ABO: Interactive Journal for Women in the Arts, 1640-1830

Volume 11
Issue 2 *Fall 2021 Special Issue: Visions*

Article 6

2021

Dress as Deceptive Visual Rhetoric in Eliza Haywood's Fantomina

Kathryn S. Hansen
Chalmers University of Technology, kathrynstrong@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/abo

Part of the Educational Methods Commons, Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Commons, and the Literature in English, British Isles Commons

Recommended Citation

Hansen, Kathryn S. (2021) "Dress as Deceptive Visual Rhetoric in Eliza Haywood's Fantomina," *ABO: Interactive Journal for Women in the Arts, 1640-1830*: Vol.11: Iss.2, Article 6.
http://doi.org/10.5038/2157-7129.11.2.1275
Available at: https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/abo/vol11/iss2/6

This Scholarship is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ University of South Florida. It has been accepted for inclusion in ABO: Interactive Journal for Women in the Arts, 1640-1830 by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ University of South Florida. For more information, please contact scholarcommons@usf.edu.

Dress as Deceptive Visual Rhetoric in Eliza Haywood's Fantomina

Abstract

Writers of fiction capitalize upon dress's potential as an agent of deception, using clothing as a means through which characters control their identity to perpetuate lies. Eliza Haywood's *Fantomina; or, Love in a Maze* (1725) contains this type of heroine, and the novella shows dress can provide women with power that they can find in few other arenas. This novella constructs lying and dress as potent related tools that allow the protagonist to achieve her desires by creating untruths that pass for realities. In so doing, *Fantomina* capitalizes upon two related phenomena: the cultural perception of women's status as innately deceptive and the pervasive accusation that clothing hides the truth. This essay discusses how *Fantomina* celebrates deception by using clothing as visual rhetoric. To do so, it first sets out the popular association of dress with deception, paying particular attention to the hoop petticoat. A discussion of the ways in which Haywood's heroine employs dress as visual rhetoric follows, establishing how *Fantomina* celebrates lying as a useful strategy for women.

Keywords

Eliza Haywood, Fantomina, dress, deception, visual rhetoric

Creative Commons License

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial 4.0 License

Cover Page Footnote

Immense thanks to Linda Troost, whose support and zeal continues to be appreciated.

This scholarship is available in ABO: Interactive Journal for Women in the Arts, 1640-1830:
https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/abo/vol11/iss2/6

Joseph Addison's *Tatler* 116 of January 5, 1709–10, places a hoop petticoat on trial, and while the charges against it are never made explicit, the petticoat's enormous size seems to be the cause for which it appears before Isaac Bickerstaff. Yet Bickerstaff does not find in favor of the petticoat. Instead, Bickerstaff concludes this number of the *Tatler* by clarifying that he would have women "bestow upon themselves all the additional Beauties that Art can supply them with, provided it does not interfere with, Disguise, or pervert, those of Nature" (44). At the heart of Bickerstaff's rationale is a concern with clothing's relationship to truthfulness. Bickerstaff worries that the hoop strays too far from nature or too easily allows women to fictionalize their appearance. Nor was the *Tatler* the only outlet for such beliefs, with thinkers from Sir Joshua Reynolds to Samuel Johnson presenting dress as antithetical to truth.[i]

Writers of fiction capitalize upon dress's potential as an agent of deception, using clothing as a means through which characters control their identity to perpetuate lies. Eliza Haywood's *Fantomina; or, Love in a Maze* (1725) contains just such a heroine, and the text suggests that, through dress, women can obtain power. The novella constructs lying and dress as potent related implements that allow the protagonist to fulfill her desires by creating untruths that pass for realities. In so doing, *Fantomina* capitalizes upon two related phenomena: the cultural perception of women's status as innately deceptive and the pervasive accusation that clothing hides the truth. Haywood's novella harnesses the power created by these beliefs. As a result, *Fantomina* presents an example of lying as useful. In this essay, I discuss how *Fantomina* celebrates deception by using clothing as visual rhetoric. To do so, I sketch out the popular association of dress with deception, paying particular attention to the hoop petticoat, which itself was frequently associated with deception in the eighteenth century. Then, I discuss the ways in which Haywood's heroine employs dress as visual rhetoric to establish how *Fantomina* celebrates lying as a useful strategy for women.

Reality and deception

In early eighteenth-century Britain, the emerging genre of the novel perpetuates the popular idea that clothing is deceptive, often depicting dress as a tool through which a character reshapes his or her identity. If one's "true" identity is expected to be static, clothing's participation in the alteration of identity aligns dress with falsity. The idea that the novel itself participates in deceit amplifies the potential deception conveyed by intradiegetic clothes. As Lennard Davis argues, "English novels of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries were perceived by many

of the middle and upper classes as immoral and illicit not only for their criminal content but for their very enterprise of fictionalizing, inventing, forging reality, and lying" (131).[ii] In part to counter such perceptions, many mid- to late-eighteenth-century writers like Samuel Richardson, Frances Burney, and others assert that fiction tells larger philosophical truths through constructed plots. But the prevalence of deception in earlier eighteenth-century novels helps to perpetuate the idea that the novel is a form predicated on untruth. However, what constitutes "truth" is open to interpretation, particularly in dress. Sumptuary laws proscribing what garments were acceptable were, by the eighteenth century, no longer enforced, leaving individuals responsible for their own clothing selection. This freedom of dress selection allowed individuals greater latitude in shaping the perception of aspects of their identity like class, occupation, or religion. Clothing could thus present a constructed identity as real, and this aligned clothing's function with that of fiction because both share the potential to blur distinctions between seeming and being through the simulation of identities.

