

Coco Hailey
English 10B
Professor Nersessian, TA Barrios
Final Paper Assignment

How the Pursuit of Novelty Changes Identity, and Allows for the Immoral Treatment of Human Feelings and the Human Body in *Fantomina: Or Love in a Maze*

Fantomina: Or Love in a Maze by Eliza Haywood presents the labyrinthine nature of desire in the scandalous narrative of a young lady who takes on various disguises to keep the object of her love in constant pursuit. Haywood constructs a world in which Haywood's main character loses her own identity and becomes the identities and personas she designs. Throughout the novel Haywood denies the reader the true name of the young lady, in an effort to emphasize her lack of identity. For the purpose of this essay, the nameless character shall be referred to as her first alter-ego Fantomina. Haywood frames Fantomina's sexual escapades as an experiment to critique the unfair treatment of Beauplaisir as a tool to gratify curiosity. However, Beauplaisir in turn uses Fantomina as tool to gratify his sexual desires. The text critiques the exploitation of human feelings and the human body as a means for a new discovery or new achievement. While Fantomina continues to keep Beauplaisir interested through various disguises, Fantomina's own feelings and sense of self become victim to the very game she designs. Haywood argues against the pursuit of novelty by illustrating how Beauplaisir's and Fantomina's identities are made counterfeit as they become enthralled in their sexual game. *Fantomina: Or Love in a Maze* doubly criticizes the pursuit of novelty by illustrating how the pursuit of novelty comes at morally impermissible costs, while also critiquing how the pursuit of novelty, only values the novelty, and not the merit, of an achievement.

In the text love is reduced to a calculated experiment. Fantomina presents love in such a manner to reflect the changes in mindset and every-day affairs brought on by the evidence based ideology of the Enlightenment. Fantomina aims to treat Beauplaisir as an object; her goal is to experiment with him after watching the sexual exchanges of licentious women and high-class men at the theater. In order to do so, she creates a series of alter-egos to continuously charm Beauplaisir after he becomes disinterested. Fantomina is her first persona, who is a prostitute of superior rank. The presentation of love as a series of trials, deepens the analogy of love as an experiment. Haywood uses specific diction throughout the text to present Fantomina's treatment of love as controllable and calculated. The word business is continuously repeated (2741, 2745, 2753) as is the word stratagem (2746, 2751). The words business and stratagem present love as an objective exchange. Love is equated to a business arrangement or an experiment. The analogy highlights how Fantomina attempts to control the terms of the contract, or the environment of the arrangements between herself and Beauplaisir. Furthermore Haywood specifically names the male character Beauplaisir, which is French for fine pleasure, to demonstrate how Fantomina does not value him as a human, but uses him as an object to gratify her own curiosity. Fantomina's experiment is representative of the experiments of the Enlightenment period which also justified the pursuit of experiments and advances at the expense of morally impermissible costs.

In Fantomina's sexual escapades Beauplaisir is used as a means to an end. Fantomina continues to pursue her desires even at the cost of the moral implications associated with her lack of regard for Beauplaisir's feelings. Haywood uses Fantomina to illustrate the moral over steps a person will take in order to achieve their desires. Throughout the novel, Fantomina does anything

her inclinations or humors render agreeable to her (2740). She is comfortable with ignoring how her deception of Beauplaisir might affect him because she is motivated by a desire. She treats Beauplaisir as a means to an end, “to gratify her own curiosity (2740).” Fantomina’s goal is not even described as a constant desire but as a whimsical and flimsy inclination or humor. In *Fantomina: Or Love in A Maze* desire is fickle and inconstant, and yet the desire for novelty is still a motivator. The language of the text demonstrates how even though Fantomina’s desire for novelty, is based on a whim or inclination, she is still comfortable using Beauplaisir as a means to an end. As mentioned above, Haywood’s text uses Fantomina’s love experiment as a representation for the actual experiments of the Enlightenment period. The Enlightenment period was one of invention and scientific discovery. New technology called into question the role of ethics in experiments, especially if the treatment of human lives or feelings as a means to gratify curiosity or achieve a goal. Haywood astutely uses Fantomina’s treatment of Beauplaisir to comment on the moral consequences that come in using human feelings as a means to an end. Moreover, Haywood warns of the effects of experimentation by illustrating how Fantomina’s treatment of Beauplaisir as a tool, actually harms Fantomina herself.

