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Fantomina: 5 mark questions and sample answers

Q: Comment on the name of the heroine and the text.

A: Fantomina is a short work of amatory fiction drawing much upon the romance tradition of the earlier century, where the narrative consisted of the life and adventures of the protagonist who was eponymous. Thus the heroine and her tale bear the same name, drawing all fictional and critical focus on the sequence of events conditioned and interpreted by the suggestions and implications of the name. Though the name is seemingly taken up in a moment of sudden crisis to offer a false identity before Beauplaisir, it is really well-planned by the heroine and her author. The heroine must cover her respectable origin in the country gentry when engaging in the sexual libertinism of London, and shall go on to create a maze around the hero, appearing before him in many shapes like a phantom. The name has a foreign charm so treasured in upper-class prostitutes of the 18th century, matching the French source of the hero's name, which helps her in effective disguise. As she goes metamorphosing from Fantomina to Celia to Bloomer, the titular name grows in symbolic significance – from a real woman she grows to become the timeless mystery at the heart of femininity that ever draws man by its wile into erotic submission. Throughout her many identities she retains the fairylike, ephemeral and slightly ghostly attributes thrown up by the name 'Fantomina', so that the whole narrative achieves a fantastic quality helping the reader to gloss over the improbability of the plot. Within the fictional space, she represented for her contemporary female readers a feminine self empowered to avenge sexual injustices upon women, and this power, made up of craft and self-control and renewable sexual charms, is encapsulated in the name. She is a phantom as well as a child of fantasy – she embodies, and enacts male erotic fantasies while secretly achieving her victory over male polygamy – becomes herself a revolutionary text in the context of a hypocritical patriarchy. The name combines uncertainty, lure and eeriness: a combination that works to give the heroine subtle control over her man's blunt lustfulness, and to give the text a fictional insulation behind which the critique of patriarchal formulations of sexuality may work.

Q: What traces of Restoration Comedy do you find in Fantomina?

A: Eliza Haywood was much engaged with the Restoration Comedy of Manners and in close contact with dramatists like Aphra Behn and William Congreve, though her own work consists mostly of fiction. Her career covers a period in the early 18th century which still retained the interactions of Catholic and Protestant influences on social mores and literature. Her amatory fictions therefore bear resemblances to such comedies, though with an altered consciousness of the changed gender equation and its cultural and economic backdrop. The first resemblance is the preoccupation with love of a promiscuous kind among the affluent and fashionable upper class of London, where women are accepted as toys to be bought and enjoyed, and thrown away thereafter. The first and most important scene in the narrative opens in a London theatre,

where the ongoing shameless flirtations remind of the Restoration stage, and which prompts the heroine to cast aside her provincial Puritanism and assume the role of the loose city woman to see how such a life tastes. She is met by Beauplaisir whose French name (meaning a fashionable man after pleasure) points unmistakably to the heroes of Restoration comedies, and he resembles them in his modes of courtship. He assumes Fantomina to be a costly prostitute and seeks her physically after a brief customary flirtation, then grabs the maid Celia without any polite courtship because she is a poor country girl from the working classes and can be cheaply had for money, and then uses all his skill at insinuating sexual longing with Bloomer because she is a widow with a financial prospect, and finally prostrates himself before the noblewoman Incognita as the affair promises social rise. Then, the plot where the heroine uses disguise, craft and intrigue to trap her man in her maze is full of the sort of intricate designs used in Restoration comedies. The element of improbability running through Fantomina's successful disguises also continues the extension of credibility into fantastic possibilities exercised on the Restoration stage through masks and unbelievable intrigues. The locales used as places of romantic encounters – the cities of London and Bath, rented lodgings, parks and driving coaches – are those frequently found in the comedies, and the opposition of the city and the country so characteristic of Restoration theatre also constitutes the moral fibre here. Most importantly, the language of courtship, with its constant hypocritical couching of carnal lust in phrases of spiritual passion, its class consciousness and material motive, is taken up from the dialogue of Restoration comedies, culminating in the long verbal game of aggression and pseudo-resistance that goes on between Beauplaisir and the widow. The victory of the female in the battle of love and wit is another feature of Restoration comedy, which was a theatre dominated by its heroines. Finally, the moralistic end with the old mother (Restoration comedy ever was a playground of the young), the natural fall of the woman's dominance and the punishment of a nun's life are similar to the moral messages Restoration comedy sought to give beneath its immoral surface.

