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The Carnivalization of Eighteenth-Century English Narrative

“THE SECRET history of a carnival,” wrote Addison in his 1718 *Remarks on Italy*, “would make a collection of very diverting novels.” One might take such a comment simply as part of the ingenuous discourse of eighteenth-century tourism: like Mary Wortley Montagu, Horace Mann, and many other English visitors, Addison delighted in the masked balls and carnivals of Venice, Rome, and Florence and celebrated the “great diversion” (as he put it) of dressing “as a false personage” (*Works* 2: 39).¹ But one might also take his remark, paradoxically, as bearing a certain proleptic relation to English literary history itself. Addison offers what could be called an advertisement for a theme—a theme that the eighteenth-century English novel was subsequently to provide. With the spectacular rise of carnivalesque activity in England in the second and third decades of the eighteenth century—marked by the institutionalization of the public, or subscription, masquerade—the novel took a cue from popular culture: the carnival set piece, or masquerade scene, became a standard, though highly problematic, fictional topos. To the degree that the writers incorporated the novel institution of the masquerade into an existing world of representation, the masquerade became an institution of the novel, making the multifarious body of eighteenth-century English fiction a “secret history of a carnival” indeed.

One need only recollect some of the eighteenth-century novels in which a masquerade occurs to appreciate the ubiquitousness of the scene: *Roxana*, *Tom Jones*, *Amelia*, *Pamela*, part 2, *Sir Charles Grandison*, *The Adventures of Peregrine Pickle*, *Fanny Hill*, Burney’s *Cecilia*, Inchbald’s *Simple Story*, and Edgeworth’s *Belinda*. In addition one can find significant allusions to the world of masquerade and public travesty in *Roderick Random*, *The Vicar of Wakefield*, *Evelina*, and a host of minor works of the period.² Critics have tended to discount masquerade scenes—in part, one suspects, because such episodes may seem deceptively inconsequential in the novels themselves. Authors like Richardson and Fielding typically try to bracket the masquerade scene—to set it off as merely a brief interlude in some

more serious project of mimetic or didactic elucidation—disguising it as a narrative, as well as an existential, “diversion.” This attempt at circumscription often occurs, oddly enough, while the characters themselves comment on the masquerade’s powerful sensuous éclat. Nonetheless, one may still be deceived by a superficial aura of extraneousness or marginality.

But we are inclined to bypass fictional representations of the carnivalesque for deeper reasons too, reasons having to do with our notions of eighteenth-century English fiction itself. True to the masquerade’s symbolic role as the exemplary site of mutability, incongruity, and mystery, the episode is often a strangely unrecuperable textual event. It may strike us as uncanny, or as discontinuous with those patterns of didactic or ideological meaning that characterize the work elsewhere. Though subliminally compelling, it may also have a mystifying or chimerical narrative impact. And since the scene often marks a moment in contemporary narrative when otherwise lucid character types, like the adepts of psychosis, suddenly seem to behave conspicuously unlike themselves, as though contaminated by the prevailing instability of the occasion in which they participate, the figure of the masquerade seems subtly linked to the violation of certain cherished critical paradigms—notably, the commonplace that early English fiction is distinguished by its new sense of the integrity of individual psychology and its coherent representation of character over time. The scene is almost invariably an affront to *Bildung*: it offends against those structures of consistency and logical development that we try, consciously or unconsciously, to impose on the classic eighteenth-century text.³

In what follows, however, I argue that the masquerade episode is not in fact inconsequential—either for the novel in which it appears or for the theory of eighteenth-century narrative in general. If the role of the masquerade is masked, so to speak, behind a textual facade of moralism and ideological decorum, it is powerfully subversive nonetheless. In particular I am concerned here with the peculiar intimacy between topos and plot, with the ways in which the masquerade, the

emblem of universal transformation, is linked to the pleasurable processes of narrative transformation—to intrigue and the working out of larger, often comic fictional destinies. Besides being a symbolic epitome of plot—the embedded imago of a world of metamorphosis and fluidity—the masquerade is typically a perpetrator too: a dense kernel of human relations out of which are born the myriad transactions of the narrative. This plot-engendering function frequently undermines whatever explicit negative didactic or allegorical significance the occasion carries elsewhere—for instance, its conventional inscription as the archetype of a corrupt and hypocritical “Town.” The scene may thus be considered a master trope of semantic destabilization in eighteenth-century fiction, in that it characteristically precipitates an entire range of thematic as well as narrative changes and discontinuities. Itself a problematic rhetorical event—its own ideological status remains finally unclear—the masquerade episode introduces a curious instability into the would-be orderly cosmos of the eighteenth-century English novel. Its moral indeterminacy is paradigmatic; its saturnalian assault on taxonomies and hierarchies—established “fixities” of every sort—is the prerequisite, often enough, to a general collapse of decorum in the fictional world.

As Bakhtin has memorably demonstrated, it is possible to make an analogy between the role of the carnivalesque in literary works and its role in culture.⁴ Whether rhetorical or actual, the carnivalesque occasion—like the masquerade—is always provocative: it intimates an alternative view of the “nature of things” and embodies a liberating escape from the status quo. At the end of this essay I return to the comparison between the function of the masquerade in English fiction and that of the institution of masquerade in culture. First, however, a few words are necessary about the diversion itself.

The masked assembly became a popular form of urban entertainment in the mid-teens and early twenties of the eighteenth century, when the first public masquerades were organized in London at the Haymarket under the direction of the Swiss entrepreneur “Count” John James Heidegger. A nocturnal affair, held in brilliantly illuminated rooms, the “promiscuous Assembly” (as the *Spectator* called it) was open to anyone who could afford the price of ticket and costume.

In many respects the occasion was modeled on the traditional public carnivals of the Continent. Thanks to the general anonymity of the scene, collective behavior was unrestrained: eating, drinking, dancing, and gaming were enjoyed to excess. Costumes were often spectacular and phantasmagoric. Besides the classic black mask and domino, popular masquerade disguises included foreign or exotic “fancy dress,” transvestite costumes, ecclesiastical parodies (of nuns or priests), picturesque occupational costumes (of shepherds, milkmaids, and the like), as well as costumes representing animals, supernatural beings, and literary, historical, and allegorical personages.⁵ The fantastic multiplicity and incongruity of the visual spectacle were to a large degree replicated in the disparate composition of the masquerade crowd itself, which drew on both sexes equally and on all ranks of contemporary English society. Only there, remarked a character in Griffin’s 1717 comedy *The Masquerade*, could one meet “a Nobleman [dressed] like a Cynder-Wench, a Colonel of Dragoons like a Country Rat-Catcher, a Lady of Quality in Dutch Trowsers, and a Woman of the Town in a Ruff and Farthingale” (7; 1.1). Both aesthetically and sociologically the scene was indeed a carnivalesque hodgepodge of promiscuous elements.

