Chapter One

Introducing the Masquerade

One of the cultural forms that had rapidly risen into prominence and had found a place in the social and literary discourses was the masquerade. Mentioned by Addison as early as in 1714, the masquerade infiltrated the social imagination in such a way that Alexander Pope wrote to Lady Mary Wortley Montagu in 1717: “For the news in London I’ll sum it up in short; we have masquerade at the theatre in the Haymarket …”.¹ The interest was to be transformed into a frenzy in the second and third decades of the century. Heidegger’s masquerades at Haymarket attracted crowds in thousands. Newspapers ran series of advertisements for masquerades leading Walpole to complain, “histories of masquerades … take up the people’s thoughts … supply the place of politics”.²

The “Midnight Masque” entered as an integral part of the cultural iconography of the period and was consequently reflected in paintings like Hogarth’s The Harlot’s Progress or Marriage à la Mode. Its impact on literature in general and the novel in particular was enormous. Plays like Benjamin Griffin’s The Masquerade or An Evening’s Intrigue were wholly set in masquerades, while references to the “Midnight Masque” formed episodes in Tom Jones, Roxana, and The Rape of the Lock among others. This introductory chapter aims to trace the development of the eighteenth century masquerade, the reasons for its popularity and the deeper cultural concerns that it embodied.

The phenomenon was essentially a pan-European one. As a costumed public festivity it was popular in Italy from the sixteenth century. The masquerade ball was held for members of the upper classes in Venice
and was associated with events and rituals of marriage and court. In fact, Venice till date retains its popularity of elaborate masks. In France, masked balls were initially held several times at the opera. It proved so popular that the *Comédie Française* began holding its own masked balls daily in 1716. It led the poet René de Bonneval to comment:

> This shepherdess, so simple in her clothes and in her manners, is perhaps a princess who wants to relieve herself for the evening of the respect that is owned her rank. This other woman, whose glittering outer announces a distinguished person is nevertheless nothing but a bourgeoisie who aspires to attract the attention of the highest lords.\(^3\)

By dispensing with artificial barriers and restraints such masquerades provided a formal framework for individuals of different classes, sexes and ages to mingle and interact.

The word masquerade may be traced to the Arabic word *mashkara* (‘laughing stock’ or buffoon) or the French word *masquerer* (to ‘blacken the face’ and therefore to conceal one’s identity). Other parallels could be the Latin *macula* or ‘spots’ and the Spanish *mascarades* (individuals dressed as devils). The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the masquerade as “a type of party where people wear special costumes and masks over their faces to hide their identities”.\(^4\) Masquerades were lavish entertainments that incorporated masking, feasting, music and dancing. The impetus for masquerades varied – they were held in honor of royalty, to celebrate special occasions or even as displays of pomp. Whatever be the occasion, masquerades were always festive, carnivalesque and full of delight. In England the masquerade was made popular during the spectacular court entertainments of Charles II. However these masquerades
were exclusively aristocratic events that included masking, feasting and dancing. John James Heidegger enjoys the credit of having introduced masquerade ball as a public entertainment to eighteenth century London, with the first being held at Haymarket Opera House in London. Records show that anybody could enter these masquerades with a ticket and they were patronised by prime ministers and prostitutes. The popularity of the masquerade reached a crescendo in the eighteenth century all across Europe, but by 1800, the vogue had subsided. The masquerade was often seen as a space of license and intrigue, both erotic and political. In 1792, King Gustav III of Sweden was assassinated while attending a masquerade.

Often referred to as “the World Upside-Down”, the masquerade provided its participants a space to transcend or redefine their identities. Issues of class, gender, sexuality and role-reversal were all tangled up within the confines of the ball-room. Instead of being a formal party with sophisticated exchanges, this was more a space of freedom from societal bindings. To participate in a masquerade being masked and therefore, in disguise was mandatory. The masks could be removed after the supper meal. This notion of being masked and therefore in hidden identity facilitated the attendee to let loose his or her instincts. The most frequently visible and popular masquerade costume was the domino – a dark loose cloak, mostly provided with a hood that served as the mask. Used by both the sexes, this costume represented intrigue, adventure, conspiracy and mystery – the four elements that formed a distinct part of the masquerade atmosphere.5

Elements of the masquerade can be traced back to classical Greece and Rome; but masked entertainments rose in prominence during the medieval carnivals exploring the joyous, the grotesque and the anti-authoritarian impulses. The eighteenth century masquerade also drew copiously from traditional rural festivals including Maypole dances and
Halloween. The Jubilee masquerade at Ranelagh Gardens in 1749 included characters like a “Maypole dress’d with gardens … Hobby Horses, Mad Tom, Merry Andrew, Punch, Tiddy Dole deers and bears”. The masquerade was thus successful in bringing together the classical and the indigenous traditions of the carnival. Bakhtin’s study of the medieval carnival draws attention to several motifs that the masquerade drew upon — sartorial exchange, masking, collective verbal and physical license, an unbridled atmosphere of extreme joy combined with the “temporary suspension of all hierarchic distinctions and barriers among men … and the prohibitions of usual life”. We shall of course return to the issue of the carnivalesque in our analysis of the masquerade, but it is worthwhile to note that the eighteenth century phenomenon was a more urban phenomenon with its own dynamics.

Critics have often drawn parallels between the Jacobean masque and the eighteenth century masquerade. The Jacobean masque was a lavish courtly form, sharing with the masquerade opulence and a masked motif. But the parallels end there. The masque was a very sophisticated phenomenon strictly reserved for the aristocrats and courtly circle. Moreover, it involved a number of characters, a rudimentary plot, elaborate sets and dialogues. Entry to the masque was extremely restricted and it would always end with a rigid championing of order and ideology. The Elizabethan and Jacobean masques were part of the cultural apparatus used to establish a powerful circulation of ideology, to create a viable myth concerning the sacred status of the monarch and the court. The indoor masque took place on special occasions, especially the Christmas season before a select audience of royalty and aristocrats. Although scattered examples exist in the Tudor era, masques became a fixture in the Stuart court, partly due to the active interest and support of the first Queen Anne and the Queen Henrietta Maria. Masques included dazzling technical
effects, daring music and drama based chiefly on allegory, mythology and classical traditions. Typically, the masque dissolved into the audience’s participation in a dance. Ben Jonson identified the ideological overtones of the masque in “An Expostulation with Inigo Jones” where he refers to it as “the spectacle of State / Court Hieroglyphics”. The masque, as Jonas A. Barish observes:

represents a society not so much aspiring after, as joyfully complimenting its own being, the possession of the blessings it considers itself to have achieved. The compliments to the king … are one’s expression of this self-congratulation on the part of the community. To eulogise the king is to congratulate the society, of which the king is figurehead, for the communal virtues are symbolised in him.

