies of seduction, so that every new encounter from the single lover becomes a fresh new seduction. Fantomina thus emerges as a radical free agent – in each of these cases it is she alone who designs her disguise and executes her plan. We would like to emphasise this solo execution of the transformation of identity because it is a unique freedom that the masquerade offered to the female self.

At this point in the text, Haywood inserts a narrative gloss that defends her fiction from the charges of improbability that Beauplaisir can still not identify Fantomina. Haywood’s defence is Fantomina’s sublime masquerading skill so that she can as it were masquerade her whole self to transform identity:

I can only say that besides the Alteration which the changes of Dress made in her, she was so admirably skilled in the Art of feigning, that she had the Power of putting on almost what Face she pleased … she could vary her glances, tune her
Voice to Accents the most different imaginable from those in which she spoke when she appeared herself. (p. 238)

Catherine Craft-Fairchild once referred to Fantomina as the “most significant masquerade text of the century” and we can here understand the justification.\(^{38}\) The masquerade is no longer an isolated topos or event, a licensed space where the transformation of identity is temporary. Instead Fantomina’s whole existence appears to be a relentless masquerade. Thus, fiction and masquerade create a potential community of curious experimental female readers willing to explore the machinations of desire, suffocating and challenging the deeply ingrained codes of patriarchy. It is here that the fictional masquerade becomes a strategy beyond the limited space of the actual masquerade ball.

In the final episode of seduction, the masquerade is more rigidly formalised. Fantomina hires a mansion and invites Beauplaisir to it under the name of the mysterious Incognita. Addressing him (once again with delicious irony) as “the All-conquering Beauplaisir” (p. 242), she entices him to seduce her, warning “there is but one thing in my Power to refuse you, which is the knowledge of my name ... my face is hid.” (p. 242) The curious Beauplaisir immediately responds and the masked Incognita (literally without identity, cognition) enters into a private masquerade with Beauplaisir as the only guest. The mysterious Incognita masks her face and even during their sexual liason, she hides herself under the cover of darkness “she came, but came in the Dark ... she had taken care to blind the windows in such a manner, that not the least Chink was left to let in day.” (p. 245)

Haywood is here evoking a different tradition of masquerade disguise. Till this point, Fantomina’s masquerade identities have fallen under different classes as opposed to representing a specific historical,
allegorical or literary figure or adopting the neutral guise of the domino. Now in the role of the mysterious Incognita, the heroine does the disguise of the domino – a concealing habit and mask completely hiding the wearer, transforming him or her into a mere cipher. As Castle points out, “the domino was the quite essential sign of erotic and political cabal, the mask of intrigue itself.” No costume, it appears, can succeed the utterly blank and hence infinitely significatory possibilities of the domino. Ballaster points out:

As Incognita, Haywood’s heroine presents the climax of feminine representation; she embodies the exchangeable female body, the empty sign into which both male and female readers can project their own fantasy and desire.

This last disguise reveals the power of the masquerade to challenge patriarchal authority. Fantomina is no longer using a strategic guise of femininity – she is at it were a disembodied feminine body that seeks the gratification of sexual pleasure. All the while she is up for display, yet never revealing her identity – she submits to sexuality but controls the submission. Fantomina’s masquerade is more complicated and powerful than any of the female masquerade in earlier fiction. Unlike Haywood’s Dalinda whose mask is removed when she faints or Behn’s Maria who takes off her mask to give Dangerfield a sight of her face, Fantomina keeps her mask and does not allow her lover to penetrate her disguises. By not letting the man into the secret of what her costume will be, the woman acquires the ability to see rather than to be seen. An interesting contrast may be drawn with the first and the last seduction. In the first seduction Fantomina is curious but anxious, and once Beauplaisir initiates the sexual moves she is helpless before the onslaught of his desire. In this case she is the proactive agent, seeking sexuality, setting up the place and time of seduction and refusing Beauplaisir the sense of control over the sexual encounter.
Perversely, Beauplaisir himself is almost being used as a male prostitute – a puzzled and passive participant in the process. The use of the masquerade motif thus demonstrates the sheer reversal of power offered to the woman in the takeover of sexuality. In *Tom Jones*, powerful women like Lady Bellaston likewise use the masquerade as a space to gratify sexuality.

