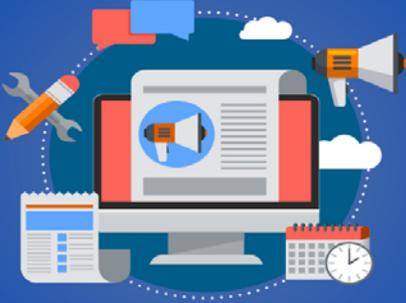


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Framing Entertainment in *Fantomina OR, Love in a Maze*: Re-reading Eighteenth-century Female Novelists

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Abstract:

Eliza Haywood, a groundbreaker writer of her age, has always been projected as a source of entertainment. Her writings still attract a large number of audiences through its revolutionary projection of the female body as an individual self of free will, coveting languages and thrilling plots. In this paper, I have reflected upon a novella, *Fantomina OR, Love in a Maze* (1725), written by Haywood and I have located my argument on how this idea of entertainment revolves around 18th-century prose writings. In doing so, I have kept my focus primary on William B. Warner's *Licensing Entertainment: The Evolution of Novel Reading in Britain (1684-1750)*. I have tried to present how the 18th century female writers brilliantly attracted a large number of audiences through their writings and brought a new genre of fiction writing. In the end, I have tried to merge Warner's idea of entertainment and the trends of Eliza Haywood's writings.

Keywords: Entertainment, Female body, Female audience, Popular Culture.

In the history of English literature, very limited information are known about Eighteenth-century female writers until immense rapid changes have occurred in the early 1980s with Jean Kern's views on the idea of a fallen woman and Mary Anne Schofield's expose of popular woman. Early modern female writers of Eighteenth-century: Aphra Behn, Delarivier Manley and Eliza Haywood, trace a new pathway of women writings through the form of entertainment. Tiffant Potter, the editor of the book named *Woman, Popular Culture and the Eighteenth Century*, grounds her argument about Eighteenth-century female writings (though primarily focused upon Jane Austen) and their agency and influence on popular culture of their era. In this paper, I shall try to register the popularity of early eighteenth-century female authors. It will

reflect not only these writers' a significant role in the history of the rise of the novel (what the authors' previous literary studies claim them to be) rather I shall put much focus on their role as a popular writer of the novel of entertainment of their contemporary era. This paper will foreground its argument primarily on William B. Warner's *Licensing Entertainment: The Evolution of Novel Reading in Britain (1684-1750)* and its multidisciplinary approaches regarding less explored aspects of Eighteenth-century women in the sphere of popular culture. For the textual understanding of 'Media culture' (Term used by W.B.Warner) and Eighteenth-century print and popular cultural politics, I have chosen *Fantomina OR, Love in a Maze* (1725) by Eliza Haywood.

Warner primarily endeavours to intensify the theory of novel writing as he declares that he 'rewrites the history of novel. And also reflect that "I present the early novelists in their role as entertainers and media workers... so that it becomes a subset of the cultural history of entertainment"' (xi). Eliza Haywood, one of the prolific writers and bestselling authors of her time. She projects her revolutionary thoughts in an entertaining way which made her writing widely popular. In *Fantomina* and other texts by Haywood serve on the pleasure of amatory intrigue, which through craving narrative of plot, transgression and assertion turns the novel into a machine of entertainment. Now here the question arises that why do these novels achieve such popularity? Why these female writers were so popular? How the idea of entertainment, which according to W.B Warner previously dealt only with an economically powerful group of people, suddenly come in contact with the masses? To answer the question related to the society of contemporary Eighteenth century, Warner projects with three approaches: first, he distinguishes the 'literary' and 'non-literary' modes of narrative fiction. Then secondly and thirdly he points out about the gender criticism revolving around the consciousness of eighteenth-century people and the emergence of 'truth' or 'realism' in that era. Warner further elaborates the idea of 'gender reader' and traces the tradition of female authorship in novel writing. He later associates the mode of realism as an idea of presenting the obscure relationship between the novel of amatory intrigue (the popular writings of Eliza Haywood) and the ethical and moral novels written by contemporary male authors.

