



Naming Oroonoko and Fantomina

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'It is not title make men brave, or good, or birth that bestows courage and generosity' (Behn

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Names, naming, and renaming are inextricably linked to power in Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko* and Eliza Haywood's *Fantomina*. In *Oroonoko*, naming illustrates the attempt to conquer Oroonoko the prince, and turn him into Caesar the slave. In *Fantomina*, the eponymous Lady acquires power by renaming and disguising herself, liberating herself sexually and usurping patriarchal power. While *Fantomina* is preoccupied with performance, *Oroonoko* portrays a man who maintains his values through betrayal and anguish. Although the novellas differ substantially in their thematic concerns, they both use names to explore honour, virtue, and self-determination. This analysis will first consider the connotations of the selected names in the texts, before examining their function in communicating ideas of morality and ownership.

The importance of names in these two texts is established by their titles. The names *Fantomina, or Love in a Maze* and *Oroonoko, or the Royal Slave*, bring the thematic content of the novellas into focus. Performance is encoded in *Fantomina's* title. The name 'Fantomina' establishes the importance of performance in the story by alluding to ideas of fantasies and phantoms; to the intangible being. The 'young Lady' (Haywood 23) disguises herself four times; first as Fantomina, then Celia, the Widow Bloomer and finally as Incognita. Neither the reader, nor her lover Beauplaisir learn her true identity. Haywood presents a character who uses performance to liberate herself from the social constraints on female sexuality. She constructs illusions that appeal to both male and female fantasies. 'Beauplaisir' is equally evocative. Literally meaning beautiful pleasure in French, it embodies the lust and desire he incites in the Lady. Fantomina is her first disguise, and the disguise that accompanies her sexual debut. Her subsequent disguises, Celia and the Widow Bloomer, demonstrate that this method of seduction is effective for the young and old, the innocent and the experienced, inspiring her plea 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!' (66). Where the name 'Fantomina' introduces the idea of performance, 'Incognita' represents the ultimate enactment of that performance. The word *incognita* describes concealed identity. While the Lady's other disguises aimed to conceal her performance, *Incognita* flaunts it, hiding her face behind a mask and shrouding the bedroom in darkness. Changing her name, along with her disguise, allows this 'Young Lady of distinguished Birth, Beauty, Wit and Spirit' (Haywood 23) to assume the role of a prostitute, a maid of 'seeming innocence' (Haywood 43), a widow, and a sexually empowered performer. While her appearance may change, her intention remains the same, albeit executed with growing confidence. These disguises enable her pursuit of *Beauplaisir* by freeing her from the fear of public ridicule, allowing her to converse and act in a 'free and unrestrain'd Manner' (Haywood 26).

The title *Oroonoko, or the Royal Slave* highlights the antithetical power hierarchies present in the book. Despite the narrator's declaration that 'I must call Oroonoko Caesar, since by that name only he was known in our Western world, and by that name he was received on shore at Parham House, where he was destined to be a slave' (Behn 40), Behn foregrounds Oroonoko's actual name in the title of the book. Saying 'our Western world', implicates the reader, implying that the reader would also only know Oroonoko by the name Caesar. This underlines an intention to tell Oroonoko's story, as opposed to Caesar's story of betrayal and murder. The alternative title, however, '*or, The Royal Slave*', suggests that 'Oroonoko' is synonymous with the term 'Royal Slave'. It defines him as a slave with privileged status, as opposed to his original status as a prince.

Names are entangled with honour and virtue in both texts. In *Fantomina*, changing names allows the 'Lady' to explore her sexuality safely by protecting her reputation.

Fantomina opens with a description of her naïveté, ‘She was young, a Stranger to the World, and consequently to the Dangers of it’ (Haywood 24). The reason she must conceal her identity in the first place is to protect her reputation: ‘She had a 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 to her Virtue’ (Haywood 37). This suggests that the reputation of virtue is more important than virginity. However, *Fantomina*’s distress when *Beauplaisir* assaults her demonstrates the fear associated with tarnishing her reputation, it ‘made her quite forget the Part she had assum’d’ (Haywood 33). She breaks down in tears and wants to reveal her identity to *Beauplaisir* to convey the gravity of his actions. She cries: ‘Oh no! I am undone beyond the power of Heaven itself to help me!’ (Haywood 34). She does not tell him because of its potential to damage her reputation. Eventually, she comes to terms with this experience and reconsiders it on her own terms: ‘The more she reflected on the Merits of *Beauplaisir*; the more she excused herself for what she had done’ (Haywood 37), the emphasis was refocused on exercising her own will, while protecting her public reputation. As a cautious woman, she recognizes the nature of the society and finds a way to explore her desires safely.