Many of the characters of the masque were emblematic: in Jonson’s *The Masque of Queens* for instance, the characters are “Fame”, “Virtue” and “Terror”. Since the masque was performed before the king at Whitehall, “good fame” and “Virtue” would flatteringly represent attributes of the king. Many critics of the masque have read “Fame” as the king’s fame and Fame’s parent “Heroic Virtue” as a representation of King James I, armed against forces that would disturb his “soft peace” and reign.

The Elizabethan and Jacobean masques were part of a cultural apparatus used to establish a powerful circulation of ideology. Ben Jonson in his Panegyric Congratulatory to be read out to James I in 1603, observed that the court masque was designed to

present the figure of those blessings, with the wish of their increase and continuance, which this mighty kingdom now enjoys by the benefit of his most gracious majesty by whom
we have this glory of peace with the occasion of so great and power.\textsuperscript{10}

The content of masque was severely limited – a brief narrative punctuated by prayers for the health of the sovereign and the country, the happy closure, the dance, the imitations to the spectators to join the banquet and the final feast. The motif of spectacle and disguise were common to both the masque and masquerade forms. But the masque was a closed and controlled display of spectacular power within a rudimentary dramatic structure. It was a celebration of the establishment and a reiteration of continuity. The eighteenth century masquerade represented a more open and chaotic form where disguise was subversive, where authority and social codes were challenged. Terry Castle points out:

The Jacobean masque was an expression of an elite aesthetic culture, and a highly articulated, self conscious artistic fantasy. It was a performance and a performance for the few. In contrast, the eighteenth century masquerade, like the earlier holiday revel was an eminently unscripted, unstaged event. There was no audience, no privileged group of beholders. All participated, and all shared in an equal verbal and gestural freedom. The spirit of theatricality, though reigning everywhere, followed no explicit program, it was individualized and anarchic.\textsuperscript{11}

The eighteenth century masquerade was rather to borrow elements from the anti-masque which Bacon views in \textit{Of Masques and Triumphs}: “Depicts fools, satyrs, baboons, wild men, sprites … and the like”.\textsuperscript{12} The anti-masque would often present a world upside down, grotesque and subversive. However, the anti-masque was never a form complete in itself – it would be collapsed immediately into the vision of order that the masque envisaged.
The rise of the masquerade in the eighteenth century can be traced principally to three factors. The first was the Enlightenment thrust on a vigorous validation and pursuit of pleasure (Edward Young was to write: “What is the pulse of this busy world / The love of pleasure”). With the rapid evolution of a material culture, the masquerade was one of the many forms of entertainment that rose to the forefront. The rise of the metropolis facilitated this phenomenon – as opulence and prosperity spread, newer classes aspired to state a claim in luxurious forms of entertainment and the masquerade duly obliged.

Norman Holland links the rise of the masquerade to the increased Restoration toleration of false appearances. As L. A. Beaurline wrote: “The ladies and gentlemen of the Restoration liked a disguise above all things”. This is to be contrasted with the more conservative Renaissance idea that the “body represented the soul”. Holland links this change to scientific developments, specifically the “new physics” by means of which “mass and volume became part of nature”, colour or odour became part of a mere “appearance”. An awareness of the ultimate disguise of reality itself that the new science had revealed spawned a special interest in the tolerance of human disguising. Thus, the new science had led to an epistemological confusion that sanctioned the motif of masking.

Another important reason was specially linked to clothing and this involved the rapid blurring of class lines. With a new economy in notion, the sartorial coding that had led to class identity could be confused. This point would be elaborately analysed later; but at this point, it is suggested that this permitted the motif of masking.

The theme of masquerade and disguise as a motif had however arisen from the Renaissance onwards. In Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales* for example, physiognomy was often a true index of the soul of an
individual. Hence, the “gat tooth’d” face of the Wife of Bath could be an index to her identity. Norman Holland agrees that the Renaissance continued this tradition: “In Shakespeare’s day, the general feeling was that appearance reflects nature, that the body reflects the soul and ideally the outward appearance and the inner reality are the same … in the Restoration things were different”. However as Stephen Greenblatt has shown, the Renaissance had already moved towards a concealment and revision of identity through “an increased self consciousness about the fashioning of human identity as a manipulatable artful process”.

The Restoration furthered this problematisation of identity, one suspects, with the growing atmosphere of intrigue and deceit that was practised in court. Thus we note an increasing presence of disguise and masking in literature found its concomitant reflection in the rise of the masquerade as an institution. What it points to, is the complexity of the entire notion of human identity as emerged in the Restoration – all its basic categories – class, gender, rank were now being questioned.

The second important phenomenon facilitating the rise of the masquerade was the massive increase in trade and prosperity. With the flourishing of overseas trade, England witnessed a steady inflow of material and resources. As more and more people were drawn to the cities, class hierarchies were gradually becoming more fluid. The display of wealth in the spectacular masquerades at Haymarket bear testimony to Britain’s rising status as a superstar. On the other hand, the steady attraction of a larger clientele to the masquerade reflects the interest of the newer classes to fill the spaces hitherto reserved for the gentry. In France for example, as Amy Wyngaard points out:

members of the bourgeoise were becoming increasingly powerful, rapidly making large fortunes through speculation,
overseas trade and commerce. Even members of the lower classes found opportunity for financial gain during the turbulent years of the Law System (1716-1720) and stories of the dramatic rise of servants contributed to the widespread impression of significant social and economic flux. This sense of social confusion was compounded by the gradual effacement of the apparent distinctions between classes as members of the bourgeois and domestic servants were increasingly acquiring elegant clothing… once luxury items that only the aristocracy could afford.

An allied factor integrally related with the expansion of trade and commerce, was the gradual impact of colonial adventures. Marine ventures meant unlimited scopes for colonial expansion. This, in turn, required the mapping of these new territories and led to the rise of an elaborate literature of travel. These accounts might have been factually inaccurate and drew largely upon the imaginative, as Swift points out in *Gulliver’s Travels*. It nonetheless created a significant readership that was fascinated by the multiple images of the “other”. The masquerade costumes and representations bear testimony of colonial England’s obsession with this figure of the “other”. A complex dimension was also added by the practice of the “Grand Tour” that almost every member of affluent families undertook. The most popular costumes of the masquerade (the domino for instance) or the characters (Harlequin etc.) were all drawn from Italian and Spanish stereotypes. Joseph Spence for example, in *Letters from the Grand Tour* (1734) writes about the Italian’s “noble art of mimicking … the grand music parties on the bridges of Florence”. References were also made to the Venetian Carnival of 1687, which attracted a record of 30,000 visitors. The Bishop of London in 1724 drew attention to the masquerade as a European phenomenon, denouncing it as the machinations of a certain
“Ambassador of the Neighbouring Nation” and a “French plot to enslave true Englishman by encouraging licentiousness and Effeminacy”.  