Fantomina’s desires are confused when she is faced with the dilemma of losing her virginity to Beauplaisir. There is a reversal of power dynamics when Beauplaisir treats Fantomina as a tool to gratify his own sexual desires. Fantomina seduces Beauplaisir under false pretenses, but then at the risk of losing her virginity, Fantomina is hesitant. Haywood continues to frame desire as fickle by reversing the descriptions of Fantomina’s desires from “inclinations or humors” into feelings of hesitation. During the sexual exchange, Fantomina is described as fearful, confused, unprepared, resistant and struggling (2743). In juxtaposition to these

adjectives, Beauplaisir is described as bold, resolute, prosecuting, eager, victorious and triumphant (2743). Haywood uses this language to illustrate a reversal in power dynamics.

During this scene Fantomina is depicted as vulnerable while Beauplaisir is depicted as a masculine, sexual force. Even though Fantomina orchestrated the terms of the sexual encounter, the loss of her virginity makes her feel as if it is actually Beauplaisir who is in control.

Beauplaisir's masculine sexual desire overrides Fantomina's hesitations. After Fantomina loses her virginity she cries, and tells yet another lie by telling Beauplaisir that she is the daughter of a country gentleman. In the loss of her purity, Fantomina is metaphorically punished by the very experiment she designs. Fantomina attempts to use Beauplaisir as a tool in her experiment, but ironically Fantomina is hurt by Beauplaisir when he uses Fantomina as a tool to satisfy his sexual desire. Haywood warns of the danger of treating human feelings and the body as ways to satisfy desire, by showing how Fantomina is hurt when Beauplaisir treats her as a sexual object.

The first sexual encounter between Fantomina and Beauplaisir demonstrates the serious affect of Fantomina's sexual escapades on her own identity. Subsequently to losing her virginity, Fantomina tells Beauplaisir that she requires his love and devotion. Although he falsely promises her such, he devalues the young lady because she is no longer new. Haywood describes Beauplaisir's inner thoughts about Fantomina as he thinks, "that in the end she would be in reality the thing she so artfully had counterfeited (2744)." Haywood uses Beauplaisir's inner thoughts to emphasize the irreversible change that has shattered Fantomina's previous identity. The young lady is no longer the virgin she once was, and losing her virginity out of wedlock is tantamount to a huge and shameful disgrace for 18th century women. Metaphorically in losing her virginity out of wedlock, the young lady is debased to the status of prostitute or

mistress. The loss of Fantomina's virginity strips Fantomina of her previous identity as an aristocratic virgin and imposes on her the identity of prostitute she counterfeited. Moreover Beauplaisir's thoughts foreshadow how Fantomina continues to lose her previous identity as she internalizes the hyper sexualized characters she invents. Haywood uses the consequences of Fantomina's experiment as a metaphor for the consequences of pursuing a new experience or experiment simply based off a whim. This first sexual encounter sets up the stage for a series of sexual encounters that will continue to have consequences that illustrate Haywood's warning against the pursuit of novelty.