In contrast, *Oroonoko*’s honour transcends the change in his name. In the opening of the novella *Oroonoko*, the prince, is described with adulation. He was a ‘gallant Moor’ (Behn 10) with ‘that real greatness of soul, those refined notions of true honour, that absolute generosity’ (Behn 11). He is described as a man of his word, declaring that if he were to violate his honour ‘it would be eternally offending and diseasing all mankind, harming, betraying circumventing and outraging all men’ (Behn 35). The royal *Oroonoko* sets himself as an example for all of mankind. This conviction prevails in Caesar and does not change, even when he is betrayed, subjected to unimaginable torture and fatally dismembered. Before losing his name, title, and status, he declares to his army: ‘it is not title make men brave, or good, or birth that bestows courage and generosity’ (Behn 30). He indicates that there is

another, personal quality that determines this. After losing his name, title, and status, he is still described as ‘young and gallant’ (Behn 39), and ‘their prince’ (Behn 41), demonstrating that even as a slave, ‘people could not help treating him after a different manner’ (Behn 39). He is made ‘unimpeachable within the narration as a representative figure of honour and trust’ (Dickson 581), Oroonoko demonstrates that, just as ‘title’ and ‘birth’ do not instill goodness, courage, or generosity in an individual, the loss of title and status does entail the loss of those qualities. Despite being reclothed in ‘something more befitting of a slave’ (39), and renamed Caesar, ‘the royal youth appeared in spite of the slave’ (Behn 39). This demonstrates that despite the efforts to conquer him; stripping him of his name, clothes, and autonomy, his principles and honour remain strong.

The relationship between naming and ownership is most apparent in *Oroonoko*, where the change of Oroonoko’s name to ‘Caesar’ accompanies his fall from prince to slave. Shortly after Oroonoko’s enslavement, the narrator reveals that ‘the Christians never buy any slaves but they give ‘em some name of their own, their native ones being likely very barbarous and hard to pronounce’ (Behn 39). This suggests that renaming is integral to enslavement; signifying the erasure of their former identity. The distinction between ‘some name of their own’ and ‘their native ones’ places the Christians and natives in opposition. Names become symbolic of conquest and cultural imperialism. The narrator describes the name Caesar as a ‘name which will live in that country as long as that (scarce more) glorious one of the great Roman’ (Behn 39-40). Caesar is a name of tremendous cultural significance in ‘our Western world’ (Behn 40). While the ‘fame’ (Behn 40) of Caesar’s name embodies Oroonoko’s ‘grandeur’ (Behn 41), renaming Oroonoko Caesar prescribes his downfall, betrayal, and death. This foreshadowing communicates the slavers’ control over his body, identity, and future.

In 'False Gifts/Exotic Fictions', Catherine Molineux posits that 'The narrator explicitly differentiates the black prince from the field slaves, both in his physical form and in his refusal to submit to even the "Name" of "Slave"' (Molineux 461). This can be extended, as Oroonoko is not only differentiated from the other slaves, but from himself as Caesar. Caesar is the name that was imposed on him by people who sought to dominate him. Oroonoko reclaims his name at the end of the novella when 'Caesar' is whipped and treated in the most 'deplorable and inhumane manner' (Behn 64). He declares 'You should see that Oroonoko scorns to live with the indignity that was put on Caesar' (Behn 65). He reiterates this as he nears his death, 'you will find no more Caesar's to be whipped, no more find a faith in me. Feeble as you think me I have strength yet left to secure me from a second indignity' (Behn 70). This signifies Oroonoko's detachment from Caesar, from the subjugated self that was betrayed, abused and controlled by others. While he cannot change his fate, he reclaims his autonomy and refuses to succumb to his oppressor. He never shows weakness or pain, he 'was not perceived to make any moan, or to alter his face' (Behn 63) and while the executioner 'cut of his members', 'his ears and his nose', 'he still smoked on, as if nothing had touched him' (Behn 72).

