

The Narrative Device of Disguise in Action and Adventure Films

Yukari Tamazaki

The term “masquerade,” when applied within film studies, habitually refers to the film stars’ often excessive cinematic performances (or over-representations) of their gendered identities, namely the masquerades of femininity and masculinity. In fact, terms like “masquerade” and “performance” “have been crucial to feminist writings on the cinema and gendered identity,”¹ as Yvonne Tasker observes. Mary Ann Doane’s interpretation of *femmes fatales* as representations of immoderate femininity² is heavily reliant on Joan Riviere’s psychoanalytic writing, “Womanliness as a Masquerade,” and Judith Butler also plays out the idea of bodily identity and its “performativity,”³ to use Tania Modleski’s phrase, from a lesbian perspective. Performances and masquerades are surely not circumscribed to those of femininity, especially in action films where sometimes over-developed muscular male bodies are displayed and portrayed as spectacle.⁴ Gaylyn Studlar explicates Douglas Fairbanks’s formula of a certain kind of masculinity and the significance of its representation,⁵ and Steven Cohan entitles his work on “the gendered and sexualized masquerades underlying the performative dimensions of masculinity in the movies”⁶ of the fifties “Masked Men.”

Such applications of the terms “masquerade” and “performance” generally indicate that cinematic representations are reflections of or reactions to reality. Consequently, the postmodern separation of a screen representation from the audience’s reality makes it easier for the critics to fall into simplistic understandings of the representation: a representation can be read as either A or B of the polarised halves. The danger of polarisation lies in the critic’s tendency to oversimplify their understandings of reality by dismissing one of the halves. However, “masquerade” in films may provide the critics with more complex meanings, if they start to take other types of masquerades, which often seem rather simply obvious and uncomplicated in their functions and meanings, into consideration. What I am trying to elucidate is that the employment of the term “masquerade” which delivers the idea of performative gender does not always include the masquerades that concern double or mistaken identities. To put it plainly, most film critics dismiss literal masquerades on screen too easily, oftentimes as a simple theatrical or narrative device which is not specific to films, favouring the seemingly complex psychoanalyses of “cinematic” representations. It is not my intention to reject or argue against the idea of gender as performance itself, however, for I am much indebted to the idea in the first place. Still, one of the things I aim to do in this paper is to manifest a possibility of masquerades as being cinematic as well, or at least surprisingly pertinent to the nature of films, particularly those of the action and adventure genre.⁷ I will concentrate my discussion of masquerades upon those of males in adventure or action films, primarily because I started to think about the idea of male disguise and masquerading in swashbucklers and all the more because the mechanism of male disguise has distinctive significance in those particular films. My focus on male identities on screen would unfortunately prevent me from exploring the meanings of masquerading women that are unquestionably vital to feminist film studies, but I believe the matter deserves separate and independent exami-

nations.

First I will attempt to describe briefly what I include in the term “masquerade” and their readily perceptible effects. I will then proceed to examine how disguises work in films such as *The Mark of Zorro* (1940) and *The Prisoner of Zenda* (both 1937 and 1952 versions). Reference will also be made to other adventure and action films such as *The Thief of Bagdad* (1924), *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (1938), *The Crimson Pirate* (1952) and *The Dirty Dozen* (1967), in which the notion of disguise can be found in some way or another, in addition to not overtly action-oriented films (though still significant films of the 1930s in which the protagonists achieve something through an “adventure”⁸) such as *The Masquerader* (1933), *The Scarlet Pimpernel* (1934), and *A Tale of Two Cities* (1935), which manipulate the idea of doubled and/or mistaken identities. I hope my examinations of the chosen films will clarify the function of disguises in films with adventurer heroes, and the cinematic quality of actual masquerading to be explicated convincingly enough through each example.

MASQUERADING MEN AND THE SPIRIT OF ADVENTURE

In the sense that an action film could be a “pure cinema,”⁹ masquerading or disguise in films is a *pure* cinematic adventure. On the lexical level, masquerade is an action¹⁰ which is intended to prevent the truth about something from becoming known. Significantly, it is an action which enables the deception mechanism to be played out in a film. When the agent of masquerade attempts to conceal something, he must convert his “intention” into “action” deliberately. He must create another persona that is different from himself in order to conceal his own identity. The methods of hiding an identity can be numerous, though the most elementary or simplistic method would be to playact the contrasting character. Thus, cross-dressing is often found in espionage scenes or films

where deception becomes a key component. As the primary question for a newborn would usually be of its sex, the person's sex is the principal concern when we reflect upon one's identity in this society. Since an action such as spying is prevalently considered to be a masculine conduct, the agent of action is customarily expected to be male. The *film noir* convention of a "deceptive" feminine heroine is an elaboration of this understanding of gendered behaviour, which is frequently manipulated further to deceive the audience's expectation once more as well. Therefore, when a hero intends to mask his intention of rendering a "masculine" conduct, he would often assume the guise of a woman.

