

— Can We Have a Conversation: Sexual and Social Grammar in *Fantomina*

Irena Huang  
Advisor: Heather Keenleyside  
Preceptor: Tristan Schweiger

THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

MASTER OF ARTS PROGRAM IN THE HUMANITIES  
UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO  
24 May 2019

The name Eliza Haywood is intimately bound to the genre of amatory fiction. She was known as the “Great Arbitress of Passion”<sup>1</sup> whose name “from the 1720s onwards, was synonymous with the most extreme excesses of romance.”<sup>2</sup> As a figurehead of the genre, Haywood develops specific amatory conventions to create an affective relationship between the reader and the words on the page. By developing these recognizable conventions, Haywood is able to direct her writing to a community of female amatory fiction readers and use the amatory discourse of love and desire to take on social myths.<sup>3</sup> Readers expected language that engaged the body while the text provided social commentary, trained by the amatory conventions to experience the seduction of the language while also learning from it. Kathleen Lubey argues that one of the amatory conventions Haywood develops is a “grammar of eroticism” that functions as an epistemological construct, generating desire while distancing readers from that desire. This “grammar of eroticism” enables the reader to affectively engage with sensational imaginative scenes while learning how to thoughtfully process passionate encounters.<sup>4</sup> Lubey defines this “grammar of eroticism” as “heightened scenes in the novel” depicted using “the gasping effects of dashes, inverted syntax, and other arrhythmic prosody.”<sup>5</sup> In this paper, I engage with the em dash, in particular, as an element of the “grammar of eroticism” and argue that Haywood innovates the em dash as a visual amatory convention to depict conversation in *Fantomina* (1725). The em dash functions as a visible cue on the page for the reader to track, and I read Haywood as using this visual element of the familiar grammar to seemingly cue an erotic scene while actually depicting

---

<sup>1</sup>Emily Hodgson Anderson, “Performing the Passions in Eliza Haywood’s ‘Fantomina’ and ‘Miss Betsy Thoughtless,’” *The Eighteenth Century*, 46, no. 1 (2005): 1–15.

<sup>2</sup>Ros Ballaster. *Seductive Forms: Women’s Amatory Fiction from 1684 to 1740*. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1992. p. 158

<sup>3</sup>Ballaster, *Seductive Forms*, 157-8.

<sup>4</sup>Kathleen Lubey. “Eliza Haywood’s Amatory Aesthetic.” *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 39, no. 3 (2006): 316.

<sup>5</sup>Lubey, “Eliza Haywood’s Amatory Aesthetic,” 316.

a conversation (sexual or otherwise) gone wrong. While Lubey primarily focuses on the “grammar of eroticism” as evoking pleasure and sensation, this analysis examines the lack of pleasure the “grammar of eroticism” can indicate, expanding the grammar to include the unpleasantness of instructive moments in *Fantomina*.

In *Fantomina*, Haywood uses the amatory convention of the em dash to signal conversation. The well-established metaphor of spoken conversation representing sexual conversation is cued with the em dash, which functions to introduce verbal and sexual speech and to indicate reciprocal speech. The em dash is present during verbal conversations and sexual conversations to indicate a mutual, reciprocal exchange. Haywood, however, complicates the idea that mutual conversation and exchange always occur by using the em dash to also introduce non-reciprocal conversations that revealingly have no answering em dash. The loss of the visual cue signals a disruption of the grammar and a danger within the plot during the scene of Fantomina’s loss of virtue. Within *Fantomina*, this breakdown of conversation leads to a crisis in the text that results in Fantomina becoming a single authorial figure. There is a rupture in the text that shows Fantomina turning away from conversation as the mode of sexual interaction and instead developing narrative and writing as the frame for interaction. Rather than than using the existing model of conversation occurring between two people, her desire for narrative control results in the development of persona after persona, with Fantomina as the single author of every plot. This crisis-born model of narrative-based engagement is revealed to collapse under pressure, however, resulting in the em dash returning at the close of the narrative. The arrival of Fantomina’s mother reintroduces the conversational em dash to demonstrate that both Beauplaisir’s conventional use of the conversational em dash and Fantomina’s model of narrative control are flawed. In the

conclusion, the mother presents the ideal use of the em dash and how to responsibly navigate amatory language, completing the instructive potential of the “grammar of eroticism.”

## I. CONVENTIONAL CONVERSATION

The intrigue in *Fantomina* begins at the Playhouse where Fantomina observes the men interacting with the sex worker.<sup>6</sup> The amatory em dash is introduced immediately to indicate Fantomina’s inner conversation with herself: “—This excited a Curiosity in her to know in what Manner these Creatures were address’d:—” (Haywood 41).<sup>7</sup> The sexual metaphor of conversation is engaged by Fantomina’s “excited” curiosity and her desire to know how the women in the pit are “address’d.” While Fantomina has “no other Aim, than the Gratification of an innocent Curiosity,” the experienced reader knows by the amatory language conventions that this innocent curiosity and excitement will not remain so for long (42). Fantomina’s “excitement” connotes a mental stimulation as well as the beginnings of an embodied sexual excitement. Barbara Benedict theorizes curiosity as characteristic of the amatory genre, reading Haywood’s engagement of visual lust as an “endorsement of [female] inquiry” that allows readers and heroines to explore “the desire to find something out, curiosity, and the desire to be aroused.”<sup>8</sup> Benedict reads amatory as a genre that supports objective analysis and fulfills the desire of women readers to know about sex and love, and this unshakeable curiosity of Fantomina’s “to know” invites the reader to witness how

---

<sup>6</sup> While the use of the term “sex worker” is somewhat anachronistic to the text’s language of “Prostitute” (Haywood 42), there is some ambiguity as to which narrator uses the term; arguably, Fantomina herself does not use it. When the reader is first introduced to the person Fantomina emulates, she is described as “a Woman who sat in a Corner of the Pit” and “those Women who make sale of their Favours” (Haywood 41, 42). This description of the “sale of their Favours” leads me to use the term “sex worker” in this paper, in an effort to use a straightforward and non-derogatory term for the profession.

