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Licence to Speak: Gender and Masking in Shakespearean Dance Scenes

EMILY WINEROCK

> Masquers do therfore cover their faces,
> that they may open their affections.
> (John Lyly, *Euphues and his England*, 1605)

Dancing was a common yet controversial activity in England and Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[1] It was a popular and socially acceptable means of meeting and courting potential spouses, but it was also acknowledged as an activity that could lead to illicit or ill-advised sexual encounters. Life-cycle celebrations such as weddings, religious festivals like Whitsuntide and seasonal holidays such as May Day and Midsummer were often marked by dancing, but whether this was a good thing was disputed. Advocates argued that dancing embodied the harmonious union of love and facilitated "good neighbourliness" by bringing the community together. Critics complained that dancing at festivals was irreverent and encouraged antisocial behaviours such as drunkenness and fighting, as well as sins such as lust, fornication and adultery. Protestant reformers opposed dancing on Sundays and holy days, whereas Catholics and traditionalists permitted it, provided one attended church services beforehand.

Even the courtly dances of the nobility were controversial. Proponents believed dancing was essential for displaying noble grace and virtues and argued that choreographed dances best conveyed the orderly harmoniousness of the state and the cosmos. Opponents, however, saw courtly dancing as a vain and frivolous waste of time at best, at worst, the epitome of all that was wrong with contemporary court life.[2] These contradictory associations make it challenging to assess the significance of any one moment of dancing, but their diversity and

1 See also my "'The heaven's true figure' or an 'introit to all kind of lewdness'? Competing Conceptions of Dancing in Shakespeare's England", in Lynsey McCulloch and Brandon Shaw (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare and Dance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 21–47.

2 Alessandro Arcangeli, "Dance under Trial: The Moral Debate 1200–1600", *Dance Research* 12:2 (1994), 127–155.

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contingency of meaning was also what made dancing a useful tool for meaning-makers, for authors and playwrights such as Shakespeare.

Whereas attitudes towards dancing can be gleaned from many historical sources, dance instruction manuals are the only surviving sources that document choreographies, describe their component steps and discuss the nuances of styling and dance floor etiquette. Mostly authored by dancing instructors to the nobility, these manuals explain, in varying degrees of clarity, how dances like the *galliard*, *pavane*, *coranto*, *canary*, *branle*, *volta* and other court dances were performed, and they enable us to reconstruct these dances in the present with some degree of accuracy.[3]

The manuals' choreographies and notes on etiquette also indicate that the Renaissance dance floor was a site of relative gender equality. Men and women performed the same steps and patterns and had most of the same freedoms: both could ask someone to dance, could lead a dance and could add embellishments and improvise solo combinations.[4] There were some gendered differences in styling – smoothness was prized more for women, fancy footwork for men. Similarly, dancing in an unsuitable style for one's rank was judged more harshly for men, while immodest motions were judged more harshly for women. However, these distinctions were lessened by the fact that men and women usually danced together. In single-sex group dances and solos, dancers might have utilized distinctly gendered styling, but most of the time men and women would have moved similarly on the dance floor and behaved similarly towards current and prospective partners.

The majority of the extant manuals are by Italian dancing masters, with a few by French and Spanish authors.[5] This is likely why the manuals contain numerous and detailed descriptions of dances like the galliard that were danced throughout Europe but do not mention those native to Britain such as the old measures and the jig. There are no English-authored dancing manuals between the so-called Gresley manuscript (c. 1500) and John Playford's *The English Danc-*

3 See Appendix 1: Choreographic Sources for Dances Mentioned in Shakespeare's Plays, 78–79, in Nona Monahin, "Decoding Dance in Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing* and *Twelfth Night*", in McCulloch and Shaw (2019), 49–82.

4 Emily Winerock, "'Performing' Gender and Status on the Dance Floor in Early Modern England", in Kim Kippen and Lori Woods (eds), *Worth and Repute: Valuing Gender in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2011), 449–472.

5 Jennifer Nevile, "Dance in Europe 1250–1750", in Jennifer Nevile (ed.), *Dance, Spectacle, and the Body Politick, 1250–1750* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 7–64.

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ing Master (1650).[6] For the old measures, a set of processional dances, we can tentatively match step instructions from continental manuals to a dozen or so choreographic notes that survive in manuscript.[7] For the jig, we do not have a single choreographic description, only scattered references to a fast, whirling dance associated variously with the Scots, the Irish and Will Kemp.[8] The 'jig' that concludes contemporary performances at Shakespeare's Globe in London may be dramatically effective and an audience-pleaser, but choreographically it is, at best, historically inspired, not historically accurate.[9]

Despite the absence of surviving English dancing manuals from Shakespeare's time, dancing is certainly present in his plays. At least thirteen Shakespeare plays include staged dancing, and almost all the plays contain textual references to dance. The staged dances function variously, to illustrate character or highlight contrasts between characters, to advance the plot, to set the scene – especially to convey celebration or festivity, to entertain on- and offstage audiences and to confirm a happy ending or juxtapose a tragic one.[10] Textual dance references occasionally describe dancing directly, but most often they employ dancing as a metaphor. Whereas all staged dances are in some sense positive or celebratory (at least from the perspective of the dancers), textual references may have negative connotations, such as in *The Winter's Tale*, when Leontes, considering his wife's possible infidelity, exclaims, "My heart dances, but not for joy, not joy" (1.2.141–142).[11]