In *The Crimson Pirate*, Vallo and Ojo dress up as harmless female dancers in order to approach their enemy without alarming him, but there are other ways of veiling the hero's "masculine" intention. Any form that seems harmless or impotent in terms of action is appropriate for the hero's disguise. Robin Hood¹¹ disguises himself as an old man at the archery contest in *The Adventures of Robin Hood*, for an old man cannot be expected to be muscular enough to be "masculine," and Sir Percy Blakeney in *The Scarlet Pimpernel* puts on a guise of an old hag, which is a sort of double handicap, being both old and female. In *The Mark of Zorro*, the titular hero camouflages himself as a friar when he is in danger of being caught, which sounds quite logical because monks have a connotations of castration and are thus hardly sexually masculine. A hero may even pretend to be a doll, just like the Dick Van Dyke character (and Truly Scrumptious) in *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* (1968), and conceal that he has any intention at all, since dolls are incapable of scheming anything in the first place, not having a brain, let alone perform an action on their own, being inanimate. Unfortunately, being old or even inorganic serves the same purpose as being a woman in this matter. Not only when a man cross-dresses but also when he puts on the guise of something not masculine, it is "the stuff of comedy,"¹² and the hero must comically disguise as this powerless character in order to hide

his capability as a masculine agent of action. This construction of the comic suggests that when a hero, who is supposed to be toughly masculine, is not masculine enough, he must become a laughing-stock. Simultaneously, this shows the effect of a comedy as a relaxing device, which puts the enemy off his guard.

The necessity to conceal potency on the narrative level suggests that the hero is restricted in his conduct otherwise. He cannot take action for some reason, and a masquerade enables him to alter the restrictions. The protagonist's social status or personal interests may conflict with his intention or heroic deeds, but the world is a different space when he adopts a disguise, where he may ignore the rules and conventions of his ordinary world. The hero escapes to a fantasy world where the sense of reality is violated and thus extraordinary things can happen, if you will. Don Diego Vega puts on a mask of Zorro because he cannot be known as taking revenge for his father, the ex-Alcalde, in *The Mark of Zorro*, and as Zorro he is able to confront the villains and do most daring things. More straightforwardly, a British Rudolf Russendyll can never execute the Ruritania king's authority unless he disguises as the king, though he is more than capable of it as Fritz admits "Fate doesn't always make the right men kings" in *The Prisoner of Zenda*. Likewise in another Ronald Colman's dual-roled film, *The Masquerader*, John Loder who is brilliant in his political ideas and speech does not get an opportunity to enunciate his opinion at the Parliament unless he masquerades as Sir John Chilcote. Without the prince's disguise, Ahmed the Thief cannot impress the Princess in *The Thief of Bagdad*, and without the commoner's disguise, King Richard would not be able to travel safely in *The Adventures of Robin Hood*. Disguise, therefore, provides the hero with the means to trespass the bounds of reality and perform his power or dormant ability, making it possible for him to render action. Action is enabled *through* masquerading.

Simultaneously, masquerading *is* action in itself, for it demands trans-

formation or movement. A man changes into a non-man, a youth into a non-youth, and a person into a non-person. The change is a movement, just like the hero's moving into another world. Furthermore, the essence of masquerade can be said to be a conversion of mind into physical behaviour because an intention to passively conceal something or a desire is turned into active conducts. Masquerading plays out the hero's desire, providing him with the means to exercise his adventure spirit.

A consideration of the moment of discovery is also an essential step in thinking about the disguise narrative in adventure films. When masquerading works as a plot device, "[d]isguise is an effective dramatic contrivance because the deception which produces action and the recognition which ends it are fundamentally dramatic transactions."¹³ A masked man naturally cannot stay masked. Disguise is "a course that adds the suspense of potential unmasking to his dangerous existence."¹⁴ Then the moment when the truth "becomes known" gives the story a climax. The masquerade will have to show what is supposed to have been there for the whole time behind the mask, and the deceived will have to find out the truth. But is there really the truth or any truth under the mask? Does an exposure lead to a discovery of the truth? There is a strong inclination to conceive a dichotomy of the truth and a lie in the deception mechanism, and it is easy to accept the dichotomy because the conception would fit in nicely with Taves's definition of adventure films (to which I will come back later) which supposedly have "the narrative tendency to polarize the world into two realms."¹⁵ However, certain films do not allow the audience to build the dichotomy quite so easily, for the agents of disguise are doubly masqueraded. The unveiling of one disguise does not reveal or disclose the truth; instead, it merely betrays another fabrication. That the double-layered disguise problematizes the authenticity of the truth shall be explored in the following section.