From the start, the masquerade occupied a paradoxical place in the symbolic order of eighteenth-century English culture. On the one hand, the new entertainment provoked a cacophony of public criticism—a sizable antimasquerade “complaint.” Throughout the century, writers of satiric poems, sermons, squibs, and pamphlets, as well as visual artists like Hogarth, reiterated the exemplary dangers of the masquerade: it was an emblem of luxury and excess; it introduced a foreign element of theatricality and vice into English public life; it promoted a potentially inflammatory sense of social equality by allowing the “lower orders” to consort with their betters. Above all, the masked assembly was seen as the site par excellence for sexual transgression: women—again thanks to disguise—shared the sensual “freedom” of men; voyeurism and exhibitionism were pervasive; erotic taboos were broken. Adultery, prostitution, homosexuality, incest, and the defloration of virgins were all themes associated with the masquerade: the event became a cultural sign of libertinage itself.⁶

On the other hand, despite this explosion of

negative discourse, the masquerade flourished. From the 1720s to the 1780s it was an irrepressible feature of urban public life—not just one among many popular diversions but the emblem of modernity itself, the very signature of fashion, spectacle, and surreptitious excitement. Heidegger's assemblies drew between seven hundred and one thousand persons weekly during the 1720s, while later in the century elaborate subscription masquerades, like those sponsored by Mrs. Cornelys at Carlisle House in the 1760s and 1770s, attracted up to two thousand costumed participants. The spasmodic efforts of civil and religious authorities to put an end to masquerading were generally unsuccessful; for the greater part of the century the masquerade had indeed the status of an established cultural institution, however intense the criticism it inspired.

For all the vociferousness of the opposition, the masked assembly apparently satisfied certain underlying impulses in the culture. Since participants typically adopted the costumes of beings whose natures were antithetical to their own—of a different culture, sex, or sphere of existence—one could conclude that individual masqueraders were acting out repressed fantasies of alterity, symbolically embracing otherness. But the same dialectic applies collectively too. By allowing manifold breaches of decorum, the carnivalization of social roles, and parodic symbolic reversals, the masquerade offered eighteenth-century culture an anti-image of itself: a kind of licensed topsyturvydom, or *Spielraum*, in which the very principles of order and distinction might be challenged. In a rigidly taxonomic, conceptually polarized society, it opened up a temporary space of transformation, mutability, and fluidity. It embodied, one might say, a gratifying fantasy of change in a world that sanctioned few changes—metaphysical or otherwise.

I call attention here to the conflicting responses to the masquerade because the same contradictions inform fictional representation. Eighteenth-century English culture inscribed the masquerade simultaneously in a code of danger and in a code of pleasure: though preeminently distinguished by its “pernicious” consequences (in the phrase of one critic), it was also a scene of ecstasy and euphoria—a site of atavistic “liberties” and golden-age delights. It was at once part of the topography of vice—a place where no one should go—and part of the topography of enjoyment—a

place where everyone went.⁷

In the eighteenth-century masquerade novel, too, the masked assembly is a place where everyone goes—eventually. Which is not to say—at the outset at least—that it is not also part of a (textual) code of danger. The occasion figures notably in a larger theme of initiation: “going to the masquerade” is an exemplary part of the charged confrontation with urbanity, or “introduction to the Town,” conventionally dramatized in eighteenth-century English novels. Yet initially the masquerade novel characteristically registers, as it were, an “official” resistance to its own carnivalesque topos—as though it wishes to domesticate, or neutralize in advance, the very scene it will later represent. Some form of embedded negative comment or warning almost always precedes that problematic event, serving as a kind of anticipatory didactic gloss, usually by a character already invested in the fictional world with a certain moral prestige or authority. With such prefacing—a not so subtle attempt to shape the reader's subsequent interpretation of the episode—the writers signal the superficial didactic orthodoxy of their histories, even as these histories turn, ineluctably, toward this least orthodox of diversions.

The modes of stylized resistance are surprisingly uniform. In particular, the masquerade's association with sexual impurity—and consequent danger to heroines—is almost always enunciated. In *Pamela*, part 2, for example, when Richardson's paragon hears that Mr. B. plans to take her to a masked assembly, she expresses her distaste for such entertainments, condemns the “freedoms” taken with women at these events, and wishes she didn't have to go (262; letter 55). Similarly, despite claiming that she “never had any notion of Masquerades,” Harriet Byron, in Richardson's *Sir Charles Grandison*, admits to her friend Miss Selby that she wishes the night of the masquerade were over, adding, somewhat ominously, that she fears the evening's party will be “the last diversion of this kind I shall ever be at” (116; letter 22). In Inchbald's *Simple Story*, Miss Milner's honorable guardian, Mr. Dorriforth, objects to the loose morals of the masked assembly and implicitly forbids her to go (151; vol. 2, ch. 8). Even Defoe's *Roxana*, where the didactic pattern is unstable from the outset, contains hints of the classic encoded warning: when the heroine hears that some “Gentlemen in Masquerade” are

to visit her apartments, she immediately fears a "Disturbance" and balks at receiving them. She has to be assured that "a Party of Guards" will prevent any "Rudeness" of the sort found at the Haymarket masquerade (173).

And finally—befitting the author of one of the first and most virulent poetic satires against the masquerade, *The Masquerade* (1728)—Fielding's novels offer striking examples of the embedded antimasquerade gloss. In book 13 of *Tom Jones*, after Tom offers to take Mrs. Miller and her daughter to a masquerade, his landlady animadverts on the danger of such "extravagant Diversions," particularly for innocent young women. When Mr. Nightingale disagrees, she reminds him that when her daughter went to the Haymarket with him the year before, "it almost turned her Head; and she did not return to herself, or to her Needle, in a month afterwards" (543). But it is in *Amelia*, the most complex of masquerade novels, that one finds the most severe strictures—an initial chorus of warnings so intense as to suggest that a masquerade is not to figure in the heroine's destiny at all. When the sinister Noble Peer presents Amelia with masquerade tickets, his gesture elicits a flood of preventive discourse. Booth fears aloud "what a wicked and voluptuous man, resolved to sacrifice every thing to the gratification of a sensual appetite, with the most delicious repast" might attempt on such an occasion and forbids his wife to go (301; bk. 6, ch. 6), while Amelia's friend, the wan Mrs. Bennet, is moved to divulge her own horrific experiences at the masked assembly (11–59; bk. 7, chs. 2–9). She too has gone with the Peer to a masquerade, and with catastrophic consequence: after being overcome by the hallucinatory "intoxications" of the place, she tells Amelia, she unwittingly allowed herself to be drugged and raped by him. The "fatal masquerade" indeed seems to have been that: Mrs. Bennet subsequently causes the death of her husband by infecting him with the Peer's venereal disease, and her child succumbs to a mysteriously related "fever." This exemplary tale recounted, Amelia promptly rejects the gift of tickets, leaving the reader to conclude, logically enough, that a masquerade will play no part, except in this displaced form, in Fielding's novel.