Beauplaisir’s response to the latest seduction is predictable. As a patriarchal agent, he recognises the situation of powerlessness that he is placed in and he resents this state:

He was so much out of Humour, however, at the Disappointment of his curiosity, that he resolved never to make a second Visit … and he went out of the House determined never to re-enter it, till she should pay the price of his company with the Discovery of her Face and Circumstances. (p. 245)

Haywood offers us an insight into Fantomina’s mind, revealing the strategies and the justification of her disguises by her critique of male infidelity:

Had he been faithful to me, either as Fantomina or Celia, or as the Widow Bloomer! The most violent Passion, if it does not change its object in Time will wither; Possession naturally abates the Vigour of desire. (p. 243)

Instead she delights in the way she has reversed the process by seeing the situation:

she could not forbear laughing heartily to think of the Tricks she had played him and applauding her own Strength of Genius and Force of Resolution, which by such unthought-of ways could triumph over her Lover's Inconstancy, and render
that very Temper, to which to other Women is the greatest
curse, a Means to make herself more blessed. (p. 243)

Here we note the way in which Fantomina self consciously applauds herself
seizing power. Flaunting her femininity, she has seized a new position of
masculine control; words like “Strength of Genius”, “Force of Resolution”
and “Triumph” transform the process of seduction into a metaphor of a war
of the sex, as for a position of power and privilege. In the same passage,
Fantomina visualises extending this power to a whole community of
women:

O that all neglected Wives, and fond abandoned Nymphs
would take this Method! – Men would be caught in their own
Snare, and have no Cause to scorn our easy, weeping wailing
sex! (p. 243)

Earlier she had chastised the hysterical melancholic women cheated in love.

How do some women make their Life a Hell, burning in
fruitless Expectations and dreaming out their Days in Hopes
and Fears, then wake at last to all the Horror of Despair? –
But I have outwitted even the most Subtle of the deceiving
Kind and while he thinks to fool me, is himself the only
beguiled Person. (p. 239)

The passages are radical in the exultation of wrestling power, challenging
patriarchy and also in extending the challenge to the entire country of
women readers. It seems Fantomina and the author Haywood, merge here.
While one uses desire and disquiet to retain erotic control, the other uses
writing to wrest control in a print culture dominated by men. Lurking
behind both attempts is the utopian vision of feminine control, a deep
challenge to the processes of seduction and patriarchy. Catherine Ingrassia
offers a powerful reading of these passages of Haywood as challenges to “the then-prevalent cultural constructions of woman”. Ignoring the didactic conventionality and melodramatic consequences of illicit desire that Haywood’s narratives feature, Ingrassia views them as revising literary tradition by interrogating cultural norms and encouraging “alternative (and potentially empowering) models of behaviour for women” as they “validate desire as a motivating force”.

This utopian vision of feminine control cannot be however sustained to survive within the patriarchal cultural community. Therefore a moral ending must be superimposed over this relentless masquerading. After Fantomina has successfully disguised herself in various guises of femininity, Haywood imposes a final form of femininity that resists masquerading. This is an interesting narrative strategy. It is her body and sexuality that has allowed Fantomina free mobility within society. It is the same body which reveals her identity to society. The body at this point in fiction is both a subversive agent and the submissive one. The pregnant Fantomina attempts one last masquerading “By eating little, lacing prodigious strait and the Advantage of a great Hoop-Petticoat” (p. 246). It is grimly ironical that the unmasking takes place at a court ball with unmistakable symptoms that she cannot control:

She could not conceal the sudden Rack which all at once invaded her; or had her Tongue been mute, her wildly rolling Eyes, the Distortion of her Features, and the Convulsions which shook her whole Frame, in spite of her, would have revealed she laboured under some terrible Shock of Nature. (p. 246)

This moment of shaming and parading of the body is a characteristic ploy in patriarchal moral fiction. Pregnancy is the ultimate threat that conduct book
literature throws at the wayward woman. Amatory fiction often uses it as a form of closure. Pregnancy is not merely a process of shaming here; it is also associated with pain and death. One must remember that child-birth was largely an understudied subject and could often lead to death. Thus, the grotesque symptoms of Fantomina’s pregnancy transform the very attractive body of desire into ugliness.