Eliza Haywood, about whom Juliette Merritt impressively points out that Haywood, the most creative author of eighteenth-century Britain, she was one of the best-selling authors that

often include Daniel Defoe, Samuel Richardson and Jonathon Swift also (121). In the novel *Fantomina*, Haywood titillates her audiences with amorous engagement between ‘A young Lady of distinguished Birth’, who calls herself Fantomina and a man named Beauplaisir (41). The novel begins in a theatre house. In the playhouse, this young girl becomes envious to the men and women as they involve in sexual conversations. Fantomina, whom Haywood presented as a naïve country girl desires to taste of the life of “a woman who sat in a Corner of the Pit” (41). The second day, her eagerness to experience something new makes her talk to many men. None of these men makes her feels as titillating as she feels with the entrance of Beauplaisir in the house. They engage in amorous conversation. This young girl, who is now experiencing a new stage of life, becomes amused by this man. She initially pretends to be a prostitute later becomes a mistress in reality. This woman becomes so covetous to that man that she masquerades herself as four different individuals. The later part of the story is a depiction of a trivial revenge story. In order to deceit Beauplaisir and to win his love, she dresses like a servant girl and later as a widow by covering her face with a veil and calling herself ‘Incognita’. In the whole narrative, the reconnaissance of the female protagonist and the stupidity of the male character is still alarming for twenty-first-century readers. To extend the idea of ‘gender’ Warner in his book presents the role of class in the shaping of media. Here he projects the idea of ‘popularity’ not as the work that is created for the masses, rather how the idea of popularity incorporates into elite art or into the media arguably controlled by the elite. Warner begins his argument from the ancient Greek philosopher Plato. Plato banished poets from his ideal Republic. Plato’s hatred for poetry wave around the idea that poets write lies, fantasy in their poetry that gives false hopes, false expectation. Warner writes the idea of writing realist novels by the male author of the contemporary eighteenth century was the consequence of Plato’s idea of Republic, except a drastic change occurred with the rise of the female novelist- Behn, Manley and Haywood (6). Why all the previous ages transgressed writing of pleasure? Here he argues that since Plato’s charge against poets as liars, cultural critic worried about the consequence of audience’s retort to the novel of entertainment. During the early eighteenth century, the print market gave this new genre an agency among the audiences. Often anonymously written these amorous texts produced a great sale, a culture of entertainment and eventually took control over the market.

Till now we have discussed the significant role of novels in the eighteenth century. But still there remains a basic question, why all of a sudden in a male-dominated society female

writing become widely popular and entertaining? What are the causes of this sudden popularity? The answer to this question primarily lies in the social and historical background of that age. Warner presents three reasons, (a) at the later part of seventeenth century and initial days of Eighteenth century, British Royal family lost its power. With the decline of Royal family drama also lost its holding over contemporary audiences. The primary subject of these novels was a sex scandal and historical secrets. The sexual scandal of the royal family played another essential role in these novels. Being Royal spy, Behn wrote about the interior stories of Royal families, dark histories, concubines, Royal elopement, and sexual scandals. Behn's writings immediately got popularity and so happened with her followers. Large numbers of audiences were attracted to these cheap, available books. This new trend brought a huge profit to the publishers. (b) The new laws of Protestants shut down all the theatre houses, so the door of public entertainment was closed; this place of lack of entertainment was taken by these newly arrived short amorous novels. (c) French literature also played a very vital role in this scenario; it develops standard taste and creates a layer of audiences, who were ready for the novels which were written Behn, Manley and Haywood. This new style of writing was initially introduced by Aphra Behn and then followed by Haywood and Manley. Another reason behind this popularity can be because of these female authors -as a woman is writing for another woman. The mass audience felt pleasure through the sexual description by a female author. These writings again brought the idea novel as a toll of entertainment. Initially, on the beginning days of novel writing, the novel was treated as a source of entertainment. Later on, as sexual representation in the society becomes a taboo, these texts become a subject of guilt. Haywood was also bound with this kind of taboo, may be because of that, her protagonist Fantomina suffers at the end of the story. In the *Fantomina*, Haywood promotes enfranchisement of the readers through liberating her protagonist by transgressing social rules. But she did not give purely escapist amusement to the reader rather she gave them a ride of liberation and finally brought them in their reality, probably because of that guilt presented earlier. In this age, urban culture was newly arriving in Britain and the readers of this era perhaps never failed to show an enthusiastic approach in the sex lives of the rich and famous. Warner projects in his book *Licensing Entertainment: The Evolution of Novel Reading in Britain (1684-1750)* that through making the novels sexy and absorptive, the body of the reader and the character both engage in a play of pleasure. The visual amatory depiction and pornographic element can also be presented as a matter of enjoyment and entertainment. Readers