Such embedded commentary seems intended, obviously, to limit the symbolic range of the masquerade to that of the moral emblem. Even before the event occurs, we are invited to comprehend it

as a transparent epitome of vice, as part of the moralized topography of the corrupt "Town." The masquerade itself masquerades, the gloss warns: ostensibly the scene of pleasure, it is actually the scene of "snares"—a region of manipulation, disequilibrium, and sexual threat. It disguises itself as exquisite delight, yet degrades all who enter its estranging spaces. This initial treatment of the masquerade topos almost always coincides, not surprisingly, with a larger critique of a deceptive or hypocritical human society. Besides being the icon of a debauched world of "Fashion," the allegory of urban disorder, as in Fielding and Richardson, the diversion often seems to intimate a kind of global dysphoria—a universal inauthenticity, obfuscation, and brutality. Thus the internalized attack on the masquerade confirms the didactic pretensions of the larger fiction and establishes—for a time at least—the stereotypically "virtuous" persona of the novelist, the unmasker of vice.

Yet it is precisely this kind of emblematic transparency that is obscured by the actual representation of masquerade. For despite the encoded resistance, the event, if mentioned at all, always does seem to take place. Indeed, one may take it as a rule that if the possibility of attending a masquerade arises in an eighteenth-century English novel, at some point the characters will go, as though under a peculiar narrative compulsion. This turn toward the carnival world often violates didactic economy, since the "perniciousness" of the occasion has already been sufficiently established, and the textual switch into saturnalia frequently seems strangely unmotivated or irrational. In the sequel to *Pamela*, one cannot quite grasp, for instance, why a reformed B. should force his pregnant wife (she gives birth a day or two later) to attend this scene of riot against her will, but he does. Similarly in *Amelia*, though Booth strenuously opposes Amelia's accepting masquerade tickets from the Peer, he later insists, surprisingly, that she accept a set of tickets from the equally lustful and devious Colonel James. And in *A Simple Story*, Miss Milner's decision to thwart her fiancé, Dorriforth, and venture out to a masquerade is likewise baffling—a seemingly perverse affront to the emotional bond that she has earlier worked so passionately to establish. Thus this crucial spatial shift from domestic salon to assembly room, from the predictable scenery of "everyday" life to the

estranging realm of the carnivalesque, is almost always accompanied by a certain logical discontinuity, an incursion of irrationalism into the ordered cosmos of eighteenth-century psychological, as well as topographic, representation.

With the "entry" into the masquerade scene itself—for the characters a literal entry into a novel space of estrangement and moral instability—the sense of discontinuity and paradox may be intensified to a hallucinatory degree. However brief the scene and however much the narrator may try to circumscribe its problematic features, it remains a charged textual occasion, productive of unexampled pleasures for characters and readers alike. I do not mean merely the pleasures of local color, though the representation of the carnivalesque obviously entails supplemental interest of this sort, particularly for twentieth-century readers. To be sure, the typical masquerade episode contains some allusion to the spectacular delights of the scene: some rendering of masquerade *adynata*—the marvelous visual incongruities embodied in the costumed crowd itself. The representation of the carnivalesque "diversion" conventionally diverts in this way: it adds an element of spectacle, in the ancient sense, to the ordinarily quotidian landscape of the realistic novel. Thus in Burney's *Cecilia*, the reader may take vicarious pleasure in the manifold and dreamlike aspects of the entertainment depicted there, where men turn into "Spaniards, chimney-sweepers, Turks, watchmen, conjurers, and old women" and women into "shepherdesses, orange girls, Circassians, gipseys, haymakers, and sultanas" (169; vol. 1, bk. 2, ch. 3).

But the masquerade diverts in a more important sense too. The verbal allusion to a rich and variegated phenomenological realm—a world of endless, enchanting metamorphosis—coincides always with an even more gratifying pattern of transformation: a proliferation of intrigue. Besides thematizing mutability through image, the masquerade episode serves as a nodal point for narrative transformation—the privileged site of plot. Above all, the masquerade represents that place in the novel at which significant events take place—a classic locale out of which the requisite mysteries of "story" may be elaborated.

This plot-developing function follows from the very nature of the diversion. In life as in fiction, the eighteenth-century masked assembly was a cultural "locus of intimacy." There persons other-

wise rigidly segregated by class and sex distinctions might come together in unprecedented, sometimes disruptive combinations. Satiric references, like Addison's, to the "promiscuity" of the masquerade suggested not only the characteristic sensual excess of the scene but also the scandalous heterogeneity of the community temporarily constituted within its confines.⁸ Constantly confronting "strangers" (with the mask the quintessential visual emblem of estrangement) was part of the masquerade's appeal: it substituted randomness and novelty—prerequisites of imbroglio—for the familiar, highly stylized patterns of contemporary public and private exchange.

This open-endedness, one realizes, is perfectly adapted to the elaboration of plot, whose existence depends, as Todorov has pointed out, on an initial destabilization of the ordinary, a disequilibrium at the heart of things. In his study of the fantastic, Todorov defines the minimum requirement for narrative—that "nucleus without which we cannot say there is any narrative at all"—as "a movement between two equilibriums which are similar but not identical" (163). In the genre of the fantastic—including fantastic eighteenth-century tales like *The Castle of Otranto* and *Vathek*—that which precipitates "movement," the necessary catalyst for narrative, is usually the supernatural intervention, a mysterious or extralogical incursion that radically disrupts the stable modes of ordinary fictional existence. "Habitually linked to the narrative of an action," writes Todorov, the marvelous element "proves to be the narrative raw material which best fills this specific function: to afford a modification of the preceding situation, and to break the established equilibrium" of the fantastic text. Social and literary operations here coincide, for "in both cases, we are concerned with a transgression of the law." "Whether it is in social life or in narrative," he concludes, "the intervention of the supernatural element always constitutes a break in the system of pre-established rules, and in so doing finds its justification" (165–66).

