

Jesús López-Peláez Casellas, David Malcolm and Pilar Sánchez Calle, eds. 2004: *Masquerades; Disguise in Literature in English from the Middle Ages to the Present*. Gdansk: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Gdanskiego, 237 pp. ISBN: 83-7326-212-1.

Jesús M. Nieto García
Universidad de Jaén
jmnieto@ujaen.es

[T]he work a writer does ends up being work through which he cuts a figure, and ... the materials provided him in fictional plots, topics of public interest, and the efforts of other writers become disguises for some sort of exhibitionism. (Goffman 1986: 296)

A brief analysis of the title and subtitle of this book is, in itself, telling. It is about identity, change of identity and the way we can masquerade with regard to both. Disguise is, or may be, one of the many ways in which we masquerade; after all, "We're all doubles ... but at night ... we meet our sleeper" (Stoppard 1988: 62). More exactly, however, this volume of essays deals, not with masquerade in everyday life, but with masquerade in literature, which notion appears to be firmly grounded, despite the doubts expressed by Fowler (1990, 1996) and Peter Widdowson (1999) among others. The editors take a cross-section of literatures in English as one criterion for the delimitation of the book's scope. Going further than that would be, to say the least, risky business, as only seven at best out of the fourteen contributions to the volume deal with texts written by English authors; the others are by Scottish, American, Irish and even a Danish writer. All in all, scholars working in five different countries at least, and in three continents, are present in this book. The chronological dimension provides a further element of continuity, as the volume contains samples of texts written in the Middle Ages, through the Renaissance, then leaping to the nineteenth century and from there spanning, with Kipling, the turn of the century to the twentieth, wherein the majority of the studies are chronologically sited. Only five contributions out of the fourteen are devoted to pre- twentieth century texts. As for such a general notion as *the canon*, we can again find a mixture of canonical and not-so-canonical authors, as the contrast between Shakespeare in one contribution and popular contemporary romance novels in another suggests. The presence of gender as a criterion is also uneven, as five contributions deal, in more or less direct ways, with texts written by women, another five with texts written by men and in three other chapters the approach does not centre on one single author, though the texts are mostly written by men. Yet one other chapter deals with anonymous Middle English romances. So, what is it that gives the volume continuity and interest? For this reviewer, it is the socio-historical approach that is predominant, rather than the rhetorical, stylistic or other views on critical perspectives, while the notions of disguise and identities provide the unifying topic.

The volume consists of an Introduction and fourteen essays. The latter are grouped into four distinct sections, comprising either three or four essays each, with each section hinging on different facets of disguise that are reflected in the titles: 'Disguise and Power', 'Disguise and Identity', 'Disguise and Madness' and 'Disguise and Gender'. These groupings of essays can be seen to lend themselves to possible areas for future research, with the only limitation, as the editors acknowledge in their Introduction, that there exists some degree of overlapping between the overall themes, particularly with respect to the notion of power, which is everywhere applicable. The same could be said of section two, 'Disguise and Identity', with respect to the contents studied in the other three sections. As a result of the close inter-connection between these two concepts, it would not be out of place to see the three chapters in this section included in others. The editors' work is, with this caveat, well carried out and provides the potential reader with an inviting commencement to the volume. Moreover, the Introduction can be considered as one more chapter in the collection of essays, since it is no mere presentation of the chapters, but a precise and informative overview of the work undertaken so far in this hitherto somewhat untilled scholarly field.

In the introduction López-Peláez, Malcolm and Sánchez deal with the notion of disguise in literature from a broad perspective, alluding both to such canonical texts and authors as *The Odyssey*, *The Bible*, Shakespeare, Jonson, Fielding and Hardy and to 'lighter' literary subgenres such as detective and spy stories. A more developed consideration of this section would have been welcomed by many readers. Before briefly introducing the different contributions and sections, the editors reflect on the possible reasons why masquerades have generated so much critical attention in recent times among literary theorists and critics in general. They reach the partial conclusion that the notion is challenging because the blurring of identity patent in disguise is merely an external, minor sign of "a wider social, intellectual, and epistemological crisis" (9). All these questionings of identity, race, sex, class and nation, therefore, help us see human beings as essentially de-structured and multiple, apart from the fact that disguise obviously threatens many long established social and political institutions. Hence the possibly dangerous nature of disguise and the interest that both the notion as a whole and this book on the subject can raise.

The first section deals with 'Disguise and Power' and is basically a good, balanced section, in which the key point hinges upon how different interactants in literary texts initially use forms of disguise to conceal their true nature in order to lead opponents to think they are not who they really are. The section opens with John Simons' 'Working Knights: Labour as Disguise in the Middle English Romances'. In spite of the initial disclaimer suggesting that the intended readership of the chapter is not a specialised one, the typology of disguise suggested in this chapter is of interest to future researchers in the field. Simons presents a categorisation of the romances written in the Middle English period according to the functionality of disguise in each narrative: that is, first, the characters disguise themselves consciously to further their plans and gain some advantage; secondly, the characters are aware that they are forced to live other than in the way due to them by birth; and thirdly, the hero or heroine is unwittingly forced into disguise by some external imposition. This typology is followed by a list of romances

which are grouped accordingly, many of which belong to the Arthurian cycle. The essay is completed by the analysis of two romances, *Havelok the Dane* and *Sir Isumbras*, both belonging to the second type and in which the heroes disguise themselves as workers or peasants.

