

## Character in action in the seventeenth century antimasque

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### Introduction

This paper seeks to analyse the depiction of character in dance in the seventeenth century antimasque, drawing on the extant sources. These are mainly the printed texts of the masques, the surviving designs by Inigo Jones, some of the music, and scattered records relating to finance, organisation and a few eyewitness accounts. It must be noted that no choreography survives, and that there is no theoretical discourse on dancing at this time in England.

In plays a character was created primarily by words in dialogue and soliloquy, supported by gesture, acting and costume. The business of a play was to tell a story or stories, through a narrative plot. The business of a masque was to frame episodes of dancing whilst delivering a moral theme. Despite the well-known example of the ballet with a plot *Le Balet Comique de la Royne*, neither the ballet de cour in France nor the masque in England developed a narrative structure.

Throughout the period of the Stuart masque (1603–1640), the main masque was danced by courtiers only, and persisted as the central feature and culmination of the whole. The dancing in the main masque was not expressive, but deployed virtuosity, grace and splendour in symbolic figures executed by groups of dancers. Experiments in ways of varying this effect resulted in the use of professional performers to create a contrasting dance scene to the main masque. The word ‘antimasque’ was coined to indicate a very separate activity from the chief one by the noble dancers. This resulted in a bipartite structure for the English ballet de cour, and strengthened the possibilities of delivering an argument in support of a moral theme, by the use of antithesis and exemplar.

The identity of the antimasque performers goes virtually unrecorded; the little information available indicates that they were recruited from those companies of players under the patronage of the royal family. The court dancing masters did not at first perform in the masques, but devised the dances for both the main masque and the antimasque; although by the 1630s, a few individuals had begun to dance in antimasque entries. The players brought to their new task as dancers a range of physical skills. They were versed in the social dances of the day, able to dance as both men and women; they still used the European theatrical forms of *moresca* and *mattacinata*; they were also executants of the native traditions of morris dance, and solo jig and hornpipe. To this they added mime as deployed in the dumb show sequences, plus gesture and the physical aspects of acting; some would be experts at tumbling or music. These skills were used in support of the action on stage. The antimasque required them to execute expressive dancing for the first time, resulting in a synthesis of these physical skills into a new mode of performance.

During the first decade of the antimasque, their expertise in expressive dancing developed rapidly, enabling them to tackle a range of themes in dance. Two categories of antimasque performer emerged: the dancer who also spoke lines, and the mute dancer. Eventually the term ‘antimasquer’ came to indicate a professional dancer. Very few individuals are called ‘dancer’ at this time, and they tended to be members of the court music establishment (invariably violinists) who specialised in dancing, and therefore usually Frenchmen. However,

the antimasque did not remain exclusive to the professional performer. During the reign of Charles, both gentlemen and nobles began to dance in antimasque entries, thus adding expressive dancing to their skills. This was undoubtedly under the influence of Henrietta Maria, who brought French tolerance of the social mix in dance entries, that allowed professionals to perform the serious dance alongside the king and his nobles, and allowed the courtiers to mingle with professionals in the comic and grotesque entries. At Whitehall, the participation of the genteel in the antimasque was not matched by the intrusion of professionals into the main masque. English decorum did not allow that impertinence.

### **Antimasque entries**

As fresh invention was a requirement of the masque genre, there was little repetition of antimasque themes across the thirty years of performances. This results in a confusing range of roles to analyse. Drawing on the masques of the court and great houses only, I propose the following broad categories, with a selection of examples:

1. Emblematic roles: the personification of human vice or weakness (Curiosity, Rumour); the representation of abstractions (Christmas Days).
2. Inanimate objects: Minced Pie, New Year's Gift as Christmas Symbols, Maypole, Windmill, Cask and Bottles.
3. Forces of Nature: winds, complete storms, the four corners of the world.
4. Animals: baboons, goats, birds.
5. Semi-human types: mythological creatures, such as nymphs and satyrs; fantasy characters, such as the Volatees (the inhabitants of the moon, half man half bird).
6. Human types: the largest category of at least fifty different sorts, with very little repetition. A few favourites can be detected, appearing up to three times: country people, seamen (sailors, skippers, mariners); drunkards.

The last two were cunningly combined in 1634 to produce a character that has never left our stages: the Drunken Dutch Skipper. On close inspection though, even the least human roles were anthropomorphic: Curiosity and Rumour were presented as Enchanters; Baboons entered as Venetian travellers; Cask and Bottles were drunkards; even the Maypole had a nymph inside it. It is the category of primarily human types that is selected for discussion here.