Of the thirteen plays with staged dancing, eight include dancers in disguise, and five feature masked dancers performing for an onstage audience and then

6 David Fallows, "The Gresley Dance Collection, c. 1500", *Royal Musical Association Research Chronicle* 29 (1996), 1–20. Two French dancing masters employed by George Villiers, the future Duke of Buckingham, presented him with dancing manuals in 1619 and 1623. However, their manuals were written in French and described French innovations and styling, not English practices. See Barthélemy de Montagut, *Louange de la Danse* (1619), ed. by Barbara Ravelhofer (Cambridge: RTM Publications, 2000).

7 Ian Payne, *The Almain in Britain, c. 1549 – c. 1675: A Dance Manual from Manuscript Sources* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003).

8 Emily Winerock, *Reformation and Revelry: The Practices and Politics of Dancing in Early Modern England, c. 1550 – c. 1640* (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2012), 77–78.

9 Roger Clegg, "'When the play is done, you shall have a jig or dance of all treads': Danced Endings on Shakespeare's Stage", in McCulloch and Shaw (2019), 83–106.

10 For studies on Shakespeare and dance, see Alan Brissenden, *Shakespeare and the Dance* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1981); the "Shakespeare and Dance" special issue of *Borrowers and Lenders* 10:2 (2017), ed. by Elizabeth Klett; and McCulloch and Shaw (2019).

11 Unless otherwise specified, Shakespeare quotations are from *The Folger Shakespeare*, ed. by Barbara Mowat, Paul Werstine, Michael Poston and Rebecca Niles, last access 1 August 2020.

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dancing (or expecting to dance) with the spectators. Act 4, scene 1 of *The Tempest* shows the influence of the early Stuart court masques, but the vast majority of Shakespeare's masked dance scenes draw on early Tudor and Italian masking practices.[12] This essay examines the masked dance scenes in *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Love's Labour's Lost* and *Timon of Athens*, with particular attention to the impact of mask-wearing on gender dynamics and perceptions of virtue.

Masks and Masking

Given the diversity of activities involving mask-wearing and the diversity of terms used to refer to masked activities in Shakespearean England, some discussion of terminology is warranted to clarify and delineate terms like *mumming*, *disguising*, *masquerade*, *mask*, *masque*, *common* and *vizard*.[13] In England prior to the 1580s, the term *mask* referred to an activity, not to an item worn. Face coverings were called *visers* (also *visars, visors*, *viziers*) or, increasingly in the sixteenth century, *vizards*. Other terms in use included *larva* (originally meaning 'malevolent ghost'), *face* and *head* (especially for whole-head coverings that rested on the shoulders).[14] Even once *mask* came into use for face coverings, stage directions reveal that it primarily indicated face coverings for women; men's face coverings continued to be called *vizards*.[15] Another potential source of confu-

12 James Knowles, "Insubstantial Pageants: *The Tempest* and Masquing Culture", in Jennifer Richards and James Knowles (eds), *Shakespeare's Late Plays: New Readings* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), 108–125.

13 In this section, I rely heavily on two works: Janette Dillon, "From Revels to Revelation: Shakespeare and the Mask", *Shakespeare Survey* 60 (2007), 58–71; and Meg Twycross and Sarah Carpenter, *Masks and Masking in Medieval and Early Tudor England* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002; repr. Abingdon: Routledge, 2016). Twycross and Carpenter's study builds on and corrects foundational works such as Enid Welsford, *The Court Masque: A Study in the Relationship between Poetry & the Revels* (Cambridge: Russell & Russell, 1927; repr. 1962); E. K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, 4 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923); and Paul Reyher, *Les masques anglais: Étude sur les ballets et la vie de cour en Angleterre (1512–1640)* (New York: Blom, 1909; repr. 1964). It also provides essential background for understanding the Stuart court masque, complementing dance-focused studies like Barbara Ravelhofer, *The Early Stuart Masque: Dance, Costume, and Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); and Anne Daye, *The Jacobean Antimasque within the Masque Context: a Dance Perspective* (PhD diss., Roehampton University, 2008).

14 Twycross and Carpenter (2002), 328–336.

15 Alan Dessen and Leslie Thomson, *A Dictionary of Stage Directions in English Drama, 1580–1642* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 140–141, 244.

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Figure 1. The Daventry mask, sixteenth century. Velvet, silk and paper, with glass mouth-bead. Northamptonshire Archaeological Resource Centre: NARC–151A67. Creative commons license.

Figure 2. A man with a turban leading a woman wearing peacock feathers. From *The Masquerades*, after Jacques de Gheyn II (c. 1595). National Gallery of Art. Open access image.

sion is that modern scholars have tended to distinguish the earlier medieval and Tudor masked recreations from the later Stuart court spectacles by calling the former *masks* and the latter *masques*. Original sources, however, make no such distinctions and use these spellings interchangeably and indiscriminately.

