

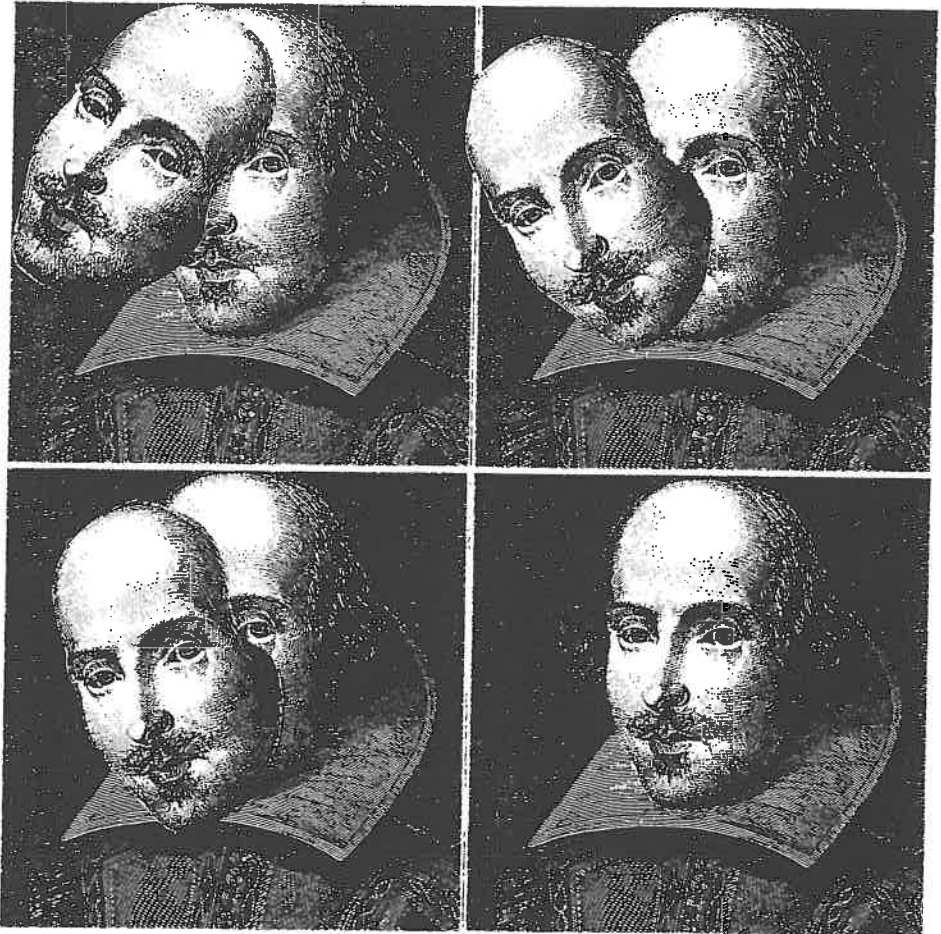
Who Was That Masked Man?

By David Hlavsa

In one of his perennial attacks on "Bardolatry," George Bernard Shaw castigates *Much Ado About Nothing's* lovers for their intemperate behavior. Their story, writes the cantankerous Irishman, is hopelessly sensational — "pleasing only to lovers of the illustrated police papers." As always, he makes a good case; from Shaw's mulishly rational perspective, there is indeed something lurid about *Much Ado*. Beatrice and Benedick and Hero and Claudio, uncertain of their proper roles, play out a kind of desperate masquerade. Their grand gestures and dramatic postures very well may, to some, seem a bit overdone.

But finally, their antics are all part of defining their place in society, a process which, due to the national emergency, has been put on hold for the duration. The men have been off playing soldier, fighting — if this is possible to imagine today — a just war (presumably making the world safe for aristocracy), and the women, waiting for their return, have grown used to the rarefied routine of Leonato's court. Now that the wars are over, and peace, which allows time for introspection, can no longer be avoided, the lovers are terrified to find themselves stripped of the habits that have given them comfort and security. They know they are expected to become responsible citizens, to select a partner and start a family, but no one has told them how to go about it. To them, the events of courtship are unusually stressful. Unsure of their secret identities, our heroes find themselves (sometimes literally) trying on one mask after another, looking for the persona that best fits their needs.