Jean Baudrillard's ideas concerning truth and falsehood help provide a framework through which to understand the workings of simulation. Baudrillard writes that simulation is "the generation by models of a real without origin or reality" (3). In other words, simulation can generate a lie that is accepted as truth, which then influences or alters reality itself. The breakdown of reality is seen in the substitution of "the signs of the real for the real" (2). When Baudrillard calls images "murderers of the real" (5), he suggests that images are perceived as reality itself, removing any distinction between truth and falsity. That is, images signify reality without requiring a reality to anchor them. Although Baudrillard writes of the twentieth century, the fear of what he outlines as the manipulation of reality registers as a threat in period discussions of the eighteenth-century novel. As the novel begins to solidify as a genre, it takes on the characteristics of a "hyperreal." The Baudrillardan hyperreal is, in essence, the non-real made to seem real, which could also function as a loose definition of the novel.

The concept of the non-real made real is particularly pertinent to novels of the early eighteenth century because they frequently present themselves as truth rather than fiction. The title page of Defoe's *Moll Flanders* (1722) provides an example, advertising that the book is written "from her [Moll's] own Memorandums," and the preface begins with the lament that "the World is so taken up of late with Novels and Romances that it will be hard for a private History to be taken for Genuine where the Names and other Circumstances of the Person are concealed, and on this Account we must be content to leave the Reader to pass his own Opinion upon the ensuing Sheets, just as he pleases" (37). While many eighteenth-century readers may well have understood this maneuver as part

of the novel's extended fictional world, such claims for a novel's truth muddy the distinction between reality and fiction. Defoe's preface, presented in the guise of the editor of Moll's memoirs, solidifies the link between clothing, writing, and deception by asserting "the Pen employ'd in finishing her Story, and making it what you now see it to be, has had no little difficulty to put it into a Dress fit to be seen" (37).[iii] In this metaphor, words and dress share a glittering surface that can obscure something deeper beneath: an idea, an identity. Defoe's metaphor might at first appear merely to uphold the assumed connection between words and dress that Alexander Pope had perpetuated when he wrote "*True Wit* is *Nature* to Advantage drest" (l. 297). But Defoe's metaphor here also denies the female protagonist exclusive control over her own story. Though the editorial persona is not explicitly named, Defoe's name on the title pages of modern editions creates the sense that he is Moll's editor. The conceit that an editor exists and admits to making changes in Moll's linguistic "dress" takes the ability to employ authorial power away from Moll.

In contrast, Haywood's protagonist in *Fantomina* exercises total control over her dress, and by extension, her story. Critics have noted the sartorial power evident in the novella. For instance, Juliette Merritt argues that Haywood reverses the expected power structure of the gaze, "subjecting her male characters to scrutiny" and thereby objectifying them, "creating for her female readers a critical position to occupy" (49). The heroine reworks the visual order, and Merritt provides a listing of the heroine's tools in this process: "Disguise, secresy, private and public identities, are all involved in Fantomina's manipulation of the scopic world" (51). Yet, while Merritt is interested in the power involved in directing the gaze, she is less interested in dress's role as shaping the perception of the object of that gaze. Ros Ballaster also demonstrates great interest in the power dynamics inherent in the novella, suggesting "that in this early fiction, Haywood glimpses a means of empowering the female within amatory conflict, of making her a weaver and dilator of her own amatory plot, through the elaboration of a familiar concept-metaphor of the early eighteenth century, that of the masquerade" (179). For Ballaster, clothing is merely costume, a "concept-metaphor" (179) rather than a literal object. Ballaster emphasizes the power of textiles, using a cloth metaphor by indicating that Haywood's heroines are "weavers" of plots. However, she does not explore further this text/textile metaphorical alignment.[iv] Instead, she points to the novella's emphasis on fiction's power, conceding "[u]nrealistic though Haywood's fictional romance world is, it constantly reinscribes the 'truth' of women's oppression at the hands of men, and seeks to compensate them with the pleasures of fiction" (195). Here, however, my argument differs from Ballaster's in two key ways: Ballaster focuses on the pleasures that women, not men, receive

from fiction, and Ballaster describes *Fantomina* as evoking a larger *truth*, while I present an opposing claim that the novella celebrates *deception*.

My argument's focus on lying also differs from that of critics who have linked the masquerade topos in the novella to the idea of the expression of societal truths. Catherine A. Craft views clothing in *Fantomina* as an extension of the masquerade phenomenon that allows women to exert control over themselves, writing that the protagonist's "masquerade, rather than a submission to the dominant moral and social codes, is a resistance to them" (830). Craft mentions this theme in service to the novella's emphasis on women-authored narrative: "While Fantomina's tale is a fantasy of female freedom, more realistic stories are embodied through the characters of her disguises" (830). As with Ballaster's argument, the focus here homes in on the novella's realism or correspondence to some kind of truth rather than on its endorsement of lying. Ashley Tauchert also contributes to the discussion of the novella's invocation of the masquerade motif, asking "what—if anything—lies behind the masquerade?" (475). Like the others, she construes clothing as a surface to be cast aside to find a true meaning underneath it.

Dress as visual rhetoric

I argue, however, that, in *Fantomina*, dress functions as an avowed but covert deception, which differs from functioning as costume. The masquerade topos deeply involves the concept of costume, or garments that are implicitly acknowledged not to reveal their wearer's actual identity. Yet in *Fantomina*, the heroine presents her clothing as actual day-to-day wear rather than as costumes. Despite the fact that the protagonist's garments do not actually correspond to her real identity, her clothing takes power from viewers' acceptance of it as real rather than as fiction.