THE MARK OF ZORRO AND THE TRIPLE PERSONAE

The function of masquerade has been customarily understood quite simply, by postmodern film scholars who theorise masquerade merely in the sense of gendered performance, as “doubl[ing] representation”¹⁶ because the deception mechanism operates to establish the sheer dichotomy of the false surface and the true interior. When the performance of gendered identities is concerned, the audience who seeks identification are prevented from identifying with the screen representation, being distanced by the excessive performance. On the other hand, when the literal masquerade is examined, as in studies of Shakespeare, the idea of performative gender is dropped, and a disguised character is understood as “virtually two persons. One personality is maintained for the companions, who are deceived; and the other personality for the spectators, who are not deceived.”¹⁷ The audience is supposed to identify with the “real” personality. Masquerades in adventure films have to be conceived in both ways, and films like *The Mark of Zorro* and *The Scarlet Pimpernel* expose the complexity of the manipulation of disguises in adventure films and the partiality of looking at the matter only from one perspective.

If disguise solely doubles representation or produces another personality, the unveiling of the disguise has to prove one of the personae as a mask and the other an original. This process would be done through the establishment of a dichotomy. An understanding of a *femme fatale* as a mere performance of over-represented femininity preconditions that the surface form is *not* the reality, and a literal masquerade where a person simply produces another, often contrasting persona functions when there *is* a real, original character. Theoretically, should the disguise be found out, the double representations or the double existences have to be reconciled, for a person cannot be divided into two. The recognition of the reality leads to an expulsion of the non-reality, and the discordance of having the impossible double existences is harmonised by the masquerader’s

returning to the reality. However, this is not the case in *The Mark of Zorro* or *The Scarlet Pimpernel*.

In *The Scarlet Pimpernel*, Percy constantly puts on the guise of a fop even before his wife, Lady Marguerite, and then acts every once in a while as the elusive Scarlet Pimpernel. He sometimes talks seriously in front of his League when planning his next action (or adventure), which itself does not include physical exercise, as the Pimpernel, and this is when he is neither the fop nor the hero. It is possible to say, therefore, that this is also when the Leslie Howard character is the adventure-loving, but socially restricted Percy himself, who may only play with his adventure spirit within his mind. So there are three visible personae on the screen.¹⁸ Since a contrasting persona has an effect of hiding the opposite potency, the disguise of a fop converts Percy's desire and his masculine potency into the Pimpernel's action. There is a temptation to interpret both the persona of a fop and that of the Pimpernel as "false" guises, permitting the remaining Percy, who is unable to render action on his own, to be the "real" and original character; but then the recognition of the truth has to be followed by the obliteration of the false two personae and a concurrent *return* to the static Percy, which in fact does not really take place at all. Percy's incompleteness, his incompetence to perform heroic deeds, suspends him from being authenticated as the absolute original because being a "whole" person, who is "an ideal in all respects, with courage, strength, and altruism, rather than mere brute strength"¹⁹ is prerequisite to an adventurer, the hero, or the protagonist by definition. Percy, who proves himself to be just another of the imperfect personae, needs the other two personae in order to be a complete being. Therefore, the "real" identity and a false disguise are not polarised in *The Scarlet Pimpernel*, for none of the personae is the "real" original character, whose existence is presupposed to substantiate the polarisation. The double-layered disguises challenge the idea of polarisation.

The idea of triple imperfect personae is elaborated further in *The Mark of Zorro*. The first persona is Don Diego who is an excellent *cavaliero* in Spain, yet to learn of the troubles at home. We may hypothesise, as a starting point, that the first persona is the “real” protagonist himself, the original. The second persona would be the masked Zorro who could be defined as an embodiment of Diego’s heroic or adventurous quality. It is almost as if the heroic part of an individual were extracted and amplified to produce a perfect hero. However, Zorro is not precisely a hero in terms of righteousness, as his name “fox” also insinuates. Diego’s father clearly proclaims that “Two wrongs don’t make a right, and never will,” and he goes on to check Diego from doing illegal things by saying that he “will not follow Quintero and neither [his] son.” Since fathers are always in the right in the patriarchal society, Zorro is not only defying his own father, he is also breaking the laws of society. Although Diego’s adventure as Zorro seems to be justified by the outcome, it nonetheless violates the boundaries of law when in action. Because this legitimately impertinent second persona must be concealed in the world of laws and confinement, the first persona conceives the third persona, a fop, who would be incapable of any masculine action.