Q: Comment on the character of Beauplaisir.

A: Beauplaisir is a stock character out of the Restoration comedies – the type of urban dandy from the upper classes who goes about using his manly physical charms and sweet tongue to deceive women into affairs. His name means a beau (a fashionable young man or dandy) in search of 'plaisir' (pleasure in French, here meaning sexual pleasure). He belongs to that stratum of London society where men and women spend their lives in intrigues and liaisons related to love and moneymaking – masking their exteriors with a behavioral decorum adopted by genteel Restoration society and pursuing dark interests underneath. His place in Fantomina's plot is that of the male lover – the stereotype of male sexuality displaying in his tastes and sexual drives the rise and fall of male desire. The pattern of strong desire expressed in melodramatic praise of beauty until the woman is possessed, and then the slow abatement, becomes repetitive, and this is the nature on which Fantomina builds her deceptive plans to recapture him. The rest of Beauplaisir's life, personal or social, is kept unfocussed so that he may represent this generalized character of male sexuality. The surge of desire in him is so

blunt that he fails to recognize the same woman in her various disguises, or discards the faint feelings of likeness as unimportant beside his lust. His character seems to be aimed at proving two truths – that exaggerated courtship from males is but a covert expression of lust, and that male sexuality is a dumb, blind force compared to female sexuality which has a greater balance of body and mind. These are proved by the careless promiscuity with which he leaves the woman once his lust is satisfied, while the woman's steady desire makes her follow him and master his promiscuity with her intellect. His variable sexual behavior with women from different classes is shrewdly read by Fantomina – she anticipates his demands as she shapes herself into the maid or widow – and this is possible because he stands for interpersonal maleness instead of individual. When he is caught in her snare unawares, it is the whole male sex that is caught and subjected to ridicule and criticism. Towards the end the noose tightens and he is exasperated to keep up his pretences to Fantomina and Bloomer. Now she delivers her masterstroke – offering him the faceless female body in Incognita – indicating that men want a dehumanized female body to use for personal gratification. Faced with this ironic truth, he is infuriated. His male egotism is belittled as he fails to see the face and know the name, and he begins to feel his sexual hold on her weakening. It is a threat to his masculinity – he saves himself from this psychological humiliation by swearing never to come again. There are however two redeeming traits in his character: he offers to take charge of the illegitimate child when all is known, and the natural infidelity of his sex is set off against the physical pleasure he gives her, that makes her follow him.

Q: Why does Fantomina take up her first disguise?

A: As the story opens we find a young lady from a respectable family residing in the country come to London to stay with an aunt, with the intention of gathering some idea of London society. This was a common phenomenon of the time, since a great cultural gap existed between the country and the cosmopolitan capital, where life was very different under foreign influxes of fashion, and new thoughts on social organization. The city stood for liberal life and free intermixing between the sexes, while the country gentry still held on to more conventional ideas of sexual purity. The best public place for the young lady to gather social experience was the theatre, and there she goes, secure in a box, to observe socialization. She observes that men are engaged in ogling certain women who pose invitingly and gladly enjoy their flirtatious praises. Of these, she singles out a particular woman who seems to be the cynosure, and begins to feel curious about how the woman should feel, being so attended and desired. Her own reaction to what she sees is a moral disgust at the shameless prostitution, but her curiosity creates a division between her intellectual and sensual selves. She condemns such loose behavior in women and wishes to experience such looseness simultaneously. She is young, full of spirit and curiosity, new to this unknown exciting world, and also probably eager to test her own beauty's worth and attractive skills. She is also in a mood to enjoy her newfound freedom in the city. In a playful whim, she decides to don the disguise of a fashionable rich prostitute and appear at the theatre to test whether she can draw all eyes to herself. In this, she is driven by her adventurous nature and at this point is unaware of the consequences of her act. The act

reveals the careless mutinous youth in her, and the tumultuous subconscious desires of a generation repressed by a strict moral order in general.

Q: Describe the first encounter between Fantomina and Beauplaisir.