Changing terminology combined with the chance survival of artifacts have also caused confusion among scholars and commentators. In Shakespeare's time, the most popular mask for women was the black, velvet and silk, full-face mask, which was held on by ribbons or with a mouth-bead, a bead attached to the mask that the woman held in her mouth.[16] The only surviving mask from sixteenth-century England, the Daventry mask, is of this type (see Figure 1). A mouth-bead

16 Special thanks go to M. Laura Martinez, Sarah Bendall, Allison Skewes, Linda J. Phillips and Christoph Heyl for generously sharing their knowledge of masks and early modern attire through personal correspondence when libraries were closed due to the coronavirus global pandemic.

Figure 3. Elegant lady with peacock. Gillis van Breen, after anonymous (c. 1595 – c. 1610). Rijksmuseum. Public domain.

Figure 4. A veiled lady and two masked musicians. After Jacques de Gheyn II (c. 1595). Rijksmuseum. Public domain.

made a mask much easier to take on and off than masks that were tied or pinned on, but it was literally silencing. Primarily worn outdoors to protect a woman's face from sun exposure, it could also be worn for masking (see Figure 2). However, women also wore half-masks (see Figure 3).

While they provided less anonymity than a full-face mask, half-masks allowed for speech without unmasking. It seems likely that for scenes where female characters speak or sing while masked, the actors would have worn half-masks. Certainly, this seems more plausible than claims that actors would not have worn masks and vizards because they would have prevented speech.[17] Indeed, half-mask vizards were standard for musicians accompanying maskers in illustrations (see Figure 4).

17 Mattieu A. Chapman, "The Appearance of Blacks on the Early Modern Stage: *Love's Labour's Lost*'s African Connections to Court", *Early Theatre* 17:2 (2014), 77–94, quote 86; Virginia Mason Vaughan, *Performing Blackness on English Stages, 1500–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 10.

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The masked dance scenes staged by Shakespeare draw on both English and continental masking traditions. Mumming was an English, mostly urban, Christmastime tradition dating back at least to the Middle Ages. Mummers would dress up in strange or fantastical clothes and visit other people's houses where they challenged the host to a game of dice. Mummers always concealed their faces, sometimes with visors, sometimes by blackening or whitening their faces. Another convention was that mummers could not speak, only gesture or mumble to communicate.[18] In the sixteenth century, a variant emerged that Meg Twycross and Sarah Carpenter term *courtly mumming*.[19] Disguised visitors brought a herald or interpreter to translate for them, and they gave gifts to their host instead of playing dice. Costumes were coordinated and thematic, with the visitors presenting themselves as ambassadors from foreign countries or ancient civilizations.[20]

Disguising was an English court tradition where the emphasis was on dressing up in "a strange *guise* (fashion)" rather than on necessarily obscuring one's identity.[21] Disguisers (male or female courtiers) would process into a hall, sometimes on pageant vehicles, and then perform "dyvers and many daunces".[22] Accounts emphasize the cost and extravagance of the matching costumes, which were fashioned for the event.[23] By the sixteenth century, masks were a standard component of disguising attire, with references to fantastical visors, simple caul or netted masks and realistic or neutral "well-favoured" full-face masks, although alternatively disguisers might blacken their faces, necks and arms with makeup or gauze.[24] Dancing took up the majority of a disguising, but the most exciting moment was the unmasking. The young Henry VIII was a particularly avid disguiser, and dramatic unmaskings at the end of the dancing became his trademark.[25]

Another influence on Henry VIII and his court were Italian masking traditions, especially the street masquerading of the carnival season, which extended

18 Twycross and Carpenter (2002), 83, 88, 92–93.

19 Ibid., 151.

20 Ibid., 160–161.

21 Ibid., 129.

22 Ibid., 136, 144; Dillon (2007), 61.

23 Twycross and Carpenter (2002), 133. Edward III favoured sets of 13 or 14, while Henry VIII preferred sets of six in coordinating colours.

24 Vaughan (2005), 11–12, 133, 137; Twycross and Carpenter (2002), 137–139, 142; Andrea Ria Stevens, *Inventions of the Skin: The Painted Body in Early English Drama* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 91–92.

25 Twycross and Carpenter (2002), 149–150; Dillon (2007), 61–62.

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from Christmas to Ash Wednesday, the period between the Advent and Lent fasts.[26] Sometimes the maskers serenaded women from the street; sometimes they threw eggs; sometimes the women threw eggs at them.[27] Street maskers were usually young men, although there are accounts of women masking, sometimes cross-dressed.[28] Street maskers ranged widely in rank and profession: carnival masquerading was both a popular and an elite practice. There was also a more exclusively elite version that Twycross and Carpenter have termed the "amorous masquerade".[29] This variant featured a group of (usually young, male) maskers who made surprise nocturnal visits to the houses of their peers rumoured to be hosting feasting and dancing. Masked and disguised, they would dance and flirt with the young women at the party who were not usually masked and whose fathers and husbands were obligated by the laws of hospitality to tolerate the visitors. Although originating in Italy, by the sixteenth century, amorous masquerading had been enthusiastically adopted across Europe, with Henry VIII reportedly introducing it in England.[30] Interestingly, while Henry VIII encouraged this "courtly version of Italian masking",[31] he tried to suppress some of the more traditional English masking practices. The "Acte against disguysed persons and Wearing of Visours" of 1511 outlawed street masquerades and selling masks.

