

# Fantomina Analysis Essay

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Eliza Haywood wrote *Fantomina*, a short novel, at a time when the genre was only just being introduced. The novel had not yet gained respect as a literary form. Many people, around the eighteenth century, believed that novels were meant for mothers and their daughters, who were typically at home all day with nothing else to do, since most did not work. Many novelists would adhere to this idea when creating female characters; they often carried few roles. However, *Fantomina* appears to demonstrate feminist views that were rare, and more radical for its time. Eliza Haywood shows an intelligence and stealthiness in her main [character](#), in contrast to the era's concept of what a woman should be. This seems to put *Fantomina* ahead of its time, in many respects.

At the start of the [novel](#), Eliza Haywood places her [protagonist](#) in a very interesting, unique position, with regards to society of the time. The nameless main character is first illustrated in a playhouse, observing the interactions of the strangers around her. She notices a prostitute, surrounded by a swarm of men. "She could not help testifying her contempt of men who...threw away their time in such a manner, to some Ladies...the greater was her wonder, that men, some of whom she knew were accounted to have wit, should have tastes for very depraved" (257-258.) "*Fantomina*", as she later comes to be called, oversees all of this. Haywood seems to put her above this crowd of men and prostitutes, while she observes and makes judgments on the nature of their behaviors. She expresses

that she is disgusted by the mindlessness of the men in this situation. One might argue that this depicts a reversal of gender roles. Typically, men would look at women in this way, and the male character wo...

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...f her time. She wrote the novel at a time where women were incredibly limited. They were essentially accessories to society's men. Fantomina sheds light on the error of such ideologies. It shows women to be intelligent, powerful beings, while shedding light on the weaknesses of men. Haywood shows great contrast between society's perception of the ideal women, through Fantomina's mother and the convent, and the rebellious main character that disregards these societal norms. In doing so, Haywood shows her readers the potential of women. Given that the majority of the readers of novels were young women and mothers, Fantomina must have been a relevant book for that audience. It seems likely that Haywood wrote such a powerful book to, in a sense, inspire her female readers to be strong, independent controllers of their own lives.

#### Works Cited

Fantomina, Eliza Haywood

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