

AMOROUS ENCOUNTERS IN THE SATIRICAL PRINT CULTURE OF THE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY LONDON MASQUERADE

ENCUENTROS AMOROSOS EN LA CULTURA SATÍRICA DE LAS MASCARADAS LONDINENSES DEL SIGLO XVIII

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Abstract

Masquerades dominated the culture of polite urban entertainment in eighteenth-century England, summoning London's *bon ton* to engage in dancing, dining, role-playing, and conversation while in disguise. The anonymity and enticement provided by masks and costumes turned the masquerade into a frequent narrative frame for the depiction of amorous encounters and assignations in Georgian literary and visual culture, especially in relation to women's behavior, morality, and presence in the public sphere during the nascent cult of sensibility. Satirical prints, widely consumed at this time, found this topic a particularly appealing one for the Georgian public's taste, denouncing and disseminating masquerade's moral perils for women. This article explores amorous encounters associated with the space of the masquerade as represented in Georgian print culture and how such visual narratives employed the figure of the female masquerader to define models of respectable or deviant femininity.

Keywords

Masquerade; print culture; satirical prints, women's representation; William Hogarth

Resumen

Los bailes de máscaras dominaron la cultura de entretenimiento del siglo XVIII inglés, reuniendo a la sociedad londinense para bailar, cenar, realizar juegos de identidad y conversar bajo una apariencia disfrazada. El anonimato y la fascinación por las

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máscaras y disfraces convirtió las mascaradas en un marco narrativo frecuente para la representación de encuentros amorosos en la cultura literaria y visual georgiana, especialmente en relación con el comportamiento, la moral y la presencia pública de las mujeres durante el naciente culto a la sensibilidad. El público de la época se vio atraído por las estampas y grabados –ampliamente consumidos en este período– que denunciaban y diseminaban los peligros morales de las mascaradas para las mujeres. Este artículo explora la representación de encuentros amorosos asociados con las mascaradas en la cultura de la estampa satírica georgiana y cómo estas narrativas visuales utilizaron la figura de la mujer enmascarada para definir modelos de feminidad.

Palabras clave

Mascarada; grabados; estampas satíricas; representación femenina; William Hogarth

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o.

In 1746, the enamel painter and friend of artist William Hogarth, Jean-André Rouquet, stated: «A husband whose wife goes to the masked ball without him is not a husband without apprehensions»². This reflection belonged to Rouquet's «Explication Des Estampes Qui on[t] pour titre Le Mariage á la Mode», part of a longer pamphlet published in London that constitutes the only contemporary account of Hogarth's major prints subjects authorized by the artist himself. The described series was an ensemble of six canvases painted three years earlier in 1743 and published as a set of prints in 1745. The tragicomic and melodramatic storyline was widely known to the Georgian public: a loveless arranged marriage, brought together by parental socioeconomic ambitions, and followed by innumerable misfortunes triggered by secrecy and deception. Rouquet's remark referred in particular to *The Bagnio*, the fifth and penultimate canvas in the series. The composition accounted for the tragic ending, and subsequent deaths, of the equally unfaithful Earl and Countess Squanderfield, as a consequence of the lady's amorous encounter with Counsellor Silvertongue at a masquerade.

Hogarth's series came to epitomize a perception of the masquerade widely spread amongst Georgian society and replicated by contemporary print culture: that of the masked ball as a space for riveting assignations and moral corruption, especially in relation to women's behavior and presence in the public sphere during the nascent cult of sensibility. Nonetheless, the reality of the masquerade's reputation was far more complex and certainly Janus-faced, as it was also seen by many as a key urban stage for the display of fashionability, status, and cultural legitimacy. That dichotomy translated into ambivalent and contrasted representations of women's presence and their amorous encounters at the masquerade in Georgian visual culture, some of which will be explored here to examine how artists and printers employed the figure of the female masquerader to define models of respectable or deviant femininity.

I.

Introduced around 1710 by the foreign impresario Johann Jakob Heidegger at the King's Theatre in Haymarket, London, the popularity of the so-called subscription masquerade grew rapidly from a novel and alluring divertissement to a major cultural phenomenon and institution of eighteenth-century British life. As a public, commercial assembly involving dancing, promenading, eating, and the adoption of disguises and masks, masked balls normally lasted until the early morning (Figure 1). They could be stand-alone events, or part of other public, royal, or diplomatic festivities. Hosted in architecturally enclosed venues, such as theatres, gardens, assembly rooms, or other entertainment spaces on designated days, they required a purchased ticket or subscription, along with the wearing of a mask and disguise. Either a domino, a type of Venetian-inspired loose hooded cloak worn over a fancy dress, or a character costume were usually accepted.

2. Rouquet, 1746: 39. English translation by W.B. Coley included in Lichtenberg, 2009: 129.



FIGURE 1. ASCRIBED TO GIUSEPPE GRISONI, A MASQUERADE AT THE KING'S THEATRE, HAYMARKET, 1724. OIL ON CANVAS, 24 X 27.8 CM. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

These etiquette demands often restricted the socio-economic level of the attendees to which they were opened, namely the aristocracy and upper classes³. On occasion, depending on the venue and host, masquerades could also be within the reach of the wealthy middling sorts, which actively participated in masquerading when possible, and even of less reputable publics such as high-end prostitutes, thieves, and rakes. As a result, social views on masquerades rapidly evolved and became highly fluctuating as the century advanced: members of the *bon ton* were regular attendees and conceived the events as a fashionable opportunity for self-display; meanwhile, public opinion, expressly moralists and intellectuals, ranted relentlessly about the corrupting social mingling, frivolity, and licentiousness that masquerades enabled. The destabilization of social distinctions within the deceitful and bewildering environment of masquerades came to be blamed for many of the social ills during the Georgian period, especially those concerned with the female sex.

During the initial rise of masquerades' popularity, George II's royal patronage of Heidegger and his approval of these events, which he was known to be extremely fond of, was shaken by public reactions against licentiousness. Gillian Russell explains how the novelty of masquerades lay in part in the laxity that it allowed for

3. For a thorough historical analysis of the socio-economic realities of the eighteenth-century London masquerade, see: Kobza, (2020): 161-181.

women, who were able to attend incognito and even unchaperoned, and indulge in self-display; thus, creating an innovative space of cultural and social agency for women⁴. This new cultural and social reality instigated a varied number of reactions. Several examples of anti-masquerade literature were published in the early 1720s, such as *The Conduct of the Stage Consider'd with Short Remarks upon the Original and Pernicious Consequences of Masquerades* (1721) and *Essay on Plays and Masquerades* (1724), followed by a famous sermon preached by the bishop of London in 1724. On the same year, the anonymous poem *The Masquerade* warned scornfully how easily wives could deceive their husbands under masquerading dress:

The spacious Dominoe defies
The cunning Reach of jealous Eyes,
Concealing Shape and Air;
The Wife, before her Husband's Face,
Might suffer her Gallant's Embrace,
Nor his Resentment fear⁵.