During the sixteenth century, Tudor monarchs and their courtiers drew on all of these mask games and recreations – mumming, disguising and masquerading – mixing and repurposing them as they saw fit.[32] Of particular interest is the variant that sixteenth-century chronicler Edward Hall termed a *mask*, and that modern scholars have termed the *Tudor mask*.[33] A group of young people, masked and disguised, arrive unexpectedly at a party. They ask the (unmasked) members of the opposite sex to dance with them and 'common' together (chatting, flirting etc.). Then they either unmask or leave.

Shakespeare stages versions of the Tudor mask in *Romeo and Juliet* and in *Henry VIII*, as well as in the three plays discussed subsequently: *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Love's Labour's Lost* and *Timon of Athens*. In *Romeo and Juliet* and in

26 Twycross and Carpenter (2002), 52.

27 Ibid., 58.

28 Ibid., 65.

29 Ibid., 170.

30 Sydney Anglo, "The Evolution of the Early Tudor Disguising, Pageant, and Mask", *Renaissance Drama* 1 (1968), 3–44, quote 4; Twycross and Carpenter (2002), 170–174.

31 Dillon (2007), 62.

32 Ibid., 59.

33 Anglo (1968), 4–8; Dillon (2007), 59–60.

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Much Ado About Nothing, the masking is essentially an amorous masquerade, while the masking in *Henry VIII*, *Love's Labour's Lost* and *Timon of Athens* incorporates elements of courtly mumming and disguising, such as the maskers communicating through an interpreter and presenting themselves as a delegation of foreign ambassadors or ancient warriors. Shakespeare also upends certain expectations, most notably by making the maskers in *Timon of Athens* women, but also by having the ladies visited by the maskers in *Love's Labour's Lost* also wear masks.

Much Ado About Nothing

Much Ado About Nothing was first performed around 1598 by the Lord Chamberlain's Men and was also performed at the English court in 1613. For most of the play, the two female leads are presented as opposites. Hero is sweet, reserved and obedient, while Beatrice is salty, sassy and anti-authoritarian. However, in the dance scene in Act 2, Hero exchanges remarks with the Prince that resemble Beatrice's mocking wit more than Hero's usual demure murmurings. When the Prince asks, "Lady, will you walk about with your friend?", Hero responds, "So you walk softly, and look sweetly, and say nothing, I am yours for the walk, and especially when I walk away", which she likely then does (2.1.84–88). Hero's attendants, Margaret and Ursula, as well as Beatrice herself, have similar feisty exchanges with other gentlemen at the party. The women can safely mock and flirt with the revellers because the men are masked, and Renaissance masking conventions extend the protection and licence of the mask to those who dance and converse with mask-wearers.[34]

Act 2 begins with Beatrice, Hero and Leonato, among others, on the way to the evening's entertainment.[35] Then 'revellers' enter: the Prince, Claudio and Benedick, among others, in disguise. Twycross and Carpenter categorize this scene as "a traditional amorous mask" where "masked men of the court choose unmasked dancing partners from among the women".[36] The plot and dialogue support this reading that the revellers are masked and the women are not. The Prince has agreed to woo Hero on behalf of Claudio, and upon entering, the Prince approaches Hero directly: there is no indication that he has to determine which

34 Twycross and Carpenter (2002), 172–179.

35 Nona Monahin offers detailed analysis and staging suggestions for Beatrice's dance-filled tirade against marriage in the opening of this scene; cf. Monahin (2019), 51–59.

36 Twycross and Carpenter (2002), 186.

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lady she is, as he would if she were masked. Conversely, both the Prince and Hero refer to his visor (2.1.95–96). However, in modern productions of *Much Ado About Nothing*, whether the women wear masks has become a directorial choice.

Kenneth Branagh's 1993 film starring Emma Thompson as Beatrice and Branagh as Benedick is one of the most well-known versions of *Much Ado About Nothing*. The scene begins with a dramatic and almost medieval entrance for the revellers, whose disguises genuinely obscure their identities. Hero and Beatrice, along with many others at the party, also wear masks, but these are half-masks that do not really disguise their identities. The Prince gives his first line and takes Hero by the hand, but Hero responds with only a squeal of delight as they join the dancing. After some shots of masked dancers and musicians, the camera cuts to Beatrice and Benedick's exchange. The other three couple's exchanges in Shakespeare's text, including Hero and the Prince's, are eliminated. We then get more wonderfully evocative shots of masked dancers, before we see (as Claudio does), Hero in earnest conversation with the Prince in the distance, her mask in her hand. Indeed, Beatrice and Hero might as well not have masks, they wear them so rarely. While Kate Beckinsale's Hero has an appealing innocence and sweetness, Branagh's decision to cut all of her lines in this scene takes away her liveliest moments in the play.[37]

