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Amie Baumwell April 6th, 2011

Eighteenth-Century Fiction and the Case of Female Identity: An Investigation into the Heroines of Eliza Haywood's Fantomina and Jane Austen's Northanger Abbey

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Abstract

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This paper sets out to explore the question of how two female characters of eighteenth-century female authors "use" fiction and fantasy to negotiate a variety of societal and ideological issues. Using two primary works, Eliza Fowler Haywood's novella Fantomina; Or, Love in a Maze (1725) and Jane Austen's novel Northanger Abbey (1817), I will show that, through performance and imaginative novel reading (respectively), the heroines are able to defy the traditional feminine roles of their time.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

This paper sets out to explore the question of how two female characters of eighteenth-century female authors "use" fiction and fantasy to negotiate a variety of societal and ideological issues. Using two primary works, Eliza Fowler Haywood's novella *Fantomina; Or, Love in a Maze* (1725) and Jane Austen's novel *Northanger Abbey* (1817), I will show that, through performance and imaginative novel reading (respectively), the heroines are able to defy the traditional feminine roles of their time.

In *Fantomina*, a lady who has just arrived in London after growing up in the country becomes curious about the relationships between men and women at a playhouse. Undoubtedly influenced by masquerade, a popular type of ball during the time, this lady decides to disguise herself in order to satisfy her curiosity.[1] When she experiences urban social norms for the first time – that is, those norms that women were expected to follow – this lady is able to reinvent herself in several ways. She wants to understand the interactions between prostitutes and gentlemen, so she dresses up as Fantomina, a prostitute, and lures a gentleman – Beauplaisir – into bed.[2] After a vague scene of seduction in which the lady loses her virginity to the gentleman, Fantomina learns how to manipulate her lover. She ultimately takes on three more disguises:

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[1] Critic Ros Ballaster describes the appeal of masquerade for the eighteenth-century woman in her book, *Seductive Forms*: "The anonymity of the masquerade provides women with the opportunity of maintaining public reputation and indulging in private sexual desire" (181). This is exactly what Fantomina does throughout Haywood's novella, thereby demonstrating the duplicity of virtue and public reputation. She later adds that "while their male counterparts could move from coffee-house to ale-house, gallery to pit, between elite and populist cultures, bourgeois women found themselves increasingly confined to the home and the 'polite' assembly. Only the masquerade provided a sanctioned space for a lifting of restrictions on women's social mobility" (188). The masquerade, therefore, was an escape from the confines of domesticity and politeness – ideals that were thrust upon eighteenth-century women.

[2] Ballaster comments that, in the eighteenth-century, "Those heroines who do not fall prey to the male plotter are those who manage to rival that power of scripting in their own person. Hence, the nameless heroine of *Fantomina* (1725) learns to maintain the interest of the young man who first seduces her by presenting herself to him for seduction in a series of 'masquerade' disguises" (203). Just as Haywood gains power from scripting her heroine, Fantomina herself gains power from scripting her roles.

Celia, a maid in Bath, the vulnerable Widow Bloomer, and Incognita, a bourgeois woman who will not take off her mask. When her "severely virtuous" mother arrives in London, Fantomina is forced to stop performing and therefore must give up her game. Haywood implies, therefore, that a woman can only express her deepest desires through the medium of fiction. Social norms are examples of this fiction, as they are shared ritualistic codes of conduct artificially created in society; adhering to these social norms requires engaging in scripted conversations and avoiding organic conversation topics.

The fiction-oriented nature of social norms is a common thread that binds together two very different works by Eliza Haywood and Jane Austen. Austen's *Northanger Abbey* is the story of Catherine Morland, a naïve young country girl who travels to Bath with her neighbors, the Allens, and must adapt to the social expectations that exist there. She encounters not only the ignominious Thorpe family but also the handsome Henry Tilney and his mysterious father, General Tilney. At Bath, Catherine learns that gothic novels are popular among her peers, and she begins to avidly read them. This fiction reading allows her to try to understand those around her, especially General Tilney, through the characterizations provided in such works as *The Mysteries of Udolpho.* As Catherine travels to the Tilneys' Northanger Abbey, she is overcome with gothic delusions and fantasies about both the place and the people who inhabit it. Through her obsession with fiction and fantasy, Catherine evolves from naïve young country girl who only knows right from wrong into a more mature, social performer who understands that evil can exist even where there is some good mixed in with it. Using Catherine's transformation as evidence, Austen assures her readers that they cannot underestimate the ability of the novel to enlighten the mind. She also points out that appearances and realities do not always coincide. Perhaps she even implies that the person reading her novel is learning without even knowing it;

though her novel may at first appear to be a silly mechanism of simple entertainment, it is, in reality, a mode of edification.

Both Austen and Haywood focus their narratives on women and the behavior to which society confines them. These two female authors – empowering themselves and their sex simply by writing – have the most knowledge of what it is like to be women; therefore, their narratives more accurately depict the life of a woman than any male's novel could.[3] Though an eighteenth-century man might be hesitant to admit that a woman is an expert in anything other than domestic work, he would have to admit that both of these female authors have the unique expertise gained from being members of the sex that they ultimately seek to vindicate.[4]

The concept of propriety, or what Mary Poovey calls "the Proper Lady," arose in the period in which the middle classes were becoming prominent in England. This lady was an "angel of the house," a woman who adhered strictly to the norms required of her, who raised her children and remained in the domestic sphere, satisfied with being subjugated by her husband.[5]

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[3] Patricia Spacks notes that Henry Fielding, in his *Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men*, also accurately describes contemporary feelings about women in the mid eighteenth-century. In this essay, he notes, "I do by no means hint at the various laughs, Titters, Tehes, &c of the Fair Sex, with whom indeed this Essay has not any thing to do; the Knowledge of the Characters of Women being foreign to my intended purpose; as it is in Fact a Science, to which I make not the least Pretension" (Spacks, 103). By mentioning this quote, Spacks focuses on a dismissal or ignorance of women on the part of "knowledgable men" and describes the male opinion that there is an absolute difference between the sexes (Spacks observes, for instance, that a woman's laugh must necessarily be different from a man's).

[4] Critic Ros Ballaster agrees that female authors explore the concept of female agency through their fiction: "In these early novels the 'domestic' preoccupations…are not evident and plots of sexual pursuit, whether those of seduction and betrayal, or those of courtship and marriage…are stories in which the canvas of sexual intrigue serves as the ground for explorations of what constitutes political or civil agency, especially for women" (203). Exploring fictions of courtship and sexual intrigue, therefore, seems synonymous with exploring female agency.

[5] To prove this point, Poovey quotes a Dorsetshire clergyman, who describes the proper bride: "'God had also fully indicated her function when he deliberately created her for the Profit and Comfort of man. A good wife should be like a Mirrour which hath no image of its own, but receives its stamp from the face that looks into it.' A woman must not only obey her husband, he continued, but must bring 'unto him the very Desires of the Heart to be regulated by him so far, that it should not be lawful for her to will or desire what she liked, but only what her husband should approve and allow'"(3). She adds that Mary Astell affirmed this vision of the woman; Poovey quotes Astell, who says that the woman should be able to

The idea of a woman being truly and naturally satisfied with her status as property is unrealistic; this underlines the idea that social norms – specifically those associated with being the proper lady and wife – are, to a certain degree, performances in themselves. A woman must act a certain way in order to survive in a society where the expectations for her own self-actualization are low; though she may want more for herself, she must perform the way in which society demands in order to live a comfortable life. Similarly, the dominant male perspective essentially creates a script for what the proper behavior for a woman is in a social situation – like when she is at a ball, or while she is having tea. In this way, social interactions are themselves scripted.

Ros Ballaster claims that the rise of the novel coincided with the increasing prominence of English bourgeois ideology in the eighteenth century, which valued morality and virtue as domestic qualities.[6] However, she adds that the concept of proving one's worth was also a huge part of this ideology, so that one's "moral worth" was not simply a matter of birthright.[7] During this time, views of women's roles were shifting after the sexually charged Restoration period presented in *Fantomina* (women are viewed as objects of lust). Ballaster notes, though, that this shift simply placed women into the domestic category (which Poovey would argue was represented by "The Proper Lady"). This concept of "Proper Lady" represents the near-impossible standard to which women were held in the eighteenth century. Forcing women to move closer to this standard were religious fanaticism and the rise of the middle classes, which

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attach her "innocent affections" where "Duty requires." Essentially, a woman, when chosen to be a wife by any man, should accept and love him in her duty as modest domestic servant.

[6] Ballaster notes that "women's domestic fiction of the mid eighteenth-century traced an inevitable trajectory in the courtship-to-marriage plot towards the silencing and commodification of women" (210).

[7] Ballaster says that "moral worth, no longer assumed to be a privilege of birth, must now be proved through action and behaviour. Such ethics might be understood to extend new opportunities to middle-class women as the embodiment of domestic virtue. However…women novelists were also aware that confining women to domestic and private moralities could be as oppressive a tyranny as viewing them solely as sexual playthings and targets for male lust, an attitude associated with the libertinism of the earlier Restoration culture" (206). Women novelists could not conform their heroines to either opinion of women which existed in the eighteenth century (the sexual object or the domestic servant).

led to the constraint of female will; a woman, who had previously (at least, in a limited way) participated in the economy through trade and domestic industry, became more and more limited to the household in the eighteenth century.[8] Further, chastity became extremely important as the integral land-owning class grew; patriarchs became concerned with keeping their assets within the family.[9] An innate distrust of women developed because of this desire, and this expectation of chastity furthered the duplicity of virtue during this time. Women were forced into a certain way of life and perhaps would have acted differently if they had greater freedom of choice.[10]

Fantomina's ability to maintain her virtue in the eyes of society while not being truly chaste underscores this contemporary fear. Her ability to maintain her appearances as a lady while she violates the feminine expectation of chastity multiple times would have been alarming to contemporary male audiences. However, her behavior also demonstrates the inherent duplicity of virtue, as she shows that women do have desires and simply "act" as if they are virtuous because society prescribes this role for them. In society's eyes, Fantomina never truly violates propriety; she acts the appropriate norm for each of her characters. For example, when she is in the disguise of Celia, she knows how to behave as a maid is expected to behave; additionally, she is able to play the part of the grieving widow well as she inhabits the disguise of the Widow Bloomer, talking about her dead husband just as much as she would be expected to and therefore

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[8] Poovey's *Proper Lady* describes what a female's role became as the middle classes rose to prosperity. Society's opinion of a woman's role evolved into a "more narrowly defined model of a dutiful wife 'incorporated and consolidated' into their husbands' interests, emotionally and economically as well as legally" (7). She goes on to describe women "as both representatives and guarantors of property…women became objects of men's aspirations and ambitions – a position that implicitly demanded that women desire to *be* nothing but men's property" (11).

[9] Poovey also notes that "for women of established or aspiring families this [strict settlement, where the eldest son is the heir to the family estate of landed families] meant, first of all, a strict reinforcement of the rule of chastity, since, as we have seen, a bastard could completely undermine dynastic ambitions" (12).

[10] Poovey adds that "as a daughter, a wife, a mother, a widow, as a virgin or a whore, every woman was defined by relationship – explicitly to a man, implicitly to sexuality itself" (Preface, x).

following society's guidelines for her character. Therefore, outwardly, Fantomina does not violate the rules of propriety.

Catherine does not violate propriety either. In fact, through Catherine, Austen reaffirms the importance of decorum to social order. Perhaps the importance of propriety influences Catherine's adherence to social norms in *Northanger Abbey*. In order to survive in society and have a happy ending, Catherine must, to a certain degree, adhere to propriety as much as she knows how to; because she is able to do so, she is ultimately able to become socially mobile. Unlike Isabella Thorpe, who disregards propriety altogether in order to find a husband, Catherine does her best to follow society's guidelines and therefore marries the man she loves and lives what the reader assumes will be a happy life. Her adherence to society's guidelines, therefore, provides Catherine with the opportunity to improve her social situation. Austen implies that this is necessary for the woman to do in order to, ironically, assert any kind of free will; however, Catherine, in all her innocence, is inherently duplicitous because she has to *learn* to be proper and then act the part.

While Eliza Haywood's *Fantomina; Or, Love in a Maze* and Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* are vastly different works from different centuries, they are similar in important ways. First, both narratives follow a single female heroine through a transformation. Fantomina transforms from a wealthy country Lady to four different disguises and finally to a nun, and Catherine evolves from ignorant country girl of modest means to a gothic obsessed but socially normative young woman who negotiates her life with fantasy. Ultimately, she becomes a more aware person and wife. Second, both works emphasize the scripted interactions required within their social settings. Fantomina can become whomever she wants in an urban setting where every person is acting out a social norm and Catherine must learn to adopt the proper behavior

necessary for society life in Bath. Third, both works center on a heroine who uses fiction in order to mitigate the social limitations of life as an eighteenth-century woman. While Fantomina performs different roles as if she were on stage, Catherine becomes enthralled with gothic novels to the point where she lives her life as if she were in one.

Chapter 2

Fiction as a Catalyst for Social Mobility in *Fantomina*

Eliza Haywood - through her narrator's voice and her heroine in *Fantomina; Or, Love in a Maze* - scorns female behavior, calling women the "easy, weeping, wailing Sex" (Haywood, 32). By creating a heroine who so easily manipulates her own identity and social legibility, Haywood emphasizes the importance of performance to female happiness and to overcoming the prevalent notion, during the Restoration period (the time in which the novella is set), that women are passive, easily satisfied, emotional *objects* of desire.[11] Through her performances, the distinguished Lady is able to manipulate her lover, Beauplaisir, and fulfill her desires without tarnishing her reputation. The title of the controversial novella indicates that disguise and acting will play vital roles in the plot: *Fantomina; Or, Love in a Maze* is named after the first disguise that the lady (whose real name is never revealed) takes on to trick Beauplaisir. Even more interestingly, the story opens in a playhouse – a place where it is known that people go to see and be seen - where "Fantomina" is watching gentlemen engage a group of prostitutes. Here, she watches these interactions in lieu of watching the play and learns the behavior she will need to become an actress in her own right. Eliza Haywood's manipulative Fantomina lives in a world driven by the social norms of an urban space –where she can create a new persona if she assumes the proper role – and derives power from her planned performances and her ability to rename herself multiple times.

Just like many of her heroines, Eliza Fowler Haywood acted out many roles in her fiction and in her life. As the "Great Arbitress of Passion," Haywood maintained control over her life

[11] Ros Ballaster describes the importance of Fantomina's stark opposition to the common woman: she is evidence of "Haywood's attempt to 'plot' a way out of the negative opposition of the unfortunate mistress and the mistress of artifice, profferring in its place the model of a female experimentation with amatory codes in order to defer closure of heterosexual romance without falling into hysteria" (*Seductive Forms,* 181).

by, on the one hand, writing for profit and, on the other, dictating how her female characters navigated societal constraints within her fiction.[12] The prolific writer was also an actress (the irony of this fact is astounding, considering the importance, in her works, of performing), a publisher, and a translator (among still other occupations). She was also responsible for the *Female Spectator*, in which she took on an instructive persona (as Joseph Addison did in the *Spectator*) for the purpose of satirizing contemporary society.[13] Just as Addison's voyeuristic Mr. Spectator advised the rising middle class about how to act in society, Haywood's Female Spectator (written years after *Fantomina)* used the female perspective to accomplish the same goal for women.[14] Haywood used various personas in order to express many opinions – and in this way authored many personas that commented on society.[15] Just as Haywood used her *Female Spectator* personas to express her opinions, she created Fantomina as a manifestation of her desire to exert her strength and sexual desire in a socially constricted environment.[16] In this way, Haywood brings feminine sexuality to the surface in a society where such a notion is gendered and only males are publicly sexual beings (while women are considered to be private

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[12] See Emily H. Anderson's "Performing the Passions in Eliza Haywood's Fantomina and Miss Betsy Thoughtless."

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ballaster describes the Haywood's distinctly feminine periodical: "Eliza Haywood's the *Female Spectator*, published monthly [anonymously] from April 1744 to May 1746 with two months omitted, was published in four volumes (London, 1745) and had gone into seven editions by 1771" (*Seductive Forms,* 41). She later goes on to say, that in one of her many *Female Spectator* personas, Haywood instructs her readers against behavior like that exhibited by *Fantomina*: "The sober and industrious editor of the *Female Spectator* draws on her own youthful experience of the dangerous and seductive power of romance in order to warn her young female readers of its dangers" (196).