Dress is also powerful precisely because of dress's frequently lamented status as frivolous. Despite fears that clothing misleads, as Isaac Bickerstaff voices in *Tatler* 116, its accepted province as a woman's preoccupation tends to make dress register as beneath the notice of the rational and practical, especially the rational and practical *man*. While this is a gambit seemingly constructed to deny clothing the extraordinary power that critics cannot seem to help but admit that it possesses, it nonetheless works to construct clothing as a feminine pursuit. Erin Mackie has explained that "as a *feminine* concern, fashion has been denigrated as trivial and inauthentic, even as it is feared as a dangerous realm of female power"

DOI: http://doi.org/10.5038/2157-7129.11.2.1275

(xii). Dress becomes an easy way to lie because of its popular association with frivolity and insignificance and, simultaneously, because of its perceived function as a true broadcaster of its wearer's identity. Dror Wahrman discusses "the possible literalness with which dress was taken to *make* identity, rather than merely to signify its anterior existence" (177–78). Wahrman writes of clothing as an artifact of history rather than as a component in fiction, but this helps to explain why dress can aid fictional characters in creating alternate identities. The referential truth of dress is generally trusted in the early eighteenth century, and this assumed truth makes dress a powerful element in *Fantomina*'s protagonist's construction of narratives. By reading dress as visual rhetoric, the novella's endorsement of lying as a successful strategy becomes clear.

A brief overview of visual rhetoric will help scaffold my analysis. Sonja K. Foss explains visual rhetoric as constructing the "visual object as a communicative artifact" (145). For an object to quality as visual rhetoric, it must satisfy three criteria: it "must be symbolic, involve human intervention, and be presented to an audience for the purpose of communicating with that audience" (144). In *Fantomina*, the heroine fulfills one of Foss's criteria by resolving to indulge her curiosity. A "little Whim" comes to her "to dress herself as near as she cou'd in the Fashion of those Women who make sale of their Favours" (Haywood 42). To clarify the human interaction criterion, Foss explains, "trees are not inherently visual rhetoric. They become so only when human beings decide to use them as rhetoric, as when they are brought into homes to symbolize the Christmas holiday" (144). In dressing herself as a prostitute, the heroine uses clothing not as protection from the elements but as an implicit non-verbal statement that she is a member of the sex work force. Further, she does so with the intention to communicate this information to those in attendance at the theater, fulfilling another of the criteria of visual rhetoric. When serving as visual rhetoric, "visual elements are arranged and modified by a rhetor not simply for self-expression—although that may constitute a major motive for the creator of an image—but also for communication with an audience" (144). The heroine's communication is successful, and she finds herself surrounded by a crowd of men as soon as she enters a gallery at a theatre. The narrator emphasizes the communicative role of dress in explaining that the protagonist "found her Disguise had answered the ends she wore it for" (Haywood 42). Several men, including one named Beauplaisir, recognize a "mighty" resemblance between the prostitute and "*Lady Such-a-One*" (42), as the narrator refers to the nameless heroine, yet the narrator explains that "the vast Disparity there appear'd between their Characters, prevented [Beauplaisir] from entertaining even the most distant Thought that they could be the same" (42–43). The social disparity between what Beauplaisir believes to be two women dictates Beauplaisir's behavior. This indicates the

heroine's ability to manipulate clothing as a lie—her dress labels her a prostitute, even though she is in actuality an aristocrat—so as to effect real results. Beauplaisir discourses with her in a freer manner than he would with a gentlewoman, allowing the fiction of the heroine's dress to create a reality that she could not experience in her "true" identity. Sartorial lying allows the heroine to experience an exhilarating freedom.

Here, clothing conveys an idea more concretely than does even Beauplaisir's faculty of vision, which suggests the power that visual rhetoric can wield. Despite seeing an amazing "resemblance" (42) between the heroine and the fine lady, Beauplaisir completely trusts the message transmitted by the clothing. The heroine succeeds in creating a hyperreal, because the false prostitute persona registers to Beauplaisir as true. There is no such self as the prostitute to whom he believes he speaks, yet to him, her prostitute identity is very much a part of reality. When Beauplaisir resolves not to part without engaging her services, the heroine realizes that she has trapped herself within the lie that she has created. The heroine admits to donning her prostitute guise as a whim but, to avoid revealing her actual selfhood, claims to be a country gentleman's daughter in town to buy clothes. *Fantomina*'s heroine uses the common cultural association of women with dress to her advantage and finds that, again, clothing provides her with a powerful tool. In her shopping explanation, the heroine subtly conveys the idea that she is largely alone and thus less likely to entangle Beauplaisir in a knot of angry relatives anxious to defend her virtue. Because much of the purchasing transacted by fashionable country dwellers took place as long-distance orders rather than as purchases conducted in person in London, the heroine's constructed arrival in town to shop hints that she has no relative knowledgeable enough to transact business for her at a distance.[v] She relies on the power of dress in not only its material form, but as a conceptual element referenced in her verbal narratives as well, which suggests that she places a great deal of confidence in dress's ability to afford plausibility to her simulations.

When Beauplaisir's interest wanes in "Fantomina," the name that the heroine gives her country-gentleman's-daughter persona, she revives his interest by dressing herself as "Celia," a maid at an inn. But once more, Beauplaisir's interest fades after consummation. In the heroine's next identity, she reinforces the commonplace method of reading an individual's clothing to ascertain identity. Here, although the narrator mentions that the heroine wears mourning clothes, the narrator provides no details of the clothing: "The Dress she had order'd to be made, was such as Widows wear in their first Mourning" (53–54). This indicates that the narrative suggested by the mere category of mourning dress is sufficient for the heroine's purpose. This, too, helps establish the protagonist's clothing as

DOI: http://doi.org/10.5038/2157-7129.11.2.1275

visual rhetoric in fulfilling the criteria of symbolic action. To be considered visual rhetoric, an object "must go beyond serving as a sign . . . and be symbolic," with the object being only "indirectly connected to its referent" (Foss 144). Mourning clothing has no direct connection to widowhood, only a symbolic one. This can be seen in the fact that many cultures use clothing of a different color to indicate a state of grieving the dead, so while Western culture might correlate black clothing with mourning, it is symbolic rather than inherent.[vi] The symbolic nature of mourning dress gives further proof that the heroine's clothing functions as visual rhetoric.