The significance of this foppish disguise invites some exploration, since it is a recurrent practice for a hero to adopt the disguise of a fop. To begin with, a fop by definition is a parody of an effeminate male, and thus can be considered to generate a similar effect as cross-dressing. His excessive interest in and knowledge of fancy garments, which are socially constructed primarily as women’s stuff, are thoroughly demonstrated both in *The Scarlet Pimpernel* and in *The Mark of Zorro*. Percy “know[s] clothes” even though he may be “brainless, spineless, [and] useless” as the Prince of Wales puts it in *The Scarlet Pimpernel*. In *The Mark of Zorro*, when the villain Captain Esteban Pasquale asks Diego if he “fanc[ies] the weapon,” Diego puts out his lacy handkerchief

and says, “I know very little about it, mi dear capitan. Swordplay is such a violent business.” Here, as we can see from the contrast Diego makes, the disguise of a foppish coward clearly functions to hide his capability as a swashbuckler. The contrast illustrates the fop to be the *best* disguise in such cases, but there are several ways of understanding what this kind of disguise consequently indicates. The contrast manifests the deceiver’s potentiality to render masculine conducts. Taves argues that men may not allow themselves “to be unafraid to sometimes take refuge behind stylish dress and play the dandy or fop” unless these men have “confidence in their own manliness.”²⁰ His interpretation justifies the lengthy opening scenes of swashbuckling and horse-riding in *The Mark of Zorro*, which should make the audience affirm Diego’s potentiality.

The foppish disguise of Diego, therefore, is a distinctly fragmentary persona, as is the mask of Zorro. The black costume, including the mask, visually marks Zorro, who does not have a personal life. When he makes love to Lolita, he has to put on the guise of a friar²¹ – a non-Zorro guise, for the Zorro mask is reserved exclusively for politically heroic deeds such as revenge and achieving justice (even though he must violate the existing laws during the course of his action). Diego’s concealment of Zorro from his own father carefully functions to separate public duty from his private interests. Zorro acts for the people, and the rest is taken care of by non-Zorro personae. The first, supposedly “real” original is an incomplete being as well, having fault of his own, besides being incapable of action without disguises, and thus impossible to prove himself the “hero” of the adventure narrative, for a hero must be a whole person. As the opening sequence shows, Diego may be *capable* of swordplay, but he is more interested in *senoritas* and clothes. The audience learns that Diego is not committed to a single lady, and that he is trying to look good for his daily conquests. Looking into the mirror, Diego himself realises that “something’s wrong” with him, which suggests that this *cavaliero* may have a flaw or two as a hero. His

excessively close relationship with his mother is established early in the film: he is close to his mother than to his father since Mother understands and accepts him almost unconditionally while Father does not, almost trying to get rid of his responsibility as a father altogether (“What a son you bore me!”), which is not exactly a sign of mature masculinity for the protagonist. Maturity as a man is achieved through growing out of being the Mother’s son, and thus taking over the bread-winner role by making a commitment (getting married), following the theory of hegemonic masculinity. It also requires a person to accept and assimilate into the dominant patriarchal system of the world, which would be approved and much appreciated by paternal figures as well. Diego’s maturity is strongly denied and the patriarchy disapproves of him, as he is still his mother’s “baby” until he introduces Lolita to his parents as his future wife. To double the effect, Diego even has a surrogate father (Padre) who remonstrates with him and then congratulates him later when he reveals his Zorro persona, exclaiming repeatedly “my boy” and “my Diego.” This presents itself as a reconciliation of Diego with the patriarchal society. Each persona itself is incomplete, for the first persona Diego is not mature enough, Zorro not lawful enough, and the fop certainly not masculine enough to be the hero.

This notion of incomplete personae can be tied into one of the characteristics of adventure narratives, namely the thematic *Bildungsroman* aspect. Adventure narratives must exhibit the victory of the protagonist at the ending, through the presentation of the successful hero, which the first Diego persona can never be. The unmasking of disguises cannot lead to a repossession of the first persona. The original character, should he exist in any way, must develop through his experiences, which are conducted through the acts of disguises, to be able to disclose himself as a hero in the end. The “complete” being which is presented as the hero at the closure of the narrative has to be something of the blending of the three personae, which would symbolise an appropriate unifica-

tion, not only of the divided personalities but also of the narrative threads that come together in the closure. The hero could be a totally different person if only he comes out from the unification. In this sense, the foppish disguise of femininity which may be easily dismissed as means to convey the effects from the contrast has another place in its meanings; it could represent the existing feminine aspect of a complete being, for no individual in reality is without the complexity of having both elements of polarised characteristics.