[15] The creators of the *Spectator* created a niche for Haywood to create a *Female Spectator* because, as Ros Ballaster shows, "although women's 'interests' are…represented [in the *Spectator*] as distinctly different from men's (requiring a more refined language, for instance), they also exist only in relation to men. Woman remains the object or consumer of polite discourse, rather than the subject or producer of it" (*Seductive Forms,* 39). Haywood, therefore, created a version that gave women a voice.

[16] Haywood "calls on the assistance" of various personas, and in this sense one sees her "adopting various roles to express herself. Her strategy mirrors that of her heroines, especially Fantomina, as these 'acquaintances' come from different social classes and exhibit different personalities" (Anderson, 12).

sex *objects*).[17] Haywood brings this female version of the "language of desire" into the foreground.[18] Since Fantomina does not have the explicit power to woo Beauplaisir, she must gain control over her lover through performing. While she assumes her various roles, Fantomina ultimately gets what she wants; even though Beauplaisir is the sexual ravager in each individual situation, Fantomina is the one who makes each encounter happen and is therefore in control, on a greater level, of the exercise of her desire.

The first scene of seduction and sexuality occurs with the distinguished lady's first persona, Fantomina. Her vague sexual encounter with Beauplaisir borders on a rape, though it is not clear if the act is actually forced. Before Fantomina invites Beauplaisir to her lodgings, she thinks that her virtue is safe: "She depended on the Strength of her Virtue, to bear her fate thro' Tryals more dangerous than she apprehended this to be" (Haywood, 5). Is this thought process an excuse, on Haywood's part, for Fantomina's indiscretion? Perhaps the story is so unconventional that it is necessary to start it with a rape – as if the man is the destroyer and causes Fantomina to act as she does throughout the rest of the novella. In conventional fiction, the man preys on the innocent young maiden; for this story to proceed as it does and reverse this convention, it must first include a man forcefully taking an innocent young lady's virtue. Later, Fantomina's "virtue" certainly does not matter, as long as she is reputed in society as a virgin. Bringing the question of rape even further into question is the explanation of Fantomina's thoughts as she is about to have

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[17] As Tiffany Potter notes, "Power…is ultimately a matter of perception and relative relationships… Haywood's oft-perceived position in the early part of her career [is] as a prostitute once removed, selling seduction and sex through the medium of print" (170). She goes on to say that this "private" realm, "for female characters and the female narrator… indeed includes the language of desire" (171).

[18] For doing so, Haywood was referred to by contemporaries such as Alexander Pope as a prostitute of sorts. Ros Ballaster points out that in *The Dunciad,* Pope denigrates Haywood and her works: "Eliza's works, then, are her body which she shamelessly exposes to public view and sells to the highest bidder (the most powerful bookseller)" (*Seductive Forms,* 160). Haywood, therefore, is described as a prostitute like her heroine because she writes for profit.

sex with Beauplaisir: "…confus'd, altogether unprepar'd to resist in such Encounters, and rendered more so, by the extreme Liking she had to him" (7). This is the heroine's first encounter with passion and desire, and she is ultimately unable to resist it. The vague nature of this seduction scene reflects the limited space within which female desire is able to operate.[19] The only situation in which a distinguished lady of higher birth may give up her chastity is if she is raped or married. It seems, here, that the act is not as much a rape as it is Fantomina's inability to resist the waves of temptation that roll over her. The conventional returns to the scene, though, after the sexual act is over: "In fine, she was undone; and he gain'd a Victory, so highly rapturous" (7). The lady cries, almost revealing herself to her lover – but decides against it. She is able to control her feminine emotions after a moment of uncertainty and therefore is able to rationalize her situation and make the best of it.

The moment Fantomina nearly loses control over her persona as a prostitute, she reverts to that stereotypical emotional, "weeping, wailing" woman. However, she is able to compose herself and maintain her fiction – despite her lapse in her role as a prostitute – and therefore continues to perform. Beauplaisir, however, recognizes that Fantomina is not, in fact, a prostitute, and he thinks: "He could not imagine for what Reason a Woman, who, if she intended not to be a Mistress, had counterfeited the Part of one, and taken so much Pains to engage him, should lament a consequence which she could not but expect, and till the last Test, seem'd inclinable to grant" (8). How can Fantomina, who dresses and acts like a prostitute, lament the outcome of her behavior? This is undoubtedly what the reader is also thinking as the scene unfolds – though the narrator does emphasize before the rape that Fantomina believes she can defend her virtue. Or, is that just what Haywood wants conventional eighteenth-century readers

[19] As critic Sarah Prescott puts it, the inconstant man embodied by Beauplaisir and the vague rape that occurs demonstrate the "social codes which disenfranchise women and limit female experience (278)"

to believe? Regardless, Fantomina moves from a distinguished lady whose only responsibility is to defend her virtue, to a less conventional woman whose cunning allows her to exercise her desire in a public way.

The vague rape and Fantomina's reaction to it highlights the notion of performativity and its link to female agency in *Fantomina*. Here, performance exists in a complicated relationship with identity. Fantomina's identities are created and expressed through her performances; from performing urban social norms in the playhouse at the beginning of the story to acting out her four disguises, she never stops playing artificially constructed personas. Fiction and planning are necessary in the story, as the lady is only successful when she carefully premeditates her actions and disguises.[20] This is ironic because sexual desire tends to undermine self-control – it is the opposite here. If a woman can control her sexual desires, she can assert her will in this particular story. When Fantomina is "raped" and nearly lets her emotions drive her actions, she nearly ends her ploy before it even starts. However, she is able regain her composure and better control her actions for her next role – and is only successful because she now plans her behaviors. If she had allowed the rape to affect her, Fantomina would have lost all control of her situation and unraveled. The spontaneous and less calculated actions in the story only lead to disaster.[21] Clearly, a woman's desire, at least in Haywood's eyes, can only be genuinely expressed through a combination of carefully planned roles and fiction; desire within planned performance is successful (as Fantomina accomplishes her goal each time she disguises herself). If the fulfillment of desire is not premeditated, however, the consequences (such as rape and pregnancy) can be devastating. Through these planned roles, Fantomina is able to truly express

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[20] See Emily H. Anderson's "Performing the Passions in Eliza Haywood's Fantomina and Miss Betsy Thoughtless."

[21] Ibid.

her sexual desires and feelings; a woman's performance reveals her true sentiments, while a woman's modesty indicates that she is holding these feelings back.[22] If Fantomina had not taken on her roles, she would still be a young, curious country girl who puts on the façade of respectability and modesty that is expected of a young woman of her age and birth.

The importance of successfully acting out a role, as Fantomina seemingly does, feeds into the male-female dynamic of conquering. By having sex with Beauplaisir multiple times, but never revealing her identity to him in the process, Fantomina does not allow her lover to have full knowledge of her as his conquest.[23] She does not need Beauplaisir to know everything about her just because she wants to exercise her passions. In short, Fantomina does not become a seduced maiden at any point in the story because Beauplaisir does not find out her true identity until the very end – and, at that point, the blame for the pregnancy and sex is placed solely on her. This leaves her with an identity that she always retains, even after she is banished to a convent.

The importance of the masquerade to the story cannot be ignored. In the mid-eighteenth-century, this type of ball was extremely popular. Any woman could dress up and wear a mask and alter her social identity, as Fantomina does each time she dresses up.[24] The concept of the

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[22] Anderson agrees: "as performance enables the expression of female emotions, Haywood casts the impulse to probe beneath a woman's 'mask' in search of her true sentiments as misleading" (2).

[23] Anderson aptly expounds upon the notion that knowledge of a woman's identity allows a man to conquer her: "Haywood conflates sexual desire with the overwhelming urge to identify, and the exposure of the female body becomes synonymous with the exposure of both the passions and the 'self.' The fact of a coquette's ability to perform is rendered non-threatening to a masculine audience by the belief that sex will give a lover full knowledge of his conquest…the self-made coquette quickly becomes a male creation: the seduced maiden" (7). Fantomina's ability to withhold her identity keeps her from becoming a conquered maiden and allows her to retain her independence.

[24] Prescott explains why the masquerade was such a popular concept: "…in contrast to the restrictions placed on bourgeois women's lives in this period, the masquerade was a social space in which it was possible to enact fantasies and assume a different identity while maintaining respectability and reputation through the use of a disguise…Fantomina inhabits a range of 'masquerades' in order to trick Beauplaisir, continue her sexual gratification but also keep her good name" (279). She continues, "through an

masquerade, of dressing up in garb that is able to transform a person, is integral to the fluidity of identity that Fantomina is able to accomplish. Ironically, however, as she comes closer to her true self, an elite woman, she uses a mask instead of a new identity – more closely mimicking the masquerade and exhibiting just how easy it would be for a prostitute, or a maid, or a widow to put on a mask and act like someone of higher birth. This would be extremely disconcerting to a conservative audience (particularly a male conservative audience) who would condemn this ability to be secretly socially mobile. This same audience might also condemn the ability of a play to do the same for an actor. Identity's importance, therefore, manifests in many ways in the story. What is never determined, however, is what a person's true identity is; there is so much performance in social situations that people become caught up in their acts. The fact that we never learn true identity of the "Young Lady of distinguished Birth, Beauty, Wit, and Spirit" (or, more accurately, we never learn her name) highlights this concept (Haywood, 1).

Fantomina's performative identity can be understood in light of what she is *not*: a wife or mother. Haywood's commentary throughout the story highlights her negative opinion of the passive eighteenth-century woman. Fantomina is able to recognize the folly in these women and correct them through her performances: "…and Wisely considering that Complaints, Tears, Swooning, and all the Extravagancies which Women make use of in such Cases, have little Prevailence over a Heart inclin'd to rove, and only serve to render those who practice them more contemptible by robbing them of that Beauty which alone can bring back the fugitive Lover" (Haywood, 13). She is successful in luring Beauplaisir into her plots because she understands *what* women do to drive men away. In this way, as Haywood so adeptly describes, Fantomina avoids losing Beauplaisir forever: "…but with her Sex's Modesty, she had not also thrown off

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emphasis on its masquerade qualities the text can be interpreted as positive and empowering in its representation of female desire and female agency" (280).

another Virtue equally valuable, tho' generally unfortunate, Constancy" (13). Through describing what other women do in response to men (mainly passively accept their behavior), Haywood outlines Fantomina's identity. Fantomina does not passively accept Beauplaisir's behavior. In fact, she actively seeks his ability to satiate her sexual desire multiple times. Eventually she falls out of love with him because she realizes he is not truly worthy; he tires of her "characters" continually and lies to them, and thereby loses the Lady's trust and love. However, she still desires his companionship sexually, and continually seeks him out. Through her performances, Fantomina's identity evolves into one of an active woman – though she must keep performing to maintain it. She continues to scorn other members of her sex as her identity evolves:

> …'tis thus our silly, fond, believing Sex are serv'd when they put Faith in Man: So had I been deceiv'd and Cheated, had I like the rest believ'd and sat down mourning in Absence, and vainly waiting recover'd Tendernesses - How do some Women, (continued she) 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 Dispair (24)?

By referring to women as a "silly, fond, believing Sex," Fantomina emphasizes the qualities that she must shed in order to conquer her lover and move further away from the feminine realm and closer to the libertine realm. Through performance, she also distances herself from the disappointments inevitably caused by men who have control over their sexual partners. By repeatedly changing her identity, Fantomina shows that she will not be found "burning in fruitless Expectations." Rather, she will have no expectations but that Beauplaisir will wander eventually. The use of the word "burning" reflects the understated and passive nature of female passion – passion does, in fact, burn within women, but it is mediated by the need to wait, to expect, for a man to remain a constant lover; as soon as she realizes that a woman should not be passive, Fantomina is able to overcome what she considers to be her gender's follies. Fantomina

has realized that if a woman can avoid trusting her lover and simply enjoy the time she has with him, she is better able to enjoy herself and retain her identity in the process: "She had all the Sweets of Love, but as yet had tasted none of the Gall, and was in a State of Contentment, which might be envy'd by the more Delicate" (25). The use of the word "delicate" underscores Fantomina's status as the opposite of the typical woman. She is not delicate; she is cunning, strong, and confident in herself and her ability to perform her roles.

One role that Fantomina never plays, however, is the typical female one; though she does play the reserved lady, she does not center her desires on being married and having children. Instead of conceiving children and performing her proper role as a society woman, Haywood's heroine conceives roles for herself in order to act on her desires. This concept, that Fantomina replaces her role as a procreator with her various guises, is reinforced by Haywood's narration of the character's plotting when she "…had another project in *embryo*, which she soon ripened into action" (25). Instead of creating and carrying a child in embryo and allowing it to ripen within her, Fantomina engenders her plots. Importantly, fertility imagery appears placed when she is doing something outside of the eighteenth-century "feminine" realm – disregarding propriety and modesty and favoring desire. The various plans that Fantomina conceives and the roles she plays – her fiction – allow Fantomina not only to control her life but also her lover. Letting Beauplaisir view each of her personas as a conquest, Fantomina conquers the man.[25] She literally does not allow Beauplaisir to abandon her – a power that is incredibly novel for the time. Instead of doing what is expected – crying and letting him go – Fantomina works to keep her spark with Beauplaisir alive by creating new women to entice him, and through these women she lives out

[25] Fantomina's ability to maintain her performativity and act out her roles allows her to continue enjoying herself and avoid being abandoned. Anderson agrees, noting that "Fantomina's continued masquerade prevents the typical consequences of seduction – the abandonment and scandal that would forestall any future performance – and prolongs her powers of expression" (Anderson, 4).

her own fantasies. When describing Beauplaisir's behavior before he makes love to Celia, Haywood's narrator uses the language of consumption to express the extent to which the gentleman thinks he is conquering the young maid:

> …[he] swore he must enjoy her, though Death were to be the Consequence, devour'd her Lips, her Breasts with greedy Kisses, held to his burning Bosom her half-yielding, half-reluctant Body, nor suffered her to get loose, till he had ravaged all, and glutted each rapacious Sense with the sweet Beauties of the pretty Celia, for that was the Name she bore in this second Expedition (16).

Images of consumption are used to express Beauplaisir's passion as he "devour'd" her greedily; "burning" with desire he "ravaged all, and glutted each rapacious Sense." Of course, this is exactly what Celia (or Fantomina) wants, as she engenders his passion with the identity that she "bore." In this quote, the word "bear" can be interpreted in multiple ways. First, one "bears" something when she wears it on her body. This has implications for Haywood's use of "bear" to describe Fantomina's costume – it is something she wears on her body and can take off as she pleases. The word "bore" is also used when referring to reproduction, as a woman "bears" a child to her husband; here, Fantomina "bears" her plots to excite Beauplaisir for her own satisfaction. This reinforces the notion that Fantomina retains control over both Beauplaisir and the situation in an unconventional way: by creating her encounter with her lover, she has more agency than the man – despite his desire to "consume her." Additionally, Haywood uses the concept of fertility – something that usually subjugates a woman by relegating her to a certain function in society – to empower Fantomina. Not only does Fantomina's role give her control of the situation, but it also - through Haywood's imagery – gives the heroine strength within fiction.

Fantomina derives her identity as an unconventional woman from her artificial roles in self-created plots. When Beauplaisir first realizes that Fantomina is a virgin who, for reasons he cannot comprehend, is acting like a prostitute, he "did not doubt by the Beginning of her

Conduct, but that in the End she would be in Reality, the Thing she so artfully had counterfeited" (9). Haywood's rendering of Beauplaisir's thoughts here reflect the other side of performance, which can liberate her while at the same time turning her into that thing which she performs. Though her actions may at first seem freeing, there is always the possibility that she can become what she performs. His thoughts show that theatricality is not so easily put on and taken off. He predicts, correctly, that Fantomina will become exactly who she has created and must juggle her various roles continually, just as she must also maintain her "reputed virtue" for the sake of her status in society. After acting the part of a prostitute, a young maid, a widow, and a mysterious woman, Fantomina has become a woman who continually solicits herself to a man. She dresses up – just as a prostitute would – and allows her lover to freely exercise his passions with her. Through her self-created role, however, Fantomina maintains control of the relationship both during and after the sexual encounter. In the sense that both Fantomina and prostitutes derive some sort of power from marketing themselves to gentlemen, their lifestyles are similar in their outward expressions of feminine sexual agency. Further proof of this transformation can be found in the language used throughout the novella. In the beginning of the story, Fantomina refers to the prostitutes in the playhouse as "Creatures," and by the end of the story, the Lady is described as such: "And 'tis difficult to determine, if Beauplaisir, or the Lady, were most surpris'd at what they heard; he, that he should have been blinded so often by her Artifices; or she, that so young a Creature should have the Skill to make use of them" (39). This is reminiscent of Beauplaisir's thoughts that Fantomina will become that thing which she performs; Fantomina had begun by describing the prostitutes as "creatures" and is now called that same thing. Has she essentially become what she has feigned? Fantomina's mastery of her various roles has led to the fusion of her characters into parts of her true self.