<sup>7</sup>Henceforth, all page numbers in parentheses will refer to the primary text of Eliza Haywood, *Fantomina*, edited by Alexander Pettit, Margaret Case Croskery and Anna C. Patchias. (Broadview Press, 2004).

<sup>8</sup>Barbara M. Benedict, “The Curious Genre: Female Inquiry in Amatory Fiction.” *Studies in the Novel*, 30, no. 2, (1998): 194.

amorous conversation can play out. In this opening scene, it is important to note that Fantomina is ignorant to the dual function of “address” and conversation. While the reader knows curiosity and conversation bear a sexual connotation, Fantomina’s desire to engage is ignorant of this fact. She is curious but not fully informed of the sexual expectation that comes with conversation.

As Fantomina ventures into the pit of the playhouse, she engages in conversation with others for the first time. The text marks the exchange with reciprocating em dashes. She is surrounded by men attempting to engage her and the text uses em dashes to track the conversation. First, an em dash introduces the speech of “—A Crowd of Purchasers [...]” that makes offers, to which Fantomina reciprocates by listening: “—She listen’d to ‘em all” and the men’s speech is introduced again with another em dash: “—She was told by ‘em all” (42). The em dash visually signals the introduction of a participant, followed by an answering em dash from another participant. At this point, Fantomina is part of the conversation, yet hasn’t entered into the mutual exchange of speech. She is engaged by listening, receiving “no small Pleasure in hearing herself prais’d” and content to leave the interaction at that (ibid). The arrival of Beauplaisir, however, changes the dynamic. As Fantomina notices Beauplaisir, she thinks to herself that:

She had often seen him in the Drawing-Room, had talk’d with him; but then her Quality and reputed Virtue kept him from using her with that Freedom she now expected he wou’d do, and had discover’d something in him, which made her often think she shou’d not be displeas’d, if he would abate some Part of his Reserve (42).

Fantomina’s pleasure at listening to herself be praised is overtaken by her desire to converse with Beauplaisir. While she “had talk’d with him” in the Drawing-Room, their conversation was stifled by “her Quality and reputed Virtue.” Fantomina desires an exchange with more “Freedom” and less “Reserve.” The entrance of Beauplaisir shifts her scheme from one of gratifying “innocent Curiosity” to Fantomina’s mental statement that “—Now was the Time to have her Wishes answer’d:—” (42). Finished with listening, Fantomina seeks to be “answer’d” by Beauplaisir.

In the ensuing exchange with Beauplaisir, Haywood presents readers with a conventional model of conversation to observe. The em dash shows Beauplaisir opening conversation with Fantomina: “—He address’d her at first with the usual Salutations of her pretended Profession” and then demonstrates Beauplaisir altering his conversation to suit Fantomina specifically:

—And such like Questions; 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 [...] 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.— (43).

That Beauplaisir “chang’d the Form of his Conversation” to account for the new knowledge of Fantomina’s “Turn of Wit” and “genteel Manner” demonstrates his reciprocal engagement with Fantomina. He listens, then formulates his response in reaction to the new information presented. The em dashes track the shift in Fantomina and Beauplaisir’s conversation to create a visual sense of Beauplaisir’s changed manner of addressing her. Because this conversation is reciprocal, both Fantomina and Beauplaisir are left “infinitely charm’d with each other” and Fantomina “found a vast deal of Pleasure in conversing with him in this free and unrestrain’d manner” (43). Haywood emphasizes their mutual delight in the conversation through repetitive statements, from “infinitely charmed,” Beauplaisir feeling “transported,” Fantomina’s “vast deal of Pleasure,” and their “equal Satisfaction.” This repetition suggests Haywood is presenting this reciprocal mode of conversation as a model for how exchange should occur.

This model is important to note as the novella moves forward and reveals that conversation does not always proceed in such a reciprocal manner. After the play is finished, Fantomina and Beauplaisir have differing expectations as to what comes next. Beauplaisir presumes “on the Liberties which her suppos’d Function allow’d of” and “told her she must either go with him to some convenient House of his procuring, or permit him to wait on her to her own Lodgings” (43).

This presumption, based on what Fantomina's "suppos'd Function allow'd of," shifts conversation away from the reciprocal model. The em dashes introduce Beauplaisir's speech, but he "told her" in a demand, rather than the question and response-based mode earlier. Here, Fantomina's lack of knowledge regarding the sexual expectation accompanying spoken conversation makes it difficult for her to respond. When Beauplaisir makes the demand, she finds herself "involv'd in a Difficulty, which before never enter'd into her Head" (ibid). She is ignorant to the sexual metaphor of conversation and is unprepared to engage in sexual conversation after the spoken conversation. After the encounter, Fantomina desires "another Opportunity of conversing with him," while Beauplaisir desires "Gratification" (44, 43). They do not communicate well with each other; Beauplaisir leaves the play believing he will accompany Fantomina home the next evening, and Fantomina leaves imagining "a world of Satisfaction... in observing the Surprise he would be in to find himself refused by a Woman" (44). The reader begins to see a breakdown in the model of successful, reciprocal conversation as Fantomina and Beauplaisir's desired outcomes diverge, as Haywood sets the scene for a non-reciprocal conversation.

Criticism is divided on how to read the scene when Fantomina is "in fine [...] undone" (46). While Ros Ballaster understands the scene of Beauplaisir and Fantomina's next interaction as rape, Jonathan Kramnick claims that Haywood's language is too shifting and inextricable from the conflicting forms of narrative to land on either side of the debate.<sup>9</sup> Kramnick's exploration of consent in Haywood's writing finds the treatment of the inner world of experience and the outer world of expression in *Fantomina* to be ambiguous in this instance, and he does not understand the scene as rape. Kramnick reads Fantomina's "extreme Liking" for Beauplaisir as probable evidence of her continued desire for him, yet not enough to be conclusive on the side of consent

---

<sup>9</sup> Ros Ballaster. *Seductive Forms*, 188; Jonathan Kramnick. *Actions and Objects: from Hobbes to Richardson*. (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2010), 187.

in this first interaction.<sup>10</sup> If we consider the amatory em dash and conversation, however, the scene is very non-consensual because the interaction is a non-reciprocal conversation. Fantomina understands herself as engaging in spoken conversation, and at this moment does not have the knowledge to consent to sexual conversation. Her verbal attempts to resist Beauplaisir are met without verbal reciprocation from Beauplaisir, which does not follow the model of mutual conversation.