The perception of this moral loosening was also impacted by the reconceptualization of adultery in the early decades of the century. As a matter of fact, scholar David Turner demonstrates how by the 1730s legal prosecution of adultery was disappearing, the matter being viewed as an issue of «private vice»⁶. This decriminalization of marital infidelity spurred masquerading, with covered sexual assignations seen as riveting and amusing; but the nascent cult of sensibility, with family and married love at its core, responded to the taste for these celebrations. As argued by Terry Castle, anti-masquerade literature proliferated and certainly conditioned public opinion and visual culture⁷. The king reluctantly issued a proclamation against Heidegger in 1727, who changed the term «masquerades» to «galas;» and two years later the Grand Jury of Middlesex still insisted on eliminating these celebrations⁸.

2.

In the midst of these events during the decade of 1720, William Hogarth employed the trope of the masquerade as the context for a variety of satirical prints that further demonstrated the artist's acute perception of Georgian society's ills and taste. While the artist was not the first to engage with the subject, already a common literary trope during the first half for the century, his visual and narrative formulation of

4. Russell, 2007: 39.

5. Cited in Egerton, 1997: 41

6. Turner, 2002: 5-6.

7. Castle, (1983):156-176.

8. Russell, 2007: 39-40. «In 1750-51 bishops forced a ban on public masquerades after the Lisbon earthquake: in 1752 the Disorderly Houses Act, though it did not specifically refer to masquerades, became available as an instrument whereby the civil courts could control them...In the course of the century, therefore, the masquerade had come under the scrutiny of the monarch, the church and the civil courts: its regulation formed a domain in which these institutions could take out their authority, a domain increasingly complemented by that of print culture, in which masquerades were publicized, debated, and sometimes condemned».

the masquerade and its illicit encounters established a model for the representation of the female masquerader as adulteress or corrupted wife and mother that reverberated throughout the century's satirical print culture, a media particularly eloquent in conveying Georgian society's views of and concerns on women.

As early as 1727, Hogarth issued his ingenious and burlesque *Masquerade Ticket* (Figure 2), a satirical print ridiculing the popular entrance tickets required to access masquerades, which would later become the center of the action in his major series, *Marriage à-la-Mode*. While his first incursion into the topic of the masquerade a few years before had addressed matters of taste, here Hogarth concerned himself with the accusations of immorality and debauchery surrounding the events. The plate shows the royal crest turned into a salacious joke, crowning Heidegger as a clock administering «Nonsense», «Impertinence», and «Wit». The room is flanked by lecherous Priapus at an altar with cuckold antlers; by masked Venus and Cupid, pointing his arrows indiscriminately; and by two lecherometers «showing y^e Companys Inclinations as they approach 'em...invented for the use of Ladys and Gentlemen...» ranging from Expectation to Hot desire⁹.



FIGURE 2. WILLIAM HOGARTH, *MASQUERADE TICKET*, 1727, ETCHING AND ENGRAVING, 10,5 X 25,9 CM.
© The Trustees of the British Museum. Shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 licence

9. For details see high resolution image in the museum's online collection: William Hogarth, *Masquerade ticket*, 1727, etching and engraving, 20.5 x 25.9 cm. London: British Museum, Cc,1.89. Link to museum object: https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_Cc-1-89

After Hogarth's earlier exploration of the masquerade as artistic subject during the 1720s, the beginning of the decade of 1730s witnessed a critical moment in his career: the shifting of his creative and intellectual attention from portraiture to the invention of his modern moral subjects series. These painting cycles addressed scenes and moral narratives from contemporary life with a satirical overtone, intended to be engraved and published. In her thorough examination of Hogarth's work, Judy Egerton has highlighted about these how «the 'moral' element was heartfelt, but not exhortatory. He did not preach virtue; instead, he satirised vice and folly»¹⁰. In the intricacy of these painted storylines, the inventive attributes and emblems introduced by the artist were the key to the unfolding of the events and the characterization of the *dramatis personae* that populated them. Among these many props, symbols, and attributes, Hogarth incorporated a number of masquerade references that played a key role in conveying the nature and inclinations of their female characters and their sentimental relations.



FIGURE 3. WILLIAM HOGARTH, A HARLOT'S PROGRESS. PLATE 2, 1732, ETCHING AND ENGRAVING, 31,2 X 37,5 CM. © The Trustees of the British Museum. Shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 licence

10. Egerton, 1997: 9.

A Harlot's Progress, painted in 1731 and published as a set of prints in 1732, constituted a tale of urban corruption embodied by the moral and physical ruin of the innocent country girl Moll Hackabout. After introducing the protagonist and her awaiting fate to the viewer in the first plate, with Moll seduced by the arts of the renowned brothel mistress Mrs. Nedham upon her arrival to London, Hogarth rapidly moved to identify the masquerade as the catalyzer of the heroine's downfall through the hierarchy of prostitution. In the second plate (Figure 3), while comfortably settled as a kept courtesan and mistress to a wealthy Jew, Moll is depicted trying to distract her protector from the escape of her lover. A mask lies by a mirror on an auxiliary table on the left¹¹. According to Ronald Paulson, such element fulfills a double semantic function, in both narrative and emblematic terms: on one side, it identifies Moll's unfaithful encounter with her young lover as the result of a masquerade; on the other, it alludes to her deceiving appropriation, her pretentious imitation, of codes associated with fashionable gentlewomen, well beyond her station. The addition of the cross-dressed pet monkey, also an attribute of well-to-do women who displayed the ownership of exotic animal companions as a fashionable trait, underpins Hogarth's deployment of the emblematic tradition in this print. Furthermore, Paulson posits that the combination of mask, mirror, and monkey, all-three elements derivative of Cesare Ripa's *Imitatio*, points to Moll's new social standing, reflected in her surroundings and appearance, as the mere product of imitation, of fashionable aping¹². We shall add that the mask performs a third narrative function within this iconographic ensemble, that of signaling how her previous attendance to a masquerade, and the consequent infidelity that takes place there, turn out to be the reason of her immediate destitution.