The last disguise that the heroine effects complicates her usage of rhetoric, because she heightens Beauplaisir's desire by selectively withholding information. This time, the heroine's behavior raises in Beauplaisir a greater desire for story than for sex. She calls herself "Incognita" and writes a letter inviting Beauplaisir to participate in a sexual liaison. But the letter contains no information regarding the heroine's identity, commanding, "endeavour not to dive into the Meaning of this Mystery, which will be impossible for you to unravel" (Haywood 63). While the letter showcases verbal skill, it also undermines the importance of verbal elements to indicate identity. The protagonist writes of her refusal "to fill up my letter with any impertinent Praises on your Wit or Person," and says that she "need not go about to raise your Curiosity, by giving you any idea of what my Person is" (63). The heroine's letter hides more than it reveals. Here, she casts aside the need to lie actively and, instead, deceives simply by withholding her identity. As "Incognita," the heroine wears a mask and refuses to allow Beauplaisir to see her face. Instead, "she dress'd herself in as magnificent a Manner, as if she were to be that Night at a Ball at Court, endeavoring to repair the want of those Beauties which the Vizard should conceal, by setting forth the others with the Greatest Care and Exactness" (65). Her care in dressing splendidly only incites Beauplaisir to wish more passionately to see what she conceals. Much as her letter teases him with verbal withholdings, the heroine's "Incognita" appearance teases him with sartorial withholdings.

The heroine's clothing is a sort of blank screen upon which Beauplaisir can project any desire, inviting him to create whatever fantasy identity for his partner that he wishes. Yet Beauplaisir demonstrates no interest in creating a fantasy of his own, and is in fact upset that he is called upon to actively fantasize; instead, he prefers his amorous narratives to come to him fully formed. The heroine revels in creating deceptions, but Beauplaisir is happiest when he is fooled by a narrative and can passively accept it. The protagonist admits that her persona is a hyperreal, making no attempt to simulate a realistic identity. "Incognita" is an overtly fictional disguise and is enjoyable to the heroine because of its exaggerated

fictionality and the power that deception provides her. Emily Hodgson Anderson reads the heroine's mask in this encounter as emphasizing truth because it is "representative of the performance that allows her to articulate her genuine desires" (7). However, if the clothes that the heroine wears in this encounter are read as visual narrative, they must be seen to communicate with an audience. Because masks are unlikely to communicate the state of being genuine, I argue that the heroine's mask emphasizes deception to Beauplaisir. The narrator attests to the pleasure brought about by this last false identity, asserting that "if there be any true Felicity in an Amour such as theirs, both here enjoy'd it to the full" (Haywood 65). This suggests that, for the heroine's goal of sexual pleasure, the withholding of narrative succeeds, and it also cements her power over Beauplaisir.[vii] Yet this encounter demonstrates that Beauplaisir wants new fictions as much or more than he wants sexual gratification: he is so angered when denied a fully formed narrative that he swears never to return to the heroine. The heroine's simulations thus secure both sexual enjoyment and a feeling of mastery over Beauplaisir for her.

I use the Baudrillardan term *simulations* purposefully. Baudrillard's language in defining *simulation* conveys danger when he writes that simulation "threatens" (3) the distinction between truth and falsity. Particularly in narratives of the early eighteenth century, this is a very real danger. The exaggeratedly titillating story of the narrative demonstrates what is at stake with the permeability of fiction and reality: women might not only indulge their own sexual desires outside the bounds of male control, but they may also gain the upper hand over men by deceiving them. This insult to male pride, knowledge, and power is threatening partially because it destabilizes the assumption that all women desire marriage and domesticity. Yet *Fantomina*'s heroine instead demonstrates only the desire for sex without recrimination and for power over Beauplaisir. Tauchert questions the heroine's enjoyment, asking "Does Fantomina *really* achieve sexual pleasure in Beauplaisir's repeated rapes?" (477–78). Yet the heroine repeatedly constructs elaborate scenarios within which to bring Beauplaisir back into contact with her, and since she knows that his interest evaporates after a short period of sexual enjoyment of a woman, she disguises herself. This suggests that she does experience some fulfillment of desire, though not necessarily only sexual fulfillment; arguably, the greater draw for the heroine is the enjoyment in deceiving Beauplaisir.

Clothing's Power as Visual Rhetoric

Part of what allows the heroine to continue her adventures is that her careful planning and her well-hidden identity render her in control of her own reputation until the novella's end. The narrator repeatedly emphasizes the distinction between the *reality* of a woman's virtue and the *appearance* of a woman's reputation. The heroine's worries center more on "the Danger of being expos'd, and the whole Affair made a Theme for publick Ridicule" than on the loss of her virginity (Haywood 46). The divide between virtue and reputation replicates the divide between reality and falsity because, as long as the protagonist can maintain the false semblance of virtue, she ceases to worry about the loss of her virtue in reality. Though she initially considers arranging her affairs so as not to run "any Risque, either of her virtue or her reputation" (45), she comes to think exclusively in terms of the preservation of her reputation. The narrator soon adds that the heroine "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*" (49). When the heroine worries about the possibility of Beauplaisir's abandoning her, she comforts herself:

> 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;—and the Intrigue being a Secret, my Disgrace will be so too . . . 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 reserved Lady. (49)

