

Posudek na diplomovou práci Lindy Kazdové “Masquerade Scenes in the Works of Eighteenth Century Women Authors”

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Theories of masquerade and mimesis, and the performative approach to gender that they reflect, are pertinent to the representation of femininity in eighteenth-century literature. Starting from the Bakhtinian premise (as developed by Terry Castle) about the subversive potential of the carnivalesque, Linda Kazdová looks at the eighteenth-century practice of masquerade and makes claims for the liberating potential of an experience that is as far removed as possible from the moral, classificatory certainties of domestic feminine ideology. The masquerade dissolves boundaries, challenges social structures and offers women (albeit temporarily) release from repression. One of the paradoxes of women's writing at the time is the creation of heroines eager to experience such life, yet (especially in the later fiction) ostensibly depicting this eagerness as defeated and repudiated. The thesis is then an excellent example how eighteenth-century women's writing must be read – only search under the “mask” of the overt message (which the narrators are ostensibly putting forward) can uncover a range of covert meanings which may undercut any ostensible moralizing.

Linda Kazdová has selected three literary texts (representing three different literary genres: a short fictional tale or novella, a play and a novel) and analyses in detail the function of the masquerade scenes. Hannah Cowley, Eliza Haywood and Elizabeth Inchbald and their respective literary careers are contextualized within the reception of women's writing in the period. The texts are chosen well, being representative of various genres and of a range of possible responses to the masquerade (see page 9). Nevertheless, I feel it may have boosted the argument to consider also the particular era in which the women wrote – Haywood's tale *The Masqueraders* was published in 1724, several decades divide it from the publication/production of Cowley's *The Belle's Strategem* (1780) and Elizabeth Inchbald's *A Simple Story* (1791). The very fact that the order of discussion does not exactly follow the chronology of publication testifies to the fact that historical contextualization of the masquerade *within* the eighteenth century did not play much of a role in the thesis's conception. A pity, since the moral and social image of the masquerade did undergo a shift of sorts, as can be testified to among others by the changing textual and visual image of this pleasure past time. An interesting example of such change, developing the cultural history of the masquerade as presented in chapter I (especially the different public image of the role of J.J.Heidegger and Teresa Cornelys), can be located in the appendix to my report.

Nevertheless, despite the comment above, I have no serious reservations to the overall conception of the thesis. I realize that within the scope of an MA thesis the developing cultural history of a social popular event may have overburdened the text with detail. The major thrust is in the individual close readings of literary texts and, as such, the thesis has no major flaws. The readings are perceptive, original and inspiring. The following then are to be taken merely as comments, extensions or possible starting points for further discussion:

Early eighteenth-century fiction often uses the concept of curiosity (see page 71), linking it mostly to women and contrasting it with male – inevitably more serious – scholarly even scientific interest. Curiosity as the starting point setting off a kind of social experiment of observing male behaviour is a device that Eliza Haywood uses e.g. in *Fantomina*, and it is

common also to other amorous novels of the era (from Behn to Manley). Moreover, as Ros Ballaster also claims, such novellas ought to be read as political and social allegories.

If the “masquerade may symbolize misrule and the destruction of ... domestic order”(page 84), the domestic family romance scenario is disrupted in *A Simple Story*. Family roles are performances too and the novel is full of slippages. E.g. Dorriforth’s role of guardian / “father”/ lover etc. could be brought forward. In the limited space of the MA thesis, I realize, masquerade should not be stretched out to include all “performances” of any protagonist. But at the oral defence, could Linda comment on Dorriforth’s / Lord Elmwood’s roles (see above) and on their repetition in the second part of the novel?

Also, as Linda makes use of body language in her argument, could she link its usage in the text of *A Simple Story* to that in novels of sensibility? I have in mind the fact that frequently bodily signs in sentimental novels speak more truly than words. But in this novel bodily signs are ambiguous, they are misunderstood. How does all this function in the masquerade scene of this novel and overall in the text?

One last comment about translation – how should we translate the eighteenth-century term masquerade? Maškaráda, karneval, maškarní (ples) all seem to be feasible options – but all also depend heavily on the context. Any other conclusions?