Incidentally, both Heidegger (1659-1749) and Theresa Corneyls (1723-97) were foreigners. Heidegger was Swiss and Corneyls was born in Venice and was reputed to be a friend of Casanova. A new, aggressive and confident England was exploring the culture of the “other” and the masquerade was a trope that highlighted this interaction. As Castle points out:

The masked assemblies of the eighteenth century were in the deepest sense a collective meditation on ‘self’ and ‘other’ and an exploration of their mysterious dialectic … New bodies were superimposed over old … selves displaced supposedly new ones.  

In an interesting anecdote the Persian traveller Mirza Abu Taleb Khan narrates his experience of an English masquerade. Taleb was delighted to find a Prince of Persia on such an occasion but was amazed to discover an English gentleman donning a costume. Taleb’s amazement reflects the exact reproduction of many images of the Oriental and African “other” in such masquerades:

The English have an extraordinary kind of amusement, which they call a masquerade. In these assemblies, which consist of several hundred persons of both sexes, everyone wears a shorter veil or mask, made of pasteboard; and each person dresses according to his or her fancy. Many represent Turks, Persians, Indians and foreigners of all nations; but the greater number disguise themselves as mechanics or artists, and imitate all their customs or peculiarities with great
exactness. Being thus unknown to each other, they speak with great freedom, and exercise their wit or genius.\textsuperscript{23}

The salient features of the eighteenth century masquerades were the combination of spectacle and the displacement of social norms. It must be noted that the masquerade was a commercial enterprise, a marketed event and part of the new capitalistic world of public entertainment. They were advertised in newspapers and entry was by ticket only.

(Figure 1: A Masquerade Ticket)
Ticket prices were often low – a surviving 1744 ticket is priced only at five shillings. However, tickets could also be priced even up to four guineas. Although masquerades were mostly public events, private masquerades were often held in townhouses. Even here there were reports of gate crashers. It must however be noted that the public masquerade was almost exclusively a metropolitan venture. Unless there was a sizeable body of revelers, the elaborate arrangements would never have provided viable returns.

While entry was supposedly monitored, almost all classes including criminals, pickpockets and prostitutes jostled for space. Specific gardens and theatres were earmarked for these events and they presented an image of riotous excess and luxury. Horace Walpole’s description of the atmosphere of a masquerade is noteworthy here:

Nothing in a fairy tale ever surpassed the Ranelagh Jubilee masquerade of 1749. The amphitheatre was illuminated, and in the middle was a circular bower composed of all kinds of firs in tubs, from twenty to thirty feet high: under them orange trees, with small lamps in each orange, and below them all sorts of the finest auriculas in pots; and festoons of natural flowers hanging from tree to tree … There were booths for tea and wine, gaming tables and dancing, about two thousand persons. In short it pleased me more than anything I ever saw.

In another description Walpole notes that five hundred wax lights had almost reversed night into day, while two orchestras played simultaneously.

Such descriptions are illuminating. Each masquerade space allows a vast open area where free movement is possible. Moreover, the illumination is brilliant and serves to highlight the aura of the masked personalities. The
orange trees and the flower pots, the tea and wine, gaming tables and dancing would create an almost riotous impression of opulence and surrender to an almost unbridled element of excess.

Masquerade costumes as we have already seen, portrayed a range of “exotic otherness”. It could be a “congress of nations” with disguises including Turkish, Polish, Spanish, Circassian, American Indian, Siberian, Kamchatkan and even savage ones. John Tinney’s *Collections of Eastern and Foreign Dresses* (1750) and Thomas Geffrey’s *Collections of Dresses of Different Nations, Ancient and Modern* (1757) highlight what Ribeiro has called “a displacement of imperial fantasy and homage to otherness”.26 As Fielding was to write in *The Masquerade* (1728):

> In a wild confusion huddled lies
> A heap of incoherencies
> So here in one confusion hurl’d
> Seems all the nations of the world.27

Another category of masquerade dressing involved the fantastic. This included the witches, demons and hermaphrodites. Occasionally there were reports of masqueraders disguised as conjurers and even corpses. Animal costumes were often worn and particular favourites included the tiger and the jackal. There were picturesque disguises as well that included those of shepherds. Orange girls, flower dresses, soldiers and sailors. Classical mythology often supplied motifs for costume – Diana, Juno, Zeus and the other gods were imitated. The lower class disguises were common as well – chimney sweepers, housemaids and servants could be seen in the masqueraders with great regularity. Only rarely would one find sensational costumes. One such event was Lady Chudleigh’s appearance in a masquerade that shocked participants not by the existence of disguise but the absence of it – the Lady was nearly naked.28
What is suggestive in such accounts is the sartorial confusion that the masquerade presented. Like all social mores, clothing is also a discourse inscribing a person’s sex, rank, age and occupation – a semiotic process that possesses referential functions. In reversing this myth of the legible clothing, the masquerade was first destabilising the legible body and then the entire notion of identity.

The impact of the masquerade was undoubtedly magnified by the sharp sense of fuzzing of the sartorial codes in contemporary Europe. The hitherto obvious class distinctions were blurred, since even servants were increasingly acquiring elegant clothing. In the spectacle of the city street, an individual’s garments and accessories allowed for the most visible and effective conveyance of signs of real and desired success. Thus, the legibility of clothing emerges as a dominant theme in literary and artistic representation. In 1699 the public learnt that Breton’s servant François Nyon had gone so far as to bill his master, and had successfully pretended to be him for four days, selling off the contents of his master’s house in order to accumulate enough money to escape.29 Thus, a series of royal edicts concerning servants’ dresses were passed between 1717 and 1725. The edict of 1725 specifically suggested that servants were masquerading as masters freely in the public sphere, and specifically forbade servants to carry swords or to remove their shoulder knots, braids or other characteristic pieces of clothing. The English Gentlewoman informed its readers that in “your Habit is your modesty best expressed; your disposition best discovered. The Habit of the mind is best discerned by the state or posture of the body; the condition or the quality of the body by the Habit”.

The sartorial violation was accentuated by a violation in the speech pattern in a masquerade. Walpole in 1742 spoke about the “absolute freedom of speech” in a masquerade noting: “I took the English liberty of teasing whoever I pleased”.31 Masculine speech prerogatives – swearing,
cursing, obscenity, ribald jokes were often usurped by women. Addison complained that the rhetoric of masquerade was “pert Stile of the Pit Bawdry”.

Interestingly, there were often standard speech patterns for establishing contact. Introductory gambits included set phrases like – “I know you – Do you know me”; but these then dissolved into grotesque gestures like squeaking, caterwauling or cat-calling. An anonymous commentator observed that: “The first noise that strikes you Ears upon your entering the Room is a loud confused squeal! Like a consort of catcalls”. The masked assembly, the cacophony and the brilliant lights put together would indeed have provided a grotesque spectacle.