The unification of the three personae is cinematically, visually and narratively played out in *The Mark of Zorro*. Since disguise is partly about clothes and costumes, it may be reasonable to read disguises from their visual appearances. In contrast with Zorro's simple black attire, Diego in the foppish disguise tends to dress in paler coloured (what is more, often whitish) decorative apparel. (The first, immature Diego persona is naturally stamped by his uniform. The uniform connotes institutionalised collectiveness which disclaims independent maturity.) When the moment comes for him to disclose his disguises, both of the fop and of Zorro, while his potentiality for action is still registered by his black trousers, Zorro's unlawful transgression of boundaries is withheld by his white shirt. His clothing signifies the multi-layered reconciliations which are sequential to the unmasking of the disguises. The father and the son are united again, Zorro's violation of laws justified, and Diego and Lolita are going to "marry, raise fat children, and watch his vineyards grow," all of which indicates Diego's maturation and the unification of the split personalities which are represented as the three personae on screen. Significantly, he does not go back to his uniform. The *Bildungsroman* narrative demands progress, whereas a *return* to an incomplete persona denotes regression. The disguise plot in adventure films thus hampers a simple polarisation of reality and non-reality, challenging the verisimilitude of the real or original presence at the beginning of the story. Each persona represents respective aspect of a person, and the nature of adven-

ture films that necessitates progress and unification directs the production of a wholly ideal hero, through the manipulation of the disguise mechanism.

DISGUISE AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO MOBILITY

The idea of unifying split personalities is the underlying narrative in films like *The Prisoner of Zenda* and *The Masquerader*. While films like *The Mark of Zorro* and *The Scarlet Pimpernel*, in which the double disguises bring the narratives forward, reject the simple dichotomy, films with double or mistaken identities manipulate the idea of contrasting opposites or polarised worlds. The opening credit sequence of the 1937 version of *The Prisoner of Zenda* starts out with a shot of cavalrymen lining up on the left side of the screen, making a right about-face turn and then blowing bugles. The same shot is repeated twice, before and after Rudolf's coronation, but there is a variation in the shot after the coronation: the camera pans slowly to the right to show an identical line of cavalrymen on the right side of the screen, facing left. The shot exhibits that there are two symmetrical worlds, and now the audience is taken into the other side of the mirror, where the Russendyll character *is* the King indeed. The idea of symmetry can be applied likewise to the two Rudolfs (or the two Johns in the case of *The Masquerader*), both of whom would have to have the same name, and they are the polarised halves or psychological doubles.

Polarising characteristics into each character is rigidly visualised in both films. When one of the two renounces his political or social authority, he not only loses his place in the world-in-progress, but more significantly he is deprived of his physical power. While Russendyll is very much active as the King, the real Rudolf the Fifth is drugged to sleep and later stripped of his mobility when he is awake, being tied to the bed as the prisoner of Zenda. Similarly, Sir John Chilcote is incapable of moving at all, for he is unconscious most of the time, being addicted to drugs, while John Loder plays an active part

in the political world as Sir Chilcote. There is an explicit polarisation between the impostor, who performs, and the real person, who is confined in terms of action. The person in disguise is given all the action: he has to do whatever the “real” person was supposed to do, in addition to his own actions, such as love-making. Because the other is restricted in movement or action, the character in disguise has to move twice as much, and consequently, being in disguise becomes virtually synonymous with rendering action.

Disguise in films is associated with mobility, which embraces the idea of action. When the polarisation of mobility and confinement is played out, disguise often functions as its medium to expose the polarisation and as its means to enable unification of the polarised two, causing change or movement; in other words, “action.” The mechanism of disguise is articulated quite visually and ideologically in *The Dirty Dozen*. The convicts are naturally limited in mobility – they may only march within the wall or make unproductive steps in their condemned cells. They are confined into this condition because of their excessive capabilities for action in the first place. Excessiveness is not regularly permitted in society. Repression of action is manifested in the physical confinement. However, in the disguise of a special unit, the dirty dozen is allowed not only mobility but also excessive action. When they are to demonstrate their capability for action, they may get away with breaking the rules and regulations of the game. Partly because the world for the special unit is a world at war, the rules and conventions of the ordinary world do not always apply. Metaphorically, however, the disguise “moved” them to this world, where transgressions of boundaries and violations of laws are not necessarily accounted for. The inversion of virtuous or honourable deeds and immoral or adverse conducts in the film questions the social bounds. Therefore, the movement that disguise brought about is a transgression in itself.