During the scene of Fantomina's loss of virtue, the em dash opens a conversation, with Fantomina beginning: "—Thus much, indeed, she told him, that she was a Virgin, and had assumed this Manner of Behavior only to engage him" (46). There is no answering em dash from Beauplaisir, only the statement that: "But that he little regarded" (ibid). His lack of regard and lack of a responding em dash indicates that this is not a mutual conversation between lovers, and, given the sexual metaphor functioning in the text, also not a mutual sexual interaction. This is markedly different from the first conversation that Beauplaisir and Fantomina have in the playhouse, when Beauplaisir "chang'd the form of his Conversation" with the new information that Fantomina is witty and genteel in manners (43). Upon receiving the new information that "indeed, she told him, that she was a Virgin," Beauplaisir does not change the form of his conversation, suggesting that the scene of Fantomina's loss of virtue does not follow the conventional model of conversation.

While the grammar of eroticism is present in this moment in the arrhythmic sensation of short and long sentence fragments and the presence of the amatory em dash, the lack of conversational markers suggests that something else is going on in the passage. While the conventional use of amatory grammar suggests that the diction used would be embodied or erotic, the content of the passage actually involves Fantomina's attempted refusal of Beauplaisir. The

---

<sup>10</sup> Kramnick, *Actions and Objects*, 184, 187.

earlier connection of the em dash to articles of speech from the playhouse like “She was told,” “He address’d her,” and “She told him” is dropped and replaced with descriptions of feeling:

—It was in vain; she would have retracted the Encouragement she had given:—In vain she endeavoured to delay, till the next Meeting, the fulfilling of his Wishes:—She had now gone too far to retreat: *He* was bold;—he was resolute: *She* fearful,—confus’d, altogether unprepar’d to resist in such encounters (46).

The feelings involved in this moment are not sensual; Beauplaisir is “bold” and “resolute” and Fantomina is “fearful,” “confus’d,” and “unprepar’d” (46). Rather than being an amorous conversation that results in “equal Satisfaction” like Fantomina and Beauplaisir’s earlier conversation, the em dashes in this moment emphasize that “—It was in vain [...] —In vain” for Fantomina to protest, and the feeling language focuses on the fact that Fantomina is “altogether unprepar’d to resist in such Encounters” (43, 46). That Fantomina’s retraction of encouragement and attempts at delay are phrased as “in vain [...] In vain” demonstrates that this is not a consensual encounter, for neither the spoken nor sexual conversation are reciprocal (46). While consent is understood differently throughout history, Beauplaisir’s refusal to engage in conversation with Fantomina makes the scene read as a rape.

The text’s emphasis on the repeated “It was in vain [...] In vain” suggests that Fantomina’s error in this amorous encounter is a lack of knowledge and preparation. Although her performance of Fantomina is carefully constructed, from her dress to her manner, she has not prepared herself to resist Beauplaisir because she did not have adequate knowledge of what she was engaging in.<sup>11</sup> Haywood buries this instructive focus in the amatory language of conversation, teaching that the feminine expectation that a sexual conversation will proceed like a spoken conversation is naïve and unprepared. While Fantomina had been delighted by Beauplaisir’s verbal amorous

---

<sup>11</sup> Anderson, “Performing the Passions,” 4-5.

conversation in the playhouse, finding “a vast deal of Pleasure in conversing with him in this free and unrestrain’d manner,” she does not realize the full sexual import of such a conversation (43). While the reader familiar with amatory fiction recognizes the frequently used metaphor and catches the innuendo in her “vast deal of Pleasure,” Fantomina herself is naïve to the sexual implication. Because she expects to be able to extricate herself from sexual conversation the way she would a spoken conversation, she attempts verbal appeals during the rape, “endeavour[ing] to delay, till the next Meeting, the fulfilling of his Wishes” and telling him that she is a virgin only masquerading as a sex worker (46).

Haywood’s message is that the verbal appeal is not enough once engaged in a sexual conversation; the best protection is preparation, to carefully guard against both spoken and sexual conversation. It is the “Freedoms she allow’d” in spoken conversation that Beauplaisir takes as encouragement, the “free and unrestrain’d” conversation in the playhouse read by him as a promise of sexual freedom (ibid). Fantomina is uneducated in this manner of conversation, and this ignorance is her downfall. She does not understand what she has engaged in, so she is unprepared to resist. It is only after her sexual encounters with Beauplaisir that Fantomina feels as Celia that “now understood that Language but too well,” only then able to read Beauplaisir’s “two or three hearty Kisses” as “the Prelude to more substantial Joys” (52). Fantomina frames his kisses as language, finally understanding them as communication as she, too, becomes a reader who understands amatory language.

## II. CONVERSATION IN CRISIS

This new understanding of amatory language comes at great personal cost, leading to a rupture in the text as the conventional model of conversation is abandoned by Fantomina. After

the rape, conversation is revealed to be a potentially unstable model of exchange, leading Fantomina to pursue a different mode of engagement. No longer able to conceptualize conversation as a mutual exchange, Fantomina becomes a single authorial figure and shifts away from the reciprocal em dash to a narrative and writing-focused approach. The text focuses on Fantomina's ability to control the narrative in response to her lack of preparation, knowledge, and consent in her first sexual encounter with Beauplaisir. The em dash in her subsequent interactions is one-sided and focuses on Fantomina's schemes of entrapment. While the em dash is still used in the conventional manner by Beauplaisir, Fantomina develops a new narrative-based use for the em dash after the crisis in conversation. The em dash begins to appear in relation to "design," rather than conversation: "—From her first finding out that he design'd to leave her behind..." and "—Her Design was once more to engage him," appearing to indicate Fantomina's desired scheme, rather than Fantomina's interaction with Beauplaisir (51). In order to regain the narrative control that was taken from her, Fantomina generates a model of engagement that relies less and less on physical interaction and conversation, until the engagement with Beauplaisir occurs primarily through paper and the letters sent between the two.