Fantomina's ability to slip in and out of different characters, even varying her handwriting in her letters to Beauplaisir from Fantomina, the Widow Bloomer and Incognita, demonstrates her mastery of performance. The narrator notes:

> …she was so admirably skill'd in the Art of feigning, that she had the Power of putting on almost what Face she pleas'd, and knew so exactly how to form her Behaviour to the Character she represented, that all of the Comedians at both Playhouses are infinitely short of her Performances: She could vary her very Glances, tune her Voices to Accents the most different imaginable from those in which she spoke when she appear'd herself (21).

Fantomina surpasses even professional actors in her ability to mimic characters that reside in different social categories and whose lifestyles differ greatly. Even when not in character, she seems to still be performing, "appearing" as herself rather than "being" herself. When she attends functions in society without a disguise, Fantomina must still perform – as if she still has her virtue and is a conventional woman. There is still a layer of performance in Fantomina's need to appear virtuous and modest. She acts out the conventions of propriety – and therefore she is, in this sense, duplicitous. Fantomina's private impropriety illustrates the dual nature of virtue. The importance of virtue is a matter of social legibility – if others view a woman as virtuous, than she is a virginal and proper young lady. Fantomina's ability to keep her true identity secret therefore preserves her virtue despite the fact that, in reality, she has indulged her sexual desires several times. The virtuous woman should not be concerned with the physical pleasure provided by a man as Fantomina is; in this way, her apparent virtue is simply another expertly performed role for the purpose of satisfying society's expectations.[26] The Lady is never able to stop acting, therefore, because she is even acting when she is trying to be herself – she cannot give up her

[26] Fantomina, through her performance, is able to objectify a man instead of be objectified. As Potter notes, she "gains pleasure in this relationship not from such presumed feminine attractions as love, security, and domestic peace, but from her knowledge of her sexual and manipulative power, her superior understanding and control of the situation, and the pure physical pleasure to be gained in gratifying her inclination for Beauplaisir's objectified body" (Potter, 181).

ploy. When she is first performing, she has her doubts: "Three or four times did she open her Mouth to confess her real Quality" (4). What is the Lady's real quality? Can she even recognize her true self? Her ability to manipulate her social legibility indicates that perhaps she cannot – the fact that the roles are so easy for her to play indicates that her identity lies not only in her opposition to the conventional woman but also in her life as one great performance:

> Slippers, and a Nightgown loosely flowing, had been the Garb in which he has left the languishing Fantomina; - Lac'd, and adorn'd with all the Blaze of Jewels, has he, in less than an Hour after, beheld at the Royal Chapel, the Palace Gardens, Drawing-Room Opera, or Play, the Haughty Awe-Inspiring Lady (12).

Here, it seems as if identity is fluid – all Fantomina needs to do is change her "Garb," and she transforms from one identity to the next, the "Haughty Awe- Inspiring Lady." She is so good at changing her identity that she forms five separate versions of herself.[27]

When discussing theatricality and identity, one cannot ignore that the entire story is framed by acting. To better understand the importance of performance, one must revisit the novella's opening scene. *Fantomina* begins in a playhouse, where Haywood's mysterious heroine is enjoying not only the performances unfolding on stage but also those in the audience. She is fascinated with the attentions being paid to the prostitutes in the playhouse – over whom the gentlemen are fawning. The lady has just come to London from the country, where she was raised, and is not accustomed to such behavior. Coming to London from the country allows this young lady to start fresh and – as a stranger – to behave in whatever manner she wishes (especially because no one is really supervising her, except "an unsuspecting Aunt" {10}). Not only is she "performing" the urban social custom of visiting the playhouse to see and be seen, but she is also cogitating on how to discover more about why men are so attentive to the prostitutes

[27] In analysis of this quote, Ros Ballaster adds, "Thus 'Fantomina' turns class demarcations of place that habitually impede women's mobility to her advantage" (*Seductive Forms*, 190). Her "garb" illustrates her fluid movement among vastly different classes.

in the place that represents the crux of theatricality and deception in London. Some critics argue that Fantomina's disguises are stereotypical representations of the professions available to women in the early eighteenth-century (prostitute, maid, widower, or heiress).[28] However, it is obvious that despite her range of performances, Fantomina is most like a prostitute, proffering herself for the bodily enjoyment of a man, as well as for the satisfaction of her own not only sexual, but perhaps also mental, desires. She thrives on her ability to continually trick Beauplaisir and is almost as satisfied by her successes as she is by the time she spends with him in bed. Therefore, she profits, even though it is not monetary, from her artifice. Perhaps Fantomina's real desire *is* to perform her own power; she finds exercising this power as pleasurable as sex with Beauplaisir.

Fantomina's ability to perform her roles so professionally is reflected in the form of Haywood's story. Just as Fantomina is able to climax multiple times, both figuratively in her successes and literally each time she gains pleasure from sleeping with Beauplaisir, the story itself climaxes with each of the Fantomina's successful tricks. The form of Haywood's story presents a woman's public sexual desire and reinforces the unique power that Fantomina continually exerts.[29] This idea also highlights an anatomical difference between males and females that parallels the female sexual experience: during intercourse, while men can only climax once at a certain point in time, a woman can climax multiple times. Through this manipulation of fiction, Haywood is able to give Fantomina pleasure, as well as a sense of

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[28] Prescott points this out in her chapter, noting that the way Beauplaisir treats these different characters is also representative of how men treat the women in these various professions. This is reflective of the small amount of opportunities that were available to women during the time (280-281). It also comments on Beauplaisir's acting abilities, as he treats each character according to her social station.

[29] Potter describes the importance of the multi-climactic structure to the story by referring to it as a "feminized structure": "It is this feminized structure of multiple climaxes that is at least partly responsible for [Haywood's] exclusion from some histories of the novel as a mere serializer of experiences rather than an organizer of a larger, ostensibly more significant single-climax narrative" (Potter, 175).

superiority. Taking this idea even further, one might note that the men who predominantly create literary works contemporary to *Fantomina* – who create those "ostensibly more significant single-climax narratives" - mirror this male short-coming while women often take the novel further, to multiple entertaining and exciting moments, and therefore create literature with a more expansive view of the perennial cycles of life.[30] The multi-climactic narrative feminizes passion in *Fantomina*, and demonstrates the female need to express desire.[31] In this light, many could view the ending of Fantomina as anticlimactic, especially considering her multiple climaxes throughout the story; what some readers may view as a conventional punishment for a coquette, critics view as empowering. When one considers the fact that, despite getting pregnant, Fantomina is *not* forced to marry and be a mother, but rather is sent to a convent to live among other independent women, this ending is in fact the height of Fantomina's individuality and is just another climax in her story.[32]

Fantomina's escape from consequences during the story demonstrates Haywood's appropriation of the role of male libertine from Beauplaisir to Fantomina. Fantomina essentially exerts her sexual power in public while in disguise, defying the typical view of the woman as private, domestic, and even humble. Still, she is able to maintain her persona as a virtuous, deferent woman in the public eye by playing many different roles, like an actress in a play. Not only does Fantomina "perform" the daily behaviors of a virtuous lady, but she also performs her

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[30] (Potter, 175).

[31] Potter, therefore, asserts that "the feminization of language and passion are communicated sub textually through a multi-climactic structure that not only allows, but speaks through the female orgasm" (Potter, 176). Not only is Fantomina empowered by her ability to trick her male counterpart, she is also empowered meta-textually by the form of the novella.

[32] See Potter's "The Language of Feminised Sexuality: Gendered Voice in Eliza Haywood's Love in Excess and Fantomina."

other roles to fulfill her desires.[33] Fantomina is able to keep a firm grasp on her personal scripts so that she is able to maintain her five coherent – though vastly different – identities.

It is important to note that the emotions expressed in performance are no less genuine because they are being expressed through roles that could be played on a theatre stage; because women generally have fewer outlets through which to express feelings of desire and sexual dominance than even Fantomina does, performing them is an obvious (yet seldom exercised) necessity.[34] The technique of repetition – in the sense that Fantomina repeats her behaviors – reasserts the fact that feminine desire is an emotion that exists and needs to be addressed. She recognizes when Beauplaisir tires of her and forms a new identity to repeat her behaviors and continue to carry on her affairs with him. She is able to repeat her behavior continually throughout the story and therefore actively acquire pleasure for herself. Repeatable behavior is an integral element of performativity, because if Fantomina were unable to repeat Celia's behavior or the Widow Bloomer's grief, she would be unable to keep up her game. Even when she is performing social norms, she must be able to repeat the conversations she is taught are appropriate or she would be suspected of impropriety. In order to convincingly perform, she must be able to repeat her accents, her different types of handwriting and the ways she dresses. This repetition parallels the idea of the multi-climactic story line and reinforces the claim that Haywood challenges cultural and literary tradition by implying that if a woman can be a good

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[33] This concept recalls the importance of the masquerade. While some might conclude that a woman's "mask," artifice or performance reflects her inconstancy and vice (Prescott), others conclude that it enables her ability to more honestly express her emotions: "As performance enables the expression of female emotions, Haywood casts the impulse to probe beneath a woman's 'mask' in search of her true sentiments as misleading…In *Fantomina*, the heroine understands and implements strategies of self-conscious performance, indulging in her sexual desires and yet avoiding the unhappy fate of other promiscuous heroines" (Anderson, 2).

[34] Anderson furthers the previous argument that performance allows for honest female expression by noting that "Haywood establishes the moment of performance as a moment of expression- a chance for the woman to achieve an external representation of an internal emotion…[In this way] Haywood links the actress and her role: the emotion she has planned to display is not feigned" (Anderson, 3).

actor, she can get the better of a man. Additionally, Fantomina acts out "performances of seduction" in many different ways without concern for consequences in order to create a female identity.[35]

The malleability of social roles in *Fantomina* extends to the concept of the fluid nature of language in the story. Haywood presents a character who is able to seamlessly move through the social classes and play various roles in order to manipulate both a gentleman and the society around her; by mastering Beauplaisir's desires, she is able to beguile him at once out in the open, but at the same time still in secret.[36] Fantomina "had 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*; and having managed her Affairs so as to secure the one, grew perfectly easy with the Remembrance she had forfeited the *other*" (Haywood, 11). The words "reputation" and "virtue" essentially deviate here – virtue is only important for reputation's sake but the two concepts do not coincide. Fantomina is seemingly virtuous and therefore reputable as the Haughty Lady. Her virtue, however, is a façade – as is her reputation. In reality, the Lady is reputable but not truly virtuous because when she is performing she is not chaste. What is virtue but a publicly ascribed notion of chastity? It has already been proven as duplicitous – but it is important to recognize that it also engenders a sense of fluidity much like the language Haywood uses throughout the story. Fantomina is now, in reality, no longer virtuous, but if she pretends to be so, others will perceive her as such. Because she is perceived this way, she becomes the person she portrays – not who she really is. The true identity of the woman does not matter, but rather who she plays is

[35] Anderson also notes that the prostitute's performance is planned, "For the prostitute, the theatrical performance merely provides a backdrop for her performance of seduction, a ritual into which both parties enter with set expectations; while flirtatious banter provides variety, the conclusion is predetermined" (6). This highlights the importance of planned performance to success. If the prostitute performs her predetermined role successfully, she is paid.

[36] This performance achieves "the effective expression of female passions which would, in another setting, be disastrous and unavailing" (Anderson, 1).

the person who she becomes in society. If the public knows nothing about this loss of chastity, Fantomina remains virtuous. Fantomina quickly adjusts to the loss of her virtue, preferring to enjoy her power instead:

> 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 Intreague being a Secret, my Disgrace will be so too: - I shall hear no Whispers as I pass – She is forsaken: the odious word *forsaken* will never wound my Ears; nor will my Wrongs excite either the Mirth or 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, the yielding Fantomina, he will revere and esteem the virtuous, the reserv'd lady (11).

Though Fantomina still considers Beauplaisir her "undoer," she only does so in the sense that he has taken her virginity – but, to the outside world, she is still the "virtuous, the reserv'd lady" – so she is undone but not ruined. Just as virtue and reputation are fluid terms in the story, so are the words "character," "person" and "face."

The word "character" is often used throughout the novella, though it shifts in meaning between moral character and fictional character. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines character in several different ways. Five of these definitions directly correlate with Haywood's representation of the word:

> The estimate formed of a person's qualities; reputation: when used without qualifying epithet implying 'favourable estimate, good repute'; The face or features as betokening moral qualities; personal appearance; The sum of the moral and mental qualities which distinguish an individual or a race, viewed as a homogeneous whole; the individuality impressed by nature and habit on man or nation; mental or moral constitution; A symbol, emblem, figure; an expression or direct representation; Moral qualities strongly developed or strikingly displayed; distinct or distinguished character; character worth speaking of (OED).

The first definition directly correlates to the duplicity of virtue that Fantomina demonstrates. If a person's character is defined by her reputation, than Fantomina's moral character remains undisturbed by her promiscuous behavior. As long as she seems virtuous, then her character is

untouched. However, the second definition undercuts the first and refers to character as one's moral worth and is sometimes used in Fantomina's story. The third definition is reminiscent of the first: a person's outward appearance defines her character. This could, then, highlight the way character is used very often throughout the novella, as a word to describe Fantomina's fictional character (her various disguises). The fourth definition is similar to the third in that it represents the concept of the fictional character, and the fifth definition combines the outward appearance and the moral character to create a more holistic version of the word. By the fifth definition's standards, one's character is made up of both her moral characters and her outward appearances; because most of the time Fantomina's moral and fictional characters do not coalesce, she does not meet the requirements of this definition.

The first instance in which the word "character" becomes significant is when Beauplaisir acquaints himself with Fantomina and she, "…was resolv'd to receive his Devoirs as a Town – Mistress, imagining a world of satisfaction to herself in engaging him in the Character of such a one…he would…find himself refused by a Woman, who he supposed granted her Favours without Exception" (Haywood, 5). Here, the word has a double meaning: not only does it refer to the character of a prostitute – one who is sexually promiscuous by nature – but it also refers to one of Fantomina's other roles. The double meaning here foreshadows how Fantomina's moral character will become entangled with all of her fictional characters. This entanglement is not resolved at any point, because Haywood's novella is named after one of her heroine's aliases – "Fantomina" – rather than after her true identity. The next appearance of the word "character" comes not long after the first; this time it is much more specific to Fantomina's moral character: "…[she] forbore discovering her true Name and Quality, for the Reasons she had done before, resolving, if he boasted of this Affair, he should not have it in his Power to touch her Character"

(9). Here, her reputation is derived from her moral character; however, as was already established, the two do not necessarily coincide. Her fictional characters might negatively impact Fantomina's morality, but since her reputation remains intact, her moral and virtuous character – though a façade – does as well. Even after Fantomina gives birth, she remains *outwardly* virtuous because English society remains unaware of her behavior. Though Fantomina's behavior nearly becomes public when she goes into labor, society does not find out that she has given birth because she does so in private. The shift from moral character to fictional character is evident as Haywood uses "character" in the middle of the story as an indication of the latter: "The Widow Bloomer triumph'd some Time longer over the Heart of this Inconstant, but at length her Sway was at an End, and she sunk in this Character, to the same Degree of Tastelessness, as she had done before in that of Fantomina and Celia" (25). In this fictional character – the guise of Widow Bloomer – Fantomina still cannot maintain Beauplaisir's affections for long. The phrase "she sunk in this Character" not only refers to the loss of her lover's affections but could also refer to the further "sinking" of the Lady's moral worth with each character she undertakes, with each time she violates the concept of virtue (or, at least, how her true morality *would* sink in the eyes of society if others knew of her ploy).

However, the end of the story comes with a shift back to the moral character in a description of Incognita's mysteriousness:

> …when she was told how inquisitive he had been concerning her Character and Circumstances, she could not forbear laughing heartily to think of the Tricks she had play'd 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, which to other Women is the greatest Curse, a Means to make herself more bless'd (31).

Here, Fantomina finds Beauplaisir's desire to know her moral character entertaining because there are so many different layers of characters and so many different types of morality that she has performed. She has tricked him into believing that Incognita differs greatly from Fantomina, Celia, and Widow Bloomer. At this point, her moral character should no longer remain a mystery to him, and she finds entertainment in the triumph over female vulnerability. By the end of the story, Fantomina is forced to put an end to her performances and characters when her "severely virtuous" mother arrives. However, as has been proven, she *cannot* stop performing lest she face disaster. Because she can no longer perform her roles, her behavior is punished with a pregnancy. Once she is no longer able to perfect her characters (both moral and fictional) Fantomina loses her at own game and is nearly relegated to the position of a conventional woman – as a mother.