The rejection of polarisation in films like *The Mark of Zorro* and *The*

Scarlet Pimpernel signifies the non-existence of the “real” original to return to, and thus functions as a factor which necessitates unification of the split personae to produce a whole being, which may be cast as the hero of an adventure film. However, in films like *The Prisoner of Zenda* and *The Masquerader*, it is the generation of polarisation through the act of disguise that works towards the same goal of unification or the construction of a hero. Disguises either expose the partiality or the deficiency of each persona or reduce each character to a polarised half, and the adventure narrative which requires the construction of the hero demands either unification or some progress (or education) of a person who has been represented as an incomplete existence. The prisoner of Zenda, who is restrained in action, needs to learn “how to be a king” and “act like one” from the all-action Russendyll character, which is in a way the blending of the two contrasting characteristics. The problematic closure of *The Masquerader*, where Loder rather too easily accepts his fate to live as his cousin for the rest of his life (because Chilcote dies as Loder), may only be understood in the way that both characters are unified in the end. The dichotomy of an empty vessel and the content is played out in terms of place and substance in *The Masquerader*. Chilcote has a place in the Parliament as well as a big house with numerous rooms whereas Loder is a nobody politically and a mere lodger. But without Loder’s action, the vessel is wasted and therefore, Loder’s replacement of Chilcote is justified as unification. The progress to unification is an outcome of disguise, and therefore, while the notion of disguise polarises the ideas of confinement and mobility, it also enables and simultaneously produces movement or mobility, as shown in the case of *The Dirty Dozen*.

The formation of fragmentary existences, either split personalities or polarised halves, which is a consequence of the disguise mechanism, generates movement in several ways. It invites unification or progress on the narrative level, and it assigns one of the existences “action.” It also allows a trespass-

ing of the bounds of all conventions both on macrocosmic and microcosmic levels. Disguise results in the creation of a fantasy world where the governing laws of reality are abandoned or may be ignored, and a person is given both the privilege to disobey the rules of normally accepted behaviour, which is problematically elaborated in *The Dirty Dozen*, and mobility to invade the societal borders such as those of sex, class, and race, which can be recognised as “a great equalizer [which] bring[s] together those of different social levels.”²² All in all, disguises enable the crossing of boundaries, and sometimes even threaten the notion of what the boundaries represent. The hero of an adventure film may achieve so far through his simple masqueradings.

CONCLUSION: ADVENTURE, ACTION, AND DISGUISE

Obviously, an adventure film always needs an adventurer. In Taves’ definition, this adventurer “is impelled by an idealistic world view and a belief in patriotism, chivalry, and honor” and a “political consciousness underlies all of [his] activities.”²³ He “succeeds by facing death, courageously overcoming dangers and adversaries,”²⁴ and the victorious outcome is his accomplishment of certain designs or missions which are even symbolically conceived in the happy-ending. According to the code of adventure which Taves proposes;

victory is always possible, no matter the odds. . . . Fidelity becomes its own “success,” fealty resulting in victory that is inevitable although not necessarily easy. Victory and martyrdom may be achieved despite death and momentary failure if the code has been obeyed, and apotheosis achieved by . . . Sidney Carton in *A Tale of Two Cities*.²⁵

Adventure narratives, therefore, have a structure of *Bildungsroman*, as already indicated above, in which the protagonist of the story develops or matures through his experiences.²⁶ Disguises are his experiences, which give mobility

not only to the masquerade but also to the narrative, and the story always has a sense of progress — not regression, which is ascertained by the deception mechanism of disguise narratives.

Taves links *adventure* with *action*, “a word attached to any film with a greater emphasis on action than emotion,” in the sense that “[t]he usual definitions of adventure stress elements of the unusual, overcoming obstacles with narrow escapes, and vanquishing villains.”²⁷ In his view, however, action is a broader term than adventure, for “*action* is a more appropriate word than adventure to describe the style of storytelling that runs through many genres, a male-oriented approach dependent on physical movement, violence, and suspense, with often perfunctory motivation and romance.”²⁸ In defining the genre, he detaches films that might have clearer and more suitable categories such as Westerns, and furthermore strives to distinguish historical adventure from fantasy films as follows:

One form that is often confused with the adventure genre but lies distinctly outside its tradition is fantasy. Unlike adventure, fantasy presents a netherworld where events *violate physical reality and the bounds of human possibility, trespassing* the laws of nature and mixing the otherwise separate worlds of the natural and the supernatural. *The violation of these bounds* is fantasy’s motif and highlight, indicating that the genre is fundamentally opposed to the inherent limitations and *verisimilitude* of adventure, with its historical concerns.²⁹ (Italics mine.)