The first persona Fantomina takes on after the rape is Celia. The narrative goes into detail on her disguise, focused on how Fantomina develops Celia's narrative through dress and dialect. The emphasis is on her "design," which through Fantomina's narrative control, is found to be successful, for: "Nor were her Designs disappointed: He was fir'd with the first Sight of her; and tho' he did not presently take any farther Notice of her, than giving her two or three hearty Kisses, yet she, who now understood that Language but too well, easily saw they were the Prelude to more substantial Joys" (52). Because of Fantomina's preparation in creating the persona of Celia, "Nor were her Designs disappointed." The crucial difference between this encounter and the first

encounter is that it is Fantomina's design, rather than Beauplaisir's, that is successful. Haywood then reveals that Fantomina has become an adept reader of amatory language, for "she, who now understood that Language but too well" is fully informed of the sexual expectation in the "Language." Fantomina's earlier naiveté and ignorance is gone, and she is able to understand the amatory language well enough to control the form. That she "easily saw they were the Prelude" indicates she has become a close reader of the form of sexual interaction. This close reading develops sexual interaction as a narrative, rather than a conversation.

Beauplaisir still operates under the conversation model, however, not realizing that he has become entangled in Fantomina's "design." While Fantomina's em dashes accompany design and narrative, Beauplaisir's em dash continues to use the conventional conversational model. He "ask'd her, how long she had been at Service?—How many Sweethearts she had? If she had ever been in Love? and many other such questions[...] —His wild Desires burst out in all his Words and Actions" (53). Responding em dashes from Celia are noticeably absent as a visual convention. As Beauplaisir talks on, Celia's answers come not through em dashes, but are instead contained within Beauplaisir's long connected series of em dashes. As Beauplaisir questions her, Celia's answer is embedded within his monologue, through "All which she answer'd with such seeming Innocence" (53). Later, after Beauplaisir's offer of gold, she "cry'd, O Law, Sir! what must I do for all this?," which is also not marked with an em dash (*ibid*). That Celia speaks, yet not within the conventional em dash model, is a conspicuous sign. Rather than representing the non-reciprocation and lack of consent during the rape of Fantomina, the lack of an em dash here reads more as non-participatory. Fantomina, as Celia, is no longer attempting conversation within the conventional model, no longer participating in exchange. She has developed her own model which relies only on her own design.

The Widow Bloomer persona continues to develop Fantomina's model of engagement through "design," and Haywood reveals Fantomina's progression from close reader to writer. The Widow is a narrative-based persona who weaves a "sorrowful Tale, which had been several Times interrupted by a Parenthesis of Sighs and Groans" and Beauplaisir is unable to get "a Word from her on any other Theme" (55). While Fantomina's personas all involve a certain amount of story, the Widow Bloomer writes a grand narrative for Beauplaisir that reminds him of "the celebrated Story of the *Ephesian* Matron" (ibid). Amatory language is introduced, not by Beauplaisir, but the Widow, who describes "—the unspeakable Extasy of those who meet with equal Ardency; and represented it in Colours so lively" (56). She is beyond Celia's ability to understand the language, and is able to deploy the amatory language herself, including the em dash convention. The affair between Beauplaisir and Widow Bloomer is further represented in writing by the transition from spoken and sexual conversation to the actual writing of letters between Widow Bloomer and Beauplaisir.

Haywood complicates Fantomina's development as a reader and writer of amatory language with the introduction of the letters. The letters from Beauplaisir to both the Widow Bloomer and Fantomina are printed on the page, providing physical evidence of Beauplaisir's inconstancy. Fantomina is able to read of her own betrayal because she, of course, is the single body portraying multiple women. Cynthia Richards offers the theory of sympathetic identification while reading amatory texts, which relies on the heroine's "ability to distinguish her own story from that of others— to break a repetitive and ultimately de-humanizing chain of desire."<sup>12</sup> The narrative in *Fantomina* turns on the fact that Beauplaisir encounters the individual of Fantomina as different women, believing himself to have separately interacted with Lady Such-a-one,

---

<sup>12</sup> Cynthia Richards. "The Pleasures of Complicity': Sympathetic Identification and the Female Reader in Early Eighteenth-Century Women's Amatory Fiction." *The Eighteenth Century* 36, no. 3 (1995): 222.

Fantomina, Celia, Widow Bloomer, and Incognita. The “repetitive and ultimately de-humanizing chain of desire” that Richards describes is a chain that Fantomina willingly engages with, making Fantomina a strange case study in the genre of amatory fiction.<sup>13</sup> Rather than sharing correspondence with other women to learn of Beauplaisir’s betrayals, Fantomina reads correspondence that is all directed to herself, yet addressed to different women by the same man. Fantomina reads the stories of the personas she has created to discover that she has been betrayed, finding *herself* to be “neither first to be seduced nor the last to be abandoned.”<sup>14</sup> Her performances of different women allow her to occupy an in-between space of reader and writer that allows her a unique understanding of amatory language. Because Fantomina is one woman who is pursued by a man who believes her to be several different women, she develops her own amatory narrative and thus gains an understanding of her own situation *as* amatory narrative.

Richards also examines the “immasculating” effect of women’s identification with male texts and the sense of alienation when the reading self is intended to be a male reader, asking readers to instead consider sympathetic exchange between women as a potentially affirming counter to this immascultation.<sup>15</sup> Richards’ theory is interesting alongside *Fantomina*, as *Fantomina* can be read as experiencing immascultation when trying to identify with the conventional model of conversation, thus driven to develop her own model. That *Fantomina* experiences sympathetic exchange with herself while reading the letters addressed to Widow Bloomer and *Fantomina* complicates the theory, however; Richards understands the typical rivalry between women in seduction tales as a potential space for female community and readership, if community, rather than rivalry, was the convention.<sup>16</sup> Women’s correspondence and sharing of

---

<sup>13</sup> Richards, “‘The Pleasures of Complicity,’” 222.