A: When Fantomina, dressed to attract men, goes into the gallery-box and imitates the behavior of the prostitute woman she had noted, she finds men crowding over her. They compete to praise her charms, and many note her resemblance to her real self of the gentlewoman, which amuses her a great deal. They suppose her to be a prostitute and escalate the praise to gain her favors, and the unprecedented feeling of being surrounded by male admirers bidding for her thrills her and make her self-conscious and proud. It is at this moment that she sees Beauplaisir approaching her. She had met and spoken to him on public occasions before and was acquainted with his charming conversation skills and attractive maleness, so his attention now evidently pleases her. She expects that he would directly advance, now that she poses as a prostitute, and waits for it. Her disguise initially makes him remember her real self, but then he addresses her in terms usual with a prostitute. When her replies show an education and wit unusual in such a woman, he changes tack and moves to a repartee that entertains them both and deepens the intimacy. However after the play is over he begins to press her for the night and she, after some mollification at this unforeseen circumstance, dispels him saying that she has a prior arrangement with another gentleman. Beauplaisir is maddened by the refusal, and she appeases him with a promise to be there for him at the box the next night, free from other engagements. She spends the night with a stirring desire to meet him, still thinking she would be able to save her chastity somehow by coming out of disguise after leading him some way with it. She goes out the following afternoon to hire a separate lodging near the theatre so she might save her reputation even if she has to spend the night with him. When she comes to the lodging force by the ardent man and her own willingness, she orders a sumptuous supper that surprises him. Then the hour of sexual consummation arrives and she is faced with the loss of virginity. She struggles and pleads, is driven almost to reveal her real identity, and confesses her virgin state and this ploy to get at him. At the height of his arousal, he ravishes her, caring nothing for her pleas. Afterwards, as he watches her weep over her loss, he wonders and fails to understand such strange behavior in a prostitute. He is astounded again when she turns away the money and asks for love and constancy instead, and is amazed by her sentimental outburst. Though he fails to fathom the love he has inspired in her, he feels a degree of difference in the sexual experience which softens him. Realizing that she is not an ordinary whore, he asks how and why she made this strange device and who she was, and receives the reply that she is Fantomina, daughter of a country gentleman, and she acted to know how mistresses were treated and how they felt. He is further perplexed at this reply, but dismisses the thought with the gross worldly wisdom that whatever her identity and motive, she will be forced into the role of a prostitute hereafter. Thus the first encounter ends with an unusual yet not unsettling experience for him, and moral compromise and birth into womanhood for her.

Q: What are the effects of taking up the disguise of chambermaid Celia?

A: After some time spent in amorous bliss, Beauplaisir begins to lose interest in Fantomina. She perceives this and feels great sorrow, but bears it in silence unlike her sex and decides to avenge the abandonment. He decides to go to Bath without her, and this news provokes her injured pride and prompts her to have him at her feet again. She wishes to fling her modesty to the air and appear before him in irresistibly alluring shape by altering her disguise. Accordingly she too leaves London for Bath, and abandoning all her usual accessories on the way, arrives there alone in a new guise – a round cap, a short red petticoat and a short grey jacket. She blackens her hair and eyebrows and adopts the rough dialect of the region and a rustic look to suit it that she knows will have a strong appeal for the urban gentleman. Transformed in this manner she goes to the lodging house where he has put up, and seeks to work as chambermaid. She is taken in, and with no other boarder but an old rheumatic man, is employed in serving Beauplaisir. The sight of this voluptuous chambermaid immediately electrifies his lust, and as she brings in his morning chocolate grabs her leg and sits her on his lap with sweet enticements. Her pretence of being the innocent country girl eggs him on to fully ravish her flesh, and pay her some gold which she must accept and be overwhelmed with in this guise. Here, Fantomina's discarding of her urban, wealthy self prompts him to discard the burden of verbal courtship, and kindles in him the raw lust for easy sex with no consequence. As a visiting gentleman from London, he enjoys immense social and economic supremacy over a chambermaid – her sexual exploitation is only a form among many forms to which the country poor are subjected. What attracts him more in this case is the absence of moral or other responsibility – chambermaids are there to be enjoyed, as it is. Of the several disguises Fantomina assumes to ensnare him and rekindle his passion, this one slides down the social scale to expose the raw brutality of male sexuality when joined with the cumulative powers of men over women, rich over poor and urban over rural in a bourgeois economy.

Q: What are Fantomina's intentions when she follows Beauplaisir to Bath?