Nevertheless, the exact basis for Taves’ reasoning, the “verisimilitude” of adventure, is not so simple to confirm, especially in historical adventure films which utilise a disguise plot, all the more because disguise can be a device for transgression, as I have stated above.

Disguise itself has an effect of producing fantasy, which violates the bounds and consequently challenges them. A person who could not have done certain things without a specific disguise may be enabled to do those things

by masquerading as another person. As far as the hero is concerned, the world in which he is disguised can be called his dream world. An act of masquerade breaks the rules and conventions, and the masquerade transcends the bounds of verisimilitude. Of course, there cannot be found many “supernatural” elements in non-fantasy, historical adventure films; nevertheless, to see your double is surely not an everyday experience in the first place, and to become a daring hero like Zorro or the Scarlet Pimpernel, I think, is extraordinary enough. Therefore, the distinction between an adventure film and a fantasy film is not always useful. Taves himself, perhaps rather contradictorily observes that the adventure films embrace some fantasy elements as well while he seems to separate one from the other. He acknowledges that adventure films “drive primarily from the romantic tradition,” and describes the hero of the romantic tradition as follows:

The romance hero transcends the world of ordinary experience, emerging free and victorious in an allegory of good over evil. Adventure’s romantic sense appears in the narrative tendency to polarize the world into two realms, one innocent and idyllic and the other its opposite, as represented by heroes and villains.³⁰

Needless to say, a polarised world cannot be a realistic one.

However, a look into the functions of disguise in adventure films bestows significance even into this presentation of a non-realistic world, admirably fulfilling the audience’s desire for both identification and escapism. The audience may easily identify with the hero who is “an embodiment of heroic virtues, an uncomplicated one-dimensional figure”³¹ because the deception mechanism of masquerading allows the audience to imagine the heroic quality to be hidden within them. The suggestion of latent potential in any person is made through the visual manipulation of disguises, and “we dream the dreams wherein our aggressive urges are cheerfully unleashed”³² in the fantasy world on screen,

generated through the device of masquerading. Disguise thus produces a specific “cinematic” function. Disguise is, then, as Tasker defines *action*, “cinematic.”³³ Disguise’s “aesthetic is [perhaps not one of speed but certainly of] movement.” Disguise “centres around conflict.” And disguise “captures the body in motion.” The relationship of disguise to movement or mobility overlaps that of action and cinema. I do realise the insufficiency of my exploration into the complex matter of the audience’s identification in this essay, but I still hope that an examination of literal masquerades may have suggested a new significance in thinking about the term “masquerade,” if it did not add a complexity to the understanding of the relationship between cinematic representation and the audience’s reality.

Notes

- 1 Yvonne Tasker, *Spectacular Bodies: Gender, Genre and the Action Cinema* (London and NY: Routledge, 1993) 110.
- 2 Mary Anne Doane, *Femmes Fatales: Feminism, Film Theory, Psychoanalysis* (NY and London: Routledge, 1991).
- 3 Tania Modleski, *Old Wives’ Tales: Feminist Re-Visions of Film and Other Fictions* (London and NY: I. B. Tauris, 1998) 3.
- 4 See Tasker’s analysis in *Spectacular Bodies*.
- 5 Gaylyn Studlar, “Building Mr. Pep: Boy Culture and the Construction of Douglas Fairbanks,” *This Mad Masquerade: Stardom and Masculinity in the Jazz Age* (Columbia UP, 1996) 10-89.
- 6 Steven Cohan, *Masked Men: Masculinity and the Movies in the Fifties* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1997) xvi.
- 7 As for the significance of action films as a genre in considering male bodies and masculinities, it is well articulated in Tasker’s work cited above.
- 8 Brian Taves includes *The Scarlet Pimpernel* and *A Tale of Two Cities* in his genre of adventure films in *The Romance of Adventure: The Genre of Historical Adventure Movies* (Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1993). Although I make extensive use of Taves’s attempt to define the genre of adventure films, I only accept his definition to a certain