For the time being, Beatrice and Benedick have found solace in their "merry war." In Shakespeare's time, such sexist sparring exemplified a popular form of dissent. Under the reign of Elizabeth, as the education of upper-class women became more accepted (and women became more vocal), misogynist writers frequently attacked the institution of marriage. Women responded in kind, defending them-



selves and deriding their male critics. Thus, to some extent, Beatrice's and Benedick's "merry war" is simply rebellion a la mode.

It doesn't suit them. Beatrice's bravado is only the thinnest of disguises. For all her railing against men in general and Benedick in particular, men and Benedick are foremost in Beatrice's thoughts. Her very first action in the play is to ask after Benedick. And a scornful attitude cannot completely conceal Beatrice's mixed emotions. "Good Lord, for alliance!" sighs Beatrice when her cousin is betrothed. "Thus goes everyone to the world but I. . . I may sit in a corner and cry 'Heigh-ho for a husband!'"

For his part, Benedick simply protests too much: "Prove that ever I lose more

blood with love than I will get again with drinking," he declares to Claudio, "pick out mine eyes with a ballad maker's pen and hang me up at the door of a brothel house for the sign of blind Cupid." (Luckily, no one takes him up on it.) But for all his bluster, when Claudio asks him for his opinion of Hero, Benedick is unsure of his ground, undecided as to which mask he should choose: "Do you question me as an honest man should do for my simple true judgement," he asks, "or would you have me speak after my custom as being a professed tyrant to their sex?"

To Benedick and Beatrice, romantic feeling is unfamiliar, untrustworthy, and so must be cloaked with intellect. Unable to approach by seduction (throwing flowers), Benedick resorts to sedition

Continued on page 13

Who Was That Masked Man?

Continued from page 11

(throwing rocks). Beatrice adopts a similar stratagem. Her way of drawing closer to Benedick is by assuming intimate knowledge of his flaws, that is, by teasing. At times, their verbal roughhousing may seem calm, even casual, but insecurity and anxiety are never far below the surface. When it becomes too much, Beatrice is forced to abandon rapier wit for blunt insult: "You always end with a jade's trick," she grumbles, "I know you of old."

But theirs is less a mortal combat than a carnival competition. It takes only the slightest suggestion to defuse the conflict — a rumor, a passed "note." (The "nothing" of the play's title puns on the word "noting," a homonym in Shakespeare's time, suggesting one of the play's major themes: the ability to discern through observation the difference between appearance and reality.) Soon, like young people realizing for the

first time that people of the opposite sex are not so icky after all, Beatrice and Benedick capitulate and fall in love at the drop of a hint.

If Beatrice and Benedick protest too much at first, Hero and Claudio protest too little. By Elizabethan standards, Claudio is a thoroughly conventional young nobleman. Having done his bit for his country, he reckons that it is time to get married, inquires whether Hero is of the right social and financial standing and then woos by proxy with nary an actual word to his intended. Though it does have its sentimental side, Claudio's courtship of Hero appears oddly businesslike. Of course, to the Elizabethans, most of whom regarded romantic love alone as a rather flimsy basis for a marriage, Claudio's behavior would not have seemed cold-blooded but exceedingly correct. In terms of his society, he is playing the good scout.