### **Dances of character**

The first poet to introduce human types in an antimasque was Thomas Campion in *The Lords' Masque* of 1613, the first of three masques in celebration of the nuptials of Princess Elizabeth and Frederick, Elector Palatine. The antimasque comprised twelve mad people, under the guardianship of Mania, goddess of madness, amongst whom was trapped the poet Entheus. Orpheus, on the command of Jove, used the power of music to calm the Frantics down, in order to release the poet so that he might assist in the celebration of the marriage. Campion's text sketches the action:

At the sound of a strange music twelve Frantics enter, six men and six women, all presented in sundry habits and humours: there was the Lover, the Self Lover, the Melancholic Man full of fear, the School Man overcome with fantasy, the over-watched Usurer, with others that made an absolute medley of madness; in the midst of whom Entheus (or Poetic Fury) was hurried forth and tossed up and down, till by

virtue of a new change in the music the Lunatics fell into a mad measure, fitted to a loud fantastic tune; but in the end thereof the music changed into a very solemn air, which they softly played while Orpheus spake.<sup>1</sup>

This shows us that each Frantic was an individual type of madman; that they entered at some speed, and then executed a dance of madness, until they were calmed by Orpheus's music. During his short speech, they made their exit, leaving Entheus behind. This account also reveals that the dance was expressive of their character ('a mad measure'), with supporting music, and that the roles were also depicted by a combination of costume and action ('habits and humours'). It also tells us of a change in their demeanour during the dance, from frantic to calm.

The second and third masques of these nuptials were presented by the Inns of Court. Francis Beaumont wrote the third: *The Masque of the Inner Temple and Gray's Inn*. His antimasques were such a success that James called for them to be repeated at the end, and one was incorporated into a play for the public stage: *Two Noble Kinsmen* by a collaborative team of Shakespeare, Beaumont and Fletcher. Thus, two records of the entry give us useful information, and fuller insights into the concept. The antimasque entry presented a rural company in a May-dance typical of the country holiday. The published text provides a short account:

The second Anti-masque rush in, dance their measure, and as rudely depart; consisting of a Pedant, May-Lord, May-Lady, Servingman, Chambermaid, a Country Clown or Shepherd, Country Wench; an Host, Hostess; a He-Baboon, She-Baboon; a He-Fool, She-Fool, ushering them in.

All these persons apparelled to the life, the men issuing out of one side of the boscaige, and the women from the other. The music was extremely well fitted, having such a spirit of country jollity as can hardly be imagined; but the perpetual laughter and applause was above the music.

The dance was likewise of the same strain; and the dancers, or rather actors, expressed every one their part so naturally and aptly, as when a man's eye was caught with the one, and then passed on to the other, he could not satisfy himself which did best. It pleased his Majesty to call for it again at the end, as he did likewise for the first Anti-masque; but one of the Statuas by that time was undressed.<sup>2</sup>

There is a very strong emphasis here on lively lifelike portrayal by dancer actors, with characteristic music to support the dancing. The baboons and fools may seem out of place in an English rural company. These are undoubtedly in-jokes referencing other masques: the Baboons had appeared in the masque by the Middle Temple and Lincoln's Inn presented as the second masque of the wedding cycle, and an antimasque of She-Fools had formed part of *Love Freed from Ignorance and Folly* lead by Queen Anne, with Princess Elizabeth in her first role as masquer in 1611. Such intertextual references were a common feature of the masques, and the main reason for the repetition of characters or themes.

In *Two Noble Kinsmen* the performance is offered to Theseus and his company as an interpolated entertainment, having little to do with the plot. The dance scene is preceded by a scene in which the Schoolmaster (now named Master Gerrold) summons his team, only to find he is one woman short. They recruit a character in the sub-plot, the Gaoler's Daughter

who is descending into madness, as the spare female. By combining the minimal stage directions and information provided by the dialogue, the following team can be proposed:

First countryman: Lord of May	Friz: Lady Bright
Mute player: Servingman	Maudlin: Chambermaid
Third countryman: Mine Host	Luce: Fat Spouse
Fourth countryman: Clown	Nell: his partner
Second countryman: Fool	The Gaoler's Daughter
Mute player: Bavian (Baboon)	Barbary: his partner
The Schoolmaster	
Taborer	

Of these twelve characters, only four of the men and the Gaoler's Daughter speak dialogue, with the five females and two of the men silent, or with minimal responses, typical of mute dancers. The bavian is encouraged to tumble. Except for the Gaoler's daughter, they take on different roles in the dance from their minimal roles in the play. This reminds us of the major change between dancing as a character in the play, when it has already been established by speech and acting, and dancing as a character in the masque, when it is conveyed by dance alone.