The "Lady" must live in a world that, despite all of her money and station, renders her powerless to satisfy her desires. But she takes advantage of the world of fashion to generate a narrative that affords her enjoyment (of desire, or power), making use of the tools that a woman has at her disposal. The narrator explains that Beauplaisir sees the heroine in "Slippers, and a Night-Gown loosely flowing" during the day, but does not recognize the same women when he sees her at night "Laced, and adorned with all the Blaze of Jewels" (50). Clothing delineates difference in identity so clearly that it provides *Fantomina*'s protagonist with the means through which to script affairs with Beauplaisir without the fear of losing her reputation. As Merritt has explained, "[b]y creating an alternate self, specifically, one whose sexual role is visibly clear, Fantomina satisfies the impulses of private (sexual) life and the demands of public reputation" (51). In Baudrillard's terms, the simulation of the heroine's virtue is more real than her

actual sexual activity, and correspondingly, the façade of her reputation becomes a hyperreal. The protagonist's shift from terror at losing her virginity to happiness at preserving her reputation functions as perhaps the text's most dangerous threat to the divide between reality and deception. The specter of a woman taking control of her own sexuality, especially a woman of high social rank like Haywood's heroine, threatens the social order. Her skill in dress allows her to hide this threat: "By eating little, lacing prodigiously strait, and the Advantage of a great Hoop-Petticoat, however, her Bigness was not taken Notice of" (68). Clothing serves as the avowed deception that allows her to control the pregnancy that is the consequence of her sexual activity, and the narrator's use of passive voice – "her Bigness was not taken Notice of" – suggests that the heroine has hidden the pregnancy from everyone who has seen her.

Because the protagonist carefully maintains the deception that her virtue is intact for most of the novella, she uses visual rhetoric to defend the proposition of her good reputation. The novella's narrator emphasizes the power of visual rhetoric. In the Widow Bloomer story, the narratorial voice intrudes, interrupting the narration of a sexual encounter to defend the novella's premise of a repeatedly fooled hero. The content of the narrator's intrusion demonstrates the power of visual rhetoric to register as truth. "It may, perhaps, seem strange that Beauplaisir should in such near Intimacies continue still deceiv'd: I know there are Men who will swear it is an Impossibility" (57), the narrator begins. The narrator's defense of Beauplaisir begins with highlighting the "Alteration which the Change of Dress made" in the heroine's appearance, and ends the defense with the power of verbal lies to shape reality: Beauplaisir, "being told by ['Widow Bloomer'], that from her Birth, she had never remov'd from Bristol, . . . he rejected the Belief of having seen her, and suppos'd his Mind had been deluded by an Idea of some other, whom she might have a Resemblance of" (57). The "near Intimacies" to which the narrator refers imply the heroine's lack of dress. Anne Hollander argues that the perception of nudity is "dependent on a sense of clothing" (xiii), or in other words, that the perception of dress affects the perception of the naked body. Even though Beauplaisir makes love to the same body, he does not perceive it as the same because, in each encounter, the heroine's clothing (even in its absence) dictates how Beauplaisir senses her body. Beauplaisir reads the protagonist's body as an extension of the "texts" that she creates with her clothing. The protagonist thereby safeguards her reputation with clothing because her dress makes Beauplaisir believe that he engages with multiple different bodies. However, the heroine eventually must negotiate what her body insistently and increasingly reveals: her pregnancy.

DOI: http://doi.org/10.5038/2157-7129.11.2.1275

By writing of the heroine's pregnancy, Haywood ends the novella with the creation of a reality that the heroine cannot easily reshape. Yet even pregnancy is a happenstance that her visual rhetoric skills might have allowed her to keep hidden if she had remained steadfastly in control of her identities. The narrator asserts that the heroine would easily have hidden her pregnancy "had she been at liberty to have acted with the same unquestionable Authority over herself as she did before the coming of her Mother" (68) and provides the heroine's sartorial strategy for dealing with this inconvenience. Despite her forced relinquishing of power, the heroine controls what she can of her situation through strategic use of clothing: tight-laced bodices give her torso a slender appearance and her hoop petticoat disguises her growing belly. The heroine is so successful at manipulating others' perception of the truth of her virginity that her mother thinks her child is "struck with the Hand of Death" (69) until the doctor informs her of her daughter's actual condition. The heroine's dress successfully shapes her mother's perception of truth, and, because Haywood's narrator describes the heroine's mother as a woman of "Penetration" (68), the heroine's power of manipulating truth must be formidable. Haywood here hints at the possibility that the protagonist might have succeeded in controlling her reputation and sexual activities indefinitely because clothing allows her a measure of control that, had her child not arrived early, she might have maintained. This narrative possibility relies largely on the cultural capital of the hoop petticoat, the very item of dress on which Isaac Bickerstaff passed judgment as an emblem of female duplicity.

As *Tatler* 116's trial suggests, *Fantomina*'s mere mention of a hoop petticoat invokes feminine deception. Critics of the hoop point to its unnatural changing of a woman's shape to characterize it as the means for feminine duplicity. Erin Mackie explains that the hoop petticoat was, in the eighteenth century, "[i]dentified with the feminine, most specifically with female reproduction, with the excessive and the fantastic, with the most uncurbed onslaught of fashion's flood" (107). The popularity of the hoop helps it to function as an implement of female power: because so many women wore hoops, it became impossible to simply define the hoop as an attempt to hide pregnancy. Yet because of its widespread popularity, women who *were* pregnant could often hide their secret under the billow of a hoop. Kimberly Chrisman explains the hoop's cultural impact: "whether the hoop concealed or simply mimicked pregnancy, it created a false, undesirable appearance and was therefore immoral" (21). Concealing a pregnancy is the most feared function of the hoop, as *Tatler* 116 demonstrates. When both the hoop and its wearer have difficulty entering Bickerstaff's house, he "desired the Jury of Matrons, who stood at my Right Hand, to inform themselves of her Condition, and know whether there were any private Reasons why she might not make her Appearance separate from her Petticoat" (41).