This was intensified by the enclosed space providing an opportunity for groping and a sense of contact. In Hogarth’s *The Masquerade Ticket* (1727) the claustrophobic huddling of bodies points to a new vocabulary of desire, which included touching, embracing, fondling, petting and impromptu dancing. In 1744, *The Gentleman’s Magazine* reported that a Haymarket masquerade had degenerated into a free-for-all when “the very instruments of harmony were not safe”.

The problem of the blurring of class categories was followed by another deep social anxiety – the entry of prostitutes and criminals. Since everybody had a mask and a ticket in an event entry was unmonitored, pickpockets had a field day. Inebriated men and women were picked clean. The collective license meant free entry for criminals and there were reports of mugging and even rape after the masquerade event. But the masquerade provided the most significant opportunity for prostitutes. As Sophie Carter has noted, prostitution was considered an integral part of the masquerade. In an interesting anecdote an anonymous pamphleteer wrote to Mother Needham, the infamous matron of a brothel:
The masquerade is so properly yours and so much your concern, that 'tis not your own child, 'tis your nursery … to you these Masquerades are the opportunity of the Stroke and Consummation of Business.36

One pamphlet of 1700 explicitly identified the mask as the modus operandi of the prostitute:

By the signs that the sexes hang out you may know their qualities or occupations and not making your addresses … a whore [is known] by the Vigor-mask; and a fool by Talking to her.37

The thousands from Drury Lane who frequented the masquerade, prompted Fielding to describe:

Below stairs hungry whores are picking
   The Bones of wild-fowl and chicken;
   And into some pockets convey
   Provisions for another day.38

Because the identity was concealed, homosexual and heterosexual activity could be practised at random. In representations by Hogarth, the masquerade becomes a haven for prostitutes and an arena of sexual license. Pamphlet after pamphlet warned about the danger of accosting prostitutes and venereal diseases at the masquerade. *The Midnight Rambler* in the 1770’s warned:

Behold that creature with a most exquisite shape, a form which enraptures might pronounce almost divine … See with what lovely skill she has decorated her lovely person! Be not deluded by the adder’s beauteous skin, lest when you hope for a consummation of joy, you feel the effects of its
envenomed dart … There is an object disgusting when known and strip’t of her borrowed plumes. That Herculean is decked out with patch, powder and paint, to ensnare the inexperienced youth or captivate the intoxicated rake.\textsuperscript{39}

The notorious publisher John Dunton maintained a monthly journal \textit{The Night Walker or Evening Rambles in Search of Lewd Women} (September 1696–March 1697) in which the protagonist, a Puritan reformer, masquerades as a man of fashion to catch prostitutes only to reveal to them, along with a constable’s truncheon and a Bible, his religious intentions.\textsuperscript{40} A commentator was to note:

It is Pastime wholly unlawful … an open scene of outrageous and flaming Debauchery, where Temptation is passionately courted, the wanton imagination indulged to the last degree, so that none who go there return from there chaste and lawful. The most virtuous and resolute Maid is by degrees softened and at lost dissolved into sensuality; these are the common and sad effects of the amorous intrigues and luscious indecencies usually practis’d by masquerades.\textsuperscript{41}

Presiding over the eighteenth century masquerade was the figure of Count Heidegger, who was frequently referred to as the “cock-bawd” of the Nation. Heidegger redesigned the Haymarket in 1713 and proceeded to market his masquerade with great gusto. He was a towering figure with a huge nose that became one of the stock phallic images of the time. In an oft quoted anecdote, Heidegger was called the ugliest face in the whole of London and he reputedly won a bet against Lord Chesterfield to this effect. Naturally this led to his parallel with the devil – a point highlighted by Pope in an unpublished fragment where he describes Heidegger’s encounter with Satan:
There he went to the side-board and call’d for much liquor
And glass after glass he drank quicker and quicker,
So that Heidegger quoth
Nay, saith on his oath
Of two hogsheads of burgundy Satan drew both.
Then all like an A – the Devil appear’d
And strait the whole table of dishes he clear’d
Then a friar, then a nun
And then he put on
A face all the company took for his own
Ev’n thine, O false Heidegger, who wert so wicked
To let in the Devil.⁴²

(Figure 2: The Devil leads a group of masqueraders while Heidegger watches from the balcony in Hogarth’s Masquerades and Operas, 1724)
The crucial notion was that the masquerade was displacing human identity. In concealing the self behind the mask, the basic criterion of the eighteenth century individual were all blurred. To masquerade was to assume false appearance and Efrat Tseëlon suggests:

Masquerade unsettles and disrupts the fantasy of coherent, unitary, stable, mutually exclusive divisions. Masquerade replaces clarity with ambiguity, certainty with reflexivity, and phantasmic construction of containment and closure with constructions that in reality are more messy, diverse, impure, and imperfect. The masquerade in short, provides a paradigmatic challenge … to dualistic difference between essence and experience.43

Within its paradigm the concepts of name, class, gender, clothing, language, gesticulation were all dissolved into a zone of chaotic intermixing. Viewed theoretically, the mask was thus an “involvement shield”, a portable bodily accessory that by obstructing visual and linguistic contact, promoted an unusual sense of freedom in the person wearing it. Goffman for instance, views it as the shield behind which “individuals safely do the kind of things that ordinarily result in negative sanctions – a physical detachment that entails a moral detachment as well”.44 Catherine Gallagher likewise emphasises the mask’s ultimate power to defer true knowledge of what lies behind it. She argues that the “mask that hides the face signals the availability of the body but also implies the impenetrability of the controlling mind.”45 Laura Rosenthal, following Gallagher, offers a compromise position: “The mask”, she concludes, “signifies two contradicting forms of sexual positionality: it signifies a sexual being in control of her identity and seeking her own pleasure.46
The *quidditas* of the masquerade was its reversal of the self. Disguising or masking one’s own identity was mandatory and mostly participants dressed as far as possible from their station. Their dress spoke the reverse of what they were. Thus, a commentator notes:

I found Nature turned topside-turvy, … Women changed into Men, men into Women, children in Leading-strings, seven Foot high, Courtiers transformed into Clowns, Ladies of the Night into Saints, People of the first Quality into birds, Gods or Goddesses.\(^{47}\)

Castle stresses that “it was both a personal abdication from the responsibilities of identity and a group abdication from the strictures of the social order itself.”\(^{48}\)

The response was unequivocally critical. *England’s Vanity* in a nostalgic tone asks:

what is now become of the Moderation in apparel that formerly hath been in this land? When everyone went habited according to their orders and Degrees whereas now Gold, Silver, Velvet, Satin, Fine Cambrick, and other such costly things are worn by very Mean Persons against the Laws of God and Man.\(^{49}\)

The vizard, by hiding the face was seen as encouraging vice. Thus the vizard became the emblem of “fatal liberty of this masquerading age”.\(^{50}\) Masks like beauty patches, became signs of the corruption of the women who wore them. As Richard Ames wrote:

Not Turks by Turbans, Spaniards by their Hats
Nor *Quakers* by their diminutive *caravats*
Are better known, than is the *Tawdry Crack*
By Vizor Mask and Rigging on her Book

... The proper use of Vizors was once made
When only worn by such as own’d the trade
Though now all mingle with them so together
That you can hardly know the one from the other.  