In the second chapter, “‘And dressed myself in such humility’: Honour and Disguise in Shakespeare’s *Henry IV*”, López-Peláez presents an in-depth study of honour, disguise and power in *Henry IV Part 1*. This chapter makes a clear point and covers both literariness and theatricality. After defining the concept of honour in anthropological terms, and specifying how it usually implies the use of a new, different code, López-Peláez applies the concept to the analysis of Shakespeare’s play. He suggests that its main concern is how power is produced, and how representation is also a source in the text, since the battle for power is finally won by the man fulfilling the social role, even if this may have meant going through a previous process of integration into that society.

The third essay in this group is not that announced in the Introduction as dealing with the late seventeenth century plays of Aphra Benn. Instead, Diane Peschier offers, in ‘Gliding Jesuits: Masters of Disguise and a Covert Threat to Protestant Patriarchal Society in Mid-Nineteenth-Century England’, an analysis of a series of novels in which Jesuits are central elements in the plot and in which she finds great similarities between the texts. Although the chapter is not lacking in interest and patently fits the aims of both the book and the section in which it is included, a more historical, cross-literary approach would have been appreciated. This opinion is based on the fact that the tendencies portrayed in the novels are by no means unique or exclusive to the British scene, as the recent history of Spain, France and Portugal show, and as is proved by the existence of traditionally neglected literary genres, such as highly melodramatic novels. In the final chapter of this section, ‘The Empire’s New Clothes: Kipling’s Chameleonic Kim and White Privilege’, Carolyn Maibor approaches Kipling’s novel from a post-colonial point of view, revising the theoretically ‘Orientalist’ position adopted by the novelist, and suggesting that, in fact, Kim is presented as the saviour and redeemer of the Indian race, so epitomising British superiority over ‘natives’. As in the previous chapter, one has the impression that an approach closer to the historical evolution of Anglo-Indian and Anglo-Russian relationships at that time, plus a proper consideration of the novel as a *bildungsroman*, might have resulted in a more balanced view of the position adopted by Kipling in this novel.

The only problem with the second group of essays, centring on ‘Disguise and Identity’, is that it is essentially a tautology, since the former obviously has to do with the latter, through a permanent relationship of questioning. Otherwise, the three chapters are well written and interesting. In the first, J.-A. George deals with ‘The Father of Lies: The Figure of the Vice in Early English Drama’. In it, the author concentrates on two interludes, John Pikerlyng’s *Horestes* and Francis Merbury’s *The Marriage between Wit and Wisdom*. Although in general terms the method is mostly expository, rather than critical, the clear knowledge the author has of the theatre of the time is pervasive throughout the essay, as is, more importantly, that of the theatrical techniques and the problems people of the theatre have to face when engaging in a stage

production of non-canonical Renaissance plays. In “‘It’s a wise conspirator that knows his own name’”: Disguise, Narration and Ambiguity in John Buchan’s Espionage Fiction’, David Malcolm uses the typical structure of topic – discussion of circumstances – conclusions to address *The Thirty-Nine Steps* and *The Three Hostages*. In a fine-grained analysis he shows how disguise does not materially affect the protagonists Hannay and Arbuthnot, who remain essentially the same underneath. But precisely for this reason disguise introduces an all-pervading ambiguity into the text world of the novel, which undermines the main character- narrator’s certainties as well as the fibre of the text itself. In the third and final chapter in this section, Mary Lazar deals with ‘Disguise in the Life and Work of Jerzy Kosinski’, taking the author’s life itself as an example of identity questioning, although, for an adequate balance between life and works, about one third of the chapter is devoted to covering his writings. If the author studied had been a different one, the outcome would probably not have been as round as it is. Certainly, in this case the post-modernist idea that fiction and non-fiction tend more often than not to mix becomes a fact.