The Schoolmaster, acting as Usher, makes a speech to Theseus before they appear. This is particularly interesting as he makes a verbal play on the word 'Morris', which helps identify the genre of dance on which this entry is based.

And with thy twinkling eyes look right and straight  
Upon this mighty 'Morr', of mickle weight;  
'Is' now comes in, which being glued together  
Makes 'Morris', and the cause that we came hither,  
The body of our sport, of no small study.<sup>3</sup>

In *The History of Morris Dancing 1485–1750* (John Forrest, Cambridge: James Clarke & Co. Ltd., 1999) invaluable information on records of the morris of this time reveals the use of characters in the team of dancers, which are also captured vividly in the picture *The Thames at Richmond c.1620* reproduced on the front cover, in the collection of the Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.

The morris dance is also the framework for further entries between 1613 and 1618. A key piece of evidence survives in *Pan's Anniversary, or The Shepherd's Holiday* of 1620. This was a very special entertainment on June 19<sup>th</sup> at Greenwich Palace to celebrate James's birthday. Set in Arcadia, the masque is little more than a dancing competition between the Arcadians (the main masque danced by Prince Charles and other gentlemen) and the Boys of Boeotia who dance two antimasques. The induction to the antimasque is spoken by the Fencer, clearly indicating the ten characters: Tooth-drawer, Tinker, Juggler, Corncutter, Bel-lows-mender, Clock-keeper, Mousetrap maker, Tailor or prophet, Clerk and Tinder box man.

His speech combines references to these occupations with allusions to the theory and practice of dancing. The result is a strong emphasis on the individual skill of these particular performers. One clue to the genre of dance performed here is that the tooth-drawer is said to be their foreman. Confirmation that this is a morris dance team is found in the costume bills which itemise the suits and accessories made up for these dancers:

‘For xii yards of copper lace to leace the trappings of the hobby horse...  
For fine buckram to make the trappings...’

‘For making them ten suites, and the hobby horse a suite...’<sup>4</sup>

So there was a team of ten men, one of whom is the foreman, plus a hobbyhorse, with one man as usher to introduce them to the public. He announces their second antimasque by calling for “Room, room there...” and “...a hall, a hall they demand...”, the conventional cries for clearing a space for performances. The bill also indicates that each character was accoutred to the life: the bellows mender is provided with a pair of bellows, a budget, a hammer and a girdle, the tailor a pair of shears and a tailor’s yard while the scribe or clerk is equipped with a pen and inkhorn, a pair of spectacles, a paper book and a girdle. While no designs of these outfits exist, two of the characters appeared in a later masque and the surviving drawings confirm the presentation of lifelike tradesmen: Crier of Mouse traps and Tinder Box man. Both are depicted in workmen’s clothes, with a satchel across one shoulder on a leather strap, wearing soft, wide-brimmed hats. The drawings have no concordances in printed sources, so may well have been based on life.<sup>5</sup> When the Fencer calls them in for the first antimasque, he says: ‘Come forth lads, and do your own turns’, suggesting that they each express their individual character in a solo dance.

Such antimasques entries as these suggest that one process by which expressive dancing was evolved, independently of a dramatic context, was by adaptation of the group morris dance. This genre of dancing was a performance form, not a social form, and included the use of characters amongst the team of anonymous men, whose physical characteristics enlivened the display. At this point it is worth remembering that Jonson made an interesting reference to the morris dance in his *Entertainment at Althorp* of 1603. The character Nobody acted as usher to the team of morris dancers, including a fool, a hobby horse and musician, saying: ‘We are the huisher to a morris, / A kind of masque, whereof good store is/ In the country hereabout’.<sup>6</sup> From the evidence of the antimasques of this time, I propose that a single antimasque entry comprised three sections:

1. A dancing entry, in a group, half-group or in solo dances
2. The main dance as an ensemble
3. A transitional passage, indicating change, or a dancing exit

### **Dances of character and action**

Under the patronage of Charles and Henrietta Maria the importance of the antimasque entries increased. For the first fully-fledged and recorded masque of the new reign, *Love’s Triumph through Callipolis* of 1631, the antimasque was of depraved lovers in contrast to the main masque of perfect lovers, danced by the king, nobles and gentlemen. On this occasion, the dancers entered with no verbal induction as the opening item in the performance. The account of their entry provided in Jonson’s text suggests something more elaborate than before:

When suddenly they leap forth below, a mistress leading them, and with antic gesticulation and action after the manner of the old *pantomimi*, they dance over a distracted comedy of love, expressing their confused affections in the scenical persons and habits of the four prime European nations: a glorious boasting lover, a whining ballading lover, an adventurous romance lover, a fantastic umbrageous lover, a brib-

ing corrupt lover, a forward jealous lover, a sordid illiberal lover, a proud scornful lover, an angry quarrelling lover, a melancholic despairing lover, an envious unquiet lover, a sensual brute lover.

All which, in varied, intricate turns and involved mazes expressed, make the antimasque, and conclude the exit in a circle.<sup>7</sup>

They remained on the scene whilst Euphemus, accompanied by a Chorus, descended singing to purge Callipolis of these lustful characters, to make way for the Perfect Lovers. This suggests that they exit in threes as they are identified in the words of the song, in response to the Chorus walking about with censers. The dance entry requires more complex expression than the characters of earlier masques, and also interaction between the lovers and the mistress. It must also make its impact without verbal preparation. Jones's costume designs for ten of these dancers have survived, showing his debt to Callot's engravings of the *Commedia dell'Arte*, plus two sketches of female characters, one of which must have been chosen for the Mistress. These sketches remind us that the wearing of masks by dancers was probably conventional, putting greater emphasis on physical expression.<sup>8</sup>

This antimasque idea was taken up again four years later by the gentlemen of the Middle Temple, in their masque *The Triumphs of the Prince d'Amour* of 1635 as part of the hospitality for the visit of the Elector Palatine, Charles's nephew. The theme of the whole masque is 'Make love, not war', and it presented firstly a paired antimasque and main masque of war, and secondly a paired antimasque and main masque of love. The scene for the second antimasque was a Venetian piazza with Italian and Turkish courtesans at the windows of the palaces. The antimasquers were discovered walking in the piazza:

The first: a grave formal Spanish Lover, who addressing himself to some Courtizan in a Balconee, salutes her often with congies tedious and low.

The second: a jealous Italian Lover, who fixing his eyes on another Mistresse at her window, dinotes the vexation of his humour, by desperate sighes, beating on his breast, and sometimes a melancholy posture, standing with his Armes wreathed.

The third: A giddy Fantasticke French Lover, who being likewise addressed to some beauty, gazing at her windore, his humour is discern'd by strange ridiculous cringes, and frisks in his salutes, with which hee seemes to invite her acquaintance: having divers notes of Levitie in his habit, and wearing his Mistresse Fanne ty'd with a Ribband in his eare.

The fourth: a dull Dutch Lover, personating some Yonker of Utrecht, who gazing upwards too, doth often apply his Handkerchief to his eyes, as if the griefe of his dispaire did make him weepe.

The fifth: a furious debaush'd English Lover, who in his habit striving to imitate his Neighbour (the Monsier) still outdoes his vanitie, which his accoutrement doth severally expresse, and he hangs in the right eare his Mistresses Muffe, in the left her Shooe with a Chapeen. He is not fixed to one Balconee, but directs himselfe to all, offers to draw his Sword, and seemes to threaten with his fist, as he would rather breake their windowes, then desire them opned, that hee might gaine a looke from his Lady.

Their severall humors being a while artificially expressed, they descend, and dance their second entry, and retire.<sup>9</sup>

The establishment of character by pantomimic action comes over very clearly here, which is then translated into dance, followed by an exit. Neither antimasque has a verbal induction, so the dancers have to convey their identities by physical action alone. The music for the songs and dances was written by Henry and William Lawes: the only piece of dance music readily identifiable has a distinctly martial style so belongs to the first section of war. However, we can reasonably surmise that similar characteristic music accompanied the mime and the dancing expressing types of love. The text by William Davenant also lists the dancers and their roles, all of whom were gentlemen of the Inn.