Joss Whedon's 2012 film version has a very different mood and aesthetic from Branagh's, especially in this scene, but Whedon makes some surprisingly similar staging choices and text cuts. He eliminates Ursula and Antonio's exchange entirely, simplifies and shortens Margaret and Borachio's exchange and cuts all of Hero's lines and all but one of the Prince's. At the same time, he lengthens their exchange – but we see it from a distance rather than hearing it. Like Claudio, we are relegated to observers. Both revellers and ladies are masked, but as with Branagh, the Prince's mask is a full-face mask that genuinely conceals his identity, while Hero's half-mask does not. Hero wears her mask throughout this scene, but it does little to hide her identity or expressions, and Beatrice hardly wears hers at all. Jillian Morgese's Hero is sophisticated and even wry at times, but because Whedon cuts her lines, we do not see Hero's quick wit.[38]

Two much-lauded productions of *Much Ado* graced London stages the year before. The Shakespeare's Globe 2011 production was directed by Jeremy Herrin, with Sian Williams as choreographer. The Shakespeare-era production famously starred Eve Best as Beatrice and Charles Edwards as Benedick. Ony Uhiara

37 This scene can be viewed at https://youtu.be/i8vRoPaPdb8, last access 1 August 2020.

38 This scene can be viewed at https://youtu.be/dYjp3fkcyMw, last access 1 August 2020.

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played Hero. The dance scene began with a raucous fire-lighting and a few moments of dancing to establish the context. Then Hero and the Prince had their exchange downstage, while the dancing continued quietly behind them. Afterwards, they rejoined the dancing upstage while Margaret and Borachio took their places downstage for their exchange.

In this production, only the men wore masks; the women were unmasked, their identities known. This ought to have worked in performance, but Uhiara's energetic movement style, amplified by the way the Prince literally jerked her around, seemed out of character. Had Hero's identity been hidden by a mask, peasant-like motions could have been interpreted as an intentional and clever component of a disguise. However, because Hero's identity was known, we expected her to move with the smooth gracefulness of a noblewoman, an expectation enhanced by the historical costumes and period setting. In this production, Hero's exchange with the Prince indicated that she had more spirit and wit than was at first apparent, but the awkward and energetic movement style was unrealistic and inappropriate for the context: an unmasked noblewoman would not have acted or moved in a manner that called either her nobility and grace or her virtue into question.[39]

The Wyndham Theatre also did *Much Ado About Nothing* in 2011, starring Catherine Tate as Beatrice and David Tennant as Benedick. Directed by Josie Rourke, the dance scene in this modern-era production had a lot of festive energy and an element of decadence although it lacked the elegance of Whedon's masquerade ball. Sara Macrae's Hero retained her lines and wore a mask in Act 2, scene 1 of this production, but Macrae overdid the flirtation. Her body language was sexy and seductive with neither Morgese's reserve nor Beckinsale's sweetness. Perhaps this choice was supposed to reflect the production's modern setting – Macrae's Hero is faithful, just not virginal. The problem was that, by having Hero be seductive rather than simply saucy, it became too easy to believe Don John's assertions later in the play that she had been unfaithful to Claudio.[40] Hero's seductiveness lessened the distinctions, emphasized by Shakespeare, among the female characters: Margaret is outgoing and promiscuous, Hero is demure and virginal, Beatrice is outspoken but chaste. The production may have been trying to argue that sexy women can be faithful, but portraying Hero as worldly and seductive weakens the impact of Shakespeare's warning that a man inclined towards jealousy will believe outrageous lies about the woman he loves, even when

39 This scene can be viewed at https://youtu.be/QkJWAzUvCPg, last access 1 August 2020.

40 This scene can be viewed at https://youtu.be/M9tGZORbg2c, last access 1 August 2020.

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those lies contradict his own experiences, her character, her past actions and her own words.

In *Much Ado About Nothing*, the masked dance scene highlights both the freedom afforded by masking and the downsides of that freedom. The audience knows that Hero is entirely innocent, but her sauciness in the dance scene helps us understand how Claudio, the Prince and even her own father could imagine Hero as anything other than a spotless virgin. Similar situations occur in *The Winter's Tale* and *Othello*, where a woman's entirely innocent gestures of friendship, when seen through a husband's jealous eyes, become evidence of her infidelity. Thus, we find Shakespeare repeatedly suggesting that modest women *ought* to be able to be friendly and even flirtatious without endangering their reputations while also acknowledging that there was always a danger that even innocent interactions could be misconstrued, sometimes with disastrous consequences.

Nevertheless, the Renaissance dance floor was a site where women equalled, and often reigned over, men. Thus, it should not be surprising that female speech on the dance floor conveys a confidence and authority, even audacity, that women were less likely to possess or express elsewhere. The licence afforded maskers and their partners extended this freedom of expression even further. It is ironic and unfortunate that so many modern productions that revel in Beatrice's independence and intelligence simultaneously silence Hero – eliminating the lines that show that she, too, has spirit and wit, not just virtue.

Love's Labour's Lost

Whereas productions of *Much Ado About Nothing* often cut Hero and her female attendants' lines, productions of Shakespeare's *Love's Labour's Lost* tend to retain the quips of all the female characters, not just those of Lady Rosaline, the play's female wit and counterpart to the male wit, Lord Berowne. First performed at court for Queen Elizabeth in 1597, the play explores the consequences when the King of Navarre and three of his courtiers take an oath that they will devote themselves to study and foreswear the company of women for three years. Shortly thereafter, the Princess of France and three of her ladies arrive as ambassadors from the French King. The men do not want to break their oath, but they are eager to see the visiting ladies, so they find a loophole. They will meet and talk with the visitors, but they will not formally welcome them. They house the women in a field instead of in the castle and otherwise withhold the hospitality due to a visiting princess and her entourage. Against their wills, they also fall in love with the ladies, although their oath makes them loathe to acknowledge

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this. Instead, they devise a device: they will disguise themselves, entertain the ladies with a masked entry and dancing and try to determine whether their love is returned.