Haywood demonstrates the never ending pursuit of novelty and the emptiness of desire by showing how quickly Beauplaisir becomes disinterested in Fantomina and her personas. After sleeping with Fantomina, Beauplaisir promises her his faithful love and devotion. However he quickly becomes disinterested and escapes to Bath where he is unfaithful to Fantomina. In reality, Celia, the new love of Beauplaisir's, is actually another disguise of Fantomina's. This same cycle of interest and disinterest occurs with Celia, by which Fantomina then pretends to be a mourning widow named Bloomer. Fantomina decries "the unaccountableness of mens' fancies who still prefer the last conquest, only because it is the last (2751)." In this line women's sex is likened to a conquest which presents sex as an achievement. Beauplaisir becomes obsessed with the pursuit of new sexual experiences. In the way Beauplaisir is quickly disinterested and re-interested in new women Haywood continues to depict desire as empty and capricious. Beauplaisir has insatiable desire, and yet with each new conquest he thinks he wins, Beauplaisir is actually reliving an old experience and sleeping with Fantomina over and over again. Thus Beauplaisir's actual desire is not concerned with who he actually sleeps with, but only with the

façade that he is enjoying a new woman. Beauplaisir does not value the actual conquest, but values the novelty of the experience. Haywood uses Beauplaisir's pursuit of new sexual conquests as a metaphor for the Enlightenment's obsession with new knowledge and new advances. Haywood comments on the way in which the pursuit of novelty devalues previous achievements. The text uses Beauplaisir to illustrate how the pursuit of novelty values the novelty, and not necessarily the merit of an achievement.

Beauplaisir's letters further demonstrate how it is only the pursuit of novelty, not the actual women he pursues, that excites him. Beauplaisir keeps in contact with Fantomina and her personas through letters. Haywood presents his two letters, one which is for Fantomina and the other which is for Bloomer, next to each other so the reader can compare and contrast them. Textual analysis of Beauplaisir's letters demonstrate how Beauplaisir remains oblivious to each woman's likeness. In the first letter to Mrs. Bloomer, Beauplaisir writes "Never was woman formed to charm like you; never did any look like you (2750)." Beauplaisir is blinded in his obsession for a new sexual conquest. The obsession for novelty has rendered Beauplaisir completely unable to truly see or truly appreciate the experience. He cannot truly appreciate the new conquest if he is so oblivious to the obvious similarities between Fantomina and her personas. It is only the disguise or the allusion of novelty that excites Beauplaisir, and not the actual woman he pursues. Haywood reiterates her critique of the pursuit of novelty by conniving to demonstrate how it is a never-ending cycle based on inauthentic desire. The text continues to support the critique of the Enlightenment's fascination with discovering new things with disregard to the authenticity or significance of what is being discovered.

The description of Beauplaisir's state of mind in his letters, reflects how deeply his obsessions with sex takes on his mental state. In each letter Haywood uses specific language to show the reader the effects Fantomina's games have on Beauplaisir's identity. In the letter to Mrs. Bloomer, Beauplaisir describes his state of mind as, "I have seemed a body without a soul, and had you not by this inspiring billet, gave me new life, I know not what by tomorrow I should have been (2750)." In the letter Beauplaisir discusses his identity as if it were dependent on Mrs. Bloomer. He says his soul's existence fully depends on the continuation of their romantic affair. The pursuit of Bloomer has transcended from a sexual desire to an effect on Beauplaisir's sense of self. The description exaggerates extreme sexual desire to demonstrate the extent in which a person's mindset becomes obsessed and chained to the pursuit of novelty. The letters illustrate that Beauplaisir's self can only be defined through the context of whichever new woman he is chasing. On a larger scale Haywood implies how those that are obsessed with new experiences, dangerously define themselves only through each new experience.

Haywood continues to draw the connection between identity and novelty by varying the language and tone of each of Beauplaisir's letters. The comparison between the letter to Mrs. Bloomer and the letter to Fantomina demonstrates how Beauplaisir uses different language in each romantic affair. Beauplaisir signs the letter to Mrs. Bloomer as "Your most faithful, Beauplaisir (2751)." In comparison, he signs the letter to Fantomina as "Your ever faithful, Beauplaisir (2751)." Since Mrs. Bloomer is his newest conquest he writes "most faithful" to show his strong, burning and unfulfilled sexual passion. On the contrary the phrase in Fantomina's letter, "ever faithful," reflects an obligation rather than a sexual passion. Haywood uses subtle word changes to reflect how Beauplaisir is molding his identity to the context of each