Another pertinent definition of "character" in the *Oxford English Dictionary* is, "The style of writing peculiar to any individual; handwriting" (OED). Signing something is a way to identify the self and– combined with one's handwriting, which is unique to the self – authenticate a person's identity. However, Fantomina is able to alter both her handwriting and her signature – and therefore her identity – multiple times in the exchange of letters between Beauplaisir and Fantomina, the Widow Bloomer and Incognita. Fantomina is able to expertly alter her "character" by altering her handwriting for each of her personas: "Then writing a Letter to Beauplaisir, in a Character vastly different from either of those she had made use of, as Fantomina, or the fair Widow Bloomer" (28). Here, "Character" refers not only to her new creation, Incognita, but also to her different handwriting and therefore, according to the OED, to her "style of writing peculiar to any individual." It seems the Lady has managed to conjure three

different individual styles of writing to match her individual disguises, characters, persons, and faces.

The words "person" and "face" are also used in a fluid manner to demonstrate the malleability of identity. First, person is used to refer to Fantomina's initial role: "She was naturally vain, and receiv'd no small pleasure in hearing herself prais'd, tho' in the Person of another, and a suppos'd Prostitute" (2). Here, "Person" and "Character" are interchangeable and indicate the fictional role that Fantomina plays. However, later, Incognita uses the same word to refer to her "true identity" in her letter to Beauplaisir: "But I need not go about to raise your Curiosity, by giving you any Idea of what my Person is" (29). Beauplaisir's frustration about not knowing Incognita's true identity is extremely ironic because, in reality, he does not know the "person" of any of the three other women with whom he has previously slept. Beauplaisir does not know that Fantomina has five distinct faces and identities – nor does he actually recognize any of them: "He look'd in her Face, and fancy'd, as many others had done, that she very much resembled that Lady whom she really was; but the vast Disparity that appear'd between their Characters prevented him from entertaining even the most distant Thought that they cou'd be the same" (3). This difference, both in their outward moral characters (the Haughty Lady seems virtuous, Fantomina is merely a prostitute who would inherently lack morality) and their physical looks, keeps Beauplaisir from recognizing that he is romancing the same woman over and over again. Though the women seem to look similar, Beauplaisir is tricked into thinking all of his women are different because Fantomina is adept at changing both her fictional and moral persons. So frustrated with Incognita, "…he went out of the House determin'd never to re-enter it, till she should pay the price of his Company with the Discovery of her Face and Circumstances" (35). What he does not know is that discovering her "face" will not actually

reveal anything because her identity encompasses five different faces. Tension exists among her facial, moral, and fictional characters.

Fantomina is able to adeptly act out these five different roles and therefore conquer instead of being conquered. This idea is highlighted by the fact that she continues to re-name herself and easily change her identity. By giving herself many different names, faces and disguises, Fantomina is able to manipulate her identity in a way no one else can. Though a husband might, perhaps, be able to control the change of a woman's last name, no one but the woman herself may change the first. The first name is the identity given to a child by a parent, and its malleability by the distinguished lady in *Fantomina* lends an undeniable power to the heroine. When Beauplaisir recognizes that Incognita has control over her identity by not revealing her true name, he becomes extremely frustrated not only because she will not tell him anything, but also because he does not like knowing that the woman in the relationship has the control: "He was so much out of Humour, however, at the Disappointment of his Curiosity, that he resolv'd never to make a second Visit […] He resented, - he once more entreated, - he said all that Man could do, to prevail on her to unfold the Mystery" (Haywood, 35). The laughable weakness of Beauplaisir reflects the man's need to know his lover's identity; however, he is unable to be steadfast in his resolution to stay away from Incognita and displays his weakness by continuing to return to her bed despite his resolution not to. At this point, Beauplaisir has been fully conquered. Clearly, the woman's control over her identity in this work gives her an unprecedented ability to conquer her sexual desires and her lover. Fantomina's ability to conceal her true identity is remarkable, and in her last role, Incognita, she flaunts her talent. She comes closer to her true identity (in society, at least), a wealthy lady, but refuses to remove the mask she wears when with Beauplaisir. His curiosity surrounding her identity leads to anger because,

without knowing her, he is unable to truly conquer her. Through her role, Fantomina turns the usual male role of conqueror against Beauplaisir and takes complete control of the situation. Though Beauplaisir thinks he has conquered four different women, in reality he himself has been conquered four different times.[37] Revealing herself would not only mean the end of her control over her sexual desires but would also signal a shift of power to the man with whom she has been having multiple affairs. Beauplaisir is not used to losing control of his sexual situation: "…not imagining this Incognita varied so much from the Generality of her Sex, as to be able to refuse the Knowledge of any Thing to the Man she lov'd with that Transcendency of Passion she profess'd, and which his many Successes with the Ladies gave him Encouragement enough to believe" (30). Ironically, not one of the women with whom he has recently slept have actually professed "Knowledge of any Thing to the Man she lov'd with that Transcendency of Passion" – he has been encouraged to believe so because Fantomina has performed so well.

In reality, Beauplaisir knows nothing about the women with whom he has been engaging in relationships. Even when Beauplaisir thinks he can trick Incognita into revealing her identity by sleeping at her "home," she bests him by making the room extremely dark: "He was still in the same Darkness as before" (34). Not only does the darkness refer to the physical lighting in the room, but it also refers to the fact that Beauplaisir remains figuratively "in the dark" with regard to his lover's identity.

Though Beauplaisir is ignorant of the "plays" in which he has unwittingly participated with Fantomina, he does perform in similar ways in his interactions with women. Beauplaisir adjusts his behavior to suit each of his conquests.[38] Just as his contemporaries carry out the

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[37] Anderson adds that, "For Fantomina the mask is representative of the performance that allows her to articulate her genuine desires" (7).

[38] Ballaster comments on Beauplaisir's acting as well: "Beauplaisir's own intentness on 'acting' the part of the sincere lover, of course, favours her own deceit. The libertine driven by lust only 'sees' in the woman

norms ascribed by society, Beauplaisir (upon first acquaintance) acts out the norms associated with treating each type of person Fantomina claims to be. With the lower-class disguises, Fantomina and Celia, Beauplaisir is coarse and forward. With Widow Bloomer, he is reserved and calculating, and with Incognita he behaves like a high–class gentleman. For example, when Beauplaisir first approaches Fantomina, he treats her like he would any other prostitute. However, he comes to realize wooing her will take more effort:

> …but perceiving she had a Turn of Wit, and a genteel Manner in her Raillery, beyond what is frequently to be found among those Wretches, who are for the most part Gentlewomen but by Necessity, few of 'em having had an education suitable to what they affect to appear, he chang'd the Form of his Conversation, and shew'd her it was not because he understood no better, that he had made use of Expressions so little polite (3)

Just as Fantomina acts the part of a prostitute, Beauplaisir modifies his behavior in order to impress and seduce her. Ironically, during this interchange of fiction in which both characters are playing parts, they talk most freely: "…she found a vast deal of Pleasure in conversing with him in this free and unrestrain'd Manner" (3). The two characters are able to speak freely when playing parts separate from what is socially acceptable. The irony is even more evident when one realizes that the *actual* play is still proceeding in the background when they are creating their own production. Beauplaisir again transforms his character when he encounters Celia, where he is less concerned with wit (she is just a country maid, after all) and more concerned with the language of consumption and desire. Later, when he meets Widow Bloomer, Beauplaisir again molds his conversation to what he thinks would engage her attentions: "…it came into his Head to make Tryal, she who seem'd equally susceptible of Sorrow, might not also be so too of Love [...] With a gay Air, therefore, though accompany'd with the greatest Modesty and Respect, he turned the Conversation" (19). He feels that by using these devices, he will be able to seduce a

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the image of his own desire, casting her as a victim in his own narcissistic drama" (*Seductive Forms,* 190).

woman who is so devastated by the loss of her husband, so he alters his "character" to create the impression that he is a respectful, understanding man who just wants to help her. Haywood explains that "he did not, however, offer, as he had done to Fantomina and Celia, to urge his Passion directly to her, but by a thousand little softening Artifices, which he well knew how to use, gave her leave to guess he was enamour'd" (20). The irony here is that he regards himself as so adept at using "softening Artifices," but he cannot recognize the artifices being used to trick him.[39] The difference between Fantomina's acting and that of Beauplaisir is that the Lady is in control of her performances; she recognizes that Beauplaisir treats each of her characters differently, whereas the man is ignorant of the trickery he is involved in and simply believes he is very good at attracting women with his wiles.

Fantomina's unconventional role as sexual conqueror throughout the story leads one to question the novella's most conventional ending – in which she gives birth and is banished to a convent. The charade is finally revealed, only after Fantomina is forced to cease her plotting once her "severely virtuous" mother arrives in London. Her mother is a symbol of virtue and social responsibility – concepts that Fantomina has seemingly forgotten while she has carried on her charade.[40] Perhaps the ending is conventional so that an undoubtedly outraged reader might be pacified by Fantomina's punishment.[41] However, Fantomina retains some power in the fact that she quite possibly could have continued her charade if she had not gone into labor in a public place. She is no longer able to hide her identity when she goes into labor (as a result of her

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[39] Prescott makes an interesting point regarding Beauplaisir's behavior: "The way in which Beauplaisir moves from woman to woman (or disguise to disguise) also provides the reader with a warning as to the inconstancy of men as well as suggesting the transient nature of desire itself" (280).

[40] Prescott accurately describes the effect that Fantomina's mother's return has: "The heroine's freedom has already been severely curtailed by the appearance of her mother who demands her daughter's return to the social codes of behaviour which her fantasy life has momentarily released her from" (281).

[41] Prescott notes, "Just as the heroine's story has to end when she becomes a mother, so too does Haywood's narrative have to succumb to the conventional demands of the amatory plot with *Fantomina* leaving the country to hide her shame in a French monastery" (281).

female body) because she cannot escape the natural progression of giving birth.[42] Her appearance changes in a way she cannot control as she contorts her face and body in pain – and she is forced to give up her ploy.[43] Despite this fact, she still triumphs over the ignorant Beauplaisir. At one point, Fantomina exclaims, "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" (Haywood, 24). Fantomina's description of the male gender as the "deceiving kind" is extremely ironic as she is continually deceiving Beauplaisir; this comment reinforces the idea that Fantomina, through fiction, is purposely forcing a switch in gender roles that renders her the conqueror and Beauplaisir the conquered. Later, the narrator notes that Fantomina chuckles at how many times she has tricked Beauplaisir and does not regret her actions; her lack of sincere remorse, even when she is sent to the convent reinforces this notion. Fantomina ultimately joins the ranks of other independent women and does not have to be a mother or wife. She does not have to live the life she has continuously scorned throughout the story by marrying the father of her child:

> Possession naturally abates the Vigour of Desire, and I should have had, at best, but a cold, insipid, husband-like Lover in my arms; but by these Arts of passing on him as a new Mistress whenever the Ardour, which alone makes Love a Blessing, begins to diminish, for the former one, I have him always raving, wild, impatient, longing, dying (31).

Fantomina is able to recognize that men seemingly cannot be satisfied with only one woman; she comes to this realization while she essentially plays the part of a man. Exercising her free choice

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[42] Ballaster adds that, "She finally goes into labour at a ball...Haywood's description of this moment restores her heroine to the tradition of the hystericized victim. Her body signifies, against her will, the secret of her active desire in a grotesque parody of the love-struck virgin's paralyses and fevers at the scene of seduction" (191). The language Haywood uses to describe Fantomina's labor pains, which return her to her position as aristocratic Lady, reflect the language used to describe the conventional English heroine (and woman). Ballaster continues by noting that though she tries, a woman cannot escape her place as female because of her corporeal traits: "Once again, the indomitable materialism of the body defeats the woman's play with the ambiguity of signification. Pregnancy is the irrefutable sign of female difference that calls a halt to the woman's 'mimicry' of femininity" (191).

[43] This was a point brought up by Prescott in her chapter (281).

while in disguise, she is able to treat Beauplaisir like a man might treat his mistresses, controlling when and how the two lovers interact. Because she is able to come to this realization, no man is ever truly able to "possess her" and therefore "abate her desire"; she avoids ever having to experience the "cold, insipid, husband-like Lover." Instead, the lady whose name is never revealed is sent away to live among other women and to create and perform yet another identity – one that must endure permanently – in a new place.

Chapter 3

Fiction as a Mode of Edification in *Northanger Abbey*

Catherine Morland is Jane Austen's unlikely heroine in *Northanger Abbey*. She is neither exceptionally beautiful nor strikingly witty, and her parents love her nonetheless. Catherine does not do anything particularly heroic in the story; in fact, she is the opposite of Fantomina because she does not consciously pursue any situation where she is the center of the action. Her interactions with others, however, do make her a compelling subject to follow throughout the novel. She evolves from tomboy child to ignorant teenager and finally to pretty young woman. The key to Catherine's emotional evolution is, ironically, the novel reading she does while at Bath (specifically, her indulgence in gothic novels); this is ironic because it is the very genre Austen sets out to satirize throughout *Northanger Abbey*. Upon careful examination, it becomes apparent that Austen is in fact satirizing the *denigration* of novels; the endearing characters she creates, such as Henry Tilney and Catherine, can be assumed to share the narrator's feeling that novels are works of unquestionable worth, "in which the greatest powers of the mind are displayed, in which the most thorough knowledge of human nature, the happiest delineation of its varieties, the liveliest effusions of wit and humor are conveyed to the world in the best chosen language" (Austen, 23). As is evidenced in the narrator's explicit comments in *Northanger Abbey*, as well as in Catherine's evolution in the understanding of others such as General Tilney and Isabella Thorpe, Jane Austen at once satirizes the novel and praises its ability to edify even the most ignorant of minds. Although the heroine's fantasies become outlandish, Catherine's ability to truly understand people is ironically sharpened by her repeatedly confusing fiction and reality. Eventually, Catherine is able to better understand the world she lives in and is able to enjoy a happy ending. She marries Henry Tilney, who is a member of the gentry, and moves up

the social hierarchy from middle class country girl to gentrified wife. Fiction ultimately provides this mobility for Catherine by providing Henry with a medium through which he could interact with her while also empowering the heroine by strengthening her mind.

Through Catherine, Austen comments on the edifying capabilities of the written word, even in novels that may have been considered – by gentlemen – to be "womanly" or silly.[44] She addresses this notion in the beginning of *Northanger Abbey*: "Yes, novels; for I will not adopt that ungenerous and impolitic custom so common with novel writers, of degrading by their contemptuous censure the very performances, to the number of which they are themselves adding" (22). Austen's comparison of novels to "performances" recalls Haywood's emphasis on acting in *Fantomina*; performance and fiction here align to empower females. Austen also makes a mockery of supposedly useful quotes from prestigious works by Pope, Gray, Thompson and Shakespeare, whose words are beautiful but are not enabling in the way that novels will be. For example: "From Pope, she learnt to censure those who 'bear about the mockery of woe'" (3). After spending a great deal of time explaining that Catherine does not enjoy such prestigious works as those by Pope and Shakespeare, Austen mocks them by saying the heroine memorized the prose, yet she really does not understand what it means and it does not help her at all. This is further highlighted by the fact that Catherine learns so much from novels – which are given far less credence in society than the aforementioned works. Austen comments further on the unwarranted lack of respect accorded to novels and in some ways parallels it to the inequality between men and women:

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[44] Critic Ros Ballaster asserts that, "Accounts of the eighteenth-century novel incline either towards an aristocratic preference for the revelation of the novel's true nobility (deriving from classical or archetypal sources) or towards a more whiggish, democratizing impulse which casts the novel as the hero of the illegitimate, the marginal, and the underdog" (199). Austen is defending novels against this "whiggish impulse" to claim that the novel is only read by (and thereby is only entertaining to) marginal figures like women.

> And while the abilities of the nine- hundredth abridger of the *History of England*, or of the man who collects and publishes in a volume some dozen lines of Milton, Pope, and Prior, with a paper from the *Spectator*, and a chapter from Sterne, are eulogized by a thousand pens – there seems almost a general wish of decrying the capacity and undervaluing the labour of the novelist and of slighting the performances which have only genius, wit and taste to recommend them (22).