There was an eventual backlash against masking— the justice of Middlesex ruled in 1698 that “women frequenting the playhouses in masks, tended much to debauchery and immorality”.

Masking and the concealment of identity were also held in deep suspicion by both religious and political standards. The arch masquerader Satan, had concealed his identity to lead to the fall. In Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, Satan masquerades to conceal his despair:

> Thus while he spake, each passion dimmed his face
> Thrice changed with pale, ire, envy and despair,
> Which marred his borrowed visage, and betrayed
> Him counterfeit; if any eye beheld.
> For heav’nly minds from such distempers foul
> Are ever clear. Whereof he soon aware,
> Each perturbation smoothed with outward calm,
> Artificer of fraud; and was the first
> That practiced falsehood under saintly show.

Thus, the “borrowed visage” was seen as inherently concealing a corrupted interior and the masquerading of identity was associated with an evil motif.

Politically too, the masquerade was often used to signify cunning, deceit and corruption. The theme of equivocation had already outlined the possibilities of verbal masquerading, but in the late seventeenth century a
political diatribe explicitly attached puritans as masqueraders of virtue and Cromwell as Satan, masquerading as a King. A writer notes:

The Puritans are perpetual masqueraders, a sort of People always acting under a disguise, the greatest villainies, Rebellion, sacrilege and murder, under the specious Pretence of Reformation in Religion.\textsuperscript{54}

This is significant because it points out that the anti-masquerade rhetoric of the eighteenth century was not merely a reaction provoked by social morality, but one that was conditioned by a deeper political and theological suspicion of the motif of concealment of one’s identity.

Thus, the masquerade was a collective scene of displacement and subversion of human identity where the fantasies of transforming the self could be legitimately carried out. When one views this in context of wilful participation by purchasing a ticket, the problem becomes all the more interesting. Was the participant playing out his class, gender fantasies in such a masquerade? Was it a site of sexual liaison? Did it emerge as a site of employment for the prostitutes and criminals? The fluidity of the masquerade trope and its continuous process of exchange reveal the inherent instability of eighteenth century society as a society in transition.

Roger Caillois draws an interesting parallel between the masquerade and primitive, Shamanistic rites, both deriving their power from the deeply gratifying bodily sensation that the participants experience. He classifies it as a feeling of “ilinx” or vertigo where the rituals transport the participants into another world, in which time and space are magically altered. The masquerade in Caillois’s theory destroys the stability of perception and inflicts a kind of voluptuous panic upon an otherwise lucid mind. Caillois’s theory raises the interesting point about the masquerade inventing a
suspended time and space for itself where the participants subvert all rules with mutual consent.\textsuperscript{55}

Bakhtin’s analysis of the carnivalesque has often provided a theoretical understanding of the masquerade. In \textit{Rabelais and His World}, Bakhtin sees the carnival as a “world upside down” where the endless, joyful form of ritual spectacle creates:

the potentiality of an entirely different world, of another order, of another way of life ... and brings human beings out of the confines of the apparent unity, of the indisputable and stable.\textsuperscript{56}

Bakhtin sees this fascinating space as a site of subversion that questions all modes of social behavior — class, gender and hierarchy. As he points out:

People who is life are separated by impenetrable hierarchical barriers enter into a free and familiar contact on the carnival square. Carnival is the place for working out \ldots \textit{a new mode of interrelationship between individuals}.\textsuperscript{57}

The carnivalesque, for Bakhtin, is essentially a liberating moment that releases the heteroglossic possibilities of social communication, makes it possible to extend the narrow sense of life releasing new potential, promoting “renewal and enrichment”\textsuperscript{58} and initiating multiple voices where each retains its own unity and open totality, therefore mutually enriched.

One of the seminal aspects of these carnivals is the constant mutability and foregrounding of the material body, suggesting its openness and physicality. The theme of masking thus was practised at carnivals as they “represented a material bodily whole and therefore transgressed isolated existences. The private and the universal were still blended in a contradictory unity”.\textsuperscript{59}
While the carnival was itself a subversive and open form, it fell back upon certain dominant components. Bakhtin classifies these components into three categories — ritual spectacles, comic verbal compositions and various genres of *billingsgate*. What the carnival challenges therefore, is not merely the social representation of language. Sue Vice points out that Bakhtin’s notions can be categorised under three basic categories:

- a) Carnival is a ‘pageant without any footlights and without a division into performers and spectators’ as its participants do not watch but ‘live in it’…

- b) Carnivals allow ‘free and familiar contact between people’ who would usually be separated hierarchically and allows for ‘mass action’.

- c) Carnival *mésalliances* allow for unusual combinations: ‘the sacred with the profane, the lofty with the low, the great with the insignificant, the wise with the stupid’.  

The eighteenth century masquerade uses the carnivalesque in myriad ways. It borrows the spectacular nature of the carnival drawing its participants into one broad mass, where all are participants into one great moment of excess. It focuses on the material body through its masking, costumes, food, drink and sexual suggestiveness. As a space it is a subversive and open arena where the moral hierarchies of society are loosened.

But the one most important aspect that we have already witnessed is the possibility of contact across all possible classes. Because of its masked nature and its entry by ticket, the masquerade did not bar anybody. Thus, the prostitute could rub shoulders with the aristocracy, the politician with
the pickpocket. The collapse of gender was also a possibility because of the rampant cross-dressing. The plethora of costumes meant the unusual combinations of action could be initiated — a priest engaged in lechery, the oriental in discourse with the coloniser. The potential of the exchange was thus enormous. The vibrant energies of the carnival were thus opened up with a host of possibilities in an atmosphere marked by excess.

The subversion of language was also another important aspect of the masquerade. The innocuous “Do you know me?” was marked by deep ambiguity. Since identities were cloaked, knowing was an impossibility and this led to endless possibilities of “knowing”, often marked by sexual partnerships. As we have already seen, language often degenerated into a cacophony of laughter, chaos, catcalls and innuendoes releasing the primeval energies, ultimately leading to a subversion of all orders in language, degenerating into billingsgate. Thus, the masquerade reflects all forms of language caught between two opposing forces, one that creates change and diversity and one that imposes stasis and uniformity.