An analogy might be made, however, between the role of the supernatural in fantastic literature and that of the masquerade in certain putatively "realistic" or secularized eighteenth-century narratives. The carnivalesque episode likewise transgresses the law, though not a transcendental one; it deranges the orderly world of human relations elsewhere intimated in classic eighteenth-century

fiction, introducing an imbalance, a fundamental strangeness. The masquerade typically engenders a series of problematic *liaisons dangereuses* by throwing characters into proximity who, if an exhaustive cosmological decorum were truly the goal, would never meet: the high and the low, the virtuous and the vicious, the attached and the unattached. But by the same token, the episode may also bring about, for a time at least, the alienation of characters who *should* be together by virtue of established conjugal or familial ties: husbands and wives, parents and children, guardians and wards. Out of the masquerade's surplus of scandalous dialectical transactions, a multitude of intrigues develop. These localized complications characteristically infiltrate the larger fiction, shaping—either implicitly or explicitly—the remainder of the story. As a transgressive agent, the carnivalesque episode also provides that necessary mimetic disequilibrium on which plot depends.

The atavistic textual association between the masquerade episode and supernatural agency is typically inscribed in the imagery of costume: the characters often either disguise themselves as supernatural beings or meet others dressed in such costumes. In Inchbald's *Simple Story*, for example, Miss Milner chooses the costume of the goddess Diana—somewhat ironically, it turns out, for the masquerade is subsequently instrumental in bringing about her marriage to Dorriforth. In *Tom Jones*, Lady Bellaston disguises herself as the queen of the fairies, while in *Cecilia*, the heroine's problematic suitor, Mr. Monckton, dresses as a fiend. Since each of these characters is a perpetrator of masquerade intrigue and an instrument in later plot developments, the sartorial hints of supernatural power might be taken as symbolic of his or her *narrative* influence.

The reader, to be sure, may enjoy the hyperelaboration of incident. The immediate puzzles of the masquerade episode (who is talking to whom? who wears what costume? what do the mystifying encounters signify?) are nicely calculated to promote the reader's engagement, and they soon lead to others. The masquerade scene almost always intimates a host of further plot developments and mysteries to be solved. But—and this is perhaps its most paradoxical function in eighteenth-century English narrative—the carnivalesque topos is often peculiarly implicated in the pleasure of characters as well as of readers. Often the masquerade is the instrument not just of plot but of

a comic plot in particular. It characteristically precipitates a larger euphoric, or “rewarding,” pattern of narrative transformation—even for those characters, like the beleaguered heroines, whom one would not expect to benefit from its disarming travesties. This subterranean comic agency is seldom if ever acknowledged; indeed, the narrator or the characters, like Richardson's Pamela, may describe the masquerade, before and after the fact, as the exemplary site of moral danger. Yet the association with a comic telos, a range of ultimately happy “consequences,” is subtly insistent nonetheless. Instead of destroying, the masquerade seems finally to reward those who enter its chaotic midnight spaces.

The paradox is worth noting because, as we shall see in a moment, it suggests much about the contradictory and often compromising imaginative role played by the carnivalesque, not just in eighteenth-century fiction, but in eighteenth-century society itself. Granted, the beneficent instrumentality of the occasion may not seem immediately obvious: the narrative repercussions of masquerade can appear sinister, sometimes in highly melodramatic ways. But frequently these seemingly disastrous “consequences” are in fact a necessary prelude to something else: the ameliorization of a central character's fortunes, the “Providential” rewarding of the heroine. Like the Fortunate Fall (with which the carnivalesque has strong symbolic resonances), the masquerade episode typically stands out in the narrative as an indispensable event, as that temporary plunge into difficulty and enigma without which the characters could not realize their comic destinies.

Thus in *Sir Charles Grandison*—to take a schematic instance of the pattern—the “cursed masquerade” bears all the conventional hallmarks of an evil narrative agency: Harriet Byron is there abducted by the odious Sir Hargrave, and everyone fears that her sexual ruin is inevitable. On hearing the “fatal news” of Harriet's kidnapping, her distraught Uncle Selby exclaims that while he formerly believed public masquerades “more silly than wicked” he is now convinced that they are “the most profligate of all diversions” (119; letter 24). But one soon learns that Harriet has not been ruined; rather, the paragon Sir Charles, fortuitously riding past the coach in which she is held after the masquerade, hears her muffled screams for help and, in “a glorious action,” liberates her from her abductor. Such is the happy accidental

meeting on which Richardson's heterosexual romance depends, for of course Harriet and Charles later fall in love and marry. Yet one might argue that it is Harriet's initial movement into the world of sexual danger, represented by the masked assembly, that diverts her toward her ultimate sexual reward: for without the masquerade, she would neither have entered the beatific Grandison household (which takes her in after her ordeal) nor have come to know her "god-like" benefactor intimately. The masquerade excursion is perversely responsible for all her subsequent happiness and the essential erotic comedy of Richardson's novel. Again, the fiction obscures this almost magical plot function: Harriet's relieved relations afterward revile the occasion that caused such "barbarous" suffering. But the disguised blessing is inscribed subliminally, in comments like Mr. Reeves's remark that Harriet's experience represents "a common case" heightened into "the marvelous" (137; letter 27). Harriet too has the sense of supernatural agency: "How shall I bear this goodness!"—she exclaims after her adventure—"This is indeed bringing good out of evil! Did I not say, my cousin, that I was fallen into the company of angels?" (145; letter 27).

One might multiply cases in which the heroine's masquerade venture affirms or reconstitutes the comic plot of heterosexual romance. Roxana meets her most powerful financial and erotic patron, the "Duke of M——," at the masquerade, attracting him with her lubricious "Turkish dance." Likewise, though in a somewhat more sedate manner, Burney's Cecilia attracts a lover at the masquerade—Delvile, the man who will become her husband. In *A Simple Story*, though the masquerade episode at first appears to estrange Miss Milner and Dorriforth, it actually sets up an ecstatic reconciliation and their subsequent marriage. And in the sequel to *Pamela*, Mr. B.'s masquerade flirtation with the Countess is not the disaster for the heroine it seems to be: it too produces a transporting moment of "éclaircissement," when B. renounces the Countess, begs his wife's forgiveness, and "redoubles" his love for her.

The masquerade episode, then, is not only a narrative crux; it is characteristically implicated in the larger comic patterns of eighteenth-century English fiction. Without it, many apparently "Providential" turns in contemporary narratives

are difficult to imagine. Yet such instrumentality, one may notice, also undermines the conventional moral significance of the topos and threatens the didactic coherence of the work as a whole. By its very comic agency the carnivalesque episode contradicts its superficial negative inscription within the text, revealing itself instead as part of the paradoxical machinery of narrative pleasure. It ceases to be merely an emblem—of hypocrisy or anything else—at the moment that it facilitates, like a covert *deus ex machina*, the ultimate reward of character and reader alike.