However, the women get wind of this plot and resolve to undermine it, wanting to punish the men for their inhospitality. Explains the Princess to her ladies:

> There's no such sport as sport by sport o'erthrown,
> To make theirs ours and ours none but our own.
> So shall we stay, mocking intended game,
> And they, well mocked, depart away with shame.
> (5.2.160–163)

The women don masks, trade favours given to them by the lords and when the maskers arrive, they refuse to dance with them. However, the women do not simply decline the men's invitation to dance. Instead, they draw on Renaissance bowing etiquette to tease and mock their suitors.

A shortened version of this scene that I choreographed for *The Bard's Galliard, or How to Party like an Elizabethan* in 1999 highlights how the women use bowing conventions to confuse and confound the men.[41] The men bow upon entering the room, the men and women bow and curtsy to each other in asking and accepting the offer to dance and together they perform the opening *révérence* of a dance, all very correct for the time period. However, Rosaline, playing the part of the Princess, then stops the music and halts the dancing, the women turning their backs on their partners and literally leaving them 'off balance'. The men are understandably confused, and the King and Rosaline have a witty exchange where he tries to convince her that the women should resume their dancing. She seemingly agrees, saying that they should "take hands", but instead of dancing, she and the other ladies skip to the *conge*, or end-of-dance bow, and leave the dance floor: "Curtsy, sweethearts – and so the measure ends." (5.2.235) While directors tend to cut bows in modern productions, the audience's laughter demonstrates that even though bowing is no longer a familiar practice, the insult that the ladies give to the lords in this scene through their curtsies is perfectly clear in performance.

41 This version of Act 5, scene 2 cuts some of the speeches and repartee and shifts the timing of the ladies turning their backs but not the intended message. Archival footage of the 22 April 1999 performance at Princeton University is available at https://youtu.be/yxgAaYlUw4s?t=153, last access 1 August 2020.

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In this scene, the women perform the correct bows to begin and end a dance, but they skip the dancing that ought to go in between; their dance is literally nothing but empty courtesies. In so doing, the women point to the emptiness of the men trying to 'honour them' on the dance floor, when they have not treated them honourably off of it. Likewise, they mimic the men's use of masks to disguise their true identities and true intentions, giving the men a taste of their own medicine. While the women's curtsies are intentionally misleading, their discourtesy is motivated by their desire to show the King of Navarre and his courtiers just how dishonourable the men's behaviour has been. Masks protect the women, somewhat, from repercussions, while simultaneously hiding and revealing the men's oath-breaking and disingenuousness.

In *Love's Labour's Lost*, the agenda of the male maskers might be dishonourable, but that of the masked female characters is virtuous and corrective, however playful its conveyance. In *Timon of Athens*, on the other hand, the motivations of the female masked dancers are suspect. Indeed, disguised intentions and their eventual unmasking is one of the play's main themes.

Timon of Athens

Timon of Athens is sometimes considered one of Shakespeare's "problem plays".[42] The play has few sympathetic characters, and the only text, from the 1623 First Folio, may be incomplete. Originally attributed just to Shakespeare, it is now widely acknowledged as one of his co-authored plays, most likely with Thomas Middleton.[43] While John Jowett argues for a composition date of 1606, and Andrew Hadfield suggests it was written (and possibly performed) in 1608, the first documented performance of the First Folio text was in 1761, almost 150 years after Shakespeare's death.[44] Today, it remains one of the least frequently performed of Shakespeare's plays.

42 See, for example, Francelia Butler, *The Strange Critical Fortunes of Shakespeare's Timon of Athens* (Iowa City: Iowa State University Press, 1966); and E. L. Risen, *Shakespeare and the Problem Play: Complex Forms, Crossed Genres, and Moral Quandaries* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2012).

43 Eilidh Kane, "Shakespeare and Middleton's Co-Authorship of *Timon of Athens*", *Journal of Early Modern Studies* 5 (2016), 217–235.

44 Andrew Hadfield, "*Timon of Athens* and Jacobean Politics", *Shakespeare Survey* 56 (2003), 215–226, quote 218; John Jowett, "Introduction", in William Shakespeare, *Timon of Athens*, ed. by John Jowett. The Oxford Shakespeare (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 3.

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Female maskers dressed as Amazon warriors appear in Act 2, scene 1 at one of Timon's famous banquets.[45] Their entrance is preceded by a trumpet fanfare and a messenger, Cupid, who announces that "certain ladies" desire admittance to the party (1.2.120). Timon welcomes them in, and the stage directions specify: "*Enter the masque of Ladies [as] Amazons, with lutes in their hands, dancing and playing*" (1.2.134 SD).

