

HOW HE USED MASQUES, THE CRAZE OF THE DAY



Fred Tyler as Sir Toby Belch, Lizzie Hudson-Collier as Maria, Robert Peyton Carter as Sir Andrew

Gay Costume Dances Were New in England When He Wrote

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By John W. Cunliffe, D. Lit.,
Professor of English, Columbia University.

AS a Court entertainment, consisting mainly of dances in costume, the masque was largely dependent on the taste and open-handedness of the reigning sovereign. The austere Henry VII. gave little encouragement to such frivolities. Bacon says of him: "In triumphs of jousts and tourneys and balls and masques (which they then called disguises) he was rather a princely and gentle spectator than seemed much to be delighted." It was, characteristically enough, under the pleasure-loving Henry VIII. that the masque, with its distinctive conventions, was established as an English institution, and its introduction from Italy in 1512 was thought important enough to be recorded by the chronicler Hall, whose description of the occasion is of sufficient interest and significance to be here quoted: "On the day of the Epiphany at night, the King with eleven others were disguised, after the manner of Italy called a masque, a thing not seen before in England. They were apparelled in garments long and broad, wrought all with gold, with visors and caps of gold. And after the banquet done, these masquers came in, with six gentlemen disguised in silk bearing staff torches, and desired the ladies to dance. Some were content, and some that knew the fashion of it refused, because it was not a thing commonly seen. And after they were danced and commended together, as the fashion of the masque is, they took their leave and departed, and so did the Queen and all the ladies."

far-reaching consequences, in the history of the drama. Going back to Hall's description of the first English masque—that of Epiphany, 1512—we notice that he remarks as its distinctive feature an Italian custom with which, up to that time, the English Court was unfamiliar. The masquers invited the ladies to dance, and the dancers entertained each other with conversation, the interest of which depended largely on the fact or supposition that the identity of the masquers was unknown. Shakespeare gives us the best example that has survived of this fashion of sprightly talk in the masquing scene of "Much Ado About Nothing" (II, I). Even the gentle Hero replies saucily to Don Pedro under the benefit of his disguise, and the interchange of compliments between Benedick and Beatrice is, of course, the liveliest of all. Balthasar and Margaret, Antonio and Ursula, give us the standard wit and chaff usual on such occasions, and the conversation between these two couples may therefore be quoted:

Balth. Well, I would you did like me.
Marg. So would not I, for your own sake; for I have many ill qualities.
Balth. Which is one?
Marg. I say my prayers aloud.
Balth. I love you the better; the hearers may cry Amen.
Marg. God match me with a good dancer!
Balth. Amen.
Marg. And God keep him out of my sight when the dance is done! Answer, clerk.
Balth. No more words: the clerk is an ass.
Urs. I know you well enough; you are Signior Antonio.
Ant. At a word, I am not.
Urs. I know you by the wagging of your head.
Ant. To tell you true, I counterfeit him.
Urs. You could never do him so ill-will, unless you were the very man. Here's his dry hand up and down; you are he, you are he.
Ant. At a word, I am not.
Urs. Come, come; do you think I do not know you by your excellent wit? Can virtue hide itself? Go to, mum, you are he; grace will appear, and there's an end.

In "Romeo and Juliet" (I, v.) the conversation of the two lovers, then meeting for the first time through the opportunity afforded by the masquing convention, is affected (it is in sonnet form) by the lyrical note of the play, and takes on a somewhat more serious character (though it still light in tone) from the fate that from the first overshadows them. Incidentally in the interchange of kisses between two young people who are supposed to be unknown to each other, it shows how the Italian convention of the masque had been modified by English custom. The English practice of kissing the ladies was the delight and astonishment of foreign visitors for over a century. Erasmus discourses upon it with rapture, and the Spanish Ambassador in 1604 kissed "upwards of twenty maids of honor" who were drawn up in a line to receive him when he paid his respects to the Queen. The French and Italians recognized kissing as a special feature of certain special dances, which were scandalously popular on that account, but it was only in England that the salute on the lips was the established convention for all dances, as well as for greetings and farewells. In "Henry VIII."—a play in which Fletcher is now held to have collaborated with Shakespeare—the King, who is among the masquers at Cardinal Wolsey's banquet, chooses Anne Bullen as his partner, and after dancing with her, takes off his mask to say:

Sweetheart,
I were unworthily, to take you out,
And not to kiss you.