As Robert Stam explains the masquerade problematises the sign, the very semiotics of social behaviour:

> the dominant class struggles to make the sign unaccentual and to endow it with an eternal supraclass character while the oppressed strive to deploy language for their own liberation.61

However, Bakhtin makes an important distinction between the medieval carnival and its traces in eighteenth century rococo representation. As he points out:

> Carnival forms serve a different role in rococo literature. Here the gay, positive tone of laughter is preserved. But
everything is reduced to ‘chamber’ lightness and intimacy. The frankness of the marketplace is transformed into erotic frivolity, and gay relativity becomes skepticism and wantonness. And yet, in the hedonistic ‘boudoir’ atmosphere, a few sparks of the carnival fires ... have been presented. In the setting of gloomy seriousness so widespread in the eighteenth century, rococo perpetuated after a fashion the traditional carnivalesque spirit.62

The marketing strategies of the masquerade, the elaborate spectacles and the enclosed nature of the masquerade has its proximities with the rococo but the energy and the subversion of the masquerade bring it closer to the carnivalesque.

The critical response to the masquerade with its entire spectacular extravaganza, can be best visualised in Hogarth’s detailed painting of The Masquerade Ticket (1727).

(Figure 3: Hogarth’s Masquerade Ticket, 1727 showing the lecherometers)
The enclosed nature of the masquerade with the crowded assembly jostling together is represented with a variety of costumes. What is interesting is the satirical reversal of certain minute details. The unicorn and the lion at the top centre recline on the clock in the relaxed masturbatory posture, thus drawing attention to the “libidinous assembly”. The hands of the clock are titled “Wit” and “Impudence” and the pendulum is entitled “Nonsense”, highlighting the subversive nature of the masquerade. The chief satirical indicators are the two gigantic “lecherometers” on either side of the hall which measure the development of mounting passion from “Expectation” to “Hope” to “Hot Desire”. On the right is a classical stature of a woman and a cherub aiming its arrow at the participants. On the left the figure of Time carrying his scythe reaches for an antler or an altar. As he does so, a man behind him grabs hold of his wing and wields an axe, and a figure in front of him stabs, the blood from the wound being collected in a bowl.

The iconographic details are revealing of the contemporary attitude to the masquerade. The stabbing of Time foregrounds the sense of suspension of time whereas the detail of Cupid’s arrows illustrates the idea of the masquerade as a zone of erotic license. The lecherometers, the pendulum, the lion and the unicorn create the sense of a descent into a primeval chaos. In an earlier painting *Masquerades and Operas* (1724) the same critical attitude is noteworthy. A group of masqueraders are led by the Devil into the long room at Haymarket as Heidegger watches from the window above. The procession has strong echoes of condemned prisoners led onto the last row of Tyburn tree and therefore echoes of eternal damnation. In fact, Hogarth’s fascination with the masquerade continues in *The Harlot’s Progress*. Here the harlot deceives her elderly keeper by taking another lover. She proceeds to deceive her keeper by creating a distraction while the younger lover escapes. What is significant is the mask
that lies on her table, along with the accessories of the masquerade. Quite
obviously, Hogarth associates the masquerade with prostitution and deceit.

(Figure 4: The second plate of Hogarth’s *A Harlot’s Progress*, 1734)

As Sophie Carter points out:

The white mask and a masquerade ticket lie on the dressing table in the left hand ... and a discarded masquerade costume lies crumpled in the right hand corner, so that the Harlot makes her debut as Harlot — as opposed to the representation of the potentiality and imminence of her fall in Plate I, literally within a frame of masquerade references ... these detects function in both a narrative and an emblematic capacity to articulate the whorish duplicity of the newly made harlot ... More generally she flouts society codes of virtue and feminine decorum by appropriating a birthright
and which is entirely at odds with her moral condition. Her sumptuous clothing and surroundings are here equated with the mask which lies on her dressing table, and render little more than a facade of gentility. Masquerade is at once the condition of the Harlot’s existence and its condemnation.63

The sheer number of Hogarth’s paintings dealing with the masquerade reflects a duality within the artist. On the one hand it had seeped so intrinsically into the culture that he could no longer ignore it. On the other hand, the sharp moral confusion that it created demanded his critical condemnation. In fact, Hogarth was not the only artist to carry this duality. In an anonymous print of 1724, the forcers of the masquerade parade on the London streets until they are destroyed by the triumvirate of Britannia, Wisdom and Piety while Hercules chains a restive crowd of masqueraders and cudgels a supplicating Heidegger.

(Figure 5: Anonymous print of 1724 depicting the destruction of the masquerade)
Clearly this print treats the masquerade not merely as an arena of sexual license, but a genuine law and order problem to the English nation. So pervasive is its impact, that the mythological Hercules is called to control this force which is treated as antithetical to Wisdom and Piety. These iconic portrayals adumbrate the numerous edicts and pamphlets that called for the closing down of masquerades. Clearly the artists were fascinated by the rich artistic potential of such masquerades and the anti-masquerade rhetoric influenced them to condemn the institution in either direct or oblique terms.

Sexual categorisation was another system of coding that was challenged by the masquerade. In an interesting anecdote in *Fanny Hill*, the protagonist recounts her cross dressing as a body to be accosted by a sailor seeking a homosexual favour. The high frequency of narrative cross-dressing in the eighteenth century shows that the categories supposed to define identity, of which gender was one, were no longer perceived as stable. There are records of even the Prime Minister Robert Walpole visiting the masquerade as a woman. Marjorie Garber points out that “transvestism” not only problematises the categories “male” and “female” but implies “much more disquietingly – a crisis of ‘category’ itself”. With the rise of the public sphere and its exclusive control by the male, the transvestite female at the masquerade was thus seen as a threat to the patriarchal set up.

Interestingly, in contemporary representations, it is always the woman who is represented as dressing for going to a masquerade. As Carter has pointed out, eighteenth century London society was witnessing deepest anxiety about the transition of the woman in a society in a flux. The extent of this anxiety was manifested in the debate on the woman entering the public sphere with a significant amount of energy. Thus an entire gamut of literary debates was initiated — for example on feminine virtue (*Pamela*),
female sensibility (Cecilia) and female education (Mary Wollstonecraft). The construction of the female self was defined in terms of a lack of intelligence and susceptible to exterior allurements. The woman was thus seen as a compulsive masquerader. Even the use of toilette was seen as a refashioning of identity clearly to incite erotic chaos.

This aspect is explicitly elucidated in the satiric mock-heroic description of Belinda amidst the glittering array of make-up items:

> From each she nicely culls with curious Toil  
> And decks the Goddess with the glitt’ring spoil  
> This Casket India’s glowing Gems unlocks.  
> And all Arabia breathes from yonder Box.  
> The tortoise here and Elephant unite  
> Transform’d to Combs, the speckled and the white.