That the ladies are described as a "masque" likely indicates that they wear masks as well as costumes. That they hold lutes instead of weapons emphasizes their femininity and has choreographic implications: these Amazons would not be dancing the galliard or a sword dance. Lutes are instruments of love not war, implying, Anne Daye argues, "that the performance is transgressional, rather than martial".[46]

While the Amazons dance or just after, the play's misanthrope, Apemantus, complains: "What a sweep of vanity comes this way. / They dance? They are madwomen", and then, after some comments about flatterers and fools, he prophesizes, "I should fear those that dance before me now / Would one day stamp upon me." (1.2.136–137, 147–148) Interestingly, the Amazons do not appear again in the play after this scene, but the lords at the party do, and they certainly "stamp" on Timon later, so the comment can be understood as generalized to the whole assembly rather than being directed primarily at the dancers.

Following Apemantus's aside, the stage directions state: "*The Lords rise from table, with much adoring of Timon, and to show their loves each single out an Amazon, and all dance, men with women, a lofty strain or two to the hautboys, and cease*" (1.2.149 SD). Timon then thanks and compliments the dancers and invites them to partake of the banquet in the next room. The ladies happily accept the invitation and exit, presumably to the banquet hall.

Thus, there are two dances in this scene: a single-gender dance that brings the women onto the stage, and perhaps provides some pleasing entertainment, and a

45 This is one of the scenes generally attributed to Middleton; cf. Jowett (2004), 2. Dressing up as an Amazon or female warrior was popular throughout this period. Elizabethan Revels accounts for 1578/1579 include the purchase of silk to make "heares" (wigs) for Amazons; in January 1604, Anna of Denmark chose to portray Pallas Athena, goddess of war, in the masque *The Vision of the Twelve Goddesses*; and Penthesiliea, Queen of the Amazons, is one of the queens in the 1608 *Masque of Queens*; cf. Twycross and Carpenter (2002), 323; Clare McManus, *Women on the Renaissance Stage: Anna of Denmark and Female Masquing in the Stuart Court 1590–1619* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002).

46 Anne Daye, "'The revellers are entering': Shakespeare and Masquing Practice in Tudor and Stuart England", in McCulloch and Shaw (2019), 105–131, quote 114.

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mixed-gender dance of the Amazons with the lords at the party. This is a typical pairing of entry dance and social dancing, another amorous mask, as Twycross and Carpenter have termed it. However, in this example, it is women who enter as maskers and offer a single-gender dance, and then it is the spectators, not the performers, who choose their partners for the social dancing. Still, in *Timon of Athens*, the gender inversion does not feel controversial. The women are identified as Amazons in the stage directions, in other words, women associated with masculine skills and characteristics, so it feels fitting that they would also appropriate male masquerading practices. Moreover, the lords choose them for the social dancing, rather than the other way around, even though this was not uncommon.

Scholars have tended to emphasize the women's passivity and peripheral role in this scene: "The ladies in the masque are showgirls whose roles are confined to dancing. Their spokesperson is a male Cupid; they themselves say nothing."[47] While it is true that dancing is inherently expressive, communicating meaning through "a kind of mute rhetoric" that playgoers were perfectly capable of interpreting, this reading goes too far; female agency is still very much in evidence in the banquet scene.[48] Not only do the maskers invoke associations with female power by portraying Amazons and co-opt the male practice of masquerade, but they also appear to be the devisers as well as the performers of this entertainment. As Peter Davidson and Jane Stevenson contend, "devisership" is an important but often overlooked category of women's cultural production.[49] An entertainment's deviser was its mastermind, its artistic director and visionary, who might also be the author of the text, the composer of the music or the choreographer of the dances.

Despite abandoning the theme of Amazons, the ladies' mask in the 1999 production of *Timon of Athens* by the Seattle Shakespeare in the Park Company also conveyed a sense of female autonomy and authority. Directed by Ken Holmes and choreographed by Anna Maria Gutierrez, the women did not wear masks, but they entered veiled, invoking the mysteriousness of Renaissance masking,

47 Jowett (2004), 37.

48 Thoinot Arbeau, *Orchesography* [*Orchésographie,* 1589], trans. by Mary S. Evans, ed. by Julia Sutton (New York: Dover, 1967), 16. See also Bella Mirabella, "'In the sight of all': Queen Elizabeth and the Dance of Diplomacy", *Early Theatre* 15:1 (2012), 65–89.

49 Peter Davidson and Jane Stevenson, "Elizabeth I's Reception at Bisham (1592): Elite Women as Writers and Devisers", in Jayne Elisabeth Archer, Elizabeth Goldring and Sarah Knight (eds), *The Progresses, Pageants, & Entertainments of Queen Elizabeth I* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 205–226, especially 209.

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however briefly. The scene also preserved the two dances in the text. The women performed as a group initially, and then danced with the lords. The women's dancing, reminiscent of Egyptian *raqs sharqi* or 'belly dancing', was sensuous and provocative, but throughout the scene, and especially when dancing with the men, the women were clearly in control.[50]

Conclusion

In his widely read and influential discussion of court life and etiquette, *Il Cortegiano*, or *The Book of the Courtier*, Baldassare Castiglione explains that "to be in a maske bringeth with it a certaine libertie and lycence".[51] A mask obscured identity and thus afforded the wearer unusual freedom and even impunity. Moreover, the conventions of Renaissance masking extended this licence to those who danced and conversed with mask-wearers. One could not be held accountable for things said to someone whose identity was unknowable. Indeed, one could argue that because women's behaviour was more circumscribed than men's in the Renaissance, they benefited even more from the social loophole of the mask. At the same time, wearing a mask attracted unusual attention: observers scrutinized a mask-wearer's words and actions as they searched for clues to the masker's identity.