Characteristically, Fantomina’s pregnancy coincides with the arrival of her mother and initiates the theme of guardianship. Haywood suggests that it is Fantomina’s curiosity and her liberty that prompts her in the course of desire. Given Haywood’s personal career, this is extremely intriguing. Like Fantomina, Haywood was also without a guardian moving freely from one lover to the next. Fantomina’s plotting and Haywood’s authorial ventures are carnivalesque excesses which lack parental control. Could we relate this theme with the patriarchal rigid anxiety of control over the wayward excess of masquerade? Somewhere this narrative intertwines with the issue of female authorship and the cultural history of the masquerade. Fantomina, the female author and the masquerading woman act as subversive agents plotting out their way from patriarchal control and escaping guardianship.

The conclusion of Fantomina is fascinating. It should have followed a trajectory of revelation, social shaming and banishment or death. Following the pattern, Beauplaisir is sent for and the entire plot is revealed. The entire onus is transferred to Fantomina without any obligation for Beauplaisir to marry her. Her mother is candid:

I must confess it was with a Design to oblige you to repair the supposed Injury you had done this unfortunate Girl by marrying her, but now I know not what to say: – The Blame is wholly her’s and I have nothing to request further of you
than that you will not divulge the distracted Folly she has been guilty of. (p. 248)

As Alexander Pettit points out:

Haywood often ends her erotic fictions by retreating from libertine narration into gender specific patterns of guilt and absolution. Beauplaisir strolls out of Fantomina, blessed by the mother of the young woman whom he has impregnated during a sustained sequence of consensual sexual encounters … similarly heterosexual pornographic films after end with the punishment of the sceptically and dramatically ravished woman, while the male characters freedom from guilt is emblematized by the egress of the viewer, purged of sexual tension and assumed of his superiority to the object of his transient fancy.44

The two startling facts that problematise this closure are the fates of Fantomina and her illegitimate daughter. Beauplaisir offers to set her up in an orphanage, but both ladies disagree. Once Beauplaisir takes custody of the child’s future, he would have control over her because as per eighteenth century laws of custody, children belonged to their fathers who were the custodial parents regardless of their legitimacy. One is left unsure as to the fate of this child (intriguingly a female child). Does she withdraw with her mother to a monastery or does her grandmother bring her up? Is she a future Fantomina, free of patriarchal control, circulating female desire and subverting male codes of control? Or is she a model female reared under strict guardianship, totally docile and submissive? We ask this question because the mother-daughter relationship is intriguingly held up in a later text that we discuss – Inchbald’s A Simple Story. Is the daughter cast off into an orphanage like Moll Flanders’s innumerable children, cast into a life
of poverty and prostitution? Fantomina’s own fate is equally open-ended. Haywood summarily closes this text with her mother sending her “to a monastery in France, the Abbess of which had been her particular Friend.” (p. 248) This is a characteristic rebuke of patriarchy; banishment to a life of penitence and seclusion. Haywood is apparently invoking the binary of libidinous excess and religious austerity. Seen from this angle, it is punishment that would satisfy the patriarchal code in print culture. But Paula R. Backscheider proposes another interesting possibility. According to her:

French monasteries were centres of learning and fashionable women often stayed there, they received visitors, improved their education (dancing, music, art, poetry) and languages, flourished and enjoyed the society of other cultured women.45