This is not a mere excuse on the King's part, for an Elizabethan Puritan, inveighing against the frivolous practices of the time, says with bitter irony: "When the minstrels do make a sign to stint, then, if thou do not kiss her that thou leading by the hand didst dance withal, then thou shalt be taken for a rustic, and as one without any good manners and nurture."

The disguises in these earlier masques, though doubtless often gorgeous enough, seldom depended upon any elaborate device such as became the rule under King James. In "Henry VIII." the King and his fellow-masquers are "habited like shepherds," and are introduced as "a noble troop of strangers," (i. e., foreigners), who can "speak no English." In the masque in "Romeo and Juliet" all pretense of an allegorical device is discarded. Benvolio says:

The date is out of such prolixity:
We'll have no Cupid hood-wink'd with a scarf.



The Maskers in Romeo and Juliet

Benvolio. We'll have no Cupid hood-wink'd with a scarf.
Drawn by Moritz Retzsch



Viola Allen as Perdita at the 'Gallimaufry of gambols' in the Winter's Tale.

Bearing a Tartar's painted bow of lath, Scaring the ladies like a crow-keeper; Nor no without-book prologue, faintly spoke after the prompter, for our entrance; But, let them measure us by what they will, We'll measure them a measure, and 't be gone.

In "Love's Labour's Lost" Moth, the page, acts as prologue for the masquers, and forgets his lines when the ladies maliciously turn their backs to him; and in this scene Shakespeare travesties the masque conventions by a reversal of the ordinary situation—the ladies, themselves masked, refuse to dance and by an exchange of favors conceal their identity from the masquers, whom they easily recognize. In "The Merchant of Venice" Lorenzo and Jessica use their disguises to elope in, though the masque which has been improvised—only two hours being left for preparation—is abandoned for lack of time; Jessica acts as Lorenzo's torch-bearer, a conventional though subordinate figure in the masque, which was almost invariably an evening entertainment. Oddly enough, the most complete example of the Elizabethan masque Shakespeare has given us is in "Timon of Athens." Cuioid, the favorite spokesman on such occasions, appearing as prologue in half a dozen lines of formal compliment. Shakespeare has, of course, no compunctions about such a mild anachronism as the introduction of masques into ancient Athens. Theseus talks about masques in "A Midsummer Night's Dream," but the entertainment chosen by him is the interlude of Bottom and his companions—a very different kind of amusement, though still characteristically English and Elizabethan in ludicrous contrast with its classical setting.

In the early masques, which were, by convention at any rate, "surprise" entertainments, the music was usually simple. In "Henry VIII." the arrival of the masquers is heralded by "drum and trumpet," in "Love's Labour's Lost" by sound of trumpet only. In "Much Ado About Nothing" the masquers "enter with a drum," and in "The Merchant of Venice"



James Lewis as Sir Toby Belch in Twelfth Night

(From the Collection of William Winter)



William E. Burton and his wife as Sir Toby and Maria

(From the Collection of William R. Harvey)

Shylock's reference in connection with masques to

And the vile squeaking of the wry-necked rife,

indicates that these were the instruments by which the masquers were usually accompanied on their way through the streets, though additional music was doubtless provided by the waiting host, who was really responsible for the entertainment.

Dancing was the main feature of the masque in all the stages of its development. The earlier masque was a dance in costume, and little more than that; even after the setting of dialogue, song, and scenic devices became elaborately magnificent and expensive, dancing still remained its most prominent feature. Sir Andrew Aguecheek, in "Twelfth Night," after assuring Sir Toby Belch of his "delight in masques and revels," exhibits his competence in such "kickshaws" by "caper-

being thus encouraged, continued successively exhibiting their prowess with various ladies, finishing in like manner with capers, and by lifting their goddesses from the ground."