pursuit. Haywood reiterates the toll that the pursuit of novelty takes on one's identity by using slight word variations as metaphors for changes in Beauplaisir. Furthermore Haywood also uses slight word variations as metaphors for larger change, in the different adjectives assigned to Mrs. Bloomer and Fantomina. Beauplaisir addresses the letter to Mrs. Bloomer as "To the Charming Mrs. Bloomer (2750)." In comparison to how Beauplaisir addresses the letter to Fantomina as "To the Lovely Fantomina (2750)." The word charming evokes a sense of sexual allure and novelty, in comparison to lovely which evokes a sense of attractive comfort or safety. In keeping uniform with the manner Beauplaisir signed his letters, it is clear that Beauplaisir is more enthralled with Mrs. Bloomer. In a similar fashion to how Haywood uses the letters to reflect larger changes in Beauplaisir, Haywood uses the letters to also show how Fantomina's identity is bending to fit the mold of her personas. Haywood uses the letters to reflect how both characters' identities are made counterfeit, as they bend their own identities to pursue empty desires. The changes to both Beauplaisir and Fantomina further support the argument that Haywood uses *Fantomina: Or Love in a Maze* as a warning against the costs of experimentation and the pursuit of novelty.

The text foreshadows how Fantomina's identity will be made counterfeit when the actions of her alter-egos bring consequences to her real life. As discussed previously, when Beauplaisir first interacts with Fantomina he anticipates that Fantomina will take on the identity of the mistress that she counterfeited (2744). Haywood pushes this idea again in the letter to Mrs. Bloomer where Beauplaisir writes, "therefore adieu till then sweet lovely mistress (2750)." This line, in the specific use of the word mistress, is the second allusion that Fantomina will become the identity of the mistress she counterfeited. Haywood equates the young lady to a mistress to

foreshadow how the young lady will face the same physical consequences that affect mistresses. Haywood reiterates the risks of this, when she uses the euphemism, “another project in embryo (2751)” to describe Fantomina’s next attempt to seduce Beauplaisir. This is an obvious allusion to the young lady’s future pregnancy. In the context of the 18th century, unwed pregnancy was almost exclusively a reality for women who prostituted themselves. Fantomina’s pregnancy likens the young lady to the very mistress identity she pretended to be. Pregnancy is the physical manifestation of the consequence of Fantomina’s experiment. Fantomina’s pregnancy pre-empted the shuffling away of Fantomina into a nunnery – which is the physical removal of Fantomina from the reality she once had, and a metaphorical removal from the identity she once was. Haywood uses the unwanted pregnancy as a metaphor for the unwanted consequences that can come from pursuing new experiences. Moreover the unwanted pregnancy supports the claim that Haywood is warning of the danger of using the human body as a means to gratify curiosity or desire by showing the damaging effects Fantomina’s experiment has on her own body.

Haywood presents the interactions between the final persona, Incognita, and Beauplaisir as violent and predatory, to create a parallel between their first sexual encounter and their final sexual encounter. In both encounters Haywood uses specific adjectives that reflect an inequality in assertiveness and power. In the first sexual encounter, Fantomina is hesitant but Beauplaisir domineering. In the final sexual encounter, the power dynamics are flipped. Incognita holds the upper hand. Haywood describes the passion between Incognita and Beauplaisir as “so violent a passion (2754).” This is by far the strongest description of passion out of all the affairs Beauplaisir has. The word violent is meant to unsettle the reader. Violence speaks to the danger of unbridled passion. Haywood further depicts the encounter with Incognita as dangerous when