If we accept this interpretation of Haywood’s closure, then Fantomina is banished, but not punished. She centres into a more refined and sophisticated world and a society of single fashionable women creating a community that was unique. When one remembers Mary Wollstonecraft’s complaint about the lack of education in women, is this a kind of reward for Fantomina? Is this society that is defined by its femaleness and sophistication, the community beyond patriarchal control, a kind of society of female bluestockings? Since she can have visitors, Fantomina’s desire can equally be exercised. Is this the female utopia of control that Haywood is imaginatively creating? Or is it a dull and dreary punishment for Fantomina? One remembers, at least two of our authors, Haywood and Inchbald refused to move in with their protectors. They maintained separate lodgings where they could retain their individual identities and freedom of artistic creation. Is the freedom that the masquerade offered, finally realised in this state of isolation? Does Fantomina become the alter-ego of the
female amatory novelist? Indeed the last lines of Fantomina seem to celebrate the sheer ingenuity of Fantomina’s plotting rather than provide any negative moral gloss: “And thus ended an Intrigue, which considering the time it lasted was as full of Variety as any perhaps, that many ages has produced.” (p. 248) Mellissa Mowry points out:

For this truly democratic daughter of the city, there can be no rapprochement, no marriage with Beauplaisir who would have prostituted the City commons to his own corruption and selfishness. Although the older woman condemns her daughter for her behavior, laying the fault of this illegitimate birth at her feet, the story Finishes by telling its readers that Beauplaisir is the agent against whom young women must be protected. Neither the virtuous mother nor her democratic daughter will “commit the new-born Lady to [Beauplaisir’s] care”. For future generations must be preserved from the self-serving opportunism and elitism.46

It is interesting to place the issue of empowerment provided by the masquerade through the two different theories of Riviere and Mary Anne Doane. Critics following Riviere have argued that Fantomina’s masquerade is merely a reiteration of the hegemony of patriarchal desire. Fantomina, in order to engage Beauplaisir must forever improvise new guises of femininity to submit to him. Thus, instead of being a radical text, Fantomina strengthens Riviere’s theory of “deliberate femininity” in order to participate in man’s desire, as to enter into a system of values that is not hers and in which she can appear and circulate only when enveloped in the fantasies of men. Hence, Fantomina’s masks of womanliness attempt to hide the position of masculinity and to avert the reprisals expected. But essentially she can circulate only as an object of desire for the patriarchal agent. Is then Fantomina facilitating an understanding of the woman’s status
as a spectacle rather than a spectator? Is then her apparent attempt to wrest control merely asserting patriarchal control? This view draws upon Judith Butler’s theory that:

The ‘performative’ dimension of construction is precisely the forced reiteration of norms. In this sense then, it is not only that there are constraints to performativity. Performativity is neither free play nor theatrical self-presentation; nor can it be simply equated with performance. 47

Several critics have also pointed out that Haywood’s later fictions have a strong didactic content. In her essay “Haywood’s Amatory Aesthetic”, Kathleen Lubey draws upon one of Haywood’s own passages to argue that the erotic serves primarily as a cautionary element in Lasselia:

I take the liberty of mentioning this … to clear myself of that Aspersion … that I seem to endeavour to divert more than improve the minds of my readers … for without the Expression [love] being invigorated in some measure proportionate to the Subject, ‘twould be impossible for a Reader to be sensible how far it touches him, or how probable it is that he is falling into those Inadvertencies which the Examples I relate wou’d caution him to avoid. 48

Lubey proceeds to define the blend of the sexual and the moral within her definition of this “amatory aesthetic”:

In this way, Haywood invents a specific strategy—an amatory aesthetic—for creating the imaginative conditions that were thought to please and instruct in the literary culture of the period. It is by entering into extreme situations of love and lust, most often through the transparent perspective of
her heroines, that all readers come to acquire the most essential knowledge regarding the workings of human consciousness and desire, a knowledge that readers will convert into active self-scrutiny and self-government in social and sexual realms. Through this focus on the transports of body and mind, Haywood shows the eighteenth-century imagination to be a resilient entity indeed, capable of performing interpretive acts of abstraction even as it is aroused by the most extreme subject matter: illicit erotic images of feminine sexuality. The literature of the eighteenth century seeks to achieve the lofty aim of creating readers with fully internalized aesthetic and moral codes of conduct. Eliza Haywood made manifest that this instructive project necessitated stories of sexuality.\(^{49}\)