Austen denigrates the societal praise afforded to a man who collects famous male –authored works because it is so much greater than that afforded to the author (especially the female author) of a novel. Even a man who does nothing creative, who simply collects and then publishes works of other male authors, is given a greater literary stature than a female author. Just as men are given more opportunities than women, male authors and publishers of political works are given more credit than female writers of novels. Here again, Austen refers to political or instructional works created by men as "lines" and "papers" while she refers to works created by novelists – presumably female novelists – as "performances." Just as Austen, as a female writer, exhibits her agency through her "performance" as omniscient narrator and writer, Catherine exhibits her agency as a female who uses the fiction she reads to develop her own character. Clearly, a female needs fiction and acting to self-actualize. Austen presents Catherine's transformation as a manifestation of the importance of fiction in the development of the female mind.

Northanger Abbey's heroine possesses a distinct power– the power to transform her surroundings through fiction. Catherine's imagination allows her to form her own sense of reality – and her own opinion. Ironically, Catherine's naïveté and subsequent paranoia derived from her avid readings of Gothic novels lead to her self-actualization as a person and woman. By satirizing social norms and by highlighting the edifying power of the novel, Austen shows that, through fiction, a person such as Catherine can develop into a better human being even without

reading the works of supposed contemporary importance. As the narrator in *Northanger Abbey* points out, reading a novel is a better path to self – and worldly – understanding than, for example, reading an ostensibly more instructional work. Austen comments:

> Now, had the same young lady been engaged with a volume of the *Spectator*, instead of such a work, how proudly would she have produced the book, and told its name; though the chances must be against her being occupied by any part of that voluminous publication, of which either the matter or manner would not disgust a young person of taste: the substance of its papers so often consisting in the statement of improbable circumstances, unnatural characters, and topics of conversation which no longer concern anyone living; and their language, too, frequently so coarse as to give no very favourable idea of the age that could endure it (23).

Here, the author implies that Joseph Addison's *Spectator* – an instructional work full of political and contemporary commentary – is full of "improbable circumstances" and "unnatural characters," thereby implying that novels are more realistic than such a work. A young lady is praised by others for reading popular, supposedly edifying texts (such as the *Spectator*), but is looked down upon for reading a novel. The irony of this fact is highlighted by Catherine's ultimate transformation: she learns more from Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* than from Addison's *The Spectator*– perhaps because it appeals to those emotions, those passions, one is supposed to conceal when performing social norms. Catherine reads works from authors such as Pope and Richardson as she grows up – works from which she would, presumably, be able to learn a great deal about the world.[45] However, she does not like them much or learn much from them despite her impressionable personality. Alternately, with her pliable mind, Catherine is able to learn a great deal from gothic novels. Through this fiction, she discovers the realities of the world outside of her country home.[46] Austen implies that these supposedly didactic works truly

[45] Jane Nardin makes this point in her book *Those Elegant Decorums.*

[46] Nardin points out that "she must discover for herself the characteristic ways in which human evil manifests itself in polite English society" (63). She adds that "this probably represents Jane Austen's considered opinion of the educational value of didactic fiction for the average young mind" – that is to

have little educational value, and novels are more effective for teaching young minds because they engage the reader's imagination by appealing to emotions and therefore capturing the attention of the young reader. By infusing her story with probable circumstances (though Catherine takes this idea to the extreme), natural characters, and topics of conversation that concern contemporary audiences, Austen shows that her own novel may be more effective pedagogically than popular papers of the day.[47]

The events at the beginning of *Northanger Abbey* create the sense that the ensuing story will be a satire of the very genre it undertakes; Austen spends pages mentioning every way in which Catherine Morland is neither a good nor typical heroine: "There she fell miserably short of the true heroic height" (Austen, 4).[48] This heroic height to which Austen refers is one in which the heroine is supposed to perfect all of society's expectations for women by writing sonnets, playing the pianoforte, and drawing. Here, the reader is already exposed to the need for Catherine to more strictly adhere to her "role" as a woman in society – to behave in such a way that is acceptable for her to survive in Bath. Catherine, at Bath, learns to better follow social rules, unlike Isabella and others around her, who lie and cheat to achieve what they want. Catherine's ability to perform garners the attention of her perfect heroic counterpart, who notices how different she is from the other women at Bath. Austen shifts from direct meta-commentary

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say, that there is not much value in such fiction at all. Young minds must be fed with fiction in order to develop.

[47] Mary Poovey agrees, noting: "…Austen attempts to convert the pleasure generated by imaginative engagement into a didactic tool. As the 'productions' that provide 'more extensive and unaffected pleasure than those of any other literary corporation in the world,' novels are best suited for such education. For in the best novels, Austen continues in *Northanger Abbey*, 'the greatest powers of mind are displayed…" (77).

[48] John Hardy notes in *Jane Austen's Heroines,* "Even though the undercutting in the first two chapters might seem at first glance to be directed against Catherine, a more careful reading shows its primary target to be the conventional sentimental heroine" (1). This target becomes, therefore, Isabella, whose actions mirror those of a sentimental heroine who cares only for her own needs and disregards propriety. Not being this type, Catherine acts out society's norms while also self-actualizing and, as a true heroine, is rewarded for it at the end of the story.

to speaking through Henry, who points out society's demand for performance. For example, Henry mentions to Catherine that he understands her, saying: "With you, it is not, How is such a one likely to be influenced, What is the inducement most likely to act upon such a person's feelings, age, situation, and probable habits of life considered - but, How should *I* be influenced, What would be *my* inducement in acting so and so?" (105). The use of the words "probable habits of life" and "acting" indicates that perhaps Henry is sending Catherine a message – that she has to learn the proper ways to behave in Bath in order to interact with the people around her. Henry seems to enjoy Catherine's ineptitude and her efforts to do what she is supposed to do. He is attracted to her, it seems, because he recognizes her malleability and he can shape her. She is not like the women around her, who are "proper ladies" that strictly adhere to the norms of the Pump Room or the ball. Austen's ironic descriptions of the ways in which Catherine does not fit the heroic stereotype create the sense that Austen will continue to point out not only the woman's need to "act" but also the conventions of the contemporary novel. Here, there is a connection to the earlier discussion of acting and desire. Perhaps Austen sets out to defy the works of such authors as Haywood, whose *Fantomina* indicates that a woman must "act" in order to honestly express herself. Catherine's "acting" must necessarily lead her down a path in which her individuality is partially lost and an ability to perform in society is gained.

Austen, in a unique way, is in fact emphasizing the same ideals that Haywood does. Where Haywood implies, Austen speaks outright about society's expectations for a woman's passions by noting that, while she lives in the country, Catherine has not yet followed society's expectations for her: "without having inspired one real passion and without having excited even any admiration but what was very moderate and very transient" (4). Austen points out that a woman's passion in the eighteenth century is supposed to be moderate– and Catherine has not

even reached this societal expectation just as she has not yet reached her heroic height. Her passions have not yet been excited to the point where she must mediate them. As the story develops, it becomes apparent that reading and interpreting fiction is exactly the key to personal development. Austen, in fact, is satirizing the deprecation of novels and defends fiction by setting up an opposition between the ignominious John Thorpe and the endearing Henry Tilney. John Thorpe's views are congruent with the prevailing late eighteenth-century views of the contemporary English novel. Catherine absorbs Thorpe's proclamation that gentlemen do not read novels without noticing how ironic his statements are. John contradicts himself when he says, "Novels are so full of nonsense and stuff; there has not been a tolerably decent one come out since *Tom Jones*, except *The Monk,* I read that the other day; but as for all the others, they are the stupidest things in creation…"(32). This statement is also ironic because, as Thorpe continues, he undermines his own claims: "If I read any, it shall be Mrs. Radcliffe's…some fun and nature in them" (32). Here, it seems that Thorpe is implying that either he is not a gentleman (which the reader would not have a hard time believing) or that gentlemen do in fact read novels, even if they are unwilling to say so explicitly. These sentiments add to Thorpe's general distastefulness and contribute to Henry Tilney's amiability as a diametric opposite. Not only does Catherine mention that Tilney is a better coachman ("Henry drove so well, -so quietly- without making any disturbance" {126}) – an obvious contrast to Thorpe – but she also "reads" him as her perfect heroic counterpart when she first meets him: "This sort of mysteriousness, which is always so becoming in a hero, threw a fresh grace in Catherine's imagination around his person and manners, and increased her anxiety to know more of him" (20-1). Austen foreshadows, here, Catherine's development in her tendency to "read" others as if they are

characters in a novel by using her meta-commentary to point out that Catherine sees Henry as she might see a hero in a novel.

As Catherine "reads" Henry, her heroic counterpart decides he would like to interact with her. In order to become acquainted with her, he aligns his behavior with propriety in order to parody it. When Catherine and Henry dance and then sit down for tea for the first time, they satirize societal expectations by acting out the proper conversation for a first encounter between a lady and a gentleman. In this scene, Austen emphasizes that social norms are performance-oriented.[49] Further, while dancing with Catherine, Henry is able to openly interact with her, but he refrains and continues to behave in a way which accords with the society at Bath. Henry's hyperbolic tone and parody of social norms contributes to the sense that these norms are driven by fiction. Here, the reader of *Northanger Abbey* recognizes the voice of Austen, speaking through Henry but continuing with her meta-commentary:

> …he suddenly addressed her with – "I have hitherto been very remiss, madam, in the proper attentions of a partner here; I have not yet asked you how long you have been in Bath; whether you were ever here before; whether you have been at the Upper Rooms, the theatre, and the concert; and how you like the place altogether. I have been very negligent – but are you now at leisure to satisfy me in these particulars? If you are I will begin directly."
> "You need not give yourself that trouble, sir."
> "No trouble, I assure you, madam." Then forming his features into a set smile, and affectedly softening his voice, he added, with a simpering air, "Have you been long in Bath, madam?"
> "About a week, sir," replied Catherine, trying not to laugh.
> "Really!" with affected astonishment.
> "Why should you be surprised sir?"
> "Why, indeed!" said he in his natural tone. "But some emotion must appear to be raised by your reply…"
> "And are you altogether pleased with Bath?"
> "Yes- I like it very well."
> "Now I must give one smirk, and then we may be rational again" (Austen, 12).

[49] In his book, *Jane Austen's Heroines*, John Hardy characterizes this interaction between Henry and Catherine as a scripted one: "In the conversation that takes place between Henry and Catherine after they have been introduced, the butt of his lively banter is how people in their situation usually talk and behave" (2).

Catherine is unsure of whether or not she should laugh at his raillery – she is still learning her societal role. The language that Austen uses to express Henry's sarcasm – she uses the phrases "forming his features into a set smile" and "affectedly softening his voice" – is indicative of the importance of acting out social propriety in eighteenth-century England. Also, Austen's comment that Henry addresses Catherine in his "natural tone" reinforces the idea that sometimes the natural and the performative cannot be separated because the natural is only evident when opposed to strict adherence to repressive social norms. Henry points this out by using his "natural" tone to explain to Catherine how she *should* behave, as he is teaching her. Here, his "natural tone" and his instructive tone are the same, and it becomes evident that he is purposefully mocking social norms. Henry's natural tone is used when he is being instructive and is only natural in opposition to the repressed conversation he is parodying. After finishing the social script, Henry notes, "we may be rational again," implying that the scripts strip one of his individuality and capability to think and interact for himself. These scripts are no more "rational" or any less fabricated than are the plots of the gothic novel. Though Austen shows how prevalent performance is in every day life, perhaps she is implying that spontaneous banter should be favored. As is evident in Eliza Haywood's descriptions of the playhouse in London, the social norms that dictate behavior require that everyone play a "part" in interacting with others. Perhaps the only way to achieve spontaneous banter is, ironically, through first acting out the conversational script provided by society; similarly, in *Fantomina*, Beauplaisir and Fantomina interact in a more liberated way once they are both playing parts (she the prostitute and he an altered version of himself). Further, Austen indicates that perhaps these norms imprison members of society:

> [Catherine] was tired of being continually pressed against by people, the generality of whose faces possessed nothing to interest, and with all of whom she was so wholly unacquainted that she could not relieve the irksomeness of imprisonment by the exchange of a syllable with any of her fellow captives (9).

These "prisoners" in the socially normative Upper Rooms are all acting as if on stage, and the scenes enacted here are no less scripted than those that occur within the gothic novels that Catherine reads. Here, Austen foreshadows Catherine's confusion between reality and fiction in that she infuses this everyday social situation with the gothic trope of imprisonment. She associates, in this way, social performances as confining and inescapable. Therefore, fiction plays a decisive role in exposing what Austen views as the true nature of social behavior.

The importance of fiction to Catherine's understanding develops as she interacts with Henry Tilney. When the heroine tells Henry about the ideas that she has absorbed from Thorpe about gentlemen supposedly being averse to novels, her hero retorts: "The person, be it gentleman or lady, who has not pleasure in a good novel, must be intolerably stupid. I have read all Mrs. Radcliffe's works, and most of them with great pleasure" (85). By aligning Henry's likeable character with the view she wishes to highlight, Austen clearly establishes an impenetrable defense of the merits of the novel (even the gothic). Additionally, later on in the novel, when Henry drives Catherine in the carriage to Northanger Abbey and playfully reinforces her delusions about abbeys and gothic settings, his knowledge of the minutia of the genre again reminds the reader that gentlemen do, in fact, indulge in novels: "And are you prepared to encounter all the horrors that a building such as 'what one reads about' may produce- Have you a stout heart? - Nerves fit for sliding panels and tapestry" (127). Henry's mastery of the gothic furthers the courtship plot here – that is, he uses the fiction that Catherine knows and loves to get to know her better and to place himself within her thoughts. Every time she encounters

something like a gothic convention at the Abbey, she will think of him. He uses what Catherine knows – appealing to her emotions much like a gothic novel would – in order to strengthen her perception of his heroic nature. First, he performs the social norms of Bath with Catherine, and now he is re-performing them in this scene of early courtship in a way that he knows will heighten her passions. He uses fiction to further love within Austen's fiction novel; it is obvious that fiction penetrates every element of life – from social expectations to courtship. As such, the fiction-fueled courtship enables the plot within a novel; Austen reminds the reader that novels are not just silly, useless modes of entertainment that women use to pass the time, but rather they are captivating works that should be enjoyed by both sexes. Obviously, novels can even help men appeal to their love interests.

Henry knows how to get through to Catherine in order to teach and court her; he knows that he may only do so through the medium of fiction. Because he understands this, Henry demonstrates the most thorough understanding of Catherine of any character in the novel (except for the narrator). He is also her teacher, as he indulges in her fantasies about Northanger Abbey but also later brings her back into reality. In this way, Henry's opinions throughout the novel are usually correct. Though Henry emphasizes that women have limited – but existent – powers in their ability to refuse others, the Thorpes continually take Catherine's power of refusal from her through lying and coercion. For example, the Thorpes force Catherine to break her engagement with the Tilneys to spend time with them.[50] This coercion follows from a gothic trope and is integral in the transposition of gothic fiction into everyday life in *Northanger Abbey.* The gothic is not only evident in the scenes in which Catherine notices a mysterious chest, or in which she assumes that because he takes mysterious walks and is tyrannical, General Tilney is villainous in the gothic sense, but is also an important point to consider when investigating Catherine's

[50] See Claudia Johnson's book *Jane Austen: Women, Politics and the Novel* (36).

edification through fiction.[51] The gothic conventions in Austen's novel are not always obvious but are rather hidden in everyday social interactions, and Austen is again commenting on the performance that social norms require. Is *Northanger Abbey* implying that social behavior is, in a sense, fictional?

Henry's desire to teach Catherine is also extremely important, as is the heroine's readiness to learn. Not only does he try to teach her about landscapes in the beginning of the novel, but he also tries to teach her an integral lesson near the end of the story when she finally reveals her suspicions of his father (that in English society, such villainous behaviors would not go unpunished).[52] Henry defends Christian England, a place in which he claims law and order abide:

> Dear Miss Morland, consider the dreadful nature of the suspicions you have entertained. What have you been judging from? Remember the country and the age in which we live. Remember that we are English, that we are Christians. Consult your own understanding, your own sense of the probable, your own observation of what is passing around you. Does our education prepare us for such atrocities? Do our laws connive at them? Could they be perpetrated without being known, in a country like this, where social and literary intercourse is on such a footing, where every man is surrounded by a neighborhood of voluntary spies" (162)?

Ironically, Henry's description of Christian England is slightly frightening. The paranoia he is trying to dispel still exists in the "voluntary spies" which exist all over England; he re-inscribes

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[51] Claudia Johnson agrees, noting that "the moral and physical coercion of powerless females which figures so predominantly in gothic fiction is here transposed to the daytime word of drawing room manners, where it can be shown for the everyday occurrence it is, but no less 'strange' for all that" (37). She emphasizes that Catherine learns from gothic novels because their tropes are transferred to the social norms of Bath.