A: Fantomina is motivated by a fierce desire to have her man back at her feet craving for her favors when she follows him to Bath. She has seen his ardent love for her old disguise gradually waning, and understood it to be the inevitable nature of male passion. It has pained her to the core as she has fallen in love with him, and the coldness from him is an insult to her egotism that she wishes to avenge. She has suffered in secret at the implied rejection, but has understood that pleading or begging for a return of his passion would be useless and would annoy and distance him farther. She knows this by the example of other rejected women, and so resolves to go forward with her disguise and metamorphose into an appearance that would at once ignite him and bring him into her trap while he thinks of enjoying a new woman. This would satisfy his sexual pride and dupe him into surrendering to her – thus satisfying her pride in her trick and craft. She thinks up the disguise of the rustic girl in whom a combination of fleshliness and easy availability would be erotically irresistible, with pretence of submissive innocence on the surface to make his advances easier and bolder. Bath was a city where the English upper class of London went each summer to recreate themselves, and the change of locale enabled many clandestine affairs. Fantomina therefore intends to have her revenge there, away from the

familiarity of London, and in an atmosphere of carefree promiscuity in a city where everyone disguised their London selves.

Q: How does the hero's approach to Celia and the widow differ, and why?

A: Beauplaisir looks at the chambermaid Celia and the widow Bloomer from very different viewpoints, chiefly because of the difference in their social standings, economic states, dress and age. Since Celia is a young country girl with no education or money, he treats him merely as a subordinate female on whom sex can be forced with no polite proposal, courtship or coaxing. On the other hand, he finds the widow to be extremely difficult to lay his hands on, and has to use his wit and seductive skills to the point of exasperation, to which Fantomina craftily drives him. While he grabs the maid and starts enjoying her with almost no word or time spent, he cannot surmount the decorum of decency and feminine consent with the widow, and is forced to wait and exhaust his arts of wooing. This happens because in Celia, Fantomina offers him freedom from feminine obstacles and responsibility, and then in the widow puts up psychological barriers of chastity, mourning and devotion to the deceased husband. The widow belongs to a respectable background at Bristol, and is about to become rich, which facts prevent him from indecent behavior. She deliberately keeps talking of the virtues of her husband and her great sorrow. These have an inhibiting effect on him which she intends and enjoys, until she is tired of the game and turns to the idea of love broached by him. The two different paths his erotic drive takes are designed by her with the awareness that such variety will fascinate him, coming one after the other. While Celia is directly stimulating to the male sex by her frank physical appeal, the widow's challenge to his masculine powers of overtaking her mournful chastity is no less a stimulation – one works upon the body and the other on the brain.

Q: How does Fantomina treat the advances of Beauplaisir as the widow?

A: Fantomina has created a virtuous widowhood to simultaneously tempt and frustrate Beauplaisir's overriding desire - physical temptation is withdrawn behind the mourning veil and tears, hair disappeared from sight and penitence on the face – all designed to refuse physical proximity while paradoxically inviting an emotional supportiveness by the appeal to his mercy and generosity. The coach ride to London she prays for is a sort of physical privacy she uses to tantalize – it shall work as a silent form of seduction while the game of decent conversation is played on the surface. The feigned widowhood is planned to titillate him into desperation, restricting him by the show of virtue and thus punish his sinful flesh – a form of sweet sadistic pleasure she longs to enjoy. Beauplaisir tries a thousand ways to bring her out of grief, suggests the loss of beauty and health, but she remains steadfast in her reserve. Finally he tries the subject of love with utmost modesty, and she responds with surprising eloquence, speaking of the elevating effects on the soul when love is truly felt and shared. This is again a sarcastic commentary on the inconstancy of her lover, though he fails to understand it as such. His blunt perceptions feel the subterranean ardors in her, which encourage him to make physical advances, yet in a cautious, consoling mode. Till the end of their consummation that night at the inn, he keeps up the soft conciliatory caresses, and she gives in pretending to faint on his breast.

Until then, the elaborate verbal machinery she employs to curb his animal lust is made of discourses on moral purity, monogamy and celibacy prevalent in the eighteenth century and used by Haywood with a satiric intent.

Q: How does Fantomina control the male pattern of desire and abatement?