It cannot conceal but the moral muddle as she mixes “Puffs, powders, patches, bibles, billet-doux”. The theme of transforming her beauty is negated by Clarissa through whom the patriarchal voice speaks:

> But since, alas! frail Beauty must decay,  
> Curl’d or uncurl’d, since locks will turn to grey,  
> Since painted, or not painted, all shall fade,  
> And she who scorns a Man, must die a Maid.

This situation is rather interesting as it conflates within itself multiple questions — what happens to female virtue in a rapidly changing material world? Where does the woman fit into the public sphere? To what extent can her desire to transform her identity be allowed? It is here that conceptually and physically, the masquerade was seen as a threat. As the author of *The Character and Conduct of the Female Sex* announces:
Little indeed do those women consult either their own interest, or the reputation of their sex, who enter eagerly into the bustle of mode, obtrude themselves upon the glittering throng, and sacrifice the decent reserve, and intellectual attainments ... to the passion for dress, and visiting and splendour, and prattling and cards and assembles and masquerade without end. 

Significantly, what is happening here is that the event of the masquerade becomes a point of entry into the general nature of the woman as rake and masquerader. In this approach the masquerade became a site of danger as well as anxiety where the woman could go unescorted. Thereby, the women were seen as naturally attracted to the masquerade.

This gendered enthusiasm was endorsed in visual print culture through a repetitive portrayal of women absorbed in narcissistic pre-masquerade self-adornment. Numerous prints show including Miss Rattle dressing for the Pantheon and Lady Betty Bustle and her maid Miss Lucy preparing for the masquerade at the pantheon (both by Carnington Bowles, dated 1722). Both intrude the private space of the boudoir to depict women applying finishing touches to their fancy dress. In the latter image, class distinction is erased, as both lady and maid are galvanised by the promise of the masquerade tickets which lie enticingly upon the dressing table. Moreover, the very name Miss Rattle suggests the frivolous nature of the masquerade enthusiast. Rowlandson’s later print Dressing for the Masquerade (1790) (Figure 6) is interesting in its iconography — dense with details of mirrors, cosmetics and beauty aids, elaborate costumes and the various states of undress, they articulate the fervent, almost compulsive female enthusiasm for dress and display.
The very disorder of the packed room indicates the physical energy which these women have invested in their masquerade preparations — a chair is kicked over, clothing and boxes are strewn in the feverish bustle. It is as if these women are mesmerised and hypnotised by their own reflections. Their facial gestures replicate the lecherous delight that betray their sexual desires. Such engravings raise several questions: Do these women dress purely for their own pleasure, or to incite that of the male spectator? Do they revel in their independence and sexual license? What is also interesting is that despite equal participation of the sexes, there is no single print representing the male fascination for dressing for the masquerade. Additionally, women who visited the masquerade were seen as compromised. The masquerade was therefore, frowned at with a deep sense of unease, a site that promoted vice and was chaotically independent for women.
The British novel shared a problematic relationship with the masquerade. Both were forms that were establishing themselves as part of popular entertainment in the period. Essentially, both were democratic in allowing participation from the widest range of readership. In terms of characterization and participation, the novel drew upon characters from all social and moral realms, mingling the moral with the immoral, the sacred with the profane. Its structure, identical to that of the masquerade, was open and dialogical. In terms of language, the novelist drew upon accents and subversive billingsgate from various sources. Like the masquerade, one of the dominant themes of the novel was desire and sexuality. The central energy of the novel was love and the acquisition of property. From Richardson’s Pamela to Fielding’s Tom Jones, the novel engaged in a probing of sexual anxiety and fulfilment. Interaction across classes was also an aspect of the novel — maid servants wedding their masters for instance, and foundlings wedding heiresses were staple plots. In opposition to the romance plots, the novels thus highlighted disruptions in the social fabric; chartering energetic individuals who challenged hierarchies and conventional ideas of love and wisdom. As Tony Tanner points out:

the novel has always dramatized a larger cultural conflict between moralistic and transgressive imperatives, equanimity and adventure, the desire for bourgeois stability and the subversive fascination with change and novelty. The genre gains its particular narrative urgency from an energy that threatens to contravene the stability of the family. The orphans, prostitutes and adventurers act there as subversive forces. The plot depends on less stable and predictable realms: garden, road, and the city. It is necessary to move beyond the familiar, to take the transgressive step from the house of the father. 70
One of the dominant impulses of the novel is definitely a centrifugal force towards ideology but there is an equally powerful centripetal force towards transgression. It was this quality of transgression that brought the novel close to the masquerade.

The masquerade was a space in the plot that allowed therefore the novelist to bring disparate characters together, characters who would otherwise never have met. The novelists, to meet the exigencies of the plot, seized this feature of the masquerade. Often in the novels of the period (as we shall shortly see with Fielding), the plot reaches an impasse which only the intrigues at the masquerade can propel forward. Thus, in Todorov’s words they are agents through which “the plot progresses by destabilization of the ordinary;”71 and in Castle’s phrase they are “dense kernels”72 out of which the plot develops. Of course, one needs also to remember the racy and juicy accounts of masquerades in novels that were eagerly lapped up by an audience that regularly participated in such affairs. The pressures on the novelist were thus interesting: because the masquerade was such a dominant cultural trope, they could not ignore it. Because of its carnivalesque excess they were sites that added to the zest of the narrative and the popularity of their novels. The masquerades were spaces in the plot where disparate characters could meet, and the plot that had reached a point of stasis could be given a firm push.

The novelist’s ambiguous response to the masquerade was compounded by another significant problem. In usurping the first person narrative of the character from another class or gender, he or she too was in a way participating in the masquerade trope itself. When Daniel Defoe for instance, outlines the psychology of Moll Flanders or Roxana, he is forced to adapt the guise of the editor who sifts through the account of the prostitute. He is therefore the “pen employ’d” in finishing her story”.73 In this sense, is it a “true history” where Defoe is content “to leave the Reader
to pass his opinion upon the ensuing sheets. Defoe juggles with this problem of the two authorial selves — that of the narrator and the editor:

The considering reader of the book, may evidently see there are two strains in it — one the predicator who ventures to say things of great consequence — the other the writer or methodizer.75

Another point may be observed in Samuel Richardson’s case. In masquerading as Pamela (where the masquerading is twofold in terms of gender as well as class), Richardson denies that there are major differences: “the two sexes are too much considered as different species”.76 Hence, he too takes recourse to the editor and the narrator’s double mask. This masquerading allows empathy and distance at the same time, as the editor protects the author and prevents and identification with the supposedly inferior female discourse. The aim of this masquerade is not dissolution of the self or a “radical example of sympathetic identification”77 as Carson puts it, but a reassuring of the male self. Madeline Kahn coins the interesting term “narrative transvestism” for this process, which she defines as the technique by which a male author gains access to a culturally defined female voice and sensibility but runs no wish of being trapped in the devalued female realm.78

This problematic aspect could be extended further by citing the upper class/middle class novelist’s entry into the persona of the criminal (Colonel Jack, Jonathan Wild) or the prostitute (Moll Flanders, Roxana) where the question of editing language and situation arises substantially. Hence the novelist was placed in a piquant situation. He was acutely conscious that the masquerade was incorporated in the contemporary social iconography and had to be represented. It provided him the dense kernel from which multiple plot complexities could be generated or resolved. He
was conscious of his complicity in this trope in his donning the mask and stepping out of his gender/class/language roles. Yet, the force of the anti-masquerade rhetoric placed him at a critical distance where he had to bring out the cautionary implication of the masquerade. As a novelist, the carnivalesque potential of the masquerade excited him; as a patriarch its possibilities made him anxious. How is this dichotomy resolved for a male novelist? As a case study we would refer to Henry Fielding’s response in *Tom Jones* and *Amelia*.