Ideas of ownership are also present in *Fantomina*, but pertain most directly to patriarchal power and the commodification of sex. The Lady's first sexual experience takes place under the guise of her performance as 'Fantomina' the prostitute. The omniscient narrator describes Beauplaisir's perception of the encounter. He 'believ'd her a *Mistress*, but believ'd her to be one of superior Rank, and began to imagine the Possession of her would be much more Expensive than at first he had expected (Haywood 31). The use of the phrase 'Possession of her' extends the transactional nature of prostitution to entail a man's absolute ownership of a woman. While Beauplaisir dominates and assaults Fantomina, Incognita inverts this power dynamic. Names signify different stages of the Lady's character growth,

and as Incognita, she has matured and taken ownership of her own sexuality. With her identity hidden, ‘She yielded without even a Show of Reluctance’ (Haywood 67). Since she had previously made the reader aware that she was a master of disguise, she could ‘vary her very Glances, tune her Voice to Accents the most different imaginable’ (Haywood 52), the drama of this performance is a choice rather than a necessity. The ‘Darkness’ (Haywood 69) of the room, the curtains, and ‘her Mask’ (Haywood 68), were theatrical decisions that fulfilled *her* fantasy. Revealing her identity to him in that moment would have been ‘the ruin of her passion’ (Haywood 69). This is her real climactic moment of success, she refused to yield to Beauplaisir’s complaints, ‘she was not to be persuaded’ (Haywood 67), because it did not belong in *her* fantasy. Ironically, while she uses ‘names’ to signify her shifting identities, she steps into her power when her ‘name’, Incognita, is the farthest from recognition, the most illusory.

If the name describes ownership, Beauplaisir cannot own her without knowing her name. He expects payment for their time together, ‘he went out of the House determin’d never to re-enter it till she should pay the Price of his Company with the Discovery of her Face and Circumstances’ (Haywood 70). His language conveys a sense of entitlement to her name, and by extension, to her body and identity. This demonstrates that being refused ownership of a woman destabilises the patriarchal power structure. When Incognita refuses him, it inverts the sexual power dynamic. It turns the Lady’s name into a form of currency and puts Beauplaisir in the position of the prostitute expecting payment for his ‘Favours’ (Haywood 33).

In ‘Performing Passions’, Emily Hodgson Anderson argues that *Fantomina* engages herself in a self-conscious performance described by Anderson as ‘women acting roles that they have independently conceived for themselves— to achieve an effective expression of

female passions which would, in another setting, be disastrous and unavailing'. Her performance offers a form of emancipation from the society that represses female sexuality. Anderson's description neglects to recognise that the Lady is only able to find power by manipulating the rules of a patriarchal game. Her first disguise is an act of self-preservation and liberation. Her additional disguises, however, are only made necessary because of Beauplaisir's inconstancy, fickle interest, and neglect. Therefore, while she may gain access to things previously inaccessible to her, she remains partially constrained by gendered power dynamics. Ultimately, the young Lady is successful in her endeavor. Neither the reader nor Beauplaisir ever discover her real identity, and she gains an awareness of her own power, announcing: 'I have outwitted even the most Subtle of the deceiving Kind, and while he thinks to fool me, is himself the only beguiled Person' (Haywood 55-56).

Names are wielded like weapons in *Oroonoko* and *Fantomina*. They are vehicles of meaning that foreground Fantomina's performance, and Oroonoko's resilience. Whereas the Lady escapes ownership by concealing her real name, the loss of Oroonoko's real name is the very thing that symbolises his enslavement. In *Fantomina*, the name becomes a mask that conceals one identity while liberating another. While Oroonoko defends his honour to his dying breath, Fantomina, Celia, the Widow Bloomer, and Incognita serve separate functions that allow the Lady to pursue and maintain a man's interest while protecting her reputation and preserving the illusion of virtue. The Lady actively chooses to change her name, in what begins as 'an innocent Curiosity' and frivolous 'Whim' (Haywood 24), while the prince is renamed Caesar in an act of subjugation and erasure. Naming plays a crucial role in establishing and destabilising power in both texts, it is empowering in *Fantomina*, and disempowering in *Oroonoko*.

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