Incognita boasts how she has Beauplaisir “always raving, wild, impatient, longing, dying (2755).” These adjectives liken Beauplaisir to helpless prey. Their encounter is presented as one between two unequals. After Incognita writes Beauplaisir about meeting, Beauplaisir fervently agrees to Incognita’s terms in a letter. He signs the letter as “Your everlasting slave (2754).” Like the previous letters, Haywood uses this line in the final letter as representative of Beauplaisir as a whole. This line, in addition to the aforementioned descriptions of the encounter as violent and predatory, emphasize how Beauplaisir is being treated as a means to an end. Haywood equates him to animal and a slave to reemphasize how Fantomina continues to unjustly treat Beauplaisir. The final sexual encounter, like the first, is representative of the larger consequences that come in using human feelings or the body as a means to an end. *Fantomina: Or Love in a Maze* demonstrates how in the face of a desire for what is new, a person not only devalues the achievement itself, but takes morally impermissible liberties to complete their pursuit.

Haywood uses the last persona, Incognita, to reflect the complete deterioration of the young lady’s previous identity, in order to impress upon the serious consequences that result from the pursuit of novelty and morally questionable experiments. The text demonstrates how Incognita marks the total disappearance of Fantomina’s previous identity as a respectable young lady, by enveloping the last sex scene in shrouds of darkness and veils. Incognita is the first character that is completely covered. Beauplaisir is denied the right to see Incognita during their sexual encounter. The text describes Incognita as coming “in the dark (2755)” and leaving “in the same darkness as before (2756).” Haywood uses the words, dark and darkness to create a sense of disappearance and concealment. The veiled costume of Incognita, and the darkness that hides her body, symbolizes the complete disappearance of the young lady’s previous identity. In

conjunction with the way Beauplaisir defines himself in the context of his new sexual conquest and the manner in which the young lady defines herself by the false persona she counterfeits, the text demonstrates the affect that the pursuit of novelty takes on someone's identity. The effect Fantomina's own experiment has on her sense of self comments on how Enlightenment experiments personally affect how people come to view themselves as defined wholly by the pursuits and experiments they participate in. Overall Haywood uses the consequences of Fantomina's experiment to mobilize her critique on the costs of the pursuit of novelty. Haywood warns against the pursuit of novelty and questions the Enlightenment's obsession with new advancement at the cost of treating the human body and human feelings as pawns in experiments.

Ultimately Haywood develops a complex critique of the Enlightenment's fascination with novelty. *Fantomina: Or Love in a Maze* frames courtship as a series of trials like an experiment. Fantomina's whimsical desire to experiment with men leads her to unjustly use Beauplaisir as a means to an end. However Beauplaisir also uses Fantomina as a means to an end, when he uses her as a tool to satisfy his sexual desire. The events that ensue demonstrate the changes that occur in both Beauplaisir and Fantomina that are caused by the experiment. Beauplaisir becomes obsessed with having new sexual conquests, and fails to appreciate or notice the similarities between each of Fantomina's personas. Haywood uses Beauplaisir to critique how the pursuit of novelty devalues the merit or significance of an achievement by only placing importance on the novelty of the achievement. Beauplaisir's letters serve as a symbolic representation of how Beauplaisir's identity can only be defined in terms of his new sexual pursuit. In a similar fashion, the text demonstrates how the young lady can only be defined in terms of her latest disguise. The

young lady takes on the identity of the mistress that she counterfeit and suffers the loss of her previous identity and suffers an unwanted pregnancy. Fantomina is metaphorically punished for her experiment in which she immorally uses Beauplaisir as a means to gratify her curiosity.

Ultimately Eliza Haywood furnishes a world in *Fantomina: Or Love in a Maze* that serves as an allegory for a larger critique on the pursuit of novelty during the Enlightenment. Haywood makes plain the nature in which the constant pursuit of novelty, devalues the actual achievement, and pushes for new discoveries and advancements at morally impressive costs. The text provides a pertinent commentary, that is still ingrained in 21st century modern ideology, about the ethics of scientific discovery and the loss of authenticity amidst societal obsessions for new advancements.

(3536 words)