While mask-wearing was a customary practice in the Renaissance, playwrights used masks onstage to direct attention to what was hidden, misconstrued or misrepresented. Shakespeare's masked dance scenes feature onstage spectators whose reactions to, and interactions with, the maskers encourage us to ask, not just 'Who is truthful, honest, pure and well-intentioned?' but also, 'Who can recognize these characteristics in others?' and 'Who misinterprets what they see or is easily misled?' Shakespeare's masked dance scenes thus highlight the difference between being honest and virtuous and being perceived as such. They provide opportunities for agency and self-expression, especially for women, but they also show the fine line between wit and wantonness and the dangers for those who crossed, or were thought to have crossed, that line.

In *Much Ado About Nothing* and *Love's Labour's Lost*, the dancing and surrounding dialogue highlight female characters' wit and playfulness. In *Much Ado About Nothing*, the women take advantage of the licence afforded not just to

50 This scene can be viewed at https://youtu.be/BbeydWVobrI, last access 1 August 2020.

51 Baldesar Castiglione, *The Courtyer of Count Baldessar Castilio*, trans. by Sir Thomas Hoby (London, 1561), Book II, sig. M3.

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those who wear masks, but to those who converse with them. In *Love's Labour's Lost*, the women use their obscured identities to trick the men, but they do so for the men's own good – to spotlight and correct the men's poor behaviour. Having female maskers in *Timon of Athens* upends many of the masquerade's gendered associations, even if having the Amazons carry lutes instead of weapons, and having the male spectators choose them instead of the other way around for social dancing, somewhat lessens the subversiveness of the role reversal. Moreover, in *Timon of Athens*, it is suggested that one or more of the women are the mask's devisers, even if a man wrote, as well as presents, Cupid's speech. Female devisership, or creative directorship, of entertainments offers another example of female agency that has been mostly overlooked within Shakespeare's plays. In *Love's Labour's Lost*, the women hijack the devisership of the mask, much to the men's surprise and discomfort. *The Merry Wives of Windsor* offers another example of virtuous, clever women devising a masked performance to punish and correct male misbehaviour.

Masked dance scenes show women in control of themselves, and sometimes others, and highlight their wit and intelligence as well as their beauty, virtue and grace. In most of these scenes, we also get to share in the women's spectatorship, with the male maskers as the objects on display, strutting their stuff literally and figuratively in their processional dance. Reversing the usual gender roles, it is the women who behold, and the men who are beheld. And yet this inversion of power is incomplete as well as short-lived. In all of these scenes, it is always the men who get to choose their partners for the partner dancing, even when the women are the maskers, as in the case of *Timon of Athens*. Nevertheless, masked dances give us enticing glimpses of female wit and wisdom, not just for characters like Beatrice and Rosaline, whose quick wits and silver tongues are emphasized throughout *Much Ado About Nothing* and *Love's Labour's Lost*, but also, importantly, for Hero and the Princess of France and her ladies, who are otherwise presented as models of modesty and decorum. Shakespeare's use of female masking in these plays thus functions similarly to female cross-dressing in plays like *Twelfth Night*, *Merchant of Venice* and *As You Like It*. In all of these plays, Shakespeare utilizes masks and disguises to reveal the lively personalities of women who otherwise conform to social expectations of silence and reserve to convey their honesty and virtue.

Directors of modern-day Shakespeare productions often feel that they must 'read between the lines' or 'read against the grain' to find and convey female characters' agency. Masked dance scenes offer an often-overlooked opportunity to highlight female characters' agency and authority and to do so in ways that are not just appropriate for the time period but are already in the play. Indeed, I

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would argue, to cut women's lines in these scenes is to rob them of the agency that Shakespeare granted them and squander the anonymizing protection of the mask that enabled them to express it.

Zusammenfassung

In der Renaissance gewährten Masken eine gewisse Freiheit, und zwar nicht nur denjenigen, die die Maske trugen, sondern auch jenen, die mit ihnen tanzten oder sich mit ihnen unterhielten. Die Maske erlaubte es Frauen, frei zu sprechen und ihren Wortwitz spielen zu lassen, ohne dabei ihren Ruf zu gefährden. Masken wurden jedoch auch mit Unaufrichtigkeit und Täuschung assoziiert. Der Aufsatz analysiert Tanzszenen in drei Shakespeare-Stücken – *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Love's Labour's Lost* und *Timon of Athens* –, in denen das Tragen von Masken beträchtliche Auswirkungen auf die Gender-Dynamik, den weiblichen Handlungsspielraum und die Wahrnehmung weiblicher Tugend hat. Der Artikel erörtert schließlich auch die Chancen und Herausforderungen, die solche Szenen für moderne Inszenierungen mit sich bringen.

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