This "scrambling" of emblematic significance, it turns out, is often paradigmatic; it can signal a collapse of didactic accountability in the fictional world. The masquerade scene typically leaves in its wake what might be called a world upside down. That is, it marks a moment in the narrative at which ordinarily sanctioned social or metaphysical hierarchies may suddenly weaken or show signs of being overthrown altogether. Following the representation of masquerade intrigue, the reader may experience a sense of ideological topsy-turvydom—as though the dramatic transformations in the narrative had somehow precipitated thematic changes too. To use Bakhtin's term, one might say that the fictional world itself suddenly appears "carnivalized."

Something of this effect is already obvious in the association just educed between the scene and the comic destiny of heroines. The masquerade frequently coincides with a peculiar reversal of those conventional male-female power relations encoded elsewhere in eighteenth-century fiction. Male characters may abruptly lose their authority following the masquerade, while female characters acquire unprecedented intellectual and emotional influence over them. As the symbolic theater of female power (women masqueraders, we recollect, usurped not only the costumes but the social and behavioral "freedoms" of the opposite sex), the assembly room engenders patterns of sexual reversal that subsequently pervade, as it were, the rest of the novel. Thus the heroine typically eludes her immediate masquerade persecutors—witness Harriet in *Sir Charles Grandison* or Mrs. Atkinson in *Amelia*, who outwits the evil Noble Peer at the masked conclave in that novel. And often she also derives more lasting powers of sexual control from the occasion. She is particularly likely, as we have seen, to gain

psychological sway here over a future lover or husband. A parodic example occurs in *Tom Jones*, when Lady Bellaston, disguised as the queen of the fairies (her very dress a blazon of female authority), seduces Tom at the Haymarket masquerade and thus establishes a brief erotic and economic ascendancy over him. Even here, however, the effect of ideological destabilization remains potent: though Tom later escapes Bellaston's lascivious influence, the masquerade scene introduces an important thematic disturbance into Fielding's otherwise highly conservative fiction—one that both threatens the novel's patriarchal logic and temporarily subverts its normative vision of male-female relations.⁹

While the masquerade precipitates controversy in sexual relations—and is particularly linked to scenarios of female desire and authority—it is also associated with the disruption of class relations. (The two forms of inversion sometimes overlap in interesting structural and thematic ways.) Again it may seem as though the saturnalian reversals of the masked assembly—where “low” becomes “high” and vice versa—somehow work their way into the larger fiction. Just as women characters achieve a carnivalesque hegemony following the invocation of masquerade, so “low” characters may gain new status or importance from this powerful textual event.

Sometimes a directly subversive narrative causation is at work. In *Amelia*, for example, when Amelia's masquerade surrogate, Mrs. Atkinson, tricks the Noble Peer (who has mistaken her for the heroine) into granting her husband an officer's commission, she brings about a radical and lasting sociological change in Fielding's rigidly hierarchical fictional world. Through her ruse, which elegantly exploits the masquerade's requisite sartorial confusions, a carnivalesque transformation, from low into high, becomes permanent. The “humble” Sergeant Atkinson, who before has served as Booth's valet, indeed receives his commission a few days after the masquerade, thus abruptly rising to Booth's own rank and achieving the coveted status of gentleman (227; bk. 10, ch. 8). Once again, one might say, the masquerade episode has permitted a breach in the social order and in the underlying ideological structure of Fielding's novel.

But the scandalous consequences of masquerade may occur at a symbolic remove too, as in the second part of *Pamela*. There, a seemingly

sinister masquerade adventure—during which B. becomes estranged from the heroine and begins his “Platonick” affair with the Countess—ultimately produces a scene of ecstatic repetition, in which Pamela symbolically reenacts her own highly transgressive history. This reenactment is implicit in the language of emotion: when B. belatedly expresses his remorse and reaffirms his love for his wife, Pamela—who has taken to dressing again in the plain garments of a servant and asserting that she is not a true “lady” like the Countess—blissfully declares herself “lifted up” once more. B.'s transporting demonstration, she tells Lady Davers, has “exalted” her, and she reassumes her rich garments and her place by his side (320; letter 74). Yet in this “happy turn,” the melodramatic climax of Richardson's narrative, one recognizes a displaced recapitulation of precisely that problematic change recorded in *Pamela*, part 1: the heroine's original (and revolutionary) “exaltation” from humble to genteel status. By precipitating this charged repetition, the masquerade episode again betrays its subliminal thematic link with fantasies of mutability and with the subversion of class and sexual distinctions.

Finally, the patterns of ideological destabilization associated with the masquerade are microcosmically reinscribed on the level of character. Just as the personae of eighteenth-century English fiction are likely to transcend supposedly “given” social or sexual categories following the representation of masquerade, so they are likely to display certain unaccountable moral or emotional traits, as though temporarily estranged, or “different” from themselves in basic psychological ways. The gesture of self-alienation implicit in the act of masquerading—where one indeed “becomes” the other—would seem to be exemplary. It heralds additional, more intimate transformations and an incursion of instability into the realm of human nature itself.

The phenomenon is particularly noticeable, as one might expect, in novels like Fielding's, where the allegorical representation of character predominates and the fictional world is ordinarily composed of fixed, even caricatured moral types. Here, true to its antitaxonomic function, the masquerade scene disrupts stereotypical distinctions, such as those between paragons and knaves, the virtuous and the vicious. Supposedly lucid moral types may suddenly behave like their

opposites, intensifying the reader's sense of didactic confusion. In *Tom Jones*, for example, the masquerade in book 13 marks the point at which the hero seems, to many readers, to behave in ways notably unlike himself—displaying a venality and opportunism, manifest in his somewhat sordid dealings with Lady Bellaston, not previously associated with his usually open and good-natured character. It is as though, by donning the mask and domino supplied by his secret patron, he temporarily diverges also from a stereotypical mode of being. The schematic code of character structuring Fielding's novel—with its underlying essentialist distinction between good and evil natures—is suddenly thrown into question. Though Tom later recollects himself and becomes the same transparent, even banal moral type he was before, his peculiar opacity and inconsistency on this occasion have troubled *Tom Jones*'s critics. Likewise, the masquerade sequence as a whole has sometimes been educed as an “unsuccessful” or incongruous element in Fielding's larger artistic and thematic design.¹⁰