<sup>14</sup> Richards, “‘The Pleasures of Complicity,’” 222.

<sup>15</sup> Richards, “‘The Pleasures of Complicity,’” 222.

<sup>16</sup> Richards, “‘The Pleasures of Complicity,’” 225.

stories “draws attention to the typical heroine’s ‘awareness that she is neither first to be seduced nor the last to be abandoned,’” allowing women to become readers of other women’s stories rather than men’s.<sup>17</sup> Because of her designs, however, Fantomina develops this awareness not by sharing stories with other women, but by reading Beauplaisir’s responses to a multi-persona narrative of her own making. Unable to be in rivalry with herself, Fantomina resolves the betrayal-rivalry-community dynamic by turning her rage toward Beauplaisir.

The novella merges the timeline of fresh desire and stale abandonment into a single day: Fantomina “received in one Day Answers to both these [letters]” (58). After reading both letters from Beauplaisir, one which uses amatory language to communicate his desire, spilling over with em dashes and breathless, chained fragments (*Never did any look like you,—write like you,—bless like you;—nor did ever Man adore as I do.*) and one which transforms the amatory em dash into severe, uninterested punctuation (*—It was my Misfortune, not my Fault, that you were not persecuted every Post with a Declaration of my unchanging Passion, but*), Fantomina is shocked into speech (58-9). Haywood inserts Fantomina’s voice into the narrative, her indignation giving rise to a monologuing burst of temper:

TRAYTOR (*cry’d she,*) as soon as she had read them, ‘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? 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 (59).

Fantomina’s reading allows her to understand herself as an individual who “outwitted even the most Subtle.” Rather than reading herself as deceived and cheated, Fantomina instead loses her faith in men and comforts herself with the knowledge that she is the superior reader and writer;

---

<sup>17</sup> Richards, “The Pleasures of Complicity,” 225.

the monologue concludes with her satisfaction that Beauplaisir is the one believing a fiction, not her.

After receiving the letters, the “Knowledge of his Inconstancy and Levity of Nature kept her from having that real Tenderness for him she would else have had” and Fantomina realizes that she “had all the sweets of Love, but as yet had tasted none of the Gall” (59-60). She claims to desire instead what Helen Thompson calls “repetition of the unrepeatable” and develops herself as a serial sequence of women.<sup>18</sup> This sudden collapse of the serial seduction narrative into the singular narrative of Fantomina’s triumph over Beauplaisir collapses the patriarchal binary of “virgin” and “whore.”<sup>19</sup> Thompson points out that Fantomina’s initial success with Beauplaisir relies on her resemblance to Lady Such-a-one, as Beauplaisir’s desire for Fantomina is driven by his inability to possess Lady Such-a-one. Fantomina’s performance allows Beauplaisir to physically possess the accessible Fantomina while preserving the desirable fantasy of the virginal Lady Such-a-one. Through her authorship, Fantomina rewrites the patriarchal narrative so that she can occupy the desirable position of virgin and whore, eliding the male disappointment with the no-longer-virgin after possession. Fantomina is able to be serially new, avoiding redundancy by authoring novelty with every new persona. Her narrative holds Beauplaisir always in the present tense.<sup>20</sup> Fantomina is able to engineer a new women’s narrative, one that allows her to reinsert herself into the patriarchal plot of possession over and over again, creating “repetition of the unrepeatable;” the first flush of desire.<sup>21</sup> Her ability to read and re-read the stories of multiple

---

<sup>18</sup> Helen Thompson. “Plotting Materialism: W. Charleton’s ‘The Ephesian Matron’, E. Haywood’s ‘Fantomina’, and Feminine Consistency.” *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 35, no. 2 (2002): 201.

<sup>19</sup> Thompson, “Plotting Materialism,” 200.

<sup>20</sup> Thompson, “Plotting Materialism,” 202.

<sup>21</sup> Thompson, “Plotting Materialism,” 201.

women while centered in one identity enables her to divert the fantasy, imaginatively embodying the serial chain of desire to reproduce a patriarchal fantasy for her own ends.

That Fantomina ultimately concentrates her efforts on the production of patriarchal fantasy reveals that, after all, her hard-won knowledge of amatory language and her ability to control the narrative does not change the narrative. The skipping sensation of a singular story repeating itself with only slight revision does not alter the foundational narrative within all of Fantomina's personas: Beauplaisir takes advantage of a woman in a vulnerable position in every scenario. The independent movement of Fantomina, Celia, and the Widow Bloomer is hindered by the danger Beauplaisir's "seduction" presents. As Celia, the narrative mentions that she is to serve none but Beauplaisir and a rheumatic older gentleman at the inn, placing her "in no Apprehensions of any Amorous Violence, but where she wish'd to find it" (52). This sentence comes across as comforting, for the reader knows that Fantomina as Celia is in pursuit of Beauplaisir's amorous violence, yet Beauplaisir's reading of the scenario carries no foreknowledge of this consent. Beauplaisir is in the dark about Fantomina's engineering; to read Beauplaisir's actions separately from Fantomina's narrative is to witness his forcing of "Amorous Violence" on every woman he encounters, and to bear the knowledge that if other men were present in the inn, they would do the same. While Fantomina is able to divert the plot of inconstancy by trapping Beauplaisir in her designs, she does not ultimately change his use of non-reciprocal conversation.

