

Fantomina's curiosity and ambition

[Life](#), [Love](#)



Fantomina's Curiosity and Ambition Eliza Haywood's " Fantomina: or, Love in a Maze" is written to illustrate a woman's curiosity of love, affairs, and sexual satisfaction using deception, while trying to conceal her identity with fear of damaging her true self if she was not in full disguise. The title of the story tells us something about the perspective of story that describes the course of action. During the 18th century at the time of the short story, women's rights were greatly limited socially. They could not socialize and be seen with people from different social classes. A man controlled every aspect of a woman's life. Men were perceived to be the dominant figure and women as virgins, wives, or widows. The main character is an inexperienced noble woman, whose name is not revealed, who visits London. Up in the balcony with her wealthy class at a playhouse, she curiously realizes that prostitutes below at the main floor with the lower class are attracting and controlling men better than she is. Through disguising herself as a prostitute at a playhouse, she gains the newfound ability without restraint. She attracts men on the main floor and meets a man by the name of Beauplaisir who does not recognize her even though they have met before. While in disguise, she learns that the freedom of this disguise allows her to have power that she never had as a " Lady of distinguished Birth" (Haywood, 1). Haywood's protagonist engages in her newly found freedom of interacting and controlling, beginning her display of power over Beauplaisir. Of course, while Beauplaisir thoroughly enjoys his conversations with the beautiful young prostitute, he wants to have sex with her. Being a virgin, she puts off his request by telling him she will see him the next night, and will be better off avoiding the situation in the future, but she cannot resist the interaction with

Beauplaisir. Haywood writes that " she almost dy'd for another Opportunity of conversing with him; and not all the Admonitions of her Discretion were effectual to oblige her to deny laying hold of that which offered itself the next Night" (3). It is obvious that the woman cannot control her urge to be with Beauplaisir; she is even willing to give her virginity to be with him. She reasons that having his love is worth the loss. Keeping her true identity a secret, she told him her name was Fantomina. It seems that she is becoming a manipulative player, being desperately in love with Beauplaisir, and embracing instant gratification. She enjoys the love and power she feels in her seduction of Beauplaisir, which gives her the influence to continue enticing him. After the lapse of Beauplaisir's desire, Fantomina develops a stratagem to attract him again. " She loved Beauplaisir; it was only he whose Solicitations could give her Pleasure; and had she seen the whole species despairing, dying for her sake, it might, perhaps, have been a Satisfaction to her Pride, but none to her more tender Inclination" (9). Clearly the love in this relationship comes from only Fantomina. She goes from pretending to be a prostitute to being depressed at losing her virtue to being obsessed with gaining Beauplaisir's love no matter what. Fantomina follows Beauplaisir to Bath because she cannot stand being in control of him. Fantomina wants to experience the thrill of a constant relationship with conversations and ongoing affection. She realizes that Beauplaisir's sole intention is sex and constructs a shedding of one persona to another, continuing to hide her true identity. The second identity of Celia is plotted specifically to recapture the attraction of Beauplaisir. As Celia, she uses her newfound sexuality as a means of being consistently Beauplaisir's lover. She takes a step up in social

standing from her being a prostitute, as a respectable country girl housemaid working at the house where Beauplaisir rents on his way to Bath. Changing in appearance and personality, Beauplaisir, of course, was fir'd with the first Sight of her... His wild Desires burst out in all his Words and Actions; he call'd her little Angel, Cherubim, swore he must enjoy her... devour'd her Lips, her Breasts with greedy Kisses, held to his burning Bosom her half-yielding, half-reluctant Body, not suffered her to get loose, till he had ravaged all (10). The significance of the protagonist's second disguise being a servant is that the role offers more freedom than she had as a "distinguished" young lady. Celia does not resist at all, but simply gives herself to him as easily as an amorous servant girl might. Actually, she seduces Beauplaisir and makes him believe that he seduced her. At this point, the knowledge allows her to have the upper hand as she now can strategize and scheme her actions to benefit herself, rather than benefiting Beauplaisir. Furthermore, she knows more about Beauplaisir's characteristics and reasoning. Haywood's protagonist realizes that in order to keep him around, she must let him assume he is in control and be available to him purely for sexual pleasure. As her final identity, Incognita, her relationship with Beauplaisir is the shortest of all schemes, but she holds the most power between the various personas, remaining mysterious to him. At this point, she still has a great deal of desire for Beauplaisir, but she also does not want to lose at the game she herself has created. Incognita does not have much of an identity; she is different being not based on her appearance. She writes a very passionate letter to Beauplaisir and shows how well educated and proper she is. Not revealing her name, face, or really what type of person

she is, is her tactic for luring Beauplaisir back in. And because of that Beauplaisir is dying to know who she really is and seems to be most enchanted by her. When they have sex, she chooses to conceal her face completely, " setting forth the others with the greatest Care and Exactness. Her fine Shape, and Air, and Neck, appear'd to great Advantage. " (21). She seduces him once again, and with her personality hidden to emphasize her body more and increase her availability, she holds a great amount of power and reaches the peak of her sexuality. From start to finish there are feminist elements, although some are more distinct than others. Everything that the main character does is because she is forced to by the male dominated society. Haywood sends the message that women are equal in intelligence to men and they can control sexual relationship for personal pleasure. The title of Haywood's story actually tells us something about the story. When a person tries to complete a maze or walk through a maze, they generally choose a path and then proceed on it until it reaches a dead end. Then, they might try a new path to find their way to the ultimate goal. The main character takes on one personality and runs with it until it reaches a dead-end by means in that Beauplaisir stops being attracted to the character. Then she simply chooses a new character and tries a new path to achieve her desire of being consistently Beauplaisir's lover. Haywood describes her actions as "[taking] another course" (9). Thus, I feel that Haywood punishes her protagonist for her improper actions by having her mother send her to a Monastery in France, which leaves her entangled in the love maze she created for she ends up with a baby. Works Cited Haywood, Eliza. " Fantomina: Or, Love in a Maze. " The Longman Anthology of World

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