However, it is not a role he fully understands; his vision of correctness somehow does not include compassion or patience. When the evidence suggests that Hero is not the proper match for him, Claudio fairly splits his britches in his abrupt leap to the high moral ground: "If I see anything to-night why I should not marry her," he declares, "tomorrow in the congregation where I should wed, there will I shame her." He could, of course, settle the matter quietly, but subtlety and tact are not a part of his soldierly repertoire. In a moment, he has turned from Boy Scout to Brown Shirt. The next day, at the altar, in a grandiose and oddly formal demonstration, he waves the priest aside and begins to preach his own object lesson to the father of the bride:

Claudio: Stand thee by, Friar. Father, by your leave: Will you with

Continued on page 15

*"Your heart's
desires be with you!"*
—W. Shakespeare



THE BANK OF CALIFORNIA

Bellevue, 155-108th Avenue, (206) 453-0302
Seattle, 910 Fourth Avenue, (206) 587-6100
Tacoma, 1011 Pacific Avenue, (206) 591-2500

Member FDIC

Who Was That Masked Man?

Continued from page 13

free and unconstrained soul
Give me this maid, your
daughter?

Leonato: As freely, son, as God did
give her me.

Claudio: And what have I to give you
back whose worth May
counterpoise this rich and
precious gift?

Leonato: Nothing, unless you render
her again.

Claudio: Sweet Prince, you learn me
noble thankfulness. There,
Leonato, take her back
again; Give not this rotten
orange to your friend; She's
but the sign and semblance
of her honour.

Strong stuff. But Hero just stands there. She has said nothing for the entire duration of the wedding negotiations, and, it seems, has very little to say for herself now. Perhaps she is merely overwhelmed. However, it seems just as plausible that she has been so immersed in the role of the dutiful daughter that she just cannot bring herself to mount a more assertive defense. Instead, she swoons. Beatrice, by contrast, is ready to scream bloody murder. A crisis brings instant coherence to the habitually unbalanced, and Beatrice and Benedick suddenly find themselves ready not only to form an alliance to defeat Hero's slanderers but to admit their love for one another in the bargain. This is war, and there is nothing "merry" about it. As the gloves come off, suddenly, so do the masks Beatrice and Benedick have worn for so long:

Benedick: I protest I love thee.

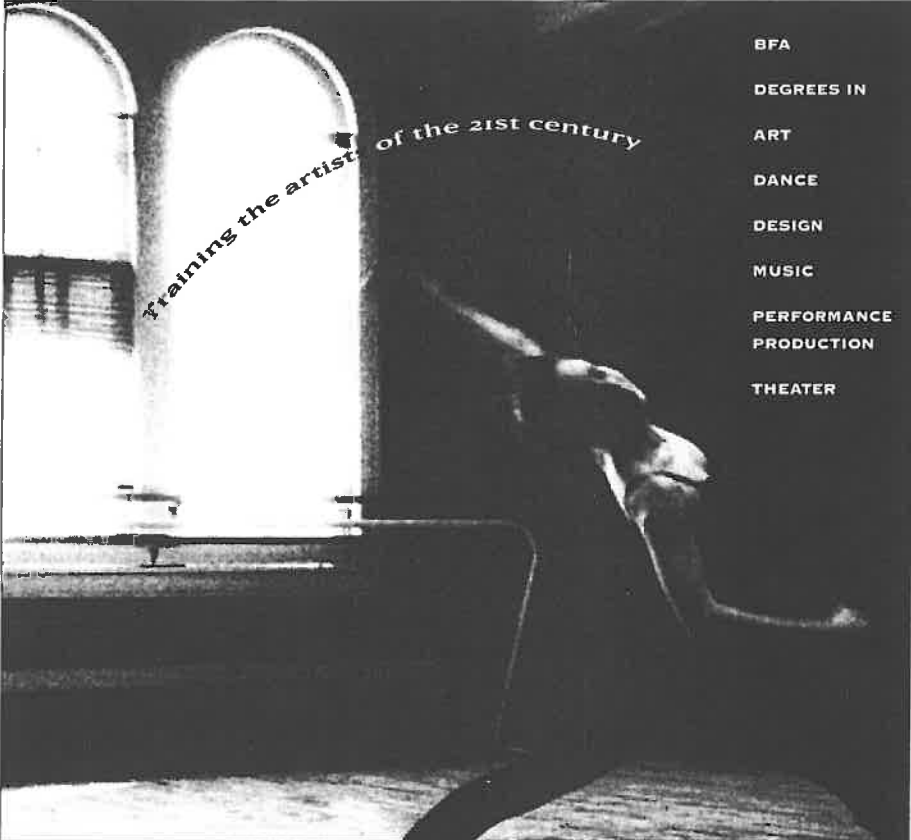
Beatrice: Why then, God forgive me!