### III. CONVERSATION AND BODY

The turn to letter-writing demonstrates the slow devolution of Fantomina from body to text. After the crisis of body during the rape, Fantomina's efforts to seize narrative control center more and more on text as the solution. Her final persona, Incognita, manages the pursuit of

Beauplaisir entirely through text. Incognita and Beauplaisir first communicate solely through letters, removing the body from the narrative. Fantomina shifts from Celia, who deals in physical amatory language and is given “two or three hearty Kisses” and caught “by the pretty Leg” (52, 53) to the Widow Bloomer, who first tells a “sorrowful Tale” before the physical act of “counterfeit[ing] a fainting” (55, 57) to Incognita, who writes “To the All-conquering BEAUPLAISIR” in a letter and receives a reply “in Terms tender enough for a Man who had never seen the Person to whom he wrote” (63, 64). In her designs, Fantomina increasingly restricts Beauplaisir’s immediate access to her body. Her desire for narrative control means that Beauplaisir is eventually only allowed to enter the narrative at the moment of her choosing. This can be read as a direct response to Fantomina’s moment of crisis, when her lack of preparation made it “in vain [...] In vain” for her to delay or retreat (46).

At the conclusion of the novella, there is a return to body that is equally as intrusive as the initial loss of bodily autonomy, as Fantomina is discovered to be pregnant. Despite Fantomina’s attempts to restrict the body from the text, the body asserts itself into the narrative. Fantomina’s self-regulated production of narrative personas comes to a halt as she (re)produces, facing “the Consequences of her amorous Follies” through pregnancy (68). Haywood’s foreshadowing joke after the Widow Bloomer encounter that Fantomina “had another project in *embrio*, which she soon ripen’d into Action” is fully realized, the Incognita scheme produced at the same moment the embryo is reproduced (60). Similarly to the beginning of the novella, when the reader understands the sexual expectation of the amatory language before Fantomina herself does, it is revealed to the reader that Fantomina is pregnant before she herself is aware. The reader is again in the know before Fantomina herself is aware of what is to come, generating a sensation of repetition as Fantomina loses bodily autonomy for a second time. This represents a textual shift back to the

narrative before bodily crisis. Unable to continue indefinitely in crisis response, the narrative-based model of engagement that Fantomina developed is forced to collapse.

Fantomina's model of engagement was never intended to continue indefinitely as an alternative to the conventional model of conversation in the novella. While she gained an increased understanding of amatory language, resolving her former naiveté and ignorance, her achievement in "outwit[ing] even the most subtle" is ultimately unable to change the rules of engagement (59). Despite her best efforts at controlling the narration, Beauplaisir continues to use the conventional model of conversation to engage. As the novella draws to a close, Fantomina's attempt to subvert the dominant narrative of the woman seduced and abandoned by transforming the singular woman into a serial chain of women has little to no impact and does not shift the conversation. Yet the novella does not conclude by reverting to the beginning's model of Beauplaisir's convention asserting itself; the conversational em dash is reinstated with the arrival of Fantomina's mother, whose assertion of will reveals a different potential for the em dash that has previously appeared connected to amatory language.

Discovering the pregnancy after the arrival of her mother, the reader is told that Fantomina is no longer at liberty "to have acted with the same unquestionable Authority over herself, as she did before the coming of her Mother" (68). Fantomina finds "all her Invention was at a Loss for a Stratagem to impose on a Woman of her Penetration" (ibid). The sexual innuendo in the description of Fantomina's mother as "a Woman of her Penetration" is an important handoff of protagonist. The narrative completes a shift in conceptualizing conversation as a metaphor for sex to conversation as the means of accessing truth and knowledge. As Fantomina's mother takes over the narrative, her conversation with the doctor who discovers the pregnancy is framed in the amatory em dashes. While moments of seduction had previously been bracketed by the em dashes,

the same dashes are now used to frame the moment of the mother's discovery: "—Never was Astonishment and Horror greater than that which seiz'd the Soul of this afflicted Parent at these Words: She could not for a Time believe the Truth of what she heard; but he insisting on it, and conjuring her to send for a Midwife, she was at length convinc'd of it.—" (69). Here, the doctor's conversational insistence mirrors Beauplaisir's insistence during Fantomina's rape, and the mother's disbelief and horror at the discovery of the pregnancy parallels Fantomina's horror at learning the sexual expectation attached to conversation.

The text's near replaying of the beginning of the novella collapses the timeline of the story into a proper, compressed version. The mother's reaction to new information uses em dashes and presents the final, ideal model of conversation for the reader to observe. While the narrator chastises Fantomina for her inappropriate response to the loss of her virtue, claiming her "Wit and Vivacity assist[ed] her in all, but where it was most needful," for she "grew perfectly easy with the Remembrance, she had forfeited [Virtue]," (49) Fantomina's mother does not grow easy after hearing of her daughter's situation. After the doctor convinces her that her daughter is indeed pregnant, Fantomina's mother's feelings are "succeeded by adequate Shame and Indignation:—" (69). The use of "adequate" to describe the mother's sensation indicates the narrator's approval, which was not bestowed upon Fantomina. Armed with the new information of Fantomina's condition, the mother "— [...] flew to the Bed where her Daughter was lying, and telling her what she had been inform'd of, and which she was now far from doubting, commanded her" (ibid). Fantomina's mother gains authority and command as she gains new information, using the conversational em dash to control the narrative.

Fantomina's mother uses the em dash convention within the established amatory language of the text, navigating innuendo-filled diction to seek reciprocation in the form of discourse rather

than intercourse. While “—It was a great while before [Fantomina] could be brought to confess any Thing,” the mother is eventually “satisfy’d” with the name “*Beauplaisir*” (69). This springs the mother into action, and she sends “Messengers at the same Time, for a Midwife, and for that Gentleman who had occasion’d the other’s being wanted” (ibid). She is able to manage the innuendo of “satisfy’d” and the aftermath of the affair efficiently and effectively. *Beauplaisir* responds to her messenger by “—immediately obey[ing] the Summons,” unable to resist her command (ibid). While the mother is “enflam’d” and “had no longer Patience,” language that elsewhere in the text would suggest an erotic scene, the displacement of the amatory language serves to demonstrate the management of emotion and sensation (70). The mother is presented as not immune to sensation, experiencing satisfaction and able to grow “enflam’d,” yet she does not allow these emotions to distract her from her purpose. Unlike *Fantomina* and *Beauplaisir*, she uses amatory language to serve her needs, rather than allowing herself to be pulled along by sensation and amatory language like the two of them.