A: Fantomina experiences the male sexual phenomenon of ardent desire and subsequent abatement in her first disguised affair with Beauplaisir. She interprets it as inconstancy inherent in male sexual behavior, and refuses to lament and plead like other women. Her injured egotism expresses itself in a motivation to avenge and bring his aberrant lust under her sexual authority, reversing the established pattern of male polygamy and regaining her lost pride in her charms. She must use her disguising skills and tact to win him back whenever he tires of her and this must happen while letting him suit his changing sexual tastes. Only variety can renew his ardor and excite him to a degree that will drown the physical resemblances between the women he enjoys successively. Realizing this, she creates a series of feminine archetypes that haunt the male psyche – the respectable virgin, the cheap rustic girl, the helpless widow and finally the faceless noble lady. In creating these selves, she has studied the machinations of male desire in a class-divided, patriarchal, bourgeois society where sexuality is bound by pretentious discourses of polity. In guiding him through these archetypes, she takes care to make access increasingly difficult – having the chambermaid is nothing, the widow exhausts his skill at wooing, and Incognita commands an authority which he finds intolerable. Further, the naked nature of male lust is exposed by the series which ends in denuding him of all masks of love by offering him the female body devoid of name and face. Also, the archetypes move up and down the social scale and expose the power structures that underlie the production of sexual desire and its variant modes of expression. While he seems to float in a world of realized fantasies, she draws him through a calculated maze of fantasized archetypes of femininity into a tug of war between them – he rushes from Fantomina to Bloomer, and then to be crushed by Incognita.

Q: Comment on the character of Fantomina's mother and her fictional role.

A: Fantomina's mother arrives in London from her foreign travels late in the plot, at a suitable point when the heroine's sexual adventures are come round and time has come for a social intervention that will end the disguised meetings which have by now become troublesome for both Beauplaisir and Fantomina. The mother represents the strict familial and social authority, whose absence has enabled the free adventurous run, and whose presence now is a fictional necessity for a realistic resolution. She is a pragmatic old lady, upright and active, and holds moral purity and familial honor above maternal affection. Her arrival puts a stop to Fantomina's amorous dashes, as mother and daughter prepare to return to their country home. It is at this juncture that Fantomina discovers her pregnancy, which in spite of her prolonged efforts of suppression, gets revealed when she falls sick at the royal ball where her mother has taken her. When the doctor and midwife confirm the maternity, the mother is shocked beyond comprehension, but soon acts to save face as much as possible. Her moral consternation turns out as fury upon her daughter, whom she refuses all assistance until she reveals her lover's

name. Then she summons Beauplaisir intending to make them confess and get married. However, upon learning the strange turn of affairs between them and seeing her daughter's faults, she behaves with admirable neutrality and moral judgment – acquitting him of responsibility and severing them for the future. She saves family prestige by the ruthless measure of sending the errant daughter to a nunnery in France – in this she represents the puritan social judgment of her time. In terms of the fictional plot, her entry is needed on several counts – to bring Fantomina out of her maze, to cull out a moral message from the fiction, to hold up the practical consequences of a childish series of potentially dangerous and thoughtless actions. Haywood had to deliver her somber social message beyond the youthful passions of her heroine, and the mother is her spokeswoman to this purpose.

Q: How does Haywood explain the success of each disguise and the failure of Beauplaisir to recognize the same woman?

A: In her first encounter, Fantomina merely dresses up like a prostitute and finds that though Beauplaisir has seen her many times before, he is led by her exterior to think she is a prostitute with accidental likeness to her. This leads her to think she will be able to dupe him in her various disguises by exciting his lust to a point where the blind force of his passion will blur earlier sensual memories. She employs her expertise in dressing and making up, alters her speech habits and social standings in her various personas, and these added to her ready invention, pluck and protean nature succeed in luring him away from recognition. Yet the fact of repeated misrecognition remains beyond credibility – it is beyond all rational comprehension that a man would fail to identify a woman he has so intimately known. Haywood knew this improbability would strike her reader, and therefore offers a passage to explain when three disguises had successfully worked. The explanation consists of Fantomina's change of dress, her excellent powers of feigning and suiting her behavior to the assumed persona, shifting her accent and voice and glances to her will – natural gifts that would leave the playhouse actors far behind. Along with these, there are spatial and social distances between the chambermaid and widow which dim the resemblances. But the most potent reason of misrecognition lies embedded in the depths of the male psyche – the forms of feminine lure she embodies in her disguises are already existent in male sexual consciousness as eternal, archetypal shapes of desire. Fantomina's instinctive understanding of this truth comes from her astute reading of masculine impulses, framed by socio-cultural discourses. Haywood was writing within the tradition of amatory fiction that took liberties with realism, and her readers were prepared to accept adventure outside the bounds of probability in the interest of fulfilling through fiction their unrealized dreams.