[52] Johnson adds that Catherine learns so well because her avid reading gives her a new perspective, not outwardly taught to her. No man has told her what to think while she has been reading: "Catherine is a 'hopeful scholar' not only in landscape theory but also in gothic novels, and her sensitivity to the lessons they afford far surpasses the capacity of her tutor, because her position of powerlessness and dependency give her a different perspective on the status quo. Gothic novels teach the deferent and self-deprecating Catherine to do what no one and nothing else does: to distrust paternal figures and to feel that her power of refusal is continuously under siege" (39).

anxiety in Catherine's mind even as he is trying to "teach" her. He tells her to consult her "own sense of the probable" – but isn't this sense exactly what he is trying to correct? Her senses are so wrapped up in the gothic that her ideas of the probable include the possibility that General Tilney is a murderer. However, Catherine – perhaps even more insightfully than her male counterpart – is able to understand the horrifying, underlying evil that persists within her lawful nation. The once naïve, trusting, and sophomoric Catherine learns through her reading that the world is not always a good place.[53]

All of these examples bring to light the importance of Austen's meta-commentary in *Northanger Abbey*: that novels are works "in which the greatest powers of the mind are displayed, in which the most thorough knowledge of human nature, the happiest delineation of its varieties, the liveliest effusions of with and humor are conveyed to the world in the best chosen language" (Austen, 23). How is it that this knowledge of human nature is most evident in fiction? Though it might seem to an ignorant reader such as John Thorpe that this is not true, Austen proves that it is, in fact, the case because Catherine gains so much insight into other people's behaviors and morals over the course of the novel. The gothic novel – or her novel – provides the perfect medium through which one can easily discern the duplicity of human nature – more specifically, of paternal nature – and of the social hierarchy in place. The gothic genre's ability to widen the gap between appearance and reality and then, in the end, have an altered reality emerge as the winner (where evil exists in different forms from murder) perfectly exhibits what Austen might say is the reader's (and the woman's) need to look deeper within him or

[53] It is in fact a place "where figureheads of political and domestic order silence dissent, where a father can be a British subject, a Christian, a respectable citizen, *and* a ruthless and mean-spirited tyrant at the same time, one who, moreover, in some legitimate sense of the term can 'kill' his wife slowly by quelling her voice and vitality" (Johnson, 40).

herself, as well as into others.[54] Catherine learns from her readings – written in the "best chosen language" – how to build an understanding and grow out of her naïveté.[55] However, her imbecility is not portrayed as a bad thing by the end of the novel. It is, in fact, vindicated (just as the gothic novel is) because it allows her to learn and achieve acute social insight. She does not totally change, but rather she evolves. She does not let go of her suspicions of General Tilney, she just places them into a more realistic context: though he is not a murderer, he is still a bad person. Naïveté and gothic novels are, therefore, rehabilitated as providing social insight in *Northanger Abbey*.

In her defense of all novels, including the gothic, Austen (through her narrator) strives to show that, despite the outlandish plots of the genre, such books have the ability to edify naïve minds. When the novel begins, Catherine is defined as one with "…a mind about as ignorant and uninformed as the female mind at seventeen usually is" (5). Austen specifically mentions the "female mind" here; what is the reader to assume the male mind is like at seventeen? Perhaps the male mind has less to gain from a novel; John Thorpe certainly does not appreciate the capabilities of the fiction of a gothic novel. For example, in the first carriage ride she suffers through with the tedious John Thorpe, Catherine "congratulated herself *sincerely* on being under the care of so excellent a coachman" after the haughty young man has inflated the dangerous nature of his wild horse (46). Thorpe has easily manipulated Catherine into believing that his delusions of horse-grandeur are valid. Austen's use of the word "sincerely" reinforces the

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[54] Nardin points out that "…it is…only the reading in gothic novels which Catherine does *after* she reaches Bath, that remains fresh enough in the young heroine's mind to be drawn upon for aid in understanding and interpreting her unprecedented experiences of evil" (64).

[55] Nardin concludes that this "is what Catherine must learn about the difference between life and gothic fiction: the same evil and potential for violence are present in both, but in real life evil tends to be expressed in ways which are customary and socially acceptable and which therefore expose the evil doer to little risk of punishment" (80). Catherine began as a young, impressionable country girl who first slowly began to learn to perform in the social realm and then had to learn through gothic novels that evil can be found even when it is shrouded in pleasantries.

portrayal of Catherine as the not yet well-read and presently innocent heroine; the reader is not tricked by Thorpe's antics, but in her juvenile lack of awareness, Catherine is. Austen gives her heroine a "tabula rasa" at the beginning of the novel in order to emphasize how much she learns from her later reading.[56] Additionally, the novels she reads allow Catherine to adjust to life in Bath and Northanger Abbey by showing her what types of people she will likely encounter.[57] For example, Catherine is prepared to deal with General Tilney when she arrives at the Abbey because her novels, especially *The Mysteries of Udolpho,* have taught her to be suspicious of secretive men. How ironic is it that the story of Catherine, a young female who learns the most from a gothic novel written by a woman (Ann Radcliffe), is also written by a woman (Jane Austen)? The influential female writer plays a vital role in Catherine's evolution. In a century marked by female complacency, subjugation and domestic servitude, this woman uses the power of the pen to empower others of her sex; not only does Austen empower Catherine, but she also uplifts Ann Radcliffe, other female authors, and those women who read novels such as *The Mysteries of Udolpho.*[58] While Catherine exemplifies a contemporary male fear that impressionable women will become overly influenced by fiction, she is Austen's idea of the perfect reader who is influenced in a positive way (as her intellect is sharpened by fiction).

Catherine's interactions with Isabella Thorpe and General Tilney most reflect the heroine's reading-inspired evolution from naïve young girl to observant young woman. Catherine's acquaintance with Isabella is one that only an ignorant young girl would form.

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[56] Though Nardin might call her simply "uninformed" (62).
[57] As critic Jane Nardin observes, "She can trust to the experiences of a wider world than that of Fullerton, which her reading has vicariously given her, as a guide in understanding the new types of people she will be encountering at Bath" (64).
[58] Mary Poovey, in her book *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer*, reinforces this point: "[Austen] began to develop a sense of herself as a professional writer, a woman telling stories not only for the amusement of her immediate family but for the edification of an audience desperately in need of reform" (209).

Isabella, an avaricious and promiscuous opportunist, takes advantage of Catherine's naïveté. In particular, when Isabella and Catherine notice three young men gazing in their direction at the Pump Room, Isabella claims to be disgusted – a feeling that Catherine easily believes and understands. However, the narrator shows the reader what Catherine cannot see (just like when the heroine could not understand John Thorpe's absurdity during the carriage ride) and leads the audience to grow more suspicious of Miss Thorpe. While Catherine wants to give the men enough time to leave before she and Isabella walk outside and avoid an unnecessary encounter, Isabella claims she will not reward their admirers' brazen behavior by doing so and, as the narrator explains, "Catherine has nothing to oppose against such reasoning…they set off immediately as fast as they could walk, *in pursuit* of the two young men" (28). Though Catherine "has nothing to oppose" with regard to Isabella's reasoning, the reader recognizes that Austen is emphasizing Isabella's contradictory behavior, perhaps to show that Catherine's mind has not yet developed at this point in the novel. The irony of this quote reflects Austen's desire to show exactly *how much* Catherine has to learn about human nature and behavior. Though during the time in which this novel was written a woman was expected to passively wait for a man to choose her as a wife, the Pump Room incident shows that Isabella clearly assumes an active role and pursues the men around her. However, Isabella defies propriety in this situation and is ultimately unsuccessful.[59] In defying propriety, Isabella behaves as if she is a heroine in a very different novel: a sentimental one in which one can behave however she wants and choose her husband. Isabella is also negotiating her lack of prospects due to her lower class status with fiction, interestingly, and acts almost as a foil for Catherine. Isabella's denial of the social norms

[59] Isabella's life is empty and purposeless; therefore, as Nardin asserts, she seeks out sentimental fiction to sustain herself: "Part of her attempt to live according to the conventions of literature is motivated by her desire to give some interest and significance to her own trammeled existence" (67).

around her allows her to search for sentimental romance.[60] She does not demonstrate an understanding of reality, just as Catherine does not at first, as she believes she lives within a romance novel in which she can ignore propriety. In this way, Isabella's use of fiction does not benefit her and she does not evolve.[61] Isabella also indulges in gothic novel reading and encourages Catherine's reading, but she does not learn anything from the novels. Though the novels improve Catherine, they are unable to save Isabella from herself. Austen, therefore, acknowledges that novels will not turn bad people into good people; rather, novels will turn naïve young ladies like Catherine into more intelligent women. Catherine's novel reading and expansive imagination – which grows with every chapter she reads – eventually allows her to overcome her prescribed role and her early imbecility. She is eventually able to rise above the reality that life is actually dull and is nothing like the exciting world of the gothic novel.[62] Moreover, Catherine seeks nothing more in fiction but than to possibly learn about the normalcy of urban life (since all she knows is secluded country life in Fullerton); she does not realize that her mind has wandered into the conventions of gothic novels. She becomes entranced by her fantasies and seemingly finds no difference between gothic conventions and social norms.[63]

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[60] Nardin continues along this line of reasoning, adding that "If she operated according to the minor conventions of everyday propriety, it would be much more difficult for Isabella to think of romance all the time…by describing her own life as if she were the heroine of a sentimental novel, Isabella can convince herself that she is a fascinating woman experiencing exciting adventures" (67).

[61] Nardin notes that "the minor rules of propriety receive Jane Austen's approval in *Northanger Abbey* because she believes them to be based upon an understanding and an acceptance of the restrictive realities of life" (68). Isabella willingly avoids living within the confines of reality. Though Catherine becomes confused between reality and gothic fiction, she never ignores her social role or place, as this is what maintains order.

[62] Nardin notes that this reality is "…that decent and intelligent people must come to terms with the fact that real life is usually dull, that it provides only restricted opportunities for action, and that most people (even if they are well above average in every way) can hope neither to be exciting in themselves, nor born to exciting fates" (68).

[63] Nardin points out that "…for such an unreflective and unsophisticated young lady, she seems to have a very reliable instinct concerning which minor rules of propriety are important because they have moral significance and which may safely disregarded, on occasion, because they are matters of custom and ceremony only" (71).

In order to portray Catherine's naïve thought process in the beginning of the novel, Austen presents the heroine's first impression of General Tilney as very positive: "It could not be General Tilney's fault. That he was perfectly agreeable and good-natured, and altogether a very charming man, did not admit of a doubt, for he was tall and handsome, and Henry's father. He could not be accountable for his children's want of spirits, or for her want of enjoyment in his company" (102). She does not understand why Henry and Eleanor are always so solemn and quiet around their father and does not even imagine that perhaps the General is not as wonderful as he appears. In the country, a man like the General would be unquestionably good, because he looks unquestionably (in Catherine's mind) good. To Catherine's uninformed mind, he cannot be good and bad at the same time – he must be one or the other. Catherine gives every person who she encounters the benefit of the doubt until her reasoning becomes clouded by her gothic fantasies. For example, in the scene in which Catherine takes a walk with Eleanor and Henry, she comments that something "very shocking" will be coming out in London. Eleanor assumes she is speaking of something political, though Henry realizes Catherine is only informing them of the future release of a novel. This misunderstanding places Catherine's imbecility in contrast with Eleanor's awareness, though neither young lady is as levelheaded as Henry. Though their misunderstanding might seem trivial, both women are insightful in their appreciation of the apparent horror present both in "Christian England" and the plots of gothic novels.[64] Eleanor is so aware of the reality around her that she is paranoid, while Catherine is so entranced with her fantasies that she can think of no other evil than the fictitious kind that exists in her novels.

[64] Johnson explains that this type of misunderstanding would have been commonplace: "The course of the novel attests, however, that the misunderstanding between Catherine and Eleanor is plausible and even insightful: political unrest and gothic fiction are well served by a common vocabulary of 'horror' because they are both unruly responses to repression" (39).

Just as she and Henry do, Catherine and Eleanor also interact carefully with social norms in mind (those social norms that Fantomina must act out). As Austen's narrator comments: "not an observation was made, nor an expression used by either which had not been made and used some thousands of times before, under that roof, in every Bath season, yet the merit of their being spoken with simplicity and truth, might be something uncommon (Austen, 54).[65] The two women act out the social norms of Bath society and develop a sisterly attachment. It seems as if Catherine lies on a continuum somewhere between Isabella and Eleanor; Isabella completely disregards propriety in order to live within fiction and Eleanor adheres strictly to society's guidelines in order to survive reality. Catherine embodies the eventual convergence of propriety and romance that must occur in order for there to be a happy ending. Though she is wronged several times throughout the novel because others misread her, Catherine's adherence to the social codes she learns while at Bath allow her to triumph in the end.[66] As previously established, living within the confines of propriety requires a certain degree of performance; therefore, if one appropriately mimics the social norms required of her, she will experience romance and have her happy ending. Catherine does move toward Eleanor on this continuum as the novel proceeds, but she never reaches strict societal adherence. This is because, along with Henry, the heroine recognizes that to a certain degree, these norms are merely acts, facades that are wonderfully performed, both knowingly and ignorantly, by society's most proper of women. Eventually, both Catherine and Eleanor get happy endings because they adhere to propriety.

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[65] Nardin notes that Catherine and Eleanor act out social norms, and adds that it benefits them to realize that "real life can be exciting, but it is certainly not exciting all day and every day, and the minor rules of propriety are meant to apply to everyday conduct. When excitement does come into real life, it comes…in its own characteristic manner, which is not the manner of sentimental or gothic fiction" (Nardin, 69).

[66] Poovey notes that this melding of romance and propriety is necessary for success: "For only by making romance speak to and answer propriety can she hope to fuse individual desire with social responsibility" (*The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer,* 209).

Catherine and Eleanor's attachment leads to a trip to Northanger Abbey, the Tilneys' home. When Catherine learns that she will be accompanying the Tilneys to the Abbey, Austen's heroine begins to mix fiction with reality, eventually becoming unable to distinguish between the two: "In addition to the rest, this roof was to be the roof of an abbey! – Her passion for ancient edifices was next in degree to her passion for Henry Tilney" (112). Catherine almost immediately, in a blissful state, begins to imagine and attribute Gothic features to the Tilneys' home: "…she was hardly more assured than before, of Northanger Abbey having been a richly-endowed convent at the time of its Reformation, of its having fallen into the hands of an ancestor of the Tilneys on its dissolution…" (113). While it may at first seem as if Catherine's outlandish fantasies are just another element of her naïveté, one eventually realizes that they represent a turning point in her personality. Along with her confusion comes Catherine's ability to recognize suspicious behavior and actions and process them with relation to the morality of others. Though she could not understand Henry's talk of landscapes, Catherine truly comes to appreciate gothic architecture through the medium of fiction. Though the concept of landscape would be typical for a lady to learn and admire because it represents serenity and beauty, the concept of architecture enthralls Catherine because it represents mystery, excitement, and gothic conventions. Despite not learning what specifically is deemed by society as proper for a young lady in her situation, Catherine *does* come to notice elements of the scenery around her.

Austen at once satirizes the gothic and shows how it has changed Catherine. It is evident that the heroine has become more aware: "Catherine had read too much not to be perfectly aware of the ease with which a waxen figure might be introduced, and a suppositious funeral carried on" (156). Catherine begins to shed her ignorance and engage with characters as if she is intently reading them, which, ironically, allows her to judge them more accurately. At this point,

she has learned to look for motives and signs regarding one's behavior; Catherine becomes suspicious of General Tilney: "And was it not off that he should always take his walk so early?" (144). She soon begins to dislike the General for fictional reasons that have blossomed in her mind; the moment that she suspects he has either forcefully silenced his wife or murdered her, Catherine dislikes him: "With a grandeur of air, a dignified step, which caught the eye, but could not shake the doubts of the well-read Catherine, he led the way across the hall" (148). Here, Austen emphasizes the fact that her heroine's suspicions arise *because* she is well-read. Catherine is resolute that Henry's father is evil and "must have been in some way or other her [Mrs. Tilney's] destroyer" (155). She would never have dared to think this before; her character has clearly evolved from the young girl who never considered that the polite General could have been the reason for his children's unhappiness to a woman of strict scrutiny. She never returns to her former confidence in his good character, even after she finds out that he has not murdered anyone. When the General learns that Catherine is not wealthy, as he originally thinks when he invites her to the Abbey (from the information he receives from the ever-reliable John Thorpe), he immediately forces her from his house. The General has clearly gotten caught up with fiction as well. The reader realizes that Catherine is not wrong about his villainy, despite the preposterous fantasies that she has conjured up about him. Finally, Catherine's feelings have caught up with the reader, the narrator, and Austen, as she also realizes that she is correct about Henry's father: "Catherine, at any rate, heard enough to feel, that in suspecting General Tilney of either murdering or shutting up his wife, she had scarcely sinned against his character, or magnified his cruelty" (206). The difference between General Tilney's absorption in fiction and Catherine's difficulty determining what is reality and what is not lies in a key discrepancy: the General's susceptibility to hearsay only magnifies his cruelties, while Catherine's folly has

improved her character. It is interesting to note that a man becomes entangled in fiction just as easily as the young and silly girl; evidently, Austen is commenting on the vulnerability of both sexes to the power of fiction.