Benedick: What offense, sweet Beatrice?

Beatrice: You have stayed me in a happy hour. I was about to protest I loved you.

Benedick: And do it with all thy heart.


Continued on next page



Training the artists of the 21st century

BFA
DEGREES IN
ART
DANCE
DESIGN
MUSIC
PERFORMANCE
PRODUCTION
THEATER

CORNISH COLLEGE OF THE ARTS
Write or call the Admissions Office: 710 East Roy Street, Seattle, WA 98102
(206) 323-1487 or (800) 726-ARTS



Lighting is fun and easy
AT BRENNAN LIGHTING

Nouveau artistry in finishes of green patina or sage gesso — complemented by hand blown art glass...an expression of ambience past with a present-day flair. This timeless collection of chandeliers, pendants and sconces is unmistakably Fredrick Ramond.

FREDRICK RAMOND™
DESIGNERS & MANUFACTURERS OF ORIGINAL LIGHTING FIXTURES

Brennan Lighting

SEATTLE 14032 Aurora Ave. No. 362-4444
REDMOND 2260 152nd N.E. 747-9300
Hours: M-F 8-5:30, Sat. 10-5, SUN 10-3

"We take the mystery out of lighting"

Drop in
before
or
stop by
after the
theater.

Have an early supper before the
show or a lite one after.
Until 11 pm, 12 on weekends.
Just five minutes from Seattle
Center.



1107 DEXTER NORTH, SEATTLE, WASHINGTON 98109

ZENGA

Brushstrokes of Enlightenment

Seattle Art Museum
Volunteer Park

October 4, 1990 —
January 13, 1991

Organized by the New Orleans Museum
of Art, with generous local support
from The Washington Commission for
the Humanities, PONCHO, and
Professor Lauren Soth in honor of
Mrs. Bemice Soth.

Takuju Kosen, *Half Body Daruma*, 1832,
ink on paper, The Gitter Collection,
New Orleans

Seattle Art Museum



1990 DESIGNER SHOW HOUSE

October 6-28
Open Daily
10am-4:30pm
Admission \$8.00



17602 Bothell Way N.E.
Lake Forest Park
Corner of Ballinger Way
& Bothell Way

THE WURDEMAN ESTATE

Tour this Georgian-style mansion, carriage house/gardener's cottage and potting shed decorated by 25 members of the American Society of Interior Designers. Grounds restored with historic style landscaping. Sponsored by SSWA to benefit the Seattle Symphony. Gift Boutique, Art Gallery, and Coffee Shop. For information 443-4740.

Who Was That Masked Man?

Continued from previous page

Beatrice: I love you with so
much of my heart that
none is left to protest.

Benedick: Come, bid me do
anything for thee.

Beatrice: Kill Claudio.

Happily, no drastic action is required of them. The various misunderstandings are already on their way to being cleared up by the inefficient but inexorable Dogberry. Claudio, having been bucked off his high horse, learns some humility (and perhaps some patience and trust as well). Playing by the rules has not prevented him from making a nearly disastrous mistake. Hopefully, the next time, he will be more careful — or Hero will be less reticent.

Taking into consideration that the play's conventional lovers are the ones who have very nearly come to grief, Beatrice's and Benedick's initial objections to established standards of behavior no longer seem so imprudent. They are, quite rightly, dissatisfied with the limitations of the roles available to them. The true path to lasting love and fulfilling marriage, Shakespeare implies, is neither by thoughtless conformity nor by blind rebellion.

Emotional life