In *Amelia*, too, the masquerade episode marks enigmatic psychological as well as narrative transformations. The crude emblematic dichotomy established early in the fiction between paragons and hypocrites here tends to dissolve, even as Fielding's narrative pattern itself becomes more intricate and mysterious. Antithetical moral types merge in disarming ways. In particular, Amelia herself—elsewhere a model of uncomplicated virtue—reveals new and problematic depths to her character. Her ruse on the night of the masquerade, when she allows Mrs. Atkinson to take her place, unbeknownst to Booth or anyone else, is symptomatic: her complicity is technically a kind of hypocrisy, linking her with the role players and double-dealers vilified earlier by Fielding's moralizing narrator. Though perhaps justifiable on the grounds of prudence, Amelia's gesture is still a compromising one, and for the first time her supposedly immaculate character is shaded with a subtle admixture of deviousness and theatricality. But there are other puzzling shifts in behavior following the masquerade: Amelia is not the only paragon to show signs of lapsing from moral uniformity (Sergeant Atkinson, for example, turns out to harbor an adulterous passion for the heroine, and confesses to the theft of her “lost” miniature), while the villains of the novel, the Noble Peer and Colonel

James among them, are somewhat mystifyingly rehabilitated. Despite having been tricked into granting the sergeant an officer's commission, the Peer charitably permits him to retain it, and both the Peer and James inexplicably cease their lustful machinations against Amelia. The masquerade scene is not only a crux in Fielding's extremely convoluted plot, it marks a chiasmus on the level of character: Fielding's implicit moral typology itself is, for a time at least, turned upside down. With this confusion of types, *Amelia* loses much of its allegorical legibility. To be sure, it becomes in many ways a more compelling fiction at this point, but it is hardly any longer the simplistic didactic exemplum Fielding seems to have conceived.¹¹

Thus, to speak of the “carnivalization” of eighteenth-century fiction is to speak of a multifaceted textual phenomenon. Though the process may begin with a localized, or strictly anecdotal, representation of masquerade—the discrete scene or set piece—it does not end there. The invocation of the masquerade almost invariably coincides with an elaboration of plot, in particular with comic plots of sexual consummation and social mutability. Yet this transgressive narrative agency, the masquerade's privileged relation to intrigue itself, offends against the prevailing didactic economy of eighteenth-century English fiction. The pleasurable consequences of masquerade negate its superficial textual inscription as an emblem of vice, inauthenticity, and corrupt urbanity. The topos cannot be recuperated simply as a version of the *carnaval moralisé*; it conditions powerful transformations in the fictional world.

One may describe these transformations in thematic as well as narrative terms. As we have seen, the allusion to the scandals of masquerade typically engenders, as though by contagion, a larger ideological scandal in the fiction—the subversion of existing distinctions, the reversal of normative moral and social hierarchies. By injecting an enigmatic, destabilizing energy into the orderly cosmos of the eighteenth-century English novel, the carnivalesque episode alters the literary artifact itself, which seldom retains its claim to didactic purity following the representation of this least purifying of diversions. Its imaginative structure may suddenly appear contradictory or hybrid—“double” in potential significance, unrecuperable according to any straightforward

didactic logic. Though it may have advertised itself as allegory, it ceases here to be merely that. With the turn toward the irrationality of masquerade, one might say, the novel itself becomes unlike itself; it diverges from its putative moral project and reshapes itself as phantasmagoria and dream.

Implicit in my argument here, of course, is Bakhtin's notion of "carnivalization," which means not just the invocation of a thematic but also a process of generic destabilization. The carnivalized work, Bakhtin suggests, resists generic classification and instead combines, like Rabelais's *Pantagruel*, a multiplicity of literary modes in a single increasingly "promiscuous" form. Interestingly enough, eighteenth-century English novels containing masquerade scenes often also display generic uncertainty. The masquerade may at times even seem to condition a formal "shifting" or ambiguity in the work. In *Amelia*, for example, the scene coincides with a general shift from satiric to mimetic modes: it marks the point at which Fielding's fiction lapses from a primarily "anatomizing" method—characterized by a ridiculing exposure of the "glaring evils" of society—and assumes more and more of the conventional features of realistic narrative. In Richardson's sequel to *Pamela*, the pattern of generic destabilization is even more obvious: after the masquerade intrigue in that novel, the work becomes a true hodgepodge of discourses—a mixture of embedded exempla, "table talk" (the symposia of the B. and Darnford households), and miscellaneous items, such as Pamela's lengthy commentary on Locke's treatise on education. Just as the masquerade episode precipitates transformation in the narrative, then, it appears to precipitate a transformation of the genre itself: it instigates a lapse in consistency on every textual stratum.

It may seem, at this point, that I have skirted an obvious epistemological problem by speaking elliptically of the manner in which the representation of masquerade engenders or precipitates a host of transformations in a novel. I have treated the carnivalesque episode as a kind of "ghost in the machine" in eighteenth-century English fiction—almost as a transcendental agency that provokes an irruption of narrative fluidity and didactic ambiguity. To identify the typical masquerade scene as a subversive textual crux is to sidestep larger matters of authorial intention and literary dynamics. Indeed, one might ask, what

conditions the representation of masquerade itself?

The question returns us to the realm of cultural history and the role of the carnivalesque, not just in the literary imagination, but in eighteenth-century English society. Granted, it is always possible to treat the contradictory literary inscription of masquerade simply as a function of idiosyncratic authorial intentions. In Fielding and Richardson, for example, the complex invocation of the carnivalesque can always be seen as a symptom of individual imaginative ambivalence—as the outward sign of a deeper private debate on the questions of order and disorder, restraint and indulgence, decorum and transgression. I do not wish to imply that either Fielding or Richardson *consciously* manipulates the topos to build, as it were, a certain ideological paradox into his fiction—or that the thematic imbroglia precipitated by the masquerade scene is part of any explicitly premeditated design. English novelists of the eighteenth century show little of that intentionally heuristic use of the carnivalesque that occurs later—say, in highly self-conscious writers like Flaubert.¹² Still, the masquerade episode does seem to satisfy diverse conscious and unconscious imperatives. It can express an underlying authorial ambivalence regarding the didactic project itself. For the eighteenth-century novelist, invoking the world of masquerade is typically a way of indulging in the scenery of transgression while seeming to maintain didactic probity. The occasion may be condemned in conventional terms, yet its very representation permits the novelist, like the characters, to assume a different role: to cast off the persona of the moralist and turn instead to the pleasures of intrigue. The writer may become at this point the purveyor of seductive fantasies rather than staid instruction. In novelists like Fielding and Richardson, in whom the conflict between moralism and subversion is intense, the masquerade functions as a figure for ambiguous authorial intentions—the textual sign of an inward tension regarding the author's role.

But it is perhaps more compelling, as I suggested at the start, to make the larger argument: that the paradoxes implicit in the fictional allusion to masquerade mirrored paradoxes in the cultural response to the carnivalesque. The masked assembly institutionalized dreams of disorder not just for its literary adherents but for the real world.