Although Linda Kazdová adopts the more enabling perspective, reading her texts as always subversive, or at least vastly complicating established norms, she is not one-sided in her interpretations, and points out the range of possible meanings. Thus, although one may not always adopt quite such a “rosy view” of e.g. Matilda’s story, Linda always scrupulously lets the text do the speaking. The thesis is thus a very good example of close reading and literary interpretation which is theoretically informed (by Bakhtin but also Irigaray and Butler) but never twisting the text to its own purposes.

Exciting reading, thoughtful analysis, thorough research, logical argumentation and good formulation characterise this thesis, which I recommend for defense with the grade **excellent (v ý b o r n ě)**.

V Praze dne 4.9.2012

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Appendix to the report:

William Hogarth , *Masquerades and Operas* , a print published in February 1724, and called in the newspapers “The Bad Taste of the Town”.



In the print, Hogarth satirises the contemporary fashion for masquerades, operas, magic, pantomime and Italianate art. On the left of the print, the exterior of the London opera house King's Theatre at the Haymarket, is dominated by a huge sign - its imagery derived from a recently published satire by another engraver - in which three foreign opera singers, Berenstadt, Cuzzoni and Senesino, are shown receiving bags of money from a trio of noblemen. Hogarth also shows the opera house hosting the conjuring acts of Isaac Fawkes and the masquerades that had been introduced into the English capital by the Swiss impresario John James Heidegger. Opposite stands Lincoln's Inn Theatre, which had recently enjoyed

enormous success through the performance of commedia dell'arte pantomimes. The 'Accademy of Arts' depicted in the background of the print (which in fact depicts the doorway to Burlington House in London) signals another bastardised form of contemporary taste – the cult of Italian and classical art and architecture being fostered by Richard Boyle, 3rd Earl of Burlington, and his protégé, the artist and designer William Kent, whose stone figure towers above the ludicrously downgraded figures of Michelangelo and Raphael.

Note how a crowd of masqued and costumed revelers are led by a fool and devil into the opera house on the left; opposite, a genteel crowd pushes its way into Lincoln's Inn Fields to see Rich's hit pantomime, *The Necromancer; or Harlequin Doctor Faustus*. In the centre foreground a rustic figure with a staff scratches his head with bemusement at the fashionable scene, while a wheelbarrow passes by, pushed by a street seller crying, "Waste paper for shops!" and filled with the plays of Shakespeare, Dryden and Ben Jonson. The caption of the original print reads:

Could new dumb *faustusI*, to reform the Age
Conjure up *Shakeseare's* or *Ben Jonson's* Ghost,
They'd blush for shame, to see the *English stage*
Debauch'd by fool'ries, at so great a cost.
What would their *Manes* say? should they behold
Monsters and *Masquerades*, where usefull Plays
Adorn'd the fruitfull *Theatre* of old,
And Rival With contended for the *Bays*.

The print obviously captured the popular sentiment, inflamed by the patriot and opposition satirists of the 1720s and 30s -contrast of native with foreign, high and low etc.

Half a century later, though, the Italian opera was boring, and tired of rubbing shoulders with the low classes at in popular amusements, pleasure gardens etc., rich patrons tend to a new experience – extremely expensive concerts of advanced and technically difficult foreign music, played by foreign professionals (e.g. Johann Christian Bach etc). The classical symphony and the age of Haydn and Mozart hits London. One who caught this wave of interest was Teresa Cornelys who organized the first successful professional concert series in the 1760s. Treading a fine line between notoriety and fashionable renown, she offered her aristocratic clientele a mixture of fashionable music and masquerades. In many waves similar to Heidegger but at the same time, catering to an audience that was much more select. Assemblies at Carlisle House, her mansion in Soho Square, started with a concert, audiences then continued to dance in masquerade until morning. But attendance was by subscription and application to a committee of aristocratic women who decided who was worthy of admission. After 1764 the concerts were separated from the dances of Cornelys' ladies' "Society". (Note that the Pantheon at Oxford Street from 1770 also housed masquerades together with high style Italian music concerts.) The company that masked balls have to keep by the latter half of the century is rather different from the conjuror and magician Isaac Fawkes (or FAUX in Hogarth's print).

below, *The Promenade at Carlisle House*, engraved by John Raphael Smith, 1781



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