Given the extent of Fantomina’s subversive tendencies such a reading seems too simplistic. We would like to point out with Mary Anne Doane that Fantomina’s masquerade flaunts femininity: but it is inherently self-conscious, thereby maintaining a certain distance between the self and the image. Thus, Fantomina plays with mimesis, trying to recover a certain space without allowing her to be simply reduced to it. For Craft-Fairchild, Haywood’s heroine’s “objectification” is staved off by the “distance” that protects the integrity of her psyche. Craft-Fairchild thus defines that as feminist threat, what can be recognized as the Lockean ideal of possessive individualism. Like Locke’s “Proprietor of his own Person”, Haywood’s heroine’s self would subsist for Craft-Fairchild, not in her person but in an immaterial condition of possessive ‘detachment’ from the body it controls.\(^{50}\) Indeed, implicit in Craft-Fairchild’s claim for ironic detachment as the very substance of Haywood’s heroine’s self, is the split between the self and the performing body. It is significant that till the end, Fantomina’s true identity
does remain concealed. And Fantomina defines a new woman who is proactive, who consciously reverses the process of seduction, destabilises notions of class and gender. In the ambiguous ending Beauplaisir, the patriarchal representative is excluded and Fantomina seems to manage to retreat into a community of women. Thus, the subversive streak dominates in Fantomina. As an amatory heroine, Fantomina consciously enters into the realm of desire: but she seeks to control its circulation. The epigraph to this text drawn from Waller, (also found in George Etherage’s *The Man of Mode* [1676]) illuminates Haywood’s consciousness of the discourse of power within the text:

In love the Victors from the Vanquish’d fly.
They fly that wound, and they pursue that dye. (p. 226)

Mary Anne Schofield draws attention to the fact that victor and vanquished in Haywood’s *Fantomina* are difficult to determine:

Beauplaisir is the victor; she the vanquished, but not for long … Haywood subtly inverts the persecuted innocence theme, and victim and victimiser exchange roles in her effort to show how to control the male.  

Schofield goes on to add that Fantomina “does not seem to be at all subdued” and her “imprisonment in the convent is only a temporary setback in her continued high-spirited life”. Warner reiterates the tone of subversiveness adding:

Both a transformation of life and a romantic plasticity of the self are initiated by the heroine’s artistry in changing her dress. By putting this empowering fantasy into practice, Fantomina can control the desire that would control her: by appearing as a succession of beautiful women, she fulfils an
impossible male demand for variety; by tricking the male
gaze that would fix her, she cures that gaze of its tendency to
rove; by taking control of the whole mise-en-scène of the
courtship scenario, Fantomina directs the spectacle of
courtship that would subject her. In all these ways,
Fantomina achieves a temporary reprieve from the courtship
system described by Backsheider (Spectacular Politics, pp.
140-45) as a discursive system that positions women as
subject to judgement, always in danger of becoming
grotesque and threatened with the loss of love.\textsuperscript{53}

In this ambiguity of interpretation Fantomina’s response to patriarchal
ideology is open-ended.

The subversive possibilities and aspirations for female control are
taken to a radical extreme in Haywood’s \textit{The City Jilt}. Haywood splits this
novella into two sections. In the first, Haywood follows the trajectory of
amatory narrative with the beautiful Glicera believing Melladore’s vows of
constancy and being brutalised by him. When Melladore justifies himself by
Announcing, “The very word Desire implies an impossibility of continuing
the Enjoyment of that which first caused its being,”\textsuperscript{54} Glicera decides to
wrest a position of power by seeking revenge on all men:

The memory of her wrongs, however, left her not a Moment,
and by degrees settled so implacable a hatred in her Nature,
not only to Melladore, but to that whole undoing Sex, that
she never rejoic’d so much as when she heard of the
Misfortunes of any of them. … The Hatred which his
Ingratitude had created in her Mind was so fix’d and rooted
there, that it became part of her Nature, and she seem’d born
only to give Torment to the whole race of Man.\textsuperscript{55}
Glicera passes like Fantomina from one masquerade to the other, but from one man to the other – she keeps old men and young man alike in competition with each other. She gains control over Melladore’s estate and the novel ends in a gesture of female solidarity with Glicera residing with her friend Laphlia “in a fine house which belonged to Melladore”. Once again the closing lines reveal a distinct admiration for Glicera’s strategies:

Few persons continue to live in greater reputation, or more endeavour by good Actions to obliterate the memory of their past Mismanagement, than this fair Jilt; whose artifies cannot but admit of some Excuse, when one considers the Necessities she was under, and the Provocation’s she received from that Ungrateful Sex.