Addison invokes the jury of women who determined whether a woman was truly pregnant when she claimed pregnancy to delay a sentence of death. With a hoop's aid, simulated innocence can pass freely for real innocence, allowing women to put into play the substitution of "the signs of the real for the real" (Baudrillard 2). The use of a hoop by *Fantomina*'s heroine succeeds, at least temporarily, in visually conveying the story of the heroine's continued virginity that renders pregnancy a narrative impossibility. When she wears a hoop, the heroine wears clothing that functions explicitly as a deception.

Because women were thought to use the hoop as a way of changing men's perceptions of reality, critics perceived the hoop to be a threat to men's dominance over women. Complaints about hoops "focused on the disjunction they created between reality and appearances" (Crowston 52), allowing them to serve particularly effectively as instruments of Baudrillardan simulation. The hoop made many viewers anxious that they could not observe clear visual links between appearance and women's "true" selves, and women seemed to enjoy the power that this allowed them. The hoop helps to perpetuate what critics saw as "an utterly female domain, where rational men could have no say" (Crowston 54). The protagonist of *Fantomina* is what critics of the hoop petticoats most fear: a hoop-wearer who deceives others regarding her virginity.[viii] The hoop is integral to the heroine's narrative of a sterling reputation because the hoop "is at odds with a conception of woman's body as 'natural,' as unconstructed, and it is hostile to the masculine desire that assumes unchallenged control of this body" (Mackie 135). The hoop threatens because it can make women authors of false personae and, therefore, authors of their own identities.

Conclusion

Though the heroine's body ultimately undermines her control, her deceptions repeatedly succeed in allowing her to maintain control over Beauplaisir. In fact, at the novella's end, Beauplaisir provides evidence of the success of the heroine's skill because he can scarcely believe "that he should have been blinded so often by her Artifices" (70). In highlighting Beauplaisir's "blindness," Haywood's narrator invokes an irony: because Beauplaisir trusted what he saw in the heroine's visual rhetoric, he allowed himself to be "blind" to truth. The narrator even praises the heroine by admitting that "it must be confessed, indeed, that she preserved an Œconomy in the management of this intreague, beyond what almost any Woman but herself ever did: In the first Place, by making no Person in the World a Confident in it; and in the next, by concealing from Beauplaisir the

Knowledge who she was" (49–50). This tribute emphasizes the protagonist's cleverness and organization.[ix] The praise that ends the novella emphasizes the heroine's use of "variety" or imaginative innovation: "thus ended an Intreague, which, considering the time it lasted, was as full of Variety as any, perhaps, that many Ages has produced" (71). These skills lauded by Haywood's narrator are the very skills necessary for the construction of rhetoric. Further, since the protagonist's rhetoric is so often visual, Haywood implicitly advocates visual rhetorical skills as effective tools for women in a way that embraces and validates deception. If women use both narrative and sartorial deceptions to further their own ends, as does Haywood's heroine in *Fantomina*, men will not know that a simulation is not real and will, therefore, incorporate the female-created hyperrealities into reality. When this transpires, women have used the tools at their disposal to exert power over their identities and reputations without the men in their lives knowing. *Fantomina* thus illustrates that clothing is a singularly effective tool for women's creation of simulations and exercise of power over men.

Setting a tone about the dangers of fiction that would color popular ideas about the novel, Richard Allestree wrote in 1673 that the "amorous passions" which it is the business of fiction to depict "to the utmost life, are apt to insinuate themselves into their unwary readers, and by an unhappy inversion, a copy shall produce an original" (12). As this Baudrillardan idea that a "copy" might "produce an original" suggests, many moralists worried that fiction was simply an increasingly popular form of acceptance of lies, presenting pernicious untruths that readers were likely to accept as truth and subsequently reproduce in their real lives. Popular fashions were analogous to lies in this respect, as the example of the hoop petticoat demonstrates. *Fantomina* presents a heroine who uses sartorial deceptions to gain her own ends, much the sort of behavior that someone like Allestree would fear. But while Haywood's heroine initially satisfies her sexual desires through her clothing changes, she soon finds herself enchanted with creating her many lies for Beauplaisir. The heroine even fools herself with one of her lies. When she envisions the way in which her wearing the clothing of a prostitute would afford her enjoyment, the heroine initially imagines "a world of Satisfaction to herself in . . . observing the Surprise that [Beauplaisir] would be in to find himself refused by a Woman, who he supposed granted her Favours without Exception" (44). This is, of course, not what transpires. The heroine later exults in her power over Beauplaisir, telling herself that she has "outwitted even the most Subtle of the deceiving kind, and while he thinks to fool [her], is himself the only beguiled Person" (44). As much as she might enjoy the sexual component of her stratagems, she takes equal, or perhaps greater, pride in her ability to perpetuate successful lies. Creating these deceptions seduces not only

Beauplaisir and the text's readers, but the heroine herself. The heroine's skill in creating hyperreal identities allows her a satisfaction much like that which an author experiences in creating realistic enough worlds for readers to believe.