Austen's satirical tone throughout *Northanger Abbey* significantly contributes to this argument. Her meta-commentary provides insight into her disdain for "guidelines" for a lady's behavior as prescribed by society: "…a celebrated writer has maintained, that no young lady can be justified in falling in love before the gentleman's love is declared, it must be very improper that a young lady should dream of a gentleman before the gentleman is first known to have dreamt of her" (16). By highlighting the true triviality of behavioral norms, Austen emphasizes that, in her novel, she will likely be discrediting and disregarding them. As Catherine reads what many believe to be silly novels, she gains insight into the façade these guidelines of propriety create, especially when she learns others misread her and cause her misfortunes:

> The general had had nothing to accuse her of, nothing to lay to her charge, but her being the involuntary unconscious object of a deception which his pride could not pardon, and which a better pride would have been ashamed to own. She was guilty only of being less rich than he had supposed her to be (204).

Despite the misconceptions about her, Catherine is able to perceive and read the character of General Tilney quite accurately – though he is not a murderer as she first thought, she is still able to see that he is evil – all thanks to a novel.[67] To return to an earlier point: Catherine's lackluster store of knowledge is further emphasized in the scene in which she is walking with Henry and Eleanor:

> She knew nothing of drawing – nothing of taste: and she listened to them with an attention which brought her little profit, for they talked in phrases which conveyed scarcely any idea to her […] She was heartily ashamed of her

[67] Critic John Hardy agrees, describing *Northanger Abbey as* "an extravagant fiction that seems altogether too remote from the concerns of real life is replaced by our recognition of the pain and distress real life can give rise to" (16).

> ignorance. A misplaced shame. Where people wish to attach, they should always be ignorant. To come with a well-informed mind is to come with an inability of administering to the vanity of others, which a sensible person would always wish to avoid. A woman, especially, if she have the misfortune of knowing anything, should conceal it as well as she can (88- 89).

By describing knowledge as a "misfortune," Austen satirizes the expectations placed on eighteenth-century women, who must be ignorant like Catherine in order to form attachments.[68] This sheds light on Catherine's transformation; as she conforms to the societal norms Austen satirizes by reading "silly" novels and having an uninformed mind, Catherine is able to edify herself. In this way, she moves beyond these expectations when she actually gains knowledge of peoples' behaviors from her readings and is ultimately able to rise in social class as a result. She is still able to form true attachments with an edified mind whereas her superficial attachments to the Thorpes – with whom she bonded when she was ignorant – do not last. As an uninformed person, she is unable to judge her peers' true characters and, as a result, does not truly know them. As Austen at once satirizes a woman's need to be ignorant for purposes of her social legibility, she furthers her heroine's ability to self-improve.

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[68] Critic Mary Poovey attributes some of Austen's criticisms to the ever-changing English society in the years during which the prolific writer lived (1775-1817). As capitalism forced changes to the social structure in England, "birth into a particular class no longer exclusively determined one's future social or economic status, the vertical relationships of patronage no longer guaranteed either privileges or obedience, and the traditional authority of the gentry, and of the values associated with their life-style, was a subject under general debate" (74). These immense changes within society created "…challenges to the traditional hierarchy of English class society and, as a consequence, to conventional social roles and responsibilities" (74). Poovey points out that with a father who was a clergyman, Austen, a Tory, and her family, were conservative parts of the lower levels of the gentry, were tied to the system of patronage and valued middle-class society (76). Austen's place in society explains her tendency to mix the classes when it comes to creating love matches: "The division of sympathies that occurs in her novels when middle-class daughters get rewarded with the sons of landed families emanates at least partly from Austen's being both involved in and detached from these two middle-class groups at a moment when they were implicitly competing with each other" (76). The turmoil that surrounds the love between Catherine and Henry is due to the societal tensions arising from the changing value system of England: "…In this period of social turmoil even the dominant system of values was characterized by internal tensions and contradictions- stresses that reflected the competition between bourgeois individual and old patterns of patronage and also the inevitable gap between the promises of individualism and the general inequalities and personal repressions that bourgeois society requires" (99).

Jane Austen criticizes her contemporary society from the vantage point of a member of a middle class and proper family. This gave her a unique perspective from other writers of her day, with her particular tendency to highlight the artificiality of social norms.[69] Applied to *Northanger Abbey,* this idea fits seamlessly with the earlier example of Austen's satirical scene between Catherine and Henry, who try to conduct a "proper" conversation. It seems the heroine and her hero interact more freely when they do not follow strict social norms (including when they argue about whether a dance is akin to marriage), but when Henry turns the conversation into a proper exchange between a man and a woman, the two are left to discuss only what others might also discuss in a similar socially prescribed situation. Because Henry emphasizes the repressive social norms, one can interpret other conversations that are not governed by social norms as more free. The sense of the scripted produces freedom; the socially acceptable conversation, when juxtaposed with freer expression, emphasizes the performative nature of society's norms. Ironically, it is through these social conventions that Catherine and Henry get to know each other, so that fiction enables their courtship. This idea is the key to Catherine's evolution. As she evolves to read others more accurately, propriety causes those around her to misread her. When General Tilney assumes Catherine is wealthy and is, therefore, an appropriate match for his son, he allows her to stay with his family at Northanger Abbey. However, when the General discovers Catherine's modest means, he turns her out of doors immediately; the difference between appearance and reality leads the General to misjudge and then punish Catherine for something over which she has no control. He loses his grip on morality once he

[69] Mary Poovey says that "…social manners may distort the constructive energies women do possess. Because of the hypocrisy implicit in propriety, Austen suggests, there can be no victors: society cannot afford to unleash the energy inherent in female desire, yet the morality by which society controls desire destroys the individual and threatens society itself" (69). Though Catherine loses her individuality as she conforms to social norms (the way in which society controls desire), her evolution as a heroine (through fiction) allows her to regain her individuality as well as gain a new understanding of the world and therefore she is able to satisfy her desire to become the wife of Henry Tilney.

learns of Catherine's true worth; her unwitting upward social movement, which occurs when she stays with the Tilneys at the Abbey, makes him angry. Though his behavior aligns with propriety (he cannot be known to have let his son court a woman of modest means, and he cannot let his daughter associate with her), there exists in this situation a deficit of morality. However, by this point in the novel, Catherine has learned to accurately understand other people because of her earlier obsession with Gothic novels.

Though he has not committed any crimes as she had at first thought, General Tilney is still the evil person Catherine judges him to be. Her realization about the difference between appearance (she sees everything as if it is in a Gothic novel) and reality (there is nothing gothic – other than the architecture –about Northanger Abbey), therefore, allows Catherine to mature as a person because the gothic genre teaches her about duplicity.[70] Catherine is able to understand, through the conventions of the gothic, the chasm between appearance and reality.[71] Though Henry corrects her when he finds out that she figures his father to be a murderer by insisting that such horrendous things do not happen in Christian England, it is implied that young women in this lawful country may still be turned out of doors to find their way home alone because they are not wealthy. Though the General and his family may seem proper and well-mannered when it comes to money in Christian England, realistically, one can be a savage tyrant in the guise of an imposing member of the gentry.

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[70] Claudia Johnson makes an interesting point regarding this idea: "It has seemed to many readers that Austen's parody in *Northanger Abbey* debunks gothic conventions out of an allegiance to the common-sense world of the ordinary, where life is sane and dependable, if not always pleasant. But by showing that the gothic is in fact the inside out of the ordinary, that the abbey does indeed present a disconcerting double image, particularly forbidding and arrogant to one who, like Catherine Morland, does not have an entrée, *Northanger Abbey* does not refute, but rather clarifies and reclaims, gothic conventions in distinctly political ways" (34). Essentially, gothic novels teach Catherine about real life – about good and evil – in a way that instructive novels, or even real life experience, cannot.

[71] Johnson adds that gothic novels teach Catherine about true evil behavior, even if the villain is not a murderer, he could still be evil in a more understated way: "Gothic novels teach Catherine about distrust and concealment, about cruel secrets hidden beneath formidable and imposing surfaces" (40).

Contrastingly, General Tilney represents the breakdown of the once strong and harsh father figure – the paternal seat at the top of the hierarchy. Though General Tilney initially represents the classic Gothic mysterious and (as Catherine finds later) tyrannical father figure, he is soon circumvented by his son's will once his behavior toward Catherine is fully revealed. Just as in England during Austen's life, the rigid hierarchy within society and the family is broken down here, and Henry crosses a class boundary to marry the woman he loves. Catherine climbs the social ladder through marriage after being edified by fiction: Is Austen's message that the novel's edifying powers allow for one to rise above society's constraints?[72] Certainly, Austen is implying that people should not underestimate the power of the novel to teach (especially a tabula rasa, like Catherine's mind) the *true* reality of a seemingly harmless situation. Though some conventions of the gothic genre are outlandish, the truths of the situations they describe can still be frightening.[73]

Catherine's transformation is complete with her final realization about Isabella. Catherine can finally see that her old friend is not, in fact, a good person. After Isabella wrongs James, Catherine recognizes that Isabella's apparent morality and propriety is a façade: "Such a strain of shallow artifice could not impose even upon Catherine…She must think me an idiot, or she could not have written so" (180-1). If the young and ignorant Catherine had received Isabella's letter, perhaps the heroine would have given her undeserving friend the benefit of the doubt. However,

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[72] Claudia Johnson observes: "By making the distrust of patriarchy which gothic fiction fosters itself the subject for outright discussion, Austen obliges us first to see the import of conventions which we, like Henry perhaps, dismiss as merely formal, and then to acknowledge, as Henry never does, that the 'alarms of romance' are a canvas onto which the 'anxieties of common life' can be projected in illuminating, rather than distorting ways…alarms concerning the central gothic figure, the tyrannical father, she concludes, are commensurate to the threat they actually pose" (Johnson, 35).

[73] "Her villain," Johnson adds, "General Tilney, is not only a repressive father, but also a self-possessed defender of national security. To Catherine, the General seems like Montoni…By depicting the villain as an officious English gentleman, publically respected on the local as well as national level…[Austen] brings it into complete conjunction with the novel of manners" (35).

Catherine has changed, and while her fantasies fade away after Henry forces her to realize how outlandish they are, Catherine holds on to the lessons she has learned: "Even she could allow, that an occasional memento of past folly, however painful, might not be without use" (164). The feelings of anxiety that she entertained while living in Ann Radcliffe's world do not wholly fade; Catherine is left with a new and more realistic view of life: "The anxieties of common life began soon to succeed to the alarms of romance" (164). A fear of the evil that can exist in reality, which Henry points out are not characteristic of Christian England, replaces her gothic fears. Reality can be just as frightening as the gothic novels, just in different ways. Evil still exists, but it can be hidden instead of evident in the characters of clear-cut, completely villainous people. People like General Tilney and Isabella can be both good and evil simultaneously. Catherine is no longer consumed by the gothic world about which she reads; she takes what she has learned, sheds her ignorance, and realizes that the world is a frightening place with its own (albeit less recognizable) evil villains.

In summary, though Catherine is a naïve and weak character in the beginning of *Northanger Abbey,* she finds empowerment in reading the novels that many men of the time so easily dismissed as "womanly" and worthless modes of simple entertainment. John Thorpe is an annoyance and an ignorant member of society who dismisses novels when Catherine brings them up. However, after seeing how much Catherine has learned and grown from her novel reading, one must wonder whether John Thorpe might also have something to gain from novels, which he claims "are so full of nonsense and stuff." Being the heroine of the novel, and being able to conquer the dishonesty she faces in the moral characters of the Thorpes and General Tilney, ascribes a great deal of importance to Catherine. By writing herself into a Gothic novel, Catherine is able to better herself, overcome her naïveté, and enter into a promising future that

she would not otherwise have been afforded without her love of fiction. If she had not traveled to the Abbey because of all the Gothic curiosities she so avidly entertained, if she had not suspected General Tilney of a great evil, and if she had not been circumspect of Isabella Thorpe, she may have been lured into more inauspicious situations with the Thorpes and perhaps a great deal of "secrets" about the real world would not have been revealed.

Jane Austen strongly defends the novel in *Northanger Abbey* through meta-commentary and through the evolution of her heroine's character and understanding, which is facilitated by her reading. Catherine learns to recognize evil and superciliousness in General Tilney and Isabella (respectively) after she has confused the fiction of gothic novels with reality during her stay at Northanger Abbey. Catherine recognizes her folly, but remains a changed and more astute person: "It seemed as if the whole might be traced to the influence of that sort of reading which she had there indulged" (163). Because she learns so much about life during her readings and adventures at Northanger Abbey, the heroine of the novel evolves from unlikely heroine to Mrs. Tilney, happily ever after.

Chapter 4

Fantomina and *Northanger Abbey* in Conversation

While at first glance Eliza Haywood's *Fantomina; Or, Love in a Maze* and Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* seem to be vastly different works, they are in fact similar in fundamental ways. Both narratives follow a single female heroine through a transformation involving the alteration of her social legibility. Fantomina transforms from a wealthy country Lady to four different disguises – which ascend from lowly prostitute to wealthy woman and thrive at separate levels of the social hierarchy – all the while maintaining her reputation for modesty and virtue in society. Finally she is forced to transform into a nun after her mother discovers her transgressions. Catherine, similarly, evolves from ignorant country girl of modest means to a gothic-obsessed but proper young woman. While most view her as what she is – a woman of modest means – she is misread by those who come into close contact with her, specifically General Tilney, who assumes that she is wealthy (because John Thorpe hinted at that fact). Though she is misread, she negotiates her life with fantasy and is able to alter her social state by evolving into an aware and ultimately wealthy wife.

Additionally, both works emphasize the levels of performance that are required by social settings. Fantomina and Catherine both travel to urban spaces from their country homes. The former travels to London and can become whomever she wants in a city where every person is acting out a social norm. She attends the playhouse, something that is expected for those who wish to see and be seen, and she also properly performs the characteristics associated with the social position of each of her disguises. In a parallel way, Catherine must learn to assume the proper behavior necessary for society life in Bath. She learns to do this through her voracious reading of gothic novels (instead of by performing, as Fantomina does). Finally, both works

center on a heroine who uses fiction in order to mitigate the social limitations of life as an eighteenth-century woman. While Fantomina performs different roles as if she were on stage, Catherine becomes enthralled with gothic novels.

The two heroines differ in their specific relationships with fiction. Fantomina deliberately self-fictionalizes, creating situations in which she can perform her roles to entice Beauplaisir. Catherine, on the other hand, unintentionally becomes caught up with gothic fiction. While Fantomina continually and intentionally recreates herself, Catherine unintentionally remakes others as her judgment becomes increasingly influenced by gothic conventions. In this way, the heroines in these two novels use fiction and fantasy to negotiate social and ideological issues facing women in their time. Through acting out her part as if on stage, Fantomina purposely negotiates the malleability of identity and social legibility; because of her reading, Catherine inadvertently manipulates her identity by climbing the social hierarchy. While Fantomina is able to artfully control how others view her (through her performances and disguises), Catherine is reading others and continually being misread by others.