Consequently, Craft-Fairchild is led to conclude:

There are real gains for woman in Haywood’s reformulation of female disguise: Fantomina and Glicera, unlike other seduced women in fiction of the period, are not defined, and do not define themselves as guilty. They remain economically and verbally empowered.

Even in her late writings, Haywood’s awareness of the subversive possibilities of the masquerade seems to be evident. In the *The Female Spectator* (1744-46) she describes the impact of a masquerade at Ranelagh upon a woman:

never did I see a creature so transported;– her eyes sparkled, her lips quivered, all her frame was in agitation, through eagerness to know something farther of this important affair.
The joy and energy sparked by the masquerade is used with deliberate strategy by a woman (whose face has been ravaged by small pox) to display and attract male admiration. Haywood defends her by arguing:

The man are so censorious, that they look on all those of our sex … as setting themselves up for sale, and therefore taking the liberty of buyers, measure us … from head to foot; and as the most perfect beauty may not have charms for all who gaze upon her in this scrutinious manner, few there are if any, who have not found some who will pass by her with a contemptuous toss, no less significant than the most rude words could be.60

Aware of the woman’s status as on display as a commodity of desire, Haywood’s account delights in feminine strategies to use the masquerade as an agent to bypass such categorisation. As we can observe, she was alert to the idea of the masquerade as a potential site of resistance throughout her literary career.

It is within this context that I would like to locate the patriarchal response to Haywood’s fiction and her erasure from the history of the novel. Given the subversive potential of her fiction and her continued threat to male authors, the reaction was bound to be extreme. While most of her contemporaries were extremely hostile, the most significant portraits of Haywood seem to be those by Richard Savage in The Authors of the Town and Alexander Pope in The Dunciad. Savage creates Haywood as a hysterical figure, in terms of her sexuality and her writings:

A cast-off Dame, who of intrigue can judge,
Writes scandal in Romance – a Printer’s Drudge,
Flush’d with Success, for Stage – Renown she pants,
And melts, and swells, and pens luxurious Rants.61
Haywood’s personal desires and her print effusions are seen in the category of the same uncontrolled and potentially dangerous excess. Savage betrays a tone of envy in his admission that she is flushed with success. The same critical dismissive and extremely vitriolic stance is seen in Pope’s portrayal in *The Dunciad*:

> See in the circle next, Eliza plac’d;  
> Two babes of love close clinging to her waste;  
> Fair as before her works she stands confess’d,  
> In flowr’s and pearls by bounteous Kirkall dress’d.  
> The Goddess then: ‘Who best can send on high  
> The salient spout, far streaming to the sky:  
> His be yon Juno of majestic size,  
> With cow like udders and ox like eyes.62

Pope’s rhetorical strategies were designed to collapse the binary terms of personal and aesthetic judgments. His assault on her “morals” was coupled with an attack on the genre in which she had achieved success, a strategy that effectively positions the poetic Eliza’s “babes of love” as interchangeable metaphors for illegitimate children and illegitimate literary offspring. The multiple reading also invoked, for *The Dunciad* readers of the 1720s, the complex but familiar figure of the monstrous woman writer in its characterisation of literary efforts of the woman writer in moral terms. In this context, Pope’s epithet “shameless scribblers”63 becomes an economical rhetorical means of effecting both a social and aesthetic marginalisation of the female subject.