The third group of essays, on ‘Disguise and Madness’, is the most uniform, especially in terms of period, approach and topic. The period is the twentieth century, the approach is mostly psychologically based, while the topic, unlike that of the previous section, is female gender, with the single exception of the chapter dealing with Beckett. The first chapter in the group, Simmons’ “‘Truth is for Tailors’: The Aristocratic Mask as Narcissistic Disorder in the Works and Life of Isak Dinesen’, is excellent; the author presents a well read, thought-provoking and clearly developed text, with a balanced mixture of the obvious psychologically based approaches, considering what the section is about, and more Bakhtin-inspired and post-colonial theories. The second, Carmen Méndez’s “‘You, my body, and my mind, one of these will go’”: Madness as Disguise in Samuel Beckett’s *Murphy* and *Endgame*’, presents a careful analysis of the Irish playwright and novelist. Pertinent here would have been some reference to Labov and Fanshel’s (1977) theories concerning unbalanced behaviour as reflected in interaction in mental institutions, especially as they offer interesting clues as to the way information is managed in doctor-patient interactions. The third and final chapter, Sánchez-Pardo’s ‘Schizophrenic Modernisms: Plath’s and de Chirico’s Drama of the Psyche’, is highly original in approach, considering as it does the interdisciplinary nature of good art, by concentrating not only on the apparently obvious connection between literature and painting, in this case, but also on the influence that de Chirico’s memoirs have had on *The Bell Jar* and other works by Sylvia Plath.

The fourth and final section, dealing with ‘Disguise and Gender’, is, from a certain point of view, slightly irregular, in the sense that, as I will argue later, the first, second and fourth chapters fit here perfectly, but one may be less convinced that the same can be said for the third chapter. Nevertheless, if one outstanding feature of this group of essays is to be selected, it is its originality. This is particularly true in terms of critical approach and the texts selected for analysis. First we turn to Robin Miskolcze’s ‘Holy Motives and Loyal Bodies: Cross-Dressed Female Seafarers in Early American Popular Literature’, where the author concentrates for the main part on a clearly non-canonical

author and narrative, Lucy Brewer's *The Female Marine*. This work apparently had great success after being first published in 1815, but has received scant critical attention in recent literature. By contrast, the author then deals with the clearly canonical texts in early American literature as represented by Cooper's sea trilogy. Although the approach is mostly descriptive rather than critical, it makes the final controversial point that "the seafaring woman retains the values of the domestic" (192). The second chapter, Lisa Fletcher's "'Mere Costumery'?: Georgette Heyer's Cross-Dressing Novels", is divided into two parts. The first, more general, deals with the way cross-dressing disguise has been approached by theorists, while the second engages with Heyer's production. Fletcher's contribution is arguably one of the most controversial in the whole volume, although one could not avoid the impression that the many pages in *These Old Shades* (206) that receive no apparent critical attention probably conceal, or reveal, much more than at first glance meets the eye. Despite this possible oversight, Fletcher makes the final point that the "[...] subgenre becomes more fraught [...] in its demands for closure and normalisation". We might wonder, however, where this normalisation should originate, given the borderline cases the narratives deal with, and how and when 'real beings' should be disclosed, and by what kinds of means, especially given the generic features of romance. The third chapter could have been, from an outsider's point of view, included in the section on Disguise and Power, as Sánchez Calle addresses 'Disguising Race, Disguising the Self: Jessie Fauset's *Plum Bun* (1928)'. The only apparent reason for its inclusion here seems to be the fact that the protagonist is a woman. Yet this does not appear to be a key issue in the novel, whereas it is one shared by some other texts that are analysed in the other sections. The author's general contentions and approach, firmly established, seem to strike more clearly on power than on sex relationships. The final result comes out quite balanced and interesting as a whole, despite its 'double' nature – not amiss, otherwise, in a book on disguise. The final chapter, López Sánchez's "'O my America, my Newfoundland": Re-Discovering Gender Costumes in Angela Carter's *The Passion of the New Eve*', is a sound analysis of transsexuality in Carter's novel. It is a magnificently well written chapter, with a clear critical point to make. This final chapter clearly comes closer, in very general terms, to the first and second contributions in this section, as the phenomenon is not unlike cross-dressing – the leading topic in these two opening chapters – in conceptual terms. Sánchez Calle's chapter, however, is quite clearly set apart from the rest in that it considers race, rather than gender, as the motivation for adopting forms of disguise.

Overall, in conclusion, the collection makes an original contribution to the controversial critical issue of the forms and motifs of disguise in literature written in English. While other writers, such as Barthes and Pynchon, could justifiably have deserved a place among the chosen few, many of the chapters will provide fruitful reading for those researchers dealing with the authors and texts there studied. Finally, the collection, as a volume, is of interest to anyone working on Bakhtinian and socio-historical approaches to literature.

Works cited

- Fowler, Roger 1990: 'Literature'. Martin Coyle, Peter Garside, Malcolm Kelsall and John Peck, eds. *Encyclopedia of Literature and Criticism*. London: Routledge. 3-26.
- 1996: *Linguistic Criticism*. Oxford: Oxford UP.
- Goffman, Erving 1986: *Frame Analysis*. Boston: Northeastern UP.
- Labov, William and David Fanshel 1977: *Therapeutic Discourse; Psychotherapy as Conversation*. New York: Academic P.
- Stoppard, Tom 1988: *Hapgood*. London: Faber and Faber.
- Widdowson, Peter 1999: *Literature*. London: Routledge.

Received 17 July 2006

Revised version received 29 August 2007