In the words of Sophie Carter, the masquerade is represented in the Georgian period as both «the condition of the Harlot's existence, and its condemnation»¹³. Thus, throughout the series, Hogarth continued to reinforce Moll Hackabout's taste for masquerading as a contributing factor towards her unstoppable disgrace and ultimate demise. The third plate (Figure 4) accounted for her loss of social status, now conveyed by the precariousness of her lodging and attire, since she is now living as a Drury Lane harlot about to be arrested. Paulson reads the witch hat hanging at the head of the bed, in clear spatial correlation to the figure of the harlot herself, as part of a recent masquerade costume and sign of her progressive moral degradation¹⁴. Just beside it, the author identifies a birch road, seemingly used by Hackabout as a tool of her trade, to inflict sexual flagellation onto her clients¹⁵. Thus, in this scene, Hogarth mordantly juxtaposed masquerading and

11. For details see high resolution image in the museum's online collection: William Hogarth, *A Harlot's Progress. Plate 2*, 1732, etching and engraving, 31.2 x 37.5 cm. London: British Museum, 1858,0417.545. Link to museum object: https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1858-0417-545

12. Paulson, 1991: 263.

13. Carter, (1991): 58. On Plate 2, see also: Krämer, 2003: 39-52.

14. For details see high resolution image in the museum's online collection: William Hogarth, *A Harlot's Progress. Plate 3*, 1732, etching and engraving, 31.8 x 38.3 cm. London: British Museum, 1858,0417.546. Link to museum object: https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1858-0417-546

15. Paulson, 1989: 81.



FIGURE 4. WILLIAM HOGARTH, *A HARLOT'S PROGRESS. PLATE 3*, 1732, ETCHING AND ENGRAVING, 31.8 X 38.3 CM. © The Trustees of the British Museum. Shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 licence

paraphilic tendencies as inherent traits to the prostitute's identity. Likewise, such elements served the artist to comment on the increasing presence of prostitutes at masquerades, a threatening and well-established phenomenon by the 1730s, and one of the many grievances and fears of moralists, along with the impossibility to differentiate them from respectable women. Hackabout's ultimate obliteration takes place in absolute misery in the fifth and penultimate plate (Figure 5), where she is neglected by the doctors and accompanied by her loyal chambermaid. The mask makes its final appearance on the foreground as part of a still life of fashion accessories, which also include a fan, heels, and her witch hat¹⁶. The object acts as a vivid reminder of Moll Hackabout's vain, dissipated, and sinful life, which eventually led not only to her demise out of syphilis, but to her ultimate offense as a woman: the abandonment of her only child. As a matter of fact, negligent motherhood became a fault strongly attached to the female masquerader in later renditions of this type.

16. For details see high resolution image in the museum's online collection: William Hogarth, *A Harlot's Progress. Plate 5*, 1732, etching and engraving, 31.1 x 38.3 cm. London: British Museum, 1858,0417.548. Link to museum object: https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1858-0417-548



FIGURE 5. WILLIAM HOGARTH, *A HARLOT'S PROGRESS. PLATE 5*, 1732, ETCHING AND ENGRAVING, 32,8 x 38,8 CM. © The Trustees of the British Museum. Shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 licence

Sophie Carter has convincingly proved how the image of the prostitute pervaded eighteenth-century London's popular print culture, a visual reality that served the social necessity to deal with the fears and anxiety caused by their ubiquitous presence in the public sphere¹⁷. Hogarth's series, enthusiastically received by the Georgian public and by a myriad of unauthorized reproductions, not only reframed this phenomenon in a palatable way for its consumption by middle and upper-class audiences, but also reaffirmed and participated in a visual narrative that characterized masquerading as a regular habit of prostitutes, and the masquerade as a favorable space for their trade. According to Carter, many of these popular prints concerning the representation of urban prostitution were informed by the trope of the masquerade¹⁸. Likewise, prostitution ranked high in the list of the many forms of sexual female deviancy enabled by the masquerade according to London's periodicals and, as seen earlier, became a favorite weapon of its detractors. An account from 1724 informed the reader of the complete impossibility of finding suitable sexual company on a certain night, due to the celebration of a masquerade:

17. Carter, (1991): 60-61.

18. *Ibid.*, 60.

...all about the Hundreds of *Drury*, there was not a *Fille de Joie* to be had that Night, for Love nor Money, being all engaged at the Masquerade; and several Men of Pleasure receiv'd Favour from Ladies who were too modest to shew their Faces, and many of them still feel the Effects of the amorous Flame which they received from the unknown Fairs¹⁹.

Implicit within this reporter's account is the initially ambiguous identity of such modest ladies at the masquerade, without doubt prostitutes masquerading as upper and middle-class gentlewomen. Furthermore, the lingering physical effects of such riveting encounters in these men of pleasure, an eloquent way to suggest the contagion of a venereal disease, confirms the deceitful nature of such modesty.