here enjoy the novelistic pleasure through the protagonists of the novel. Emily H. Anderson correctly points out in her essay “*Performing passion in Eliza Haywood’s “Fantomina” and “Miss Betsy Thoughtless”* that, the name of Eliza Haywood is intimately bound to the genre of amatory fiction. She was known as the ‘Great Arbitress of passion’ who from the 1720s onwards, was synonymous with the most extreme excess of romance. She makes an effective relationship between the reader and the world through her ‘grammar of eroticism’ (1). This idea of self-pleasure turns around the ego of an individual which Freud elaborates in his essays. *Fantomina* is also presented through these parameters by the author. Haywood made ‘Fantomina’ creator of every scene presented in the novel. Fantomina’s amorous intrigue caused a remarkable production in print media of that era and it is said that her novels were more popular than Defoe. She drops conventional mode of presenting plot through “characters” rather she gives importance to “love” over any social values and subordinating traditional expectations. This very uniqueness probably brought vast popularity for her texts and made her the most prolific writer of her era. Fantomina’s presentation in different episodes is familiar yet impossible- uncanny, which gives a distinct kind of fantasy towards its readers. Haywood through this magnetism made a new way of entertainment through amorous intrigue.

Warner in his discussion on three famous female authors of the eighteenth century, (Behn, Manley and Haywood) focuses on developing the form of entertainment that is pivotal to contemporary forms of subjectivity including post-enlightenment feminism. These amorous novels of these female writers were later amalgamated with the erotic novels written by contemporary male writers, for instance: *Raxona: The unfortunate mistress* (1719) by Daniel Defoe, *Pamela or, Virtue rewarded* (1740) by Samuel Richardson and *Joseph Andrews* (1742) by Henry Fielding. Here we find a clash between the ‘moral’ and ‘female’ novels. These female authors worked as a catalyst to this new genre of entertainment writing. These novels not only brought fame and money but also made them best-selling authors of their contemporary era. They produce both scandal and struggle. Maybe because of that, these novelists were long neglected in the history of the rise of the novel, until Ian Watt published the writings of early female novelists of the Eighteenth Century. Warner in his book though primarily focuses on female writings as a female narration or “gendered narrative” and these novels are written for female audiences, on the contrary, the novels written by male authors as for ‘general reader’(140). But as a reader, we know that one can never put his or her audiences constantly in

one particular gender and we also don't have any evidence of eighteenth-century print culture and how it captured fame in that era among female writers. It seems that Warner faced trouble in locating his text among male-dominated the literature of eighteenth-century and newly emerged woman writings of the eighteenth century. This sudden shift from 'gender' to 'general' draws the attention of feminist critics as the criticism presents female writers as gender and male authors as 'normal'. Warner consciously presents detail statistic of the rise of a female novelist but his struggle to present the truth of the kinds of the reading novel makes the approach more ambiguous. Another counter-discourse arises; these sexually obscene texts were often considered as feminine. The shared consciousness of that era was that male authors were more rational and realist than females. Therefore, they reject women writings as trivial and did not give them any position during canon formation. This attitude of male authors towards female narratives was later questioned by the female critic in twentieth-century.

Warner also warns about the power and danger of these amorous texts. Firstly, at this age, young women were not formally exposed to any classical education. In this context, these novels change their taste against serious novels. Secondly, these novels convince the reader's heart with false emotion that brought catastrophe for readers in real life. The idea of romance started emerging in the market; this new trend ultimately helped the contemporary bourgeoisie. Thirdly, the taste of the reader of these amorous novels often considered as dirty. Thus, it was assumed that these novels disfigured reader's taste for consciousness, love, passion and heart. On the other hand, a counter-argument also emerged, the writer and reader of these novels also ridiculed previous authors for their failure to present entertainment through writings. For Haywood, as we see in *Fantomina*, she challenges the male author's presentation of female's sexual pleasure. This kind of confrontation toward male authors by Haywood was later on extended by twentieth-century female movements.

In conclusion, we may sum up our discussion on the rise of the female narrative in eighteenth century Britain and its popularity. Warner depicts the more neglected the aspect of the rise of the English novel in his book. In claiming the argument, I have presented *Fantomina* by Haywood not only as a new definition of entertainment but also, I have reflected the significance of eighteenth-century female writing in the history of rise of novel, which is free from any kind of moral and ideological the investment-a free play of wish fulfillment fantasy.

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