Even as eighteenth-century English society preserved, on the face of it, a host of distinctions and hierarchies, reinforced by repressive dictates of one sort or another, the masquerade, like a theater of doubt, dramatized the possibility of change. It expressed collective fantasies of metamorphosis; it intimated that prevailing moral, social, and metaphysical categories were mere artifacts. It may seem an obvious enough point to make, but the way the masquerade functions in eighteenth-century English narrative—as an episode at once diverting and threatening to the implicit taxonomies of the fictional world—is roughly analogous to the way it functioned in the culture: as a discontinuous, estranging, sometimes even hallucinatory event that nonetheless carried with it a powerfully cathartic and disruptive cognitive *éclat*.

The argument might be embellished in various ways. A proponent of Bakhtin's lyrical theory of carnival, for instance, might favor a historical interpretation of some of the contradictions in the literary masquerade, seeing them as symptomatic of that shift away from the carnivalesque spirit which, Bakhtin has suggested, characterizes the modern period. He claims that the great traditions of European carnival were already in decline by the eighteenth century—a fact he attributes to increasing secularization and the rise of philosophies of rational individualism. The traditional carnival, he argues—the masked *fête*, *charivari*, and *sotie*—celebrated a fluid metaphysics: an archaic popular belief in the underlying unity of opposites and the "organic" wholeness of experience. Folk spectacle emphasized union over separation, changing over "finished" forms, and the "ever incompleting character of being" itself (32–33). With the development of modern notions of the subject, however—what Bakhtin calls the "completed atomized being" of rationalism—this popular metaphysics was superseded. A world of discrete individuals, without resemblance or dialectical connection to one another, took its place. Thus, in the eighteenth century one finds a "gradual narrowing down of the ritual, spectacle, and carnival forms of folk culture, which became small and trivial." Literature mirrors the change: while the themes and imagery of carnival are central to Rabelais and other writers of the Renaissance, they have become circumscribed and problematic in the literature of the Enlightenment (117–19).

Of course the eighteenth-century masquerade itself might be described as a late or decadent form of the carnivalesque: particularly in England, where festive tradition was already far more attenuated than on the Continent, the masked assembly rapidly became an almost entirely secularized and commercial phenomenon.¹³ Its philosophic dimension was somewhat paradoxical from the start, almost a vestigial effect. It is not surprising, therefore, that the contemporary novel of masquerade should also be peculiarly ambiguous. Even while the masquerade scene marks an atavistic incursion of mutability and flux into the symbolic world of representation, its moralistic bracketing—the suspicion and disavowal that surround the occasion—might be taken as the sign of a growing uneasiness and skepticism regarding the fluid epistemology of the older popular tradition. Seen in the elegiac Bakhtinian context, the masquerade novel of this period emerges as a penultimate moment in the literary history of the carnivalesque: it expresses larger philosophic and conceptual conflicts in an especially condensed and ambivalent way.

Certainly, with the exception of a few minor revivals in Regency literature, the masquerade set piece has all but vanished from the topography of the English novel by the late eighteenth century.¹⁴ Yet this absence too reflected cultural reality: the public masquerade itself had virtually disappeared in England by the time of the French Revolution. To be sure, especially in the light of the growing moral and social conservatism of the upper classes in the last decades of the century, one might explain this disappearance politically as well as purely philosophically: in that period of pervasive rebellion and unrest, the utopian reversals of masquerade may have seemed altogether too inflammatory—too threatening to the somewhat precariously maintained balance of English society. During the unsettled 1770s and 1780s, the stylized chaos of the carnival world seemed everywhere to be giving way to unmediated scenarios of active political insurgency.

But the basic connection here—between the literary theme and the cultural institution—remains a compelling one. It may suggest something too, finally, about the history of the novel and about the genre's own complex negotiation with human realities. Tony Tanner has argued that the novel, since its beginnings, has been subliminally concerned with representing trans-

gression, even while asserting itself as the embodiment of bourgeois values and vindicator of the moral and social status quo. It has harbored dreams of a world upside down while seeming to validate prevailing ideology (3–4). For the English novelists of the eighteenth century, popular entertainments and diversions—the still extant realm of the carnivalesque—offered a convenient tropology of scandal, a way of figuring such dreams. The masquerade, one could say, was simply part of a larger preoccupation with disruption.

As society itself changed, however, so did the novel, and so did the characteristic scenery of transgression. The carnival topos may be typical of the novel in its infancy, the period when proponents of the genre are concerned most intensely with establishing the novel's claim to didactic authority. So powerful is the overt moralistic imperative in early fiction that the transgressive element appears, as it were, by accident; it is figured more or less unself-consciously. The particular appeal of the masquerade scene, as we have seen, was that it allowed for just such a "naïve" elaboration of the transgressive plot, while permitting the novelist to maintain the appearance of moral orthodoxy. Presumably the writer could justify the episode, however logically discontinuous, by prefacing it with an obvious negative commentary. In contrast—it is tempting to speculate—novelists of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries had little need for ambiguously mediating figures like the masquerade; as the impulse toward crude didacticism weakened and the writer's absorption in transgressive modes became more integrated and self-conscious, scandal—whether sexual, social, or political—could be represented more directly. Tanner suggests that the plot of private erotic transgression—for example, adultery—has a new moral neutrality and imaginative centrality in the novels of Rousseau, Goethe, and Flaubert; unlike Richardson and Fielding, these writers rely less and less on devices of ideological or psychological mediation, such as the carnivalesque intrigue, to set the story in motion. Similarly, collective transgression seems to be depicted in increasingly unmediated forms in the nineteenth-century novel, often through a representation of the politicized divagations of the crowd or mob. Just as the masquerade scene loses its currency as the primary fictional topos of collective disorder, the crowd

scene, or scene of urban riot, seems to take its place: witness the complex use of such episodes in Scott, Hugo, Dickens, Eliot, Flaubert, and Zola. The nineteenth-century crowd scene serves many of the same narrative and thematic functions as the earlier masquerade scene, but it is usually far more integrated, in imaginative terms, into the mimetic and ideological structure in which it occurs. For the nineteenth-century novelist, unlike his or her eighteenth-century counterpart, transgression no longer has the shape of a discontinuous or naïve diversion. One might indeed ask whether it has not become the central, self-conscious concern of the fictional enterprise itself.