During his career as a Justice of Peace for Westminster and Middlesex, Fielding actively pursued the suppression of masquerades. In June 1751, during his tenure as a magistrate he reprimanded a group of masqueraders when the High Constable of Westminster staged a midnight raid on an illegal assembly near Exeter Exchange. In his various tracts too, the masquerade is a stigmatised location where “Men and Women of loose Reputation meet in disguised Habits” and hence were “Temples of Drunkenness, Lewdness, and all Kinds of Debauchery”.  

In *Tom Jones* the masquerade occurs in Book XII, Chapter VI where Tom is offered a masquerade ticket by the ‘Queen of Fairies’. At this stage in the novel, Tom has just arrived in the city and the plot experiences a moment of stasis. The question of his parentage is not yet resolved; possibility of meeting Sophia too, is bleak. The masquerade trope at this juncture propels the plot forward.

Moreover, this masquerade is preceded by a didactic gloss. Mrs. Milner, one of the minor characters, criticises the masquerade as a corrupting influence. As she tells Mr. Nightingale, when she last took her daughter, “it almost turned her Head, she did not return to herself, or to her needle, in a month afterwards”.

When Tom visits the masquerade he is lured in by a lady in a blue domino – she provokes him by mentioning
Sophia’s name. Desperate in his search for Sophia, Tom follows her and she turns out to be Lady Bellaston. Tom’s conversation with Lady Bellaston reflects Fielding’s reaction against the masquerade:

You cannot conceive anything more insipid and childish than a Masquerade to the people of fashion, who in general know each other as well here as well there as when they meet in an Assembly or a Drawing room. In short the generality of persons whom you see here may properly be said to kill time in this place than in any other; and generally retire from hence more tired than from the longest sermon.  

Immediately after this, Lady Bellaston craftily seduces Tom and pours out gifts and money to entrap him in her clutches and Tom’s “necessity obliged him to accept them, so his honour, he concluded forced him to pay the price”. As R. S. Crane justifies, this breach is uncharacteristic and Tom here is “not himself”. Here Fielding seems to suggest how the masquerade transforms him. Later however, he pays a heavy price of losing Sophia’s favour. In this context, the masquerade is a site that generates corruption and chaotic sexual freedom. But, otherwise this masquerade is also a unique plot device that allows two characters Lady Bellaston and Tom to meet. Moreover, the events animated by the masquerade turns out to be advantageous to Tom. It is only when Tom is framed, that the lawyer Dowling is called to the case. It is Dowling who reveals Blifil’s plot and consequently the details of Tom’s parents. Thus, apparently an agent of Tom’s downfall, it also initiates his reinstatement. The moral ambiguity however remains—would Tom have rescued his position had he not visited the masquerade? Is the masquerade essentially evil or an agent for synthesis and resolution?
In *Amelia* the masquerade as a trope appears twice— the first is an interesting tale when the hapless Booth and Amelia are invited to a masquerade through Mrs. Ellison, the housekeeper. The tickets have been obviously sent by the Lecherous Peer. At this point Mrs. Bennett, the widow steps forward recounting her experience at the masquerade: “The pleasantness of the place, the variety of the dress… gave me delight… As I was entirely void of all suspicion, my mind threw off all reserve”. She was later invited to a concocted glass of wine which left her unconscious and she was raped by the Peer. She was consequently infected with the pox which passed to her husband who died after learning of her infidelity. The masquerade thus “involved me in the most dreadful sin”. The world of masquerade is satirised ruthlessly as part of the general satire against vice portrayed in the novel.

It is with this background that we approach the masquerade from the point of view of the female author. The novel was, after all, one of the forms accessible to the female author even before its formal inception. We would study this closely in the following chapter. Moreover, we would address what the eighteenth century woman novelist felt about the masquerade as a cultural phenomenon and also as a mood of being. Was she critical of the masquerade as her male counterparts or did she see it as a moment of assertion of identity? How was this theme developed in conjunction with the “woman question” throughout the eighteenth century? How did the female author respond to the representation of the masquerade? These questions will be discussed in the following chapter of the dissertation.
Notes

11. Castle, p. 19


22. Castle, p. 4.


28. In a letter of Mrs. Montagu to her sister, she says, “Mrs. Chudleigh’s dress, or rather undress, was remarkable; she was Iphegenia for the sacrifice, but so naked, the high priest might easily inspect the entrails of the victim. The Maids of Honour (not of maids the strictest) were so offended they would not speak to her”. Quoted in Sabine Baring-Gould, *Historic Oddities and Strange Events* (London: Adamant Media Corporation, 2006), p. 35.


34. *Gentleman’s Magazine*, 21st April, 1774, quoted in Castle, p. 37.


41. “The Conduct of the Stage Consider’d with Short remarks upon the Original and Pernicious Consequences of Masquerades” (1721), as quoted in Carter, p. 63.


48. Castle, p. 73.


Hippolita: … to tattle to your men under a vizard in the playhouses, and meet’em in masquerade.
Mrs. Caution: I know you would be masquerading: but worse would come on’t, as it has done to others who have been in a masquerade, and will not be their own women again as long as they live. The children of this age must be wise children if they know their fathers, since their mothers themselves cannot inform’ em! O the fatal liberty of this masquerading age.


63. Sophie Carter, p. 56.
72. Castle, p. 124.


**Figures**

Figure 1: A Masquerade Ticket, in Castle, p. 30.

Figure 2: William Hogarth, *Masquerades and Operas* (1724), in Castle, p. 65.

Figure 3: William Hogarth, *Masquerade Ticket* (1727), in Castle, p. 23.

Figure 4: William Hogarth, *A Harlot’s Progress* (1734) in Carter, p. 58.

Figure 5: Anonymous, The Destruction of the Masquerade (1724), in Castle, p. 97.

Figure 6: Thomas Rowlandson, *Dressing for the Masquerade* (1790), in Castle, p. 287.