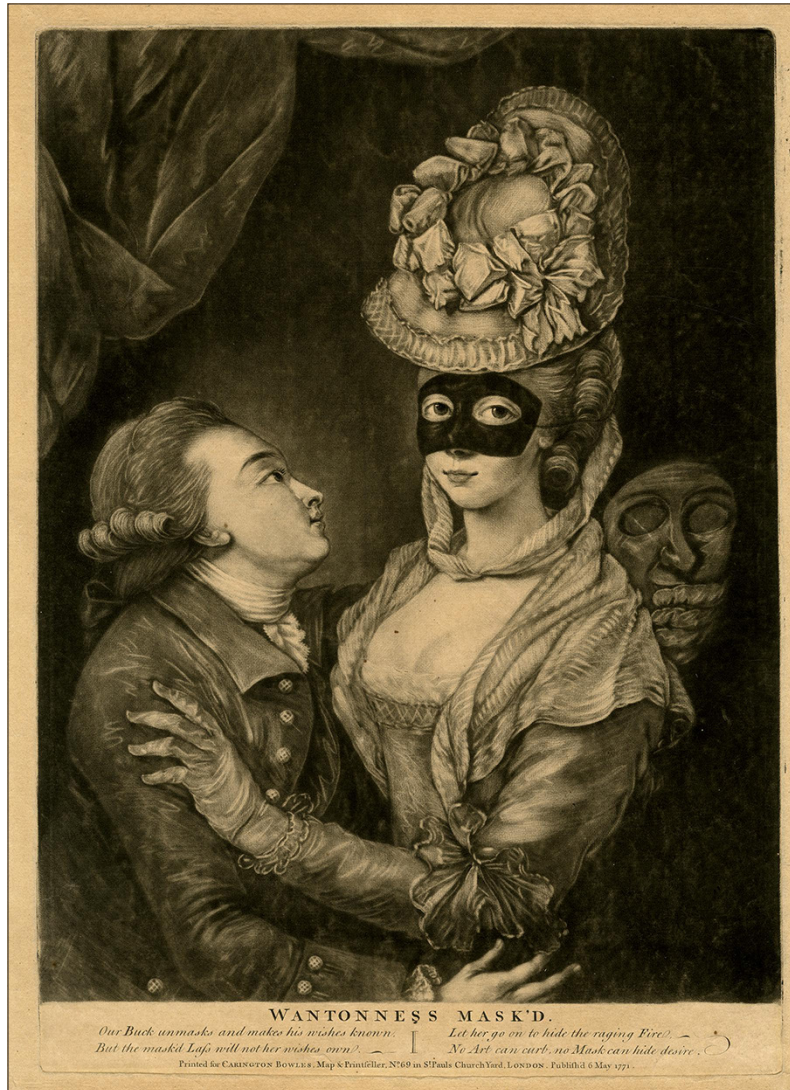


FIGURE 6. *WANTONNESS MASK'D*, 1771, MEZZOTINT, 35,3 X 25 CM. © The Trustees of the British Museum. Shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 licence

19. *Weekly Journal*, January 25, 1724. Cited in Castle, (1983): 163.

The «disturbingly chameleonic facility» of prostitutes to pose as respectable and virtuous women added to the social paranoia, with moralistic literature warning men to act cautiously in the presence of every apparently reputable woman²⁰.

A fascinating anonymous mezzotint, titled *Wantonness Mask'd* and published by Carington Bowles around 1771, conveys the social anxiety for prostitutes' treacherous subversion of social distinctions for their own profit at the masquerade (Figure 6). An enthralled young man, already unmasked, admires the countenance of a beautiful and masked young woman, identified here as a wantonness. Her figure stands larger and taller than that of her male counterpart, especially due to the opulence of her attire. Gently but firmly, she restrains his embrace and ignores his attention to engage directly with the viewer and captivate their attention. The print renders her as a deceiver, maliciously in control, and taking advantage of the naïve young man:

Our Buck unmasks and makes his wishes known.
But the mask'd Lass will not her wishes own.
Let her go on to hide the raging Fire.
No Art can curb, no Mask can hid desire²¹.

The format and the mezzotint technique, commonly used for the reproduction of paintings, indicates the pictorial aspirations of the print, which targeted a well-to-do audience. As in the case of fancy pictures, the seductive and tantalizing nature of these depictions gained a lot of popularity among the middle classes who would consume them as part their taste for domestic entertainment. The plate portrays the notion of the prostitute as the «archetypal plebeian opportunist offender», and echoes the «hordes of common prostitutes [that] warmed to these occasions disguised as women of quality and virtue», according to anti-masquerade literature²².

As Terry Castle explained in her seminal work on the London masquerade, contemporary periodicals overflowed with masquerade anecdotes of innocent men entrapped and deceived by common whores, and later profoundly shocked by the vulgar physicality, result of poor living conditions, diseases, and alimentation, laying beneath the mask and dress. Nonetheless, in the scholar's words, these «anecdotes have more the air of misogynist disingenuousness than of accurate reportage; it is far more likely that male masqueraders were entirely aware of the prostitutes in their midst, and in many cases attended with the intention of discreetly finding sexual partners»²³. The victimization of the male masquerader was also a common feature across these literary and visual representations. Robert Dighton's later reframing of the biblical parable in *The Prodigal Son reveling with harlots* (1792) (Figure 7) clearly identifies such iconographic trend, which no doubts followed Hogarth's treatment of the subject in his series

20. Carter, (1991): 70.

21. For details see high resolution image in the museum's online collection: *Wantonness Mask'd*, 1771, mezzotint, 35,3 x 25 cm, published in London by Carington Bowles. London: British Museum, 2010,7081.1427. Link to museum object: https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_2010-7081-1427

22. Carter, (1991): 65.

23. Castle, (1983): 163.



FIGURE 7. AFTER ROBERT DIGHTON, *THE PRODIGAL SON REVELLING WITH HARLOTS*, 1792, HAND-COLORED MEZZOTINT, 35 X 25,1 CM. © The Trustees of the British Museum. Shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 licence

A Rake's Progress (1735). In a private lavish interior, an inebriated young rake flirts with an elegantly dressed prostitute while the mistress responsible for the assignation stands by their side. In the manner of Hogarth, a major influence on the work of the lesser-known Dighton, several attributes surround the young couple to convey the dissipated lifestyle of the young rake, who indulges in card-playing, boxing, gambling at cockfights, and, of course, masquerading²⁴. His encounter with the prostitutes is most likely the result of his attendance

24. For details see high resolution image in the museum's online collection: After Robert Dighton, *The Prodigal Son revelling with harlots*, 1792, hand-coloured mezzotint, 35 x 25.1 cm, published by Carington Bowles. London: British Museum, 1935,0522.3.39. Link to museum object: https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1935-0522-3-39

to such event, as the domino lying beside him, and the masquerade tickets and mask scattered throughout the floor indicate. These sartorial elements, the domino and the mask, acted as signifiers of the illicit sexual affairs following a masquerade encounter, as we will see shortly in the case of Hogarth's *Marriage à-la-mode*. In Dighton's print, the prostitute and her mistress appear as the enablers of the male rake's ill decisions and misconduct: they act as the channels to satisfy and materialize his vices.

As in the case of Restoration London, the public concern with prostitutes' appropriation of the mask went beyond the deceiving qualities of the material object and extended to the application of make-up and use of other cosmetics, such as black patches, to dissimulate the unhealthy physical signs of the sex trade. Facial paint came to be deemed as much of a mask as the actual vizor, and contemporary prints insisted on the toilette ritual as a main event in the prostitute's preparation for her attendance to the masquerade. Thomas Rowlandson's *Dressing for a Masquerade* (1790) offers a glimpse into an unconventional toilette scene of fervent activity and chaotic disarray, with fabrics, clothing, masks, shoes, and all sorts of beauty instruments scattered throughout the room. In the interior of a brothel, several old women identifiable as bawds attend a group of four young women in their preparations for attending a masked ball²⁵. Rowlandson's composition offered a catalogue of the vices and faults of the female character: from the vanity suggested by their poses and the abundance of mirrors to the deceiving intent of their masks and the wearing of rouge and blush. The satirist employed the negligent and vulgar state of their undressed attire, not staged in a sophisticated and careful *déshabillé* as corresponded to polite toilette scenes, along with their unladylike gestures and demeanors to unequivocally label these women as prostitutes in masquerade.