- extent. I do not intend to begin a study of genre in this essay, but I hope my definition of “adventure” films will emerge in the following section as I discuss masquerades in films.
- 9 Kathryn Bigelow, as quoted in Yvonne Tasker’s “Action” (University of East Anglia, 2000).
 - 10 The implication of defining masquerade as an “action” excludes any masked conditions without consciousness or intention. It has to be a deliberate conduct of the subject.
 - 11 Robin Hood can even said to be a disguise altogether, since the character Errol Flynn is playing is originally Sir Robin of Locksley, who is positively different in class from Robin Hood. Robin cannot have so much of the commoners’ approval and support if he had abided with the name, which registers his “real” identity.
 - 12 Modleski 162.
 - 13 Victor Oscar Freeburg, *Disguise Plots in Elizabethan Drama: A Study in Stage Tradition* (NY: Benjamin Blom, 1965, 1915) 5.
 - 14 Taves 115.
 - 15 Ibid. 58.
 - 16 Doane 26.
 - 17 Freeburg 15.
 - 18 Counting in Leslie Howard’s performance of a gendered identity in the film on the whole would add at least another layer to the mechanism of disguise.
 - 19 Taves 114.
 - 20 Ibid. 115.
 - 21 The disguise of a friar is an interesting guise to put on here, in fact, considering the non-masculine connotation monks have. Perhaps the film is playing with the idea of unexpectedness.
 - 22 Taves 115.
 - 23 Ibid. xi.
 - 24 Ibid. 5.
 - 25 Ibid. 138. It is also interesting here that Taves takes *A Tale of Two Cities* to be an adventure film. Unless we do not accept Sidney Carton’s act of masquerading as his “adventure,” there isn’t any other adventurous element found in it.
 - 26 This is not irrelevant to the fact that adventure films frequently take their sources from the literature of the Nineteenth century.
 - 27 Taves 4.
 - 28 Ibid. 5.

- 29 Ibid. 9.
- 30 Ibid. 58.
- 31 Jeffrey Richards, "The Swashbuckling Revival," *Focus on Film* 27 (Summer 1977) 10.
- 32 Gordon Gow, "Swashbucklers," *Film and Filming* 11 (January 1972) 35.
- 33 Tasker, "Action," (University of East Anglia) 1.

Works Cited

- Cohan, Steven. *Masked Men: Masculinity and the Movies in the Fifties*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1997.
- Connor, Edward. "The Genealogy of Zorro: Deep Are the Reasons for the Perpetual Attraction of the Fop by Day & Robin Hood by Night." *Films in Review* 8 (August-September 1967): 330-33, 343.
- Craft-Fairchild, Catherine. *Masquerade and Gender: Disguise and Female Identity in Eighteenth-Century Fictions by Women*. Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State UP, 1993.
- Cutts, John. "The Finest Zenda of Them All." *Films and Filming* 17, n6 (March 1971): 40-42.
- Doane, Mary Ann. *Femmes Fatales: Feminism, Film Theory, Psychoanalysis*. NY and London: Routledge, 1991.
- Freeburg, Victor Oscar. *Disguise Plots in Elizabethan Drama: A Study in Stage Tradition*. NY: Benjamin Blom, 1965. (1915)
- Garber, Marjorie. *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety*. London: Penguin, 1993. (Routledge, 1992)
- Gow, Gordon. "Swashbucklers." *Film and Filming* 11 (January 1972): 34-41.
- Modleski, Tania. *Old Wives' Tales: Feminist Re-Visions of Film and Other Fictions*. London and NY: I. B. Tauris, 1998.
- Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." *Visual and Other Pleasures*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1989. 14-28. The essay was originally published in *Screen* 16, n3 (Autumn 1975): 6-18.
- Neale, Steve. "Masculinity as Spectacle: Reflections on Men and Mainstream Cinema." *Screen* 24, n6 (1983): 2-16.
- Parish, James Robert and Don E. Stanke. *The Swashbucklers*. New Rochelle: Arlington House, 1976.
- Richards, Jeffrey. "The Swashbuckling Revival." *Focus on Film* 27 (Summer 1977): 79-114.
- Studlar, Gaylyn. "Building Mr. Pep: Boy Culture and the Construction of Douglas

- Fairbanks." *This Mad Masquerade: Stardom and Masculinity in the Jazz Age*. Columbia UP, 1996. 10-89.
- Tasker, Yvonne. "Action." University of East Anglia. 2000.
- . *Spectacular Bodies: Gender, Genre and the Action Cinema*. London: Routledge, 1993.
- Taves, Brian. *The Romance of Adventure: The Genre of Historical Adventure Movies*. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1993.