The mother’s assertive use of the em dash is markedly different from both *Beauplaisir* and *Fantomina*’s amatory use of the convention. After reading the model of the em dash that *Fantomina*’s mother presents, *Beauplaisir* is revealed to let the em dash and amatory sensation carry him along, rather than actively using the em dash for his purpose. When he is with Celia, “—His wild Desires burst out in all his Words and Actions” (53). He is equally as out of control during the rape of *Fantomina*, when the narrator writes that “—nay, in the present burning Eagerness of Desire, ‘tis probable [...] the Knowledge of her Birth would not have influenc’d him with Respect sufficient to have curb’d the wild Exuberance of his luxurious Wishes” (46). *Fantomina* is shown to be equally as capable of being carried away by amatory sensation and the em dash. After her delight in the mutual conversation in the playhouse, *Fantomina* is swept along by the em dash and

amorous sensations: “—Strange and unaccountable were the Whimsies she was possess’d of,—wild and incoherent her Desires,—unfix’d and undetermin’d her Resolutions” (44). This stream of emotion is revealed to be the improper way to engage with sensation. The mother’s emotions, however, are “adequate,” and she is capable of being both “convinc’d” and “command[ing]” through the em dash, never carried away (69).

While the mother is able to discover information using the em dash, neither Beauplaisir nor Fantomina are able to accomplish their ends. While Beauplaisir is able to get what he wants using the em dash, as he “compelled [Celia] to sit in his Lap” and used “strenuous Pressures with which at last he ventur’d to enfold [Widow Bloomer],” (53, 57) his ability to compel and command lies primarily in the physical pressure that accompanies his entreaties. When it comes to the use of the em dash to gain information, Beauplaisir is completely ineffective. In the attempt to discover Incognita’s identity, “—He resented,—he once more entreated,—he said all that Man could do, to prevail on her to unfold the Mystery; but all his Adjurations were fruitless” (67). Through em dash after em dash, Beauplaisir seeks information, yet “his Adjurations were fruitless” and his conversational speech act of adjuring is not reciprocated by Incognita. Fantomina is also unable to assertively use the em dash to discover new information and control the narrative. Her utter lack of information results in the rape and Beauplaisir exerting his will over hers. After her traumatic encounter, Fantomina abandons the conversational em dash as a possible mode through which to gain control and spends the narrative attempting to devise an alternate mode of engagement. The mother’s model of the em dash is necessary to ensure the text does not end in an instructive void with only ineffective models presented.

The final few pages of the narrative proceed almost entirely using em dashes to drive forward, and the climax of the scene occurs through a three-sided conversation:

[Fantomina's mother] cry'd out, I will not be impos'd on: The Truth by one of you shall be reveal'd.— *Beauplaisir* being brought to the Bed-side, was beginning to address himself to the Lady in it, to beg she would clear the Mistake her Mother was involv'd in; when she, covering herself with the Cloaths, and ready to die a second Time with the inward Agitations of her Soul, shriek'd out, Oh, I am undone!—I cannot live, and bear this Shame!— (70).

The text's conversation comes full circle in this moment, as *Beauplaisir* is amusingly “brought to the Bed-side” and begins “to address himself to the Lady in it.” While his address to the Lady at her bed-side had previously been sexual, this address is very chaste and distraught, the conversation completely turned to the appropriate social standard. Fantomina is driven to speak by her horror, directly intervening in the narrative to shriek “Oh, I am undone!—I cannot live, and bear this Shame!” The story Fantomina relates to her mother and *Beauplaisir* shocks both into silence, but it is critically Fantomina's mother who breaks the silence first, telling *Beauplaisir* that “—The Blame is wholly her's, and I have nothing to request further of you” (71). While both *Beauplaisir* and the mother react in utter surprise, it is Fantomina's mother who first masters her emotions and moves the narrative forward.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

*Fantomina's* conclusion is a rather ambiguous one as far as eighteenth-century amatory narratives go. Fantomina is neither married off nor executed, and she does not commit suicide for her unvirtuous deeds. While Isabella of Aphra Behn's “The History of the Nun” is executed by guillotine at the conclusion, Fantomina is merely sent off “to a Monastery in *France*, the Abbess of which had been her [mother's] particular Friend (71). After all of her scandalous behavior, to be sent off to a monastery in France seems rather lacking in narrative drama and a missed opportunity for an instructive punitive conclusion. Close examination of the final conversation between Fantomina and her mother, however, reveals that judgment and punitive measures are

served through the mother. The punishment is framed as a family affair and the knowledge of Fantomina and Beauplaisir's behavior is contained within the enclosed sphere of the conversation between the three. Because the narrative does not extend beyond this private sphere of concern, Fantomina does not receive a dramatic social punishment, but rather a private judgment and setting of consequences by her mother. To send Fantomina off to a monastery in France may read as an undramatic conclusion to a scandalous narrative, yet the final conversation demonstrates an important proper conversation that is both reciprocal and successful in its communication of knowledge and information.

Fantomina's preoccupation throughout the narrative is a concern with the social conversation. During the rape, she remains silent about her true identity, even though that information has the potential to stop Beauplaisir's assault: "—Shock'd, however, at the Apprehension of really losing her Honour, she struggled all she could, and was just going to reveal the whole Secret of her Name and Quality, when the Thoughts of the Liberty he had taken with her, and those he still continued to prosecute, prevented her" (46). The fear that by revealing "the whole Secret of her Name and Quality," Beauplaisir would be able to reveal "Thoughts of the Liberty he had taken with her" in a public forum prevents Fantomina from asserting herself in this crucial moment. After the rape, Fantomina's comfort is that "if he boasted of this Affair, he should not have it in his Power to touch her Character" and she organizes everything "for the Security of her Reputation" (48, 49). The reader is reminded that if Beauplaisir were to tell what happened, he would be able to "boast" of the affair, the narrative of his fulfillment of desire a point of public pride, and not one of secrecy the way Fantomina's desire must be (48). Here, Haywood gives us an example of the violence that can happen to women when the fear of being talked about is greater than the need to advocate for bodily autonomy in a sexual conversation.