3.

On April 2nd, 1743, a few years after the successful publication of *A Harlot's Progress*, Hogarth advertised his new project on *The London Daily Post and General Advertiser*:

...to publish by subscription, *SIX PRINTS*...engrav'd by the best Masters in Paris, after his own Paintings; representing a variety of *Modern Occurrences in High-Life*, and called *MARRIAGE A-LA-MODE*. / Particular Care will be taken, that there may not be the least Objection to the Decency or Elegancy of the Whole Work...²⁶

While his previous moral subjects were engraved by himself and represented scenes from «low-life», the choice of an aristocratic setting on this occasion was matched by his emphasis on the quality of the French engravers undertaking the new series. Narrative, figures, and spaces were of the artist's own invention,

25. For details see high resolution image in the museum's online collection: Thomas Rowlandson, *Dressing for a Masquerade*, 1790, hand-coloured etching and stipple, 36.2 x 50.2 cm, published by S.W. Fores. London: British Museum, 1938,0613.8. Link to museum object: https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1938-0613-8

26. Egerton, 1997: 8.

referring to sources such as John Dryden's play *Marriage à-la-Mode* (1663) and contemporary fiction by authors such as Henry Fielding. As mentioned earlier, the melodramatic storyline of *Marriage à-la-mode*, published as a set of prints in 1745, was widely known to the Georgian public: a loveless arranged marriage followed by innumerable misfortunes caused by secrecy and deception. The series accounted for the tragic ending of the equally unfaithful Earl and Countess Squanderfield, namely as a result of the lady's adulterous encounter with her lover, Counsellor Silvertongue, at a masquerade, plotted in the fourth plate, *The Toilette* (Figure 8).



FIGURE 8. SIMON FRANÇOIS RAVENET I AFTER WILLIAM HOGARTH, *MARRIAGE A-LA-MODE*, PLATE IV, 1745, ETCHING AND ENGRAVING, 43,2 X 50,6 CM. © The Trustees of the British Museum. Shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 licence

This assignation, in turn, led to the fatidic events seen in *The Bagnio* (Figure 9), the fifth plate in the series, where the ill effects of women's masquerading are most persuasively rendered for the instruction of the viewer. *Explication des Estampes Qui on[t] pour titre Le Marriage á la Mode*, written in French by the enamel painter and friend of Hogarth's Jean-André Rouquet and authorized by the artist himself, was published shortly thereafter and included an edifying account on the nature of the countess's transgression:

In Paris the houses for bathing are still what they used to be in London...with the exception of two or three houses, the rest have as their principal purpose the reception of any couple, well matched or ill matched, that seeks a room or a bed for hours or for a night in pursuit of promiscuity....The masqueraders often arrange assignations at these places; and it is for just such an assignation that our heroine has accepted the masquerade ticket which her lover offers in the preceding picture....A husband whose wife goes to the masked ball without him is not a husband without apprehensions. It is natural that ours has secretly followed his wife into the ball, and from the ball to the bagnio, where he finds her in bed with the lawyer²⁷.



FIGURE 9. SIMON FRANÇOIS RAVENET I AFTER WILLIAM HOGARTH, *MARRIAGE A-LA-MODE, PLATE V*, 1745, ETCHING AND ENGRAVING, 43,1 X 50,6 CM. © The Trustees of the British Museum. Shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 licence

An intriguing oil sketch by Hogarth in the collection of the Ashmolean Museum, dated from around 1743, could be considered as an early stage in the conception of the series and a solid example of the preeminence of masquerading-led adultery in Hogarth's imagination²⁸. An aristocratic, draped interior reveals a woman fainted in a chair with her robes open, seemingly wounded and attended by two

27. Rouquet, 1746: 38-39. English translation by W.B. Coley included in Lichtenberg, 2009: 129.

28. For details see high resolution image in the museum's online collection: William Hogarth, *The Suicide of the Countess*, c. 1743, oil on canvas, 30.3 x 37.5 cm. Oxford: Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology. Link to museum object: <https://collections.ashmolean.org/object/373004>



FIGURE 10. LOUIS LECOEUR AFTER WILLIAM HOGARTH, *ILL EFFECT OF MASQUERADES*, 1797, ETCHING AND ENGRAVING, 14,2 X 15,6 CM. © The Trustees of the British Museum. Shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 licence

men, and a child witnessing the scene. The right-side, still in an earlier phase, allows one to discern a second laying female figure accompanied by three others. The most significant element are the two overlapping rounded objects lying on an elegant stool in the lower-left corner, very likely corresponding to a pair of male black and female flesh-colored masks, a type of motif previously employed by Hogarth in *A Harlot's Progress*. Never completed, the canvas was, according to Elizabeth Einberg, probably acquired from Mrs. Hogarth in 1780 by Samuel Ireland – one of the artist's earliest and major collectors – and recorded in his possession from 1781 to 1799²⁹.

In 1797, Ireland had it engraved and published for the first time under the title *Ill Effects of Masquerades*, as part of a publication on his collection (Figure 10)³⁰. Here in a commentary, he explained the scene as the result of a husband's jealousy

29. Einberg, 2016: 221.

30. For details see high resolution image in the museum's online collection: Louis LeCoeur after William Hogarth, *Ill Effect of Masquerades*, 1797, etching and engraving, 14,2 x 15,6 cm, published by Samuel Ireland. London: British Museum, K,65,134. Link to museum object: https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_K-65-134

and misjudgment³¹. Two sisters attended a masquerade in the absence of the husband of one of them, with the married one disguised as her sister's gallant. After their return, both retired to their sisterly chamber, where the wife left her gentleman robes. These were found by her husband upon his early arrival, who assumed the two sleeping bodies to be those of his wife and her lover, with the consequent ill-effect of stabbing them both. With this tale in mind, the engraver, Louis Le Coeur, completed the plate after Hogarth's original oil sketch, with the husband pathetically lamenting his actions over his dying wife, and their child turned into an unwilling and collateral victim of the masquerade. Unfortunately, even if the intricacy, deceitfulness, and tragicomic plot match Hogarth's inventiveness, Ireland does not cite a source for this information, and Einberg dismisses this reading of the sketch as from the collector's own pen. We shall argue that, while more definitive conclusions require further investigation, either formally, narratively, or iconographically, this canvas seems to play an unmistakable role in prefiguring Lady Squander's fate.