This association of desire, bovine intelligence and a highly charged sexuality seems to have inspired the portrait of Haywood in contemporary print culture. Janine Barchas points out that the frontispiece portrait
emerges as a feature of English book production in the seventeenth century and that:

A frontispiece might therefore convey the sitter’s reputation with standard iconographic embellishments, such as a laurel crown, classical costume, or hovering muse. Every frontispiece offered a miniature surrogate of the book’s absent author, a small private fetish that the book buyer could take home along with the text.64

Haywood’s frontispiece in several collections of her work then is an useful pointer to her reputation in the contemporary print world. This portrait has now been ascribed to George Vertue and it reveals Haywood’s reputation as a promiscuous yet foolish woman; who having submitted to desire has contracted syphilis and threatens to circulate it.

(George Vertue’s engraving of Eliza Haywood, 1724)
Barchas notes several points about the portrait:

Vertue’s engraving deliberately titillates than authoritates. The flower tucked behind her ear: the brazen direct gaze: the dramatically plunging neckline, the ruffled informality of what appears to be a dressing gown: and the unfastened locks of hair arranged suggestively over both shoulders – all these visual clues make it abundantly clear to an Augustan audience that the nature of the accompanying writing is amatory. Haywood also sports, like Hogarth’s Harlot, a prominent beauty spot under one eye. The result works as clever advertisement. In coarse language, it is a pin-up of the great arbitress of passion, promising another sensational bodice-ripper to the potential customer.\(^{65}\)

As the first major text of our thesis *Fantomina* raises several crucial issues. The masquerade motif that saturates the text brings together subversive possibilities about female sexuality, alternative notions of the public sphere and challenges a print culture that was increasingly being dominated by women. It was imperative for patriarchy to nullify Haywood and initiate a docile and manageable notion of femininity. In the process the masquerade had to be contained as well. The process was initiated by Samuel Richardson and its results can be seen in the fiction of Frances Burney.

The representation of the masquerade in *Fantomina* thus inhabits a zone of ambiguity. Its pervasiveness indicates the extent to which it had saturated the eighteenth century in general and fiction in particular. Haywood recognises the subversive possibilities within the masquerade, but also acknowledges the ways in which it holds up the female body for the male gaze. The enigmatic closure of her text allows the dualities of the
masquerade as a site of submission and subversion to coexist. However, the possibilities of an alternative rhetoric of female power have been subtly introduced within *Fantomina*. It is this possibility to which the later texts will respond.
Notes


15. Richetti, p. 42.


29. Warner, p. 175.


32. Craft-Fairchild, p. 64.


34. Backscheider, “Notes” to *Fantomina*, p. 234.


p. 83.
40. Ballaster, p. 191.
41. Catherine A. Ingrassia, Authorship, Commerce, and Gender in Early Eighteenth-Century England: A Culture of Paper Credit. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 82. As a female impersonator, Richardson is for Ingrassia, nothing more than an appropriator of “the narrative and stylistic conventions developed by Eliza Haywood” (p. 148), Ingrassia feels that Richardson replicates Haywood, “by investing in her style, language, and seductive fictional situations” (p. 149). She concedes that Richardson modifies Haywood’s formula by restricting and reversing, “the boundaries of female sexuality” that “resists Haywood’s empowering construction of gender” (p. 150).


43. It may be noted that even Haywood’s novel The Masqueraders closes at this point.
44. Alexander Pettit, “Adventures in Pornographic Places: Eliza Haywood’s Tea-Table and the Decentering of Moral
Argument”, *Papers on Language & Literature* 38.3 (Summer, 2002): 244-270, p. 258.

45. Backscheider, “Notes” to *Fantomina*, p. 248. Margaret Croskery rightly points out that there is no passage of repentance in *Fantomina* and therefore: “in Haywood’s words, banishment to convent or monastery was no guarantee of moral transformation, nor was it an effective stop gap to erotic pleasure.”. Croskery, “Masquing Desire”, p. 92.


50. Craft-Fairchild, p. 66.


58. Craft-Fairchild, p. 73.


60. Ibid., p. 416.


63. Ibid., p. 119. Pope’s footnote mentions her “profligate licentiousness” and “most scandalous books” and describes her as one of those “shameless scribblers” who in “libellious Memoirs and Novels, reveal the faults and misfortunes of both sexes, to the ruin of publick fame, or disturbance of private happiness”.


65. Ibid., p. 24.

**Figures**