In contrast to these elaborate dances, which constituted the masque proper, antic dances were introduced, and became known as the "anti-masque," "anti-masque," or "ante-masque." This preceded the main masque, and the three forms of spelling represent at once different phases of its purpose and conflicting theories of etymology, which need not detain us. Its historical significance lies in the fact that its performance necessitated the employment of professional dancers and actors from the public theatres, which were thus brought into contact with what had been an entertainment devised and executed by courtiers. Professional playwrights were engaged to provide the more elaborate setting of songs and dialogue, and thus became familiar with the ingenious devices by which Inigo Jones and his associates produced transformation scenes and other mechanical effects hitherto unknown to the public stage. The popular taste for spectacle grew by what it fed on, and it was at this point that the masque exerted the largest influence upon the drama in general and Shakespeare's work in particular. Some critics have called "A Midsummer Night's Dream" a masquelike play, overlooking the fact that at the time of its composition the masque was a private entertainment simple in character and absolutely independent of the regular drama. It was not until some fifteen years later that the two drew together and influenced each other. We find the evidence of this influence in the latest group of Shakespeare's plays, especially in the mechanical devices and scenic effects of "Cymbeline," "A Winter's Tale," and "The Tempest." The vision of Posthumus is masquelike enough, and the "gallimaufry of gambols" in "A Winter's Tale" was directly suggested, in Professor Thorndike's opinion, by the "antic dance, full of strange gesture and swift motion," in Jonson's "Masque of Oberon." The climax of masque effects is reached in the devices of Ariel in "The Tempest," generally regarded as Shakespeare's last play, and it was with these in mind that he wrote the profound and beautiful lines which, without excess of fancy, may be regarded as his farewell to the stage:

Our revels now are ended. These our actors, As I foretold you, were all spirits and Are melted into air, into thin air, And, like the baseless fabric of this vision, The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces, The solemn temples, the great globe itself, All which it inherits, shall dissolve And, like this insubstantial pageant-fold, Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff As dreams are made on, and our little life Is rounded with a sleep.

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Priests and Misers

From Samuel Taylor Coleridge's Lectures on Shakespeare.

AS I may not have another opportunity, the introduction of Friar Laurence into this tragedy enables me to remark upon the different manner in which Shakespeare has treated the priestly character, as compared with other writers. In Beaumont and Fletcher priests are represented as a vulgar mockery, and, as in others of their dramatic personages, the errors of a few are mistaken for the demeanor of the many; but in Shakespeare they always carry with them our love and respect. He made no injurious abstractions; he took no copies from the worst parts of our nature; and, like the rest, his characters of priests are truly drawn from the general body.

It may strike some as singular that throughout all his productions he has never introduced the passion of avarice. The truth is that it belongs only to particular parts of our nature, and is prevalent only in particular states of society; hence it could not, and cannot be permanent. The miser of Molière and Plautus is now looked upon as a species of madman, and avarice as a species of madness. Elms, of whom everybody has heard, was an individual influenced by an insane condition of mind; but, as a passion, avarice has disappeared. How admirably, then, did Shakespeare foresee that if he drew such a character it could not be permanent! There is not one of the plays of Shakespeare that is built upon anything but the best and surest foundation; the characters must be permanent—permanent while men continue men—because they stand upon what is absolutely necessary to our existence. This cannot be said even of antiquity. Take the capital tragedies of Orestes, or of the husband of Jocasta; great as was the genius of the writers, these dramas have an obvious fault, and the fault lies at the very root of the action. In Oedipus a man is represented oppressed by fate for a crime of which he was not morally guilty; and while we read we are obliged to say to ourselves that in those days they considered actions without reference to the real guilt of the persons.