In the case of *Marriage à-la-Mode*, Hogarth introduced the heroine's character as the bride in *The Marriage Settlement*³². Her decayed attitude conveys her misery and submission to parental will, as her figure embodies the property transaction taking place.³³ The painter stressed the inadequacy of the union by hinting to the groom's narcissism and the bride's future affair with Silvertongue. The juxtaposition of the future lovers, and the Earl's son early signs of venereal disease, underpins adultery as the fatal misdeed to ruin the couple's future³⁴. After reinforcing their mutual indifference and inclination to self-indulgence in *The Tête à Tête* and the Earl's libertinism in *The Inspection*, the fourth plate, *The Toilette* (Figura 8), focused on the figure of the now Countess Squanderfield in her chambers, after her morning *levée*.

Hogarth portrayed the group formed by her and counselor Silvertongue as isolated from the rest of the visitors, all of them incarnations of Hogarth's disdain for aristocratic poor taste and affected effeminate behavior. Seated in front of each other, Lady Squander's poised and mannered attitude suggests her new status, and her familiarity and devotion towards Silvertongue justify his inappropriate position. The lawyer – not wealthy enough to substitute the Earl as her husband – must exert his influence through treacherous machinations. Lady Squander has appropriated the practice imported from the French court of receiving guests *en déshabillé*, while completing her toilette. The lavish dressing-table, mirror, and cosmetic set contribute not only to the discourse of fashionability, but to that of

31. Ireland, 1799: 98-101.

32. See: Gérard Jean Baptiste Scotin II after William Hogarth, *Marriage A-la-Mode, Plate I*, 1745, etching and engraving, 38.1 x 45.8 cm. London: British Museum, 1868,0822.1560. Link to museum object: https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1868-0822-1560

33. Kate Retford has referred to marriage portraits where a marital contract is being signed as «property transactions», especially in terms of the consideration of the wife as a commodity to be transferred from father to husband. See: Kate Retford, «Joseph Highmore, Time, and Miss Whichcote's Marriage», paper delivered at the Symposium *Basic Instincts: Art, Women & Sexuality*, The Foundling Museum and Birkbeck, University of London, November 20, 2017.

34. On the role of venereal diseases in Hogarth's *Marriage à-la-mode*, see: Solkin, (2002): 26-34.

vanity and artifice as well³⁵. Hogarth recalls the toilette's unequivocal association with the debate of female beauty's artificiality in the form of face paint as deceit, and, therefore, with the masquerade as its epitome.

The main scene presents Silvertongue's delivery of the masquerade ticket to the countess³⁶. Rouquet located this gesture at the core of the series narrative and as the immediate catalyzer of the misdeeds to follow: «He is offering a ticket for the masked ball to his mistress, who will not fail to accept. The next print will show you the frightful consequences of this step»³⁷. The gestures of giver and receiver, particularly the countess's eagerly extended hand, guide the viewer's attention to the ticket itself, which allowed women to attend to masquerades unchaperoned and, therefore, acted here as the material vehicle of adultery and enabler of Lady Squander's deviant behavior. Marked «1st Door, 2ⁿ Door, 3^d Door», these inscriptions were used to control admission to the different rooms of masquerade venues, with this ticket granting full access to the bearer. Robert Cowley has noticed the torn quality of the ticket and the lack of design, maybe implying Silvertongue as a frequent masquerade-goer³⁸. The lavishness and erotic innuendo of ticket designs, in the form of visually alluring allegorical or vegetal compositions, materialized the awaiting pleasures of masquerades, and turned them into appreciated commodities in London's culture of entertainment.

Lady Squander's response is implied by her hedonistic taste in furniture: her ownership of the masquerade screen signaled by Silvertongue confirms her disposition and sexual readiness, while it serves him to communicate his erotic intents. A «low-life» scene with masqueraders and orchestra is depicted; the foreground presents a gallery of typical characters: a man in female costume, a Turk, Mr. Punch, and a friar and a nun engaged in conversation in the very center. These religious figures – pointed at by the lawyer – stood in visual and literary culture for the bawdy behavior associated with masquerades and for the lewdness of their sexual encounters. Despite being regularly assumed that Silvertongue is indicating the costumes they are about to wear, those of a nun and a friar, the final choice of clothing to be found in *The Bagnio*, the domino, shows that the lawyer is just stressing the lubricious nature of the scheme. Equally, his erotic interests are reflected in his reading: *Le Sopha*, a notorious French erotic novel which parodied the *Tales of the Thousand and One Nights*.

The viewer is further informed of Lady Squander's character and frivolity by the objects surrounding her and mocked by the young black page on the foreground. Purchased at an auction – another space for discreet rendezvous according to Rouquet, – among these grotesqueries are found an erotic Leda-and-the-swan platter and a damaged decorative statuette of Actaeon. The educated audiences

35. For a discussion on cosmetic discourses and the masquerade see: Gómez Todó, 2023: 143-165.

36. For details see high resolution image in the museum's online collection: Simon François Ravenet I after William Hogarth, *Marriage A-la-Mode, Plate IV*, 1745, etching and engraving, 38.2 x 46 cm. London: British Museum, 1868,0822.1563. Link to museum object: https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1868-0822-1563

37. Rouquet, 1746: 38-39. English translation by W.B. Coley included in Lichtenberg, 2009: 128.

38. Cowley, 1983: 102.

of a series like Hogarth's would have been familiar with the myth: lustful victim of Diana's rage, the goddess turned Actaeon into a stag to be hunted down and devoured by her dogs for observing her and her nymphs during their bath. Thus, his figure became not only a mocking emblem in satirical depictions of cuckoldry but also, according to David Turner, of «women's power to cause men's destruction»³⁹. Here the Actaeon statuette not only substitutes the absent and cuckold Earl, but it also foreshadows his humiliating ending at the hands of Silvertongue in the following plate. Across from these objects, visiting and playing cards account for the countess's gambling, an inextricable part of the fashionable sociability she is now involved in, and common in masquerades. Thus, *The Toilette* functioned as a catalogue of Lady Squander's activities, all of them part of what Russell describes as «significant social performances in which the 'ton' displayed and monitored itself, circulated information both openly and clandestinely, negotiated relationships of clientage and patronage, and enabled... adulterous liaisons to unravel»⁴⁰.