The classic masquerade scene, then, is to a great extent a temporary phenomenon in the history of the novel—and perhaps a somewhat primitive one at that. In contrast with the topoi of nineteenth-century fiction, the masquerade episode functions in a curiously automatic way; it has the aspect at times of a piece of unconscious or unintegrated textual machinery. Yet its importance in eighteenth-century English fiction, as I have tried to show, is indisputable. The scene is typically a crux; it engenders a host of pleasurable fictional transformations. One might even call the carnivalesque episode an epitome of the seductive power of narrative: it introduces a surprising and gratifying potentiality into the static world of eighteenth-century representation, giving shape to that fantasy of change which lies at the heart of contemporary narrative. That this potentiality conflicts with the emblematic meaning of the scene—its inscription within the conventional moral allegory of the "Town"—represents a contradiction, of course, yet one with which the eighteenth century itself was at home. By turning to the spectacular, secretive figures of carnival, the novelists of the period reenacted a larger collective flight into theatricality. The novel of masquerade is also, finally, an epitome of the culture in which it flourished—a mark of eighteenth-century England's own ambivalent escape from consistency, transparency, and the claims of an otherwise pervasive decorum.

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Notes

¹ On Mary Wortley Montagu's fondness for masks and masquerades, see Halsband 185. Writing to Horace Walpole in 1741, Horace Mann speaks enthusiastically of the outdoor carnivals of Florence (1: 97).

² Typical masquerade tales include Eliza Haywood's *Masqueraders; or, Fatal Curiosity* (London, 1724), her history of Erminia in *The Female Spectator*, 3rd ed. (London, 1750), 32–35, and an anonymous "Affecting Masquerade Adventure" (*Gentleman's Magazine* Dec. 1754). The masquerade was also a popular dramatic topos: Benjamin Griffin's *Masquerade; or, An Evening's Intrigue* (1717), Charles Johnson's *Masquerade: A Comedy* (1719), the anonymous *The Masquerade; or, The Devil's Nursery* (1732), Fielding's *Miss Lucy in Town* (1742), Francis Gentleman's *Pantheonites* (1773), and Hannah Cowley's *Belle's Stratagem* (1781) are representative masquerade plays and farces.

³ Only two recent critics have looked in any detail at eighteenth-century masquerade scenes—David Blewett, in his chapter on *Roxana*, and Robert Folkenflik. Both take a somewhat limited and unproblematic view of the episode, however, and discuss only its emblematic significance—as a trope for the corrupt "Town." They pass over its peculiar narrative functions as well as its ultimately destabilizing thematic effects.

⁴ This argument pervades *Rabelais and His World*, but see in particular the introduction and chapter 1, "Rabelais in the History of Laughter."

⁵ On the varieties of masquerade dress, see the dissertation by Aileen Ribeiro, the costume historian, and her illustrated essay in *An Elegant Art. Horace Walpole's Correspondence* contains numerous descriptions of costumes worn at contemporary masquerades; see also the *Weekly Journal* 25 Jan., 8 Feb., and 18 April 1724; the *Universal Spectator* 5 April 1729; *Gentleman's Magazine* June 1769, Feb. 1771, Jan. 1773, and April 1774; and *Lady's Magazine* Feb. 1773.

⁶ On the persistent association between the masquerade and illicit forms of sexual behavior see my essay "Eros and Liberty." The moralistic diatribe against the masquerade lasted throughout the century. Typical of the attacks were the Bishop of London's *Sermon Preached to the Societies for the Reformation of Manners* (London, 1724), Fielding's poetic satire *The Masquerade* (London, 1728) and *Charge to the Grand Jury* (1749), and the anonymous pamphlets *The Conduct of the Stage Consider'd, with Short Remarks upon the Original and Pernicious Consequences of Masquerades* (London, 1721) and *Essay on Plays and Masquerades* (London, 1724).

⁷ According to contemporary accounts, attendance at Heidegger's weekly masquerades at the Haymarket averaged about seven hundred persons. Later in the century masquerades became larger still: *Town and Country Magazine* for May 1770 reports that twelve hundred gathered for a masquerade at Carlisle House on 7 May and that "near two thousand persons" had attended an assembly at the Pantheon the month before. Besides Horace Walpole and Mary Wortley Montagu, celebrated devotees included George II and numerous members

of the English aristocracy and, later in the century, Garrick, Goldsmith, Burney, and Boswell.

⁸ For Addison's satiric comments on masquerade "promiscuity" see the *Spectator* 8 and 101 (Addison and Steele 1: 35–38, 1: 423–26) and the *Guardian* 154 (*Tatler and Guardian* 225–26).

⁹ Grete Ek comments on this subversion of sex roles (though without specifically connecting it with the masquerade).

¹⁰ R. S. Crane's comments in his classic essay on *Tom Jones* typify critical displeasure: he suggests that it is impossible not to be "shocked" by Tom's entanglement with Lady Bellaston and that the masquerade episode as a whole represents one of the "faults" of Fielding's novel. Crane complains in particular about the inconsistency in the characterization. "It is necessary, no doubt," he writes, "that [Tom] should now fall lower than ever before, but surely not so low as to make it hard to infer his act from our previous knowledge of his character . . . ; for the moment at least, a different Tom is before our eyes" (127).

¹¹ In the preface to *Amelia*, Fielding announces that his work is "sincerely designed to promote the cause of virtue, and to expose some of the most glaring evils, as well public as private, which at present infest the country" (12). J. Paul Hunter, among others, has commented on the hypertrophy of didactic intention in *Amelia* (see ch. 9 of his book).

¹² Barbara Babcock discusses the complex role of the carnivalesque in *Madame Bovary*.

¹³ On the increasing commercialization of the world of popular entertainment in the eighteenth century, see J. H. Plumb and Peter Burke.

¹⁴ Late set pieces include the masquerade scenes in Edgeworth's *Belinda* (1801) and Pierce Egan's *Life in London* (1821). On the Continent, where carnival tradition itself had a longer life, the masquerade remains a fictional topos well into the nineteenth century: notable scenes occur in Balzac, in *La Peau de chagrin* (1831) and *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes* (1843), and in Flaubert, in *L'Education sentimentale* (1869). The masquerade scene makes interesting vestigial appearances too in nineteenth-century operas. Verdi's *Un Ballo in maschera* (1859) remains the best-known "masquerade opera," but other works also invoke the topos—Johann Strauss's *Der Carneval in Rom* (1873), *Die Fledermaus* (1874), and *Eine Nacht in Venedig* (1883); Heuberger's *Der Opernball* (1898); and Neilsen's *Maskarade* (1906). Twentieth-century writers return to the masquerade scene primarily in the context of exoticism or self-conscious nostalgia. A striking costume ball occurs in Lawrence Durrell's *Balthazar*, in *The Alexandria Quartet* (1962), while in Brigid Brophy's *The Snow Ball* (1964), characters attend a sixties London masquerade party, dressed in eighteenth-century (Mozartean) costume. In Isak Dinesen's posthumously published "Carnival" (1977), erotic intrigues develop among eight persons on the night of the Copenhagen opera masquerade ball.

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