Eliza Haywood and Jane Austen imply the importance of reinventing the self through performing and interpreting life through fiction. While Fantomina literally acts out different roles to gain strength and control over her sexual desire, Catherine derives a more figurative power – the power of having a deeper understanding and possessing individuality and propriety at the same time – from her novel reading. By opening her story with a scene in which acting out roles is occurring not only on stage but also in the interactions among other playgoers, Haywood implies that social protocols in urban spaces such as London are, in fact, acts in themselves. Going to a large city like London creates an opportunity to reinvent oneself – to be a stranger and create a new persona (just as Catherine goes to Bath knowing very few people). Adhering to

social norms, therefore, requires a self-conscious shaping of how one appears in the eyes of those around her. Though Fantomina is able to mold how others view her, Catherine is the victim of perpetual misunderstandings (John Thorpe thinks she loves him, General Tilney thinks she has wealth) even as she mimics the behavior required by propriety in Bath. Fantomina experiences willful downward social mobility and works her way back up with each alias while Catherine begins as a middle-class tomboy and eventually moves up the social hierarchy and becomes a gentrified wife. The fact that she is first misread as a wealthy and suitable match for Henry by General Tilney gives her the opportunity to make this social jump because it allows her to get to know Henry. It is this misinterpretation of her character that allows Henry to get to know and fall in love with her true self. Not only does Henry's knowledge of fiction, specifically of the social scripts of Bath and the conventions of the gothic novel, further the courtship plot, but the fiction that influences General Tilney's decisions also furthers the courtship plot in *Northanger Abbey.* Similarly, it is the intentional misrepresentations of herself (the purposeful alteration of her social legibility) that allows Fantomina to exercise her sexual desires. Fiction acts, therefore, as a catalyst for social mobility. Where Fantomina descends and re-ascends the social ladder, Catherine is perceived by others to be a static character sitting atop the social hierarchy. In reality, Catherine eventually experiences upward social mobility from modest girl to wealthy wife.

Female social mobility was often associated with artifice in eighteenth-century English society and both Fantomina and Isabella Thorpe represent contemporary male fears of female artifice and vice.[74] Fantomina uses trickery to express her genuine desires and does not do any

[74] Patricia Spacks describes the fear of female defiance of societal expectations: **"**But despite the ostentatious obedience of good women in eighteenth-century fiction, it would be far too simplistic to claim that the myth of eighteenth-century womanhood is one of passivity […] English social actualities largely enforced female passivity; but myth reflects more than social actuality. Myths declare wishes and

harm in the process (except, perhaps, to herself). She is able to seamlessly move from disguise to disguise while maintaining her socially expected modesty and respect as a lady. This exposes the inherently duplicitous notion of virtue: in Fantomina's case, she looks virtuous but is certainly not (in the socially defined notion of the word). There are additional implications for this duplicity as well: women in society must put on the façade of virtue and act out social norms in order to survive in society; however, the socially prescribed ways of living are not based upon instincts and are therefore innately untruthful. Fantomina's fraudulence is evidence of the primary fear of female artifice: that a woman can defy society's expectations so secretly and nearly get away with it. Eighteenth-century men were afraid their wives would stray and bring illegitimate children into their homes. Gentlemen were concerned that females like Fantomina could master them and not the other way around. However, if she were to avoid acting on her desires, wouldn't those desires still exist and penetrate her thoughts? She would still appear to be virtuous, but these appearances would not align with her true feelings. The truly virtuous, proper lady is happy with her place and any woman who thinks about an alternative lifestyle is deceitful.

The fact that the reader never learns the true name of the lady creates the sense that, despite her banishment, she manages to maintain her duplicitous public (the virtuous, the reserved Lady) and private (the sexually ravenous, deceitful woman) personas and get away with her trickery. Haywood names the novella for her heroine's first alias, *Fantomina*, thereby associating her with a prostitute. Perhaps this is because the lady's behavior is similar to a prostitute's ability to profit from freely sleeping around. Her unique profit is derived from the power she accrues each time she sleeps with Beauplaisir. Additionally, the lady's first name (and

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reveal fears; the fantasized compliant woman expresses fear of alternative possibility" (111). This fear is the fear of artifice. The woman who is not compliant has the ability to destroy the family's wealth, or, what's worse, the ability to control the man without his knowledge.

the novella's title) also sounds like the word "phantom," which indicates that she is able to seamlessly move through society while being conspicuous but without really being seen for what she is. As a phantom, the lady is able to slip in and out of various guises and has the freedom to choose when she encounters Beauplaisir to achieve sexual gratification on her own terms; this is a situation that could never, in reality, exist for the lady within the confines of her social station. Similarly, Beauplaisir sounds like "Beau-pleaser," which intimates that he – as a male – exists in the story solely as an instrument of pleasure for the lady. It is thereby revealed to Fantomina, as the manipulator, that the way to maintain a man's interest is to continue to be new, to present herself as new people each time he tires of one of her personas. Because she comes to this realization about man's nature, she is able to successfully seek out her lover and satisfy her desires. This highly unconventional story in which it is the woman seeking out the man challenges prevalent notions of the woman's place in society in the mid-eighteenth-century.[75] Fantomina never ceases to be a compelling figure, as she manages to avoid a typical life as a wife and mother.[76]

Isabella Thorpe's behavior (acting as if she were the heroine in a sentimental novel in which all precepts of reality evaporate), on the other hand, demonstrates a more outward example of feminine artifice: the disregard of propriety for personal gain. She actively defies the myth that a woman must be passive when it comes to courtship. She hurts people along the way, including Catherine's brother (she is engaged to him and flirts with Henry's brother) and the

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[75] Critic Sarah Prescott agrees and notes that "Fantomina can be read as a text which implicitly celebrates female desire by authorizing and enacting women's sexual fantasies through the secret adventures of the protagonist" (280).

[76] Fantomina ultimately avoids the fate of the eighteenth-century woman, described by Patricia Spacks as a transformation from individual to symbol: "Even…an exceptionally active female, as she dwindles toward wifehood becomes a less compelling figure. Her status as an energetic and self-respecting woman becomes less important than her symbolic virtue…" (85).

heroine herself by using her feminine wiles to actively attract the best husband she can find. Here, artifice is presented in a negative light, especially because it represents the absolute opposite of Catherine's impressionable behavior. She seems to be the example of what might happen if a woman were allowed free choice. Perhaps Austen is implying, through Isabella's malicious character (meant in both the moral and fictional sense), that propriety and a certain level of performance are absolutely necessary to maintain societal order. In a century of feminine constraint, adhering to social norms and accepting the merits of fiction can help a woman have some control over her station and life and be upwardly mobile in society (like Catherine ultimately is).

Catherine's early naïveté and ability to learn from novels reflects the literary merit of such works. Austen, as previously discussed, uses Catherine's transformation in *Northanger Abbey* to show that novels have value beyond entertainment and are not works that writers should be ashamed of contributing to: "Yes, novels; for I will not adopt that ungenerous and impolitic custom so common with novel writers, of degrading by their contemptuous censure the very performances, to the number of which they are themselves adding" (Austen, 22). Austen refers to her novel as a "performance," a demonstration of her wit and value as a female; similarly, Haywood encourages performance throughout *Fantomina*. These two types of performance are similar in that they both work through fiction to display feminine worth. While Austen creates fiction novels to perform her worth and display her opinions, Fantomina creates fictional identities to express her true feelings and desires in a society in which women could not speak for themselves.[77]

[77] Critic Ros Ballaster concludes that the novel gives the eighteenth-century woman a way to voice her otherwise silenced opinions: "The novel's 'newness' of language is identified with an explicitly female authority, the form's hybrid status between public and private modes of discourse extending opportunities for a liberty of speech often denied elsewhere in eighteenth-century culture" (214).

Catherine and Fantomina also share an affinity for fiction. While Catherine's engagement with gothic novels transforms the world around her, Fantomina's creation of disguises allows her to manipulate the man she desires into sleeping with her multiple times. Catherine gains more from Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* than from Addison's *The Spectator* (a supposedly instructive work directed toward the rising middle class in England), perhaps because the former appeals to those emotions and passions that she is supposed to conceal when performing social norms. Though Addison's work is supposed to straightforwardly tell her how she can be upwardly socially mobile and be seen as a member of a higher class, the heroine does not learn from her readings of *The Spectator*. In contrast, fiction not only makes Catherine's mobility possible, but it also affords her an opportunity to be regarded, socially, as wealthy (by General Tilney, when she is not).

Similarly, Fantomina uses fiction in order to affect her own social mobility and legibility; she is easily able to descend from her high position as the Haughty Lady to the very low position of Fantomina, the prostitute. She easily tricks Beauplaisir into thinking she is a lowly woman who simply wants to entertain him, though he recognizes her wit and believes she is simply a higher-class prostitute. Though Beauplaisir notes that Fantomina is clearly pretending and will ultimately become what she pretends to be, he never suspects that her true self is of a different class from the character she is playing. Fantomina is also able to act her part in the station of Celia, a maid in Bath, staying within the confines of her social station while she acts the part by cleaning and waiting on the other gentleman also staying at the Inn in Bath:

> The dress she was in, was a round-ear'd Cap, a short Red Petticoat, and a little jacket of Grey Stuff; all the rest of her Accoutrements were answerable to these, and join'd with a broad Country Dialect, a rude unpolish'd Air, which she, having been bred in these Parts, knew very well how to imitate, with her Hair and Eye-brows black'd, made it impossible for her to be known, or taken for any other than what she seem'd […] She was presently receiv'd into the Family; and had a

> Post in it (such as she would have chose, had she been left at her Liberty) that of making the Gentlemen's Beds, getting them their Breakfasts, and waiting on them in their Chambers (Haywood, 14-15).

Others do not suspect that she is of a higher class. As Celia, the Lady is immediately given a job and performs her duties accordingly, "such as she would have chose, had she been left at her Liberty." The use of this wording is telling, because the Lady *is* freely choosing to place herself in the way of the ravishing Beauplaisir and is willing to not only act the part of a maid but also actually *do* the job for as long as her lover is interested in her. After Beauplaisir tires of Celia, the lady is able to fool him again as the Widow Bloomer, easily convincing him of her plight and, later, as Incognita, the Lady masterfully hides her true identity while convincingly acting the part of gentry-woman. By descending and then re-ascending the social hierarchy, the lady demonstrates the malleability of social legibility through accurate performance of the appropriate norms for each social station. Performance is required at every level of society.

Whereas Catherine learns about social situations through her reading, Fantomina defies them through her performances. Austen's heroine learns what Henry Tilney points out: namely, that social interactions are performances, ones essential to becoming acquainted with another person in eighteenth-century England. Henry implies that social interactions are scripted, and the reader recognizes that these scripts are no more "rational" or any less fabricated than the plots of the gothic novel. One must go through the motions in order to become acquainted with someone enough to speak freely with him or her. Especially in courtship, there exist socially normative ways of interacting that further love matches. Therefore, Henry uses two types of fiction when courting Catherine: both societal scripts and gothic conventions. He uses these fictions in two important encounters with her: the first is when he first dances and has tea with her and the second is when he drives her to Northanger Abbey. When the two have tea, Henry shifts their

free conversation into one driven by social norms, pointing out that this is the way they *should* be speaking, that this is the proper way for them to interact as a man and a woman who have just met. In this scene, Henry parodies social scripts, just as he parodies the gothic. When he drives Catherine to the Abbey, he asks her if she has a "stout" heart, and lists all of the elements of conventional gothic fiction that she should be prepared for at the Abbey. By using the gothic fiction with which Catherine is obsessed to further the courtship plot, Henry demonstrates its importance. He is able to place himself within Catherine's thoughts when she arrives at the Abbey by appealing to her obsession with fiction. Without this fiction, Henry might not have been able to converse freely with the heroine and therefore might not have been able to successfully court her.

Similarly, Beauplaisir and Fantomina perform fictitious parts before they can interact freely. She is the prostitute and he is an altered version of himself who panders to what he perceives to be her character (in the moral sense) so that he may sleep with her. Ironically, because the two characters (in the fictional sense) are performing, they are able to act in a more spontaneous way – not only by engaging in sexual intercourse but also just by conversing more openly. Fantomina notes that she enjoys the conversations she has with Beauplaisir when she first starts acting: "she found a vast deal of Pleasure in conversing with him in this free and unrestrain'd Manner" (3). It is clear that Fantomina realizes the difference between a conversation driven by social norms (which would take place if she were being her true self not acting) and one that is freer (which only takes place because she is playing the part of Fantomina); she would not realize this freedom if she were not so restrained by her social status as a member of high society. This free conversation, as the word "Pleasure" foreshadows, leads to sexual gratification. Additionally, Beauplaisir openly tells her how much he desires to ravage

her when she is playing the part of Celia. Here, it seems that Haywood and Austen agree that, through performing, people are ironically better able to engage in spontaneous conversation. It is important to note that, in some ways, social norms enable freer discourse because one can only be unrestrained after experiencing restraint and confinement.

Both *Northanger Abbey* and *Fantomina* have conventional endings. Both of their heroines are able to use fiction to escape their conventional roles (albeit temporarily), but both authors relegate their female characters, in the end, back to positions in society that accord with social norms. When her story ends, Catherine becomes a wife (one who is part of a higher social class than her family); Fantomina is banished from English Protestant society to a Catholic convent in France to be punished for her transgressions. Just as Catherine and Fantomina have to act out their social roles before they can speak freely, Austen and Haywood must cloak their stories with convention in order to traverse the boundary between male and female rights. Haywood exiles her heroine while Austen gives Catherine a happy ending (though she does describe this ending with irony). Fantomina is exiled because she has lost her virtue to a man who, at the end of story when she is having his baby, does not even know her. Her banishment not only serves as punishment for violating society's rules and having a child out of wedlock, but it also serves as consolation for Haywood's readers:

> The old Lady perceiving there was nothing likely to ensue from these Civilities, but, perhaps, a Renewing of the Crime…and as soon as her Daughter was in a Condition, sent her to a Monastery in France, the Abbess of which has been her particular Friend. And thus ended an Intreague, which, considering the Time it lasted, was as full of Variety as any, perhaps, that many Ages had produced (Haywood, 40).

Breaking the norms of society life can allow a woman to feel liberated for a small amount of time, but inevitably conventions and order will be restored. Such is the case with Fantomina, who is able to keep up her deception until she is hindered by her female biology. Because men

do not share this particular biology, they are able to act the way Fantomina does without fear of consequences such as giving birth. As the libidinous female is banished, Beauplaisir may carry on with his libertinism, and the conventional male-female dynamic is restored.

Though he is not banished, Beauplaisir is just as guilty as Fantomina. He sleeps with each of her characters multiple times (after pandering to each in order to gain her favor). Beauplaisir adjusts his behavior according to each of Fantomina's disguises and seduces each one. In this way, Beauplaisir also self-fictionalizes in order to satisfy his desires. Similarly, Henry Tilney also takes advantage of fiction to communicate with his love interest. He uses his knowledge of gothic conventions in order to court Catherine by appealing to her emotions and is, therefore, able to take advantage of her malleable mind. Further, Henry falls in love with Catherine because she is under gothic delusions, while Beauplaisir never falls in love with Fantomina because she plays so many different roles that he never truly gets to know her. As a result of these two men, both heroines experience a change in their social stations. Fantomina falls from her status as a high-class lady while Catherine moves upward and joins the gentry.

Catherine's "happy" ending occurs when she marries the man she loves. However, Austen shrouds their marriage in irony: "The anxiety, which in this state of their attachment must be the portion of Henry and Catherine, and of all who loved either, as to its final event, can hardly extend, I fear, to the bosom of my readers, who will see in the tell-tale compression of the pages before them, that we are all hastening together to perfect felicity" (209). She comments on the "compression" of the pages and notes that the story is directed towards a happy ending, as if the important events of the story do not matter as long as the ending is happy. Perhaps this is Austen's way of conceding to her audience's desires to see Henry and Catherine together, and to see Catherine placed into a woman's conventional role as wife. Austen also ends the novel with

sardonic meta-commentary: "I leave it to be settled, by whomsoever it may concern, whether the tendency of this work be altogether to recommend parental tyranny, or reward filial disobedience" (211). After maintaining tight control over her story by interjecting continually with meta-commentary, Austen relinquishes the interpretation of Catherine's "happy" ending to the reader.

Eliza Haywood's *Fantomina* and Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* are certainly in conversation despite their extreme differences in length and subject matter. They both promote performance and point out the performance-oriented nature of social norms and they are both narratives centered on heroines who are transformed *through* the medium of fiction. Just as Fantomina represents a contemporary male fear of women being on stage (and thereby being improper), Catherine represents the male fear that a woman will not be able to tell the difference between a novel and real life.[78] Ironically, however, Catherine is able to gain a critical perspective on society through this fiction, just as Fantomina is able to use her performances to satisfy her desires. The power of fiction is such that it allows these heroines to gain something valuable in a society in which women had little opportunity. Additionally, it seems that both Haywood and Austen imply that a woman can only thrive if she performs the social norms necessary, even if they do not align with her beliefs, and that a man and a woman can only interact freely after first having engaged in performance.

[78] Claudia Johnson describes this contemporary fear in her book, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel*: ""the danger for a reader like Catherine is to mistake gothic exaggerations for unmediated representation, to fail to recognize their conventional trappings" (35).

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