In the midst of this display of leisure, the presence of a neglected coral baby rattle hanging from the chair underneath her elbow extends the boundaries of the countess's mischief. By juxtaposing Lady Squander's motherhood with the enactment of her adulterous relationship, Hogarth addresses one of Georgian society's biggest fears: the transfer of the husband's estate to an illegitimate child due to an adulterous wife. Thus, *The Toilette* not only fleshes out the effects of the masquerade on the female virtue according to moralists and critics, but also encapsulates the theme of the female body as a channel for property transactions in the eighteenth century. Nonetheless, Hogarth goes a step further satirizing Lady Squander's indulgence in worldly pleasures, which happens to be causing her failure as a mother – a greater fault than her adulterous liaison. The coral baby rattle hangs from a pink ribbon and was previously painted by Hogarth as an attribute in children's portraits. While coral was thought to protect against evil, the disconnection between the mother, the child, and the object suggested here links the mother's disregard with the uncertainty of the syphilitic child's life in the last scene of the series.⁴¹ Far from the nurturing motherhood promoted by the incipient cult of sensibility, represented by contemporaries such as Joseph Highmore, Lady Squander is depicted as a negligent mother⁴². In fact, Hogarth became particularly invested in the subject of motherhood and children's neglect during this period of his biography, marked by his charitable involvement at the Foundling Hospital for children.

The usage of a woman's taste for masquerading or public entertainment as a sign of her lack of virtue as a mother increased as the century advanced and new ideals

39. Turner, 2002: 87-88.

40. Russell, 2007: 20.

41. See: Gérard Jean Baptiste Scotin II after William Hogarth, *Marriage A-la-Mode, Plate VI*, 1745, etching and engraving, 38.5 x 45.9 cm. London: British Museum, 1868,0822.1565. Link to museum object: https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1868-0822-1565

42. See: Joseph Highmore, *Mrs. Sharpe and Her Child*, 1731, oil on canvas, 127 x 101.6 cm. New Haven: Yale Center for British Art, B1981.25.339. Link to museum object: <https://collections.britishart.yale.edu/catalog/tms:830> For a detailed examination of other examples of the representation of ideal and natural motherhood in Georgian England see: Retford, 2006: 83-114.

about female natural sensibility and motherhood spread. In this context, masquerading acted as the artificial corrupting element that opposed women's natural role and predisposition to maternal love, signaling an unnatural, corrupted woman. Likewise, dissipated and over-indulgent mothers who preferred their public over their domestic role would be highly vilified in decades to come by satirists following Hogarth's legacy, such as Robert Dighton and James Gillray. The latter took a step further in the formulation of this figure in his later print *A Fashionable Mama* (1797) (Figure 11), published at the height of ideas about natural womanhood, motherhood, and the significance of breastfeeding. The artist portrayed a woman's lack of interest in her child, who she rushes to feed while the carriage awaits to take her to a ball.



FIGURE 11. JAMES GILLRAY, *THE FASHIONABLE MAMMA, - OR - THE CONVENIENCE OF MODERN DRESS*, 1796, HAND-COLORED ETCHING, 35 X 24,7 CM. © The Trustees of the British Museum. Shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 licence

The fashionability and artificiality of her pose and attire contrasts harshly with the tenderness and simplicity of her maid and that of the painting in the background representing the ideal of a virtuous and nurturing mother according to ideas of female nature and sensibility.

Returning to Hogarth's series, an unauthorized anonymous satirical poem titled *Marriage à-la-Mode: A Humorous Tale...being an Explanation of the Six Prints lately published by the Ingenious Mr. Hogarth* appeared in 1746, appropriating and extending the narrative of the series. Two scenes within the poem's fifth canto, the countess's costume arrangements and the encounter at The Turk's Head, elucidate how audiences' conception of the female masquerader as adulteress filled in the gaps in Hogarth's visual narrative:

Soon as the Lawyer had convey'd,
 The Ticket, and the Appointment made,
 Her little Heart panted with Rage,
 and flutter'd like a Bird in Cage;
 The Time preceding it was spent,
 a newer Taste of dress t'invent;
 For this she all L---ng's Wardrobe views,
 From then she drives to *Betty H----s*;
 And rattled round to all the rest,
 To see which Garb wou'd please her best;
 Sometimes the *Quaker's* charms her most,
 But that soon to the *Nun's* gives Post;
 Sometimes in Fancy she wou'd seem,
 A *Persian*, or *Sultana Queen*;
 And then the grand *Tiara* tries,
 But the next Hour doth that despise;
 Yet doth not homely *Russet* scorn,
 Like dowdy *Joan* just from the *Churn*:
 At last, when she had hurried o'er,
 And hundred diff'rent Garbs or more;
 She sees a *Dominic*, dear *Gown*!
 Which the grave *Friars* first made known,
 O! charming *Coverlid* for *Vice*,
 In which the *Church* is always nice;
 For partial to a young *Beginner*,
 She'll let the *Novice* be a *Sinner*;
 Provided he in *Secret* does it;
 Her *Maxim* is «*Sin the Closet*».
 My *Lady* therefore rightly thought,
 As she was for a *Love-Voy'ge* fraught;
 Her tempting *Charms* she best might hide,
 By this so sanctified *Out-side*».

After avid expectation, the night of the encounter takes place, and the lovers convene at the masquerade to continue with their scheme:

The diff'rent Marks they had design'd,
 By which each other they might find;
 And that there might be no Mistake,
 Had some peculiar Words to speak.
 At length the pleasing Ev'ning came,
 Which was to quench their mutual Flame;
 A *Masquerade*, nick-nam'd a *Ball*...
 The Lawyer who was there before,
 Stood to receive her a the Door;
 Where, soon as they had enter'd in,
 The Curtain drew; O horrid Din!
 A Babel Medley of strange Tongues,
 Belch'd forth from sound or putrid Lungs;
 At first they took a round or two,
 The different Characters to view;
 But as they had no Time to spare,
 Yet long enough to be betray'd,
 To him whom most they to ought to dread...
 Their Joys had three Times completed
 And would to Sleep have then retreated,
 Just as his Lordship was admitted:
 Upon the Ground her Hoop and Stays,
 Is where the Mask and Faggot lays;
 Her Dominic and all she us'd,
 Lay round the Room with his confus'd⁴³.