The development of antimasques of action as well as character can be seen in the masques of 1634 to 1638, the first occurring in *The Triumph of Peace* presented by the four Inns of Court in the Banqueting House 1634. The antimasques were danced by a large team of professional performers, just eight speaking dancers and at least twenty mute dancers: the team were organised by a sub-committee of the Inns, and the choreography created by court dancing masters. Each antimasque entry has the briefest of inductions by a Presenter, and depends primarily on dance alone to communicate the idea. Amongst the many entries, the following give examples of the nature of dances of action:

Another anti-masque of the master of the tavern, his wife, and servants. After these a maquerelle [Fat Bawd/Procuress], two wenches and two wanton gamesters. These, having danced and expressed their natures, go into the tavern. Then a gentleman, beggars four. The gentleman first danceth alone; to him the beggars; he bestows his charity; the cripples, upon his going off, throw away their legs, and dance.

(After another antimasque, these characters returned)

Maquerelle, wenches, gentlemen return as from the tavern. They dance together. The gallants are cheated, and left to dance in, with a drunken repentance.

Another entry is set against the scene of a deserted landscape:

A merchant, a-horseback, with his portmanteau. Two thieves set upon him and rob him: these by a Constable and officers are apprehended and carried off. Then four nymphs enter dancing with their javelins. Three satyrs spy them, and attempt their persons; one of the nymphs escapeth; a noise of hunters and their horns within, as at the fall of a deer. Then enter Four huntsmen and one nymph. These drive away the satyrs, and having rescued the nymphs dance with them.<sup>10</sup>

In these and other entries, there is a complex scene of action, delivered in a combination of dance and pantomime. They form part of an argument concerning the maintenance of the King's Peace, with law and justice.

A similar presentation occurs in *Luminalia*, Henrietta Maria's masque of 1638 in which the activities of the night made the first sequence of four antimasque entries. Some of these were presented by 'gentlemen of quality'. The second setting was the City of Sleep for a sequence of seven entries of dreams. Amongst the performers of these entries were leading noblemen, indicated by name. For this discussion, the seventh entry is of interest:

A cavalier in a dream being enamoured of a beautiful gentlewoman seeks by his page to win her to his love, which she seems to entertain, but he coming near to court her, she suddenly is turned into a fury, which much affrights them. Represented by the Earl of Antrim and Master Bartholomew de Mountaint, his page.<sup>11</sup>

The Earl of Antrim danced as the cavalier, the professional court dancer as his page who does the wooing, requiring a modicum of histrionic interpretation. I suggest that an anonymous but highly skilled English antimasquer danced the more complex role of the beautiful woman who turns into a fury.

In surveying and sampling the presentation of human characters in dance between 1613 and 1640, an emphasis on natural and lifelike presentation is very clear. The texts and costume information support this. There is a marked contrast here to the French approach, which features fantasy and spectacle in the ballet entrées rather than verisimilitude. A comparison can be made in the depiction of tavern characters. The English characters are based on real life, as the design for the Fat Bawd (the maquerelle of 1635) shows. Jones depicts her as a down-to-earth character in a plain jacket, skirt and apron, with a wide-brimmed hat.<sup>12</sup> A French Host and Hostess and their Valet of 1632 wear rich costume and wicker-covered bottles and a funnel on their heads to indicate their occupation.<sup>13</sup> The same use of fantastic symbols can be seen in the image of *Le Jeu* 1651, presented by Le Duc de Joyeuse, corresponding to the gamesters or gamblers of the English masque. He symbolises gaming with a hat of cards and gaming cups, a chequer board and dice collar, and cards as elbow and waist frills.<sup>14</sup> I suggest that the social separation of the antimasque and the main masque fostered two developments: full rein to the actor-dancers' powers of histrionic performance, and an emphasis on authenticity rather than glamorous presentation.

Across these years, English antimasque dancing had achieved the following:

- a significant independence from the verbal or narrative context;
- the integration of pantomime with dance;
- a life-like expression of human traits;
- the ability to perform scenes of action in dance;
- the development of the expressiveness of the whole body;
- the composing of expressive dance music.

I therefore make a hypothesis, to be tested by more detailed examination of the records, that the English masque had evolved the ballet d'action by 1640, albeit in miniature. This initiative was then profoundly fractured by the years of battle and political change, so that it had to be rediscovered by Weaver seventy years later, when he also turned to the inspiration of the commedia dell'arte, the possibilities of the tavern scene, and the expression of passion. Meanwhile aspects of the English skill in ballet d'action were conveyed to the French court through Henrietta Maria's French musicians and dancers when they returned to France with her. William Davenant, who was the living link from the court theatre of 1640 to that of 1660, wrote the following summary for the final group of antimasques in *Salmacida Spolia*, unaware that it was a kind of epitaph to the whole genre:

All which antimasques were well set out and excellently danced, and the tunes fitted to the persons.<sup>15</sup>



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