Fantomina perpetuates a parallel between the manipulation of dress and the authorship of narratives that challenges ideas like those mentioned in *Tatler* 116. Specifically, *Fantomina* challenges the idea that women should be barred from deciding what are the "Proper Ornaments of the Fair Sex" (Addison 44), and it challenges the notion that deception is a negative force. When Isaac Bickerstaff complains about anything that "interfere[s] with, Disguise[s], or pervert[s] those of Nature" (44), a fictitious persona expresses the opinion that dress should not be deceptive. Yet the deceptions in which *Fantomina*'s heroine engages are bids for freedom that she is denied without the constructed personae she achieves through dress. However, the novella problematizes any simple readings of deception as unilaterally empowering for women. For one thing, the protagonist enjoys an almost impossibly unsupervised existence through much of the narrative. The novella's ending also forces the heroine to do the one thing that she endeavored to avoid: reveal her actual name and identity to Beauplaisir. Yet the heroine and, by extension, Haywood each maintain a perverse control over the reader in withholding the protagonist's name. Beauplaisir learns "Fantomina's" identity, but readers never do. Readers only know of her high social station, a necessity of the protagonist's costly plans. This is a limitation that bars most women from very closely replicating the heroine's escapades and clearly establishes the tale as a fantasy. Haywood's narrator honors her heroine's disguise work by withholding the heroine's name from readers.[x] This suggestively implies that the identitarian possibilities inherent in clothing are immensely powerful, even if readers could not hope to copy the protagonist's specific adventures. When Beauplaisir does learn of the protagonist's "true" identity, this ending reminds readers that women suffer under different constraints than do men, and any woman who engages in the creation of narrative must remain aware of this. Anonymity cannot be guaranteed. Yet Haywood's narrative suggests that fluidity of identity can be immensely enjoyable for women since she shows how the heroine's employment of simulations allows her enjoyment and power over Beauplaisir as well as, for most of the novella, over others' perception of her reputation. The novella also provides a strong caution in the form of its heroine's punishment, though her banishment to a nunnery can be read as an opportunity to experiment with constructing more identities away from her watchful mother.[xi]

The work of dress in the plot of *Fantomina* succeeds in large part due to its widely accepted truthfulness as a visual fiction. The heroine uses it to construct herself as a series of copies, or false identities, that produce originals, or personae

that Beauplaisir perceives as true. In so doing, however fantastically, the heroine's exploits suggest that dress can allow women outside of fictive worlds the power to alter their realities. The key to this possibility is the double valence of dress. As Isaac Bickerstaff's mention of a jury of matrons in the trial of a hoop petticoat demonstrates, dress is widely perceived as an agent of deception. But dress simultaneously is denigrated as an unimportant and frivolous female interest, so its ability to deceive is strengthened because it is culturally constructed to be beneath the notice of men. This paradox creates a space in which dress can deceive successfully.

What this means is that, in *Fantomina*, dress emphasizes and even celebrates deception as a powerful visual rhetorical tool for women. The embracing of sartorial deception helps to shape the novel itself into something that critics label as dishonest. However, women's mercurial changeability, expressed through their dexterity with lies as well as fashions, threatens to collapse distinctions between reality and fiction. Thus, dress mirrors the functions and the dangers of the novel since they both are believed to reveal truth as well as perpetuate lies. Early eighteenth-century texts like *Fantomina* strongly tie together the ideas of women's inborn deception, the early novel as a lie, and fashion's status as duplicity. In so doing, they leave later writers little choice but to scapegoat fashion to rescue women and the novel from accusations of falsity. As suggested by Isaac Bickerstaff's warning that women's employment of art and nature must be regulated, dress's ability to function as woman-controlled visual rhetoric jeopardizes the borders separating reality from fiction.

---

[i] Reynolds demonstrates the view of dress as tantamount to falsity when he uses a dress metaphor to argue for the superiority of classical artists, since "the modern artist, before he can see the truth of things, is obliged to remove a veil, with which the fashion of the times has thought proper to cover her" (14). Johnson similarly testifies to the connection between clothing, lies, and fiction: "The Muses wove in the loom of Pallas, a loose and changeable robe, like that in which Falsehood captivated her admirers; with this they invested Truth, and name her Fiction" (qtd. in Spacks 1).

[ii] For more discussion of the anxiety caused by the idea that written accounts might be false, see Loveman.

[iii] Moll also uses dress to lie, wearing garments of higher status than her own and even dressing as a man to steal without her identity being detected.

[iv] The word *text* derives from *texere*, the Latin verb for "to weave" (Miller 8). The *OED* provides a rare definition for *text* as "texture, tissue" from the Latin *textus*, meaning "tissue," furthering the etymological link between *text* and *textile* ("text, n.2").

[v] Sending a shopping list with a relative who travelled to London was not uncommon among ladies who lived in the provinces, so if the Fantomina persona has no one to do this for her, a

reasonable assumption is that the heroine has few to no relatives or female guardians. For a detailed examination of the shopping patterns of a country gentlewoman, see Berry 131–55.

[vi] Even in the West, mourning clothes have included red or gray clothing as well as black; see Bedikian.

[vii] Catherine Craft-Fairchild argues that the Incognita disguise is the heroine's *least* successful: "This nameless guise, however, in which Fantomina endeavors to say almost nothing about herself, is paradoxically the least successful because in it there is some slippage: Fantomina here comes closest to revealing to Beauplaisir that her semblance of womanly weakness is just that, a semblance—her femininity is a masquerade" (66). As an acknowledged deception, the Incognita disguise does indeed work differently from the heroine's other personae, but as a tool through which the heroine achieves sexual pleasure, Haywood's narrator indicates that it is the most successful.

[viii] One example of such criticism is the anonymous poem *The Origin of the Whale Bone-petticoat*. Defining hoop petticoats as mechanisms intended to deceive men, the poem connects women with deception; the hoop is an exclusively feminine fashion, and one that employs artifice to mislead, or "bubble," men into providing women with sexual "Joys." "Thus I have shewn" writes the anonymous poet, "That Whale bone-petticoats they had their Rise, / To hide a filthy Strumpet's foul Disease" (p. 6). The poem presents the hoop as a cover for truth, exhorting "Innocents" to "dislodge, and shew / They're whole, they're safe and sound: and if they do / The Whale-bone-petticoats will tell *who's who*" (p. 8).