In Hogarth's *The Bagnio* (Figura 9) the stage-like scene takes place at *The Turk's Head*, an establishment where rooms were rented per night for gambling and other illicit encounters, with the tragicomic pathos of the scene enclosed in the kneeling figure of Lady Squander, begging her dying husband for forgiveness⁴⁴. After the discovery of the lovers, the Earl entered the room and dueled with Silvertongue, resulting mortally wounded. Their eventual fate is revealed by the disruptive entrance of the watchmen. While the lawyer attempts to escape through the window, leaving his Punch-like mask behind, the countess's pose leads the viewer towards the remains of her costume on the right: her stays – whose removal symbolizes the liberation of her body and virtue –, her hooped underskirt, lavish shoes, and a curtain mask. The still life is illuminated by a fireplace outside the pictorial frame and mirrored in the other side of the room by the dominoes laying on the floor. Both, curtain-mask and domino – described in the previous poem as a «charming Coverlid for vice!» – guaranteed anonymity and were common accessories for Georgian masquerades. The temporal immediacy between the masquerade and the erotic assignation is signaled

43. Canto V from *Marriage-A-la-Mode: A Humorous Tale, in Six Cantos in Hudibrastic Verse; being an Explanation of the Six Prints lately published by the Ingenious Mr. Hogarth*. Full text included in Lichtenberg, 2009: 142-145.

44. For details see high resolution image in the museum's online collection: Simon François Ravenet I after William Hogarth, *Marriage A-la-Mode, Plate V*, 1745, etching and engraving, 38.3 x 46.2 cm. London: British Museum, 1868,0822.1564. Link to museum object: https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1868-0822-1564

by the presence of the abandoned objects, and by their physical proximity to the undone bed, the fireplace, and the bodies of the sexual counterparts. As a matter of fact, lying masks and costumes ultimately came to operate as signifiers of sexual illicitness in visual and literary culture, as exemplified by a later print illustrating Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones* (Figure 12).



FIGURE 12. ATTRIBUTED TO WILLIAM WARD AFTER GEORGE MORLAND (?), LADY BELLASTON & TOM JONES AFTER THEIR RETURN FROM THE MASQUERADE, CA. 1787, HAND-COLORED MEZZOTINT, 33,5 X 26,3 CM. © The Trustees of the British Museum. Shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 licence

Furthermore, Lady Squander's adulterous affair and downfall reverberates throughout the room's *bric-à-brac*. Above her hangs the painting of a woman as shepherdess, turned by Hogarth into an emblem of harlotry. The composition satirizes the popularity of the «portrait as shepherdess» among female aristocrats and masqueraders, such as those by Allan Ramsay and Thomas Hudson⁴⁵. Beyond its connotations in portraiture, as a type that evoked pastoral and natural ideals of womanhood, the figure of the shepherdess certainly had a subversive, comical, and ironic potential in the context of the masquerade given its overt sexualization, skillfully exploited here by Hogarth, and later by Dighton⁴⁶. The squirrel held by the woman in the portrait – a contemporary slang term for harlot – and the lewd effect created by the male legs from the wall painting, contribute to its transformation into the portrait of a harlot, mirroring Lady Squander, as identified by Egerton among others⁴⁷. The same idea is present in the use of the bundle of faggots, a second allusion to prostitution in contemporary slang.

In *Marriage à-la-mode*, Hogarth employed the relationship between masquerading and female adultery as the primary narrative thread and catalyst of the couple's ultimate destitution. By means of a complex and elaborated iconography revolving around female deviancy and the dangers of the masked ball, Hogarth's formulation of Lady Squander's character in 1743 and its dissemination via the prints in 1745 fleshed out the anxiety of mid-Georgian society about female adultery and women's increasing agency and visibility in the public sphere. The artist's burlesque portrait of the countess as embodiment of the social, gender, and moral discourses concerning the female masquerader as adulteress encapsulated a model of femininity to be echoed by moralists and satirists in the print culture of following decades.

4.

While satirical prints' accounts of sexual assignations and moral corruption as inherent to the masquerade satisfied the Georgian public's taste for titillating but edifying storylines to an extent, the reality of these events was significantly more complex. Even if the visual corpus analyzed up to this point had a major impact on defining perceptions and ideas about women's participation in urban entertainment, and especially in masquerades, contemporary sources and representations in other media also shed light on a different perception of this phenomenon as experienced by real female masquerade-goers. In May 1749, the pre-eminent bluestocking Mrs. Elizabeth Montague attended a masquerade in celebration for the Peace of Aix-la-Chapelle, an event that she carefully planned:

45. See: Allan Ramsay, *Portrait of Lady Jane Douglas*, ca. 1735, oil on canvas, 210.8 x 144.8 cm. Private collection. And Jacob Lovelace after Thomas Hudson, *Portrait of Miss Mary Carew*, 1744, etching and aquatint, 35.1 x 28 cm. London: British Museum, 1868,0808.1405. Link to museum object:

https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1868-0808-1405

46. See: After Robert Dighton, *Return from a Masquerade – a morning scene*, 1784, hand-coloured mezzotint, 34.9 x 24.9 cm, published in London by Carington Bowles. London: British Museum, 1935,0522.1.206. Link to museum object: https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1935-0522-1-206

47. Egerton, 1997: 49.

I am ashamed that I have been so remiss in writing my dear sister, but business and amusements have poured in torrents upon me. I was some days preparing for the subscription masquerade, where I was to appear in the character of the Queen Mother, my dress white satin, fine new point tuckers, kerchief and ruffles, pearl necklace and earrings, and pearls and diamonds on the head, and my hair curled after the Vandyke picture... . Mr. Montague has made me lay by my dress to be painted in when I see Mr. Hoare again... . I staid till 5 o'clock in the morning at the masquerade, and was not tired...⁴⁸

Even if no version of the portrait survives, Montague's description of her masquerading costume as queen Henrietta Maria of France accounts not only for the importance of sartorial preparations for masquerades, but also for the common practice of women preserving the ensembles to be painted in after the celebration. At a moment when anonymous or invented female masqueraders populated satirical print culture disseminating ideas of moral corruption, libertinism, and misfortune, other forms of visual representation such as portraiture offered a significant visual counterpart, a corpus of images still pending a more detailed examination.

Therefore, the ubiquity of the female masquerader as adulteress and corrupted in Georgian satirical prints should not be interpreted as an index of its social veracity. Adultery and prostitution were most certainly social realities that thrived on the riveting excitement enabled by the anonymity of masks and disguises. Even so, contrary to what these representations seem to substantiate, women in masquerade did not necessarily engage with these practices as a norm. The pictorial proliferation of the female masquerader as adulterous, duplicitous, and corrupted responded primarily to the social urgency to grapple with the cultural agency this context offered to women and its challenging of the ideals of domesticity that ruled Georgian society.

48. Mrs. Elizabeth Montagu, Letter to her sister, May 8, 1749, in Montagu, 1900: 264-65.

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