Fantomina's concern is that revealing her name to Beauplaisir would result in "the whole Affair made a Theme for publick Ridicule" (46). The worst punishment that Fantomina can imagine is her "Wrongs excit[ing] either the Mirth or Pity of the talking World" and the "Whispers as I Pass" (49). Because this fear of the social conversation drives much of the narrative, it is important that in the conclusion, the story of Fantomina's misdeeds remains enclosed in a circle of trust. Only Beauplaisir, the mother, and Fantomina are fully aware of what has transpired, and Beauplaisir is asked to "not divulge the distracted Folly she has been guilty of" (71). Fantomina's greatest fear of becoming the subject of social conversation and ridicule does not come to pass. The absence of social punishment suggests that it is not the world's judgment that is important to consider. In the concluding conversation when all is finally revealed, it is her mother that Fantomina must answer to. The mother, crucially, first asks "Is this the Gentleman to whom you owe your Ruin?" (70). While Fantomina is unwilling to assign blame to Beauplaisir, calling him "the innocent Cause of my Undoing," the mother identifies Beauplaisir as the person responsible (*ibid*). Fantomina's mother does not believe Beauplaisir has anything to "boast" about concerning his involvement (48). Unlike the social conversation Fantomina imagines, which would ridicule Fantomina and laud Beauplaisir, the mother includes Beauplaisir in her judgment of wrongdoing.

Fantomina and Beauplaisir are forced to stand trial at the hands of Fantomina's mother, who acts as the ultimate judge and deliverer of punishment. The conversation begins with Fantomina saying:

—Promise your Pardon, (*continued she,*) and I will relate the Means. Here she ceas'd, expecting what she would reply, which, on hearing *Beauplaisir* cry out, What mean you, Madam? I your Undoing, who never harbour'd the least Design on you in my Life, she did in these Words, Though the Injury you have done your Family, (*said she,*) is of a Nature which cannot justly hope Forgiveness, yet be assur'd, I shall much sooner excuse you when satisfied of the Truth, than while I am kept in a Suspence, if possible, as vexatious as the Crime itself is to me. Encouraged by this she related the whole Truth (70).

It is the mother's pardon that Fantomina values, and the text uses an em dash to introduce Fantomina's request. With her mother, Fantomina is comfortable engaging through the em dash, trusting that her conversation will be reciprocated in kind. Fantomina enters into this conversation fully informed, to the point where she is "expecting what [her mother] would reply," able to anticipate her mother's next words (ibid). Beauplaisir notably receives no em dash in this conversation. His interjection of "What mean you, Madam?" is passed over by both mother and daughter and his question receives no response. Indeed, his interruption is passed over in the text as though it never occurred, with the mother's response to Fantomina attached to his trailing statement by a comma, as the mother speaks over him: "[Beauplaisir says] I your Undoing, who never harbour'd the least Design on you in my life, she [the mother] did [reply] in these Words [...]." The mother frames Fantomina's wrongdoing as an "Injury you have done your Family," the language of "Injury" suggesting the possibility of recovery. Fantomina is "Encouraged by this" response, and thus able to relate the whole truth, completing a successful reciprocal conversation and communicating the information the mother sought.

For Haywood to conclude with a model of successful conversation between the mother and Fantomina reveals the important function the conversational em dash bears. The amatory convention of the em dash is something that Fantomina ultimately learns to successfully navigate after observing the mother's proper modeling of how to navigate amatory conversation. The development of the em dash, through Beauplaisir's conventional use of it and Fantomina's abandonment of its conversational function, resolves in Fantomina's mother's proper use of it to reveal the reciprocal and informative nature of conversation. While the em dash in *Fantomina* may initially appear to be an unimportant, minute amatory convention, its clear visual presence on the page and its appearance in crucial moments of the novella make it deserving of closer attention in

amatory texts. Haywood's innovation of the em dash in *Fantomina* as a visual convention to depict conversation helps the reader find their footing during the reading of erotic scenes. Because the em dash, a familiar element of Lubey's "grammar of eroticism," is used in scenes both erotic and not erotic, readers are able to observe various models of its use and access the instructive potential of amatory scenes. This small punctuation mark bridges the question of consensual or non-consensual and creates openings to speak, supporting the importance of conversation in amatory encounters.

## Works Cited

- Anderson, Emily Hodgson. "Performing the Passions in Eliza Haywood's 'Fantomina' and 'Miss Betsy Thoughtless.'" *The Eighteenth Century*, 46, no. 1 (2005): 1–15.
- Ballaster, Ros. *Seductive Forms: Women's Amatory Fiction from 1684 to 1740*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992.
- Benedict, Barbara M. "The Curious Genre: Female Inquiry in Amatory Fiction." *Studies in the Novel*, 30, no. 2 (1998): 194-210.
- Haywood, Eliza. *Fantomina*, edited by Alexander Pettit, Margaret Case Croskery and Anna C. Patchias. Broadview Press, 2004.
- Kramnick, Jonathan. *Actions and Objects: from Hobbes to Richardson*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2010.
- Lubey, Kathleen. "Eliza Haywood's Amatory Aesthetic." *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 39, no. 3 (2006): 309–322.
- Lubey, Kathleen. *Excitable Imaginations*. Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 2012.
- Richards, Cynthia. "'The Pleasures of Complicity': Sympathetic Identification and the Female Reader in Early Eighteenth-Century Women's Amatory Fiction." *The Eighteenth Century*, 36, no. 3 (1995): 220–233.
- Thompson, Helen. "Plotting Materialism: W. Charleton's 'The Ephesian Matron', E. Haywood's 'Fantomina', and Feminine Consistency." *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 35, no. 2 (2002): 195–214.