[ix] This praise also provides practical advice as to how other women might duplicate the protagonist's success. The heroine speaks didactically when, after enunciating some of her strategies, she exclaims "O that all neglected Wives, and fond abandon'd Nymphs would take this Method!—Men would be caught in their own Snare, and have no Cause to scorn our easy, weeping, wailing Sex!" (65). As Merritt argues, "Haywood's writing demonstrates a sustained exposé of the conditions of female existence; to read her is to witness an analysis of those conditions and a set of strategies through which women can enhance their social power" (22). *Fantomina* gains further strength as a set of amatory strategies when placed in the context of some of Haywood's oeuvre, which includes such overt conduct literature as *A Present for a Servant-Maid* (1743), *The Wife* (1755), *The Husband* (1756), and *The Young Lady* (1756).

[x] I have perpetuated this namelessness by choosing to refer to the heroine as "the heroine" or "the protagonist" rather than refer to her by the name of the novella, which is the name of just one of her fictional personae. The frequent confusion of critics who conflate the heroine and her first persona echoes the difficulty that Beauplaisir experiences in separating reality from fiction.

[xi] Rivka Swenson reads the ending of the novella as subversive, noting that the nunnery "would seem to denote reformation, if it were not for the material realities and cant connotations attached to 'abbess' and 'monastery'" (38).

Works Cited

Addison, Joseph. *Tatler* 116. *Selections from* The Tatler *and* The Spectator, edited by Robert J. Allen, 2nd ed., New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970.

Allestree, Richard. *The Ladies Calling. In Two Parts.* London, 1673.

Anderson, Emily Hodgson. "Performing the Passions in Eliza Haywood's *Fantomina* and *Miss Betsy Thoughtless*." *The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation*, vol. 46, no. 1, Spring 2005, pp. 1–15.

Ballaster, Ros. *Seductive Forms: Women's Amatory Fiction from 1684 to 1740*. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1992.

Baudrillard, Jean. "The Precession of Simulacra." *Simulacra and Simulation*, translated by Sheila Faria Glaser. Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1994, pp. 1–42.

Bedikian, Soian A. "The Death of Mourning: From Victorian Crepe to the Little Black Dress." *Omega*, vol. 57, no. 1, 2008, pp. 35–52.

Berry, Helen. "Prudent Luxury: The Metropolitan Tastes of Judith Baker, Durham Gentlewoman." *Women and Urban Life in Eighteenth-Century England*, edited by Rosemary Sweet and Penelope Lane, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2003, pp. 131–56.

Chrisman, Kimberly. "*Unhoop* the Fair Sex: The Campaign Against the Hoop Petticoat in Eighteenth-Century England." *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, vol. 30. no. 1, 1996, pp. 5–23.

Craft, Catherine A. "Reworking Male Models: Aphra Behn's *Fair Vow-Breaker*, Eliza Haywood's *Fantomina*, and Charlotte Lennox's *Female Quixote*." *PMLA*, vol. 86, no. 4, October 1991, pp. 821–38.

Craft-Fairchild, Catherine. *Masquerade and Gender: Disguise and Female Identity in Eighteenth-Century Fictions by Women*. University Park, Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993.

Crowston, Clare Haru. *Fabricating Women: The Seamstresses of Old Regime France, 1675–1791*. Durham, Duke University Press, 2001.

Davis, Lennard J. *Factual Fictions: The Origins of the English Novel*. New York, Columbia University Press, 1983.

Defoe, Daniel. *Moll Flanders*. Edited by David Blewett, New York, Penguin, 1989.

Foss, Sonja K. "Theory of Visual Rhetoric." *Handbook of Visual Communication: Theory, Methods, and Media*. Edited by Kenneth L. Smith, Sandra Moriarity,

Keith Kenney, and Gretchen Barbatsis, New York, Routledge, 2005, pp. 141–52.

Haywood, Eliza. *Fantomina; or, Love in a Maze. Being a History of an Amour Between Two Persons of Condition. Fantomina and Other Works*, edited by Alexander Pettit, Margaret Case Croskery, and Anna C. Patchias, Peterborough, Broadview, 2004, pp. 41–71.

Hollander, Anne. *Seeing Through Clothes.* Berkeley, University of California Press, 1993.

Loveman, Kate. *Reading Fictions, 1600–1740: Deception in English Literary and Political Culture*. Aldershot, Ashgate, 2008.

Mackie, Erin. *Market à la Mode: Fashion, Commodity, and Gender in* The Tatler *and* The Spectator. Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997.

Merritt, Juliette. *Beyond Spectacle: Eliza Haywood's Female Spectators*. Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2004.

Miller, J. Hillis. *Ariadne's Thread: Story Lines*. New Haven, Yale University Press, 1995.

The Origin of the Whale Bone-petticoat. A Satyr. Boston, 1714.

Pope, Alexander. *An Essay on Criticism. The Poems of Alexander Pope*, edited by John Butt, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1963, pp. 143–168.

Reynolds, Sir Joshua. *Discourses on Paintings and the Fine Arts, Delivered at the Royal Academy*. London, Jones, 1825.

Spacks, Patricia Meyer. *Imagining a Self: Autobiography and Novel in Eighteenth-Century England*. Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1976.

Swenson, Rivka. "Optics, Gender, and the Eighteenth-Century Gaze: Looking at Haywood's *Anti-Pamela*." *The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation*, vol. 51, no. 1–2, 2010, pp. 27–43.

Tauchert, Ashley. "Woman in a Maze: *Fantomina*, Masquerade and Female Embodiment." *Women's Writing*, vol. 7. no. 3, November 2000, pp. 469–86.

"Text, n.2." *OED Online*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Wahrman, Dror. *The Making of the Modern Self: Identity and Culture in Eighteenth-Century England.* New Haven, Yale University Press, 2004.