Q: Why does Fantomina decide to hide her face and name as Incognita?

A: Fantomina had seen from her encounters with Beauplaisir as herself, Celia and the widow Bloomer that the mind and soul of the woman was of no consequence to a man. All the professions of love dressed in the fashionable rhetoric of the day were but empty pronouncements, beneath which ran lust of an impersonal nature. This was confirmed by the

cold mechanical repetitions of hollow rhetoric after the woman had been possessed. With Celia, he conducted a transaction of mere fleshly pleasures, temporary and shorn of protestations of love, and with Bloomer his arduous verbal journey was motivated by carnal flames. These experiences convinced her of his hypocritical nature, which had caused her such pain and which she wanted to punish. That is why she takes her final persona of the noble lady who shall remain anonymous and faceless, and daunt him to submission with her social superiority. The name Incognita suggests this anonymity, as also the sexual lure of a secret affair. When she writes inviting him and dictating the conditions, he is both thrilled that a noble lady should be driven to such a risky affair by his masculine appeal, and convinced that physical intimacy will break down her reserves. But she is determined to give him the body alone, compelling him to face the beastly nature of his own desire, as a moral lesson and punishment. The holding up of her identity shall undermine his control over her, making him feel like a subordinate rather than the victorious possessor. It is precisely this disappointment she wishes for him, from which she would probably derive a final sadistic satisfaction.

Q: How does Fantomina arrange to meet him as Incognita?

A: Fantomina's final disguise is that of a noble, aristocratic lady who is moved by Beauplaisir's masculine attractions to risk a secret affair. Unlike the earlier disguises, this one requires an elaborate arrangement and aides to make up the pretence of nobility. She goes out and hires a palatial building fit for her purpose near her own lodgings, where she can invite him to impress the idea of grandeur. Then she goes to a park where men of various sorts frequent. Looking among them she finds two men who seem to be poor and ready to serve any purpose for money. With professions of sympathy at their sad predicament, she proposes to them a job whose specific nature she does not immediately reveal, sets them on the lure of money by giving some, and asks them to meet her the following day if they are agreeable. The next day they meet her and agree to the employment as long as they are not driven to any danger or crime. She now makes them vow absolute secrecy and obedience, and gives them servants' liveries and explains their task. She sends them with her letter to Beauplaisir, ordering them not to reveal anything about her when he questions. When he arrives responding to the letter, the men receive him as a lady's servants should, and bring him refreshments and conduct him to the appointed room. When Beauplaisir insists on spending the night, planning to discover her, she has them bolt and cover up all the bedchamber to shut out all light, and comes to him in complete darkness and leaves his bed in the morning unseen. As he rushes out, the men surround him – they dress and refresh him while the lady assumes her guard. The whole arrangement, performed so perfectly, frustrates and infuriates him, and he leaves the house refusing to come again.

Q: Describe the events after the discovery of Fantomina's pregnancy.

A: Fantomina discovers her pregnancy when her sexual encounters with Beauplaisir have passed through all the disguised phases of Fantomina, the chambermaid, the widow and the noble lady. She is back in London and receiving him in alternating identities of Fantomina and

widow Bloomer, after he has come away from Incognita. She is dismayed at the discovery, and plans to suppress the swelling belly as long as she can by hiding it under her dress. When the pregnancy develops, she thinks of going to some remote place on some pretext and disposing of the baby in secret. But at this point her mother returns from her foreign travel and plans to go back to their country residence. Before they leave the city, she takes Fantomina to a ball at the royal palace where she falls sick and is unable to control her spasms and convolutions. The alarmed mother takes her home and calls for a doctor, who after examining her reveals to the mother the news of pregnancy. The mother is aghast, and presses her daughter to disclose the name of the man, which she tries to withhold. But when the mother refuses her the help of the midwife until she speaks the truth, she relents. Beauplaisir is called up by the mother and brought to face Fantomina, as the mother demands a joint confession and a marriage to cover up. Beauplaisir is astounded; he declares he knows the lady but has never had any designs on her. Fantomina now has no choice but to tell the whole story which dumbfounds the hearers. Then, the mother withdraws the demand of marriage and Beauplaisir refuses to marry but agrees to take care of the baby girl if they so want. He continues to visit the young mother for some time, until the old lady, afraid that their affair may resume, asks him to stay away. As soon as the baby is ready to be moved, Fantomina is sent away to a nunnery in France to live the rest of her life in penitence.

Q: Are Fantomina's actions guided by any moral purpose, or by sexual desire alone?

A: On her first night with Beauplaisir, Fantomina had lost her virginity and was forced into the social position of a prostitute, however she deny her status to be so. She had doubtlessly enjoyed the physical pleasures greatly, and was transported to a sensual heaven with him. But she had also fallen in love – love of a sincere devoted kind – which is testified by her prayer for constant affection from him, and her passionate refusal to accept the money he offered. From this point, their sexual union could lead to morally sanctified love and marriage – her whim could become her life. But Beauplaisir treats her merely as a whore and leaves her when he is satiated. Her love remains unrequited, and insulted. She bears the pain in silence, and ascribes the loss to the natural inconstancy of male nature. Her suffering and rejection by him leads to injury and anger, but also beneath them to a love and dedication that fiercely refuses to leave the man she has loved. So, in her subsequent disguises and manipulations, she traces a pattern of constancy to contrast against the inconstancy of men – she follows him in his desires, offers him the sexual variety he craves for, and brings him back to Fantomina to test his fidelity. The whole exercise is a moral enterprise to expose the brutishness of male passion, and punish it in the shape of Incognita. Of course she is attached to him chiefly sensually, but as her experience proceeds, the moral indignation at his shameless lying rises, and bursts out when he writes that he had forgotten the name of the woman to whom her letters should be addressed, and so had not written. For Fantomina and for Haywood, the amorous pursuit is undertaken from the underlying moral purpose of rectifying aberrant male sexuality, as well as establishes the eternal difference of the polygamous male and monogamous female natures.

Q: Comment on the use of letters in Fantomina.

A: There are two kinds of letters in Fantomina – those written to her and those by her. Together, they play a significant role in depicting and satirizing the stylized language of courtship prevalent among the upper classes of post-Restoration society. The use of letters between lovers was an important device in the Restoration comedies, where they were used in the battle of wit fought between the hero and heroine, and Haywood here uses them in much the same vein. The first letter Fantomina writes is an amorous call from the widow Bloomer to visit her at his earliest, and the next is a sentimental complaint from Fantomina to a lover who has not written for a long time, and pleading to see him. The letters are instruments of her snare – she wishes to see how he manages a new and an old love. The reply to Bloomer is full of exaggerated and anguished praises of her charms, with a promise to meet her in the afternoon and an intolerable waiting until then. The superlative praise of every attribute of the beloved is done with a mad sentimentalism that provokes laughter, being divorced from reality. The reply to Fantomina repeats the formal phrases of high praise, but then offers a flimsy reason for not having written, and ends with a somewhat forced consent to meet. The letters are short, but the language of praise in its convoluted, elongated, languishing manner imitates the rarefied unworldly nature of genteel courtship. There is another exchange of letters when she poses as Incognita – where her submissive complaining tone is substituted by a double tone of covert admiration and forbidding authority. While expressing a sensuous hunger for his manhood, she here assures him of her charms for which the 'greatest men in the kingdom' yearn. By withholding her identity, this letter reverses the gender equation – she assumes the command of the male aggressor, and he is resigned to the role of female receiver. His reply to this summon is confused, submissive and attendant upon her will. The playful surrender of the male at the female's feet, conventional in courtly love, here becomes earnest and therefore, the languishing rhetoric disappears.

Q: Does Fantomina have a morally conventional ending?

A: In writing Fantomina, Haywood experimented with the moral conventions of her time, responding to the dynamic gender relations in a fast-changing, cosmopolitan London. Sexual mores were largely defined still by a religious patriarchy dominated by puritans who emphasized on hard work and self-sacrifice, and looked upon love and matrimony as socially ordained matters. But this framework was also being challenged by the avant garde of London, and the emerging prose fictions were a chief mode of this challenge, read by the young who aspired to define their personal lives themselves. Thus Haywood fulfills a double responsibility – giving scope to dynamic new thought and to limit it within a frame of practical consequence, adjusting the new adventurous more to reality. So the disguised sexual adventures of Fantomina go to outrageous and unbelievable limits, broaching serious questions about existing orders, and exposing inequities from which women suffer. The fictional plot creates a fictional private space where the heroine can reverse the gender roles and register a critique of heartless male polygamy, and point at the supportive ideological structures that validate it. This seems revolutionary on the surface, and seemed so to many contemporary, and female readers, but Fantomina is motivated throughout by the morally conventional monogamous devotion of the

female, and strives to contain male polygamy by catering to male desires. Thus a moral strain runs through the plot, and the final self-defeating pregnancy is foreshadowed by the successive defeats of each disguise to hold the man's passion. In the end, when pregnancy is discovered and social convention intervenes through the mother, the punishment of a life of penitence is harsh and forbidding for the reader. However, the reader has known this inevitability, and it does not take away the power or rationale of the sexual experiment.

Q: What does the text of Fantomina reveal about female sexuality/love?

A: Fantomina was written in a society where female sexuality was largely restricted by religiously sanctioned matrimony, and love outside marriage was considered anathema. Haywood was considered one of the writers encouraging immoral love among her female readers, when she was reflecting new and radical thoughts of the urban bourgeoisie on the changing gender relations in the city. Her young and female readers used fiction as an imaginary space to fulfill their deepest unrealized desires, and conquer gender battles that they lost in reality. Such fiction, including Fantomina, was frequently built on the model of romances from the previous century, but here the romantic deference to the feminine sex was replaced by the commercialized transaction of flesh glossed over by stylized courtly rhetoric. It is within this complex and dynamic situation that Fantomina makes an ambiguous statement about feminine love. The heroine's unwavering attachment to Beauplaisir in spite of his frank libertinism speaks for the essentially monogamous and devoted nature of feminine love, as also for the inseparable association of sensual pleasure and heartfelt affection. As demonstrated by the heroine's career, feminine love, when spurned or cheated, turns revengeful and goes to unimaginable extents to regain honor and appreciation. But in all its crafty and cruel machinations it is ever guided by a subterranean softness for its object. Fantomina's injured egotism makes her create disguises before which her man must surrender, and she uses the successive guises as a tightening noose to draw him near. Her career demonstrates that female sexuality is wily beyond male comprehension; it takes mysterious mazy ways of expression, but is fundamentally based on constancy and honest affiliation.

Q: Comment on the subtitle and epigraph to Fantomina.

A: The text of Fantomina is headed by a subtitle and an epigraph, both indicating the strangeness of the sequence of events and the paradoxical truths that underlie it. The subtitle – 'Love in a Maze' – indicates the reader's entry into a magical, fictional world where the rational faculties of the real world will remain suspended, in favor of a network of fantastic realities, demanding a "willing suspension of disbelief". This fantastic world created by feminine passions and dark carnal forces is also signaled by the title Fantomina, with its suggestion of fantasy. Actions in this world, it is meant, will be directed by a higher order of reason, one that is subjective and romantic. The clause that follows the subtitle explains that it is a history (in the time it meant a real account) of a secret love affair between two affluent people – meaning that it happens within the urban, leisurely upper class whose chief preoccupation has been to hoodwink established sexual conventions since the Restoration. Then comes the epigraph – a

couplet from the Restoration poet Edmund Waller – that deftly summarizes the action and its paradoxical motives. “In love the victors from the vanquished fly”, as Beauplaisir abandons Fantomina after winning her, and “they fly that wound”, as he injures her heart but then escapes as if he is himself injured, and “they pursue that die”, as Fantomina, dying for his renewed ardor , follows him. All these strange things happen in love, which is a maze that jeopardizes normal motives, actions and results. When the victor should occupy and rule the vanquished, he flies in terror, and the dealer of wounds who should bravely advance runs away instead. When the dying should lie or escape, they chase the victor. The metaphor of battle here employed to explain the different, irrational nature of love was common enough in Restoration theatre and poetry, and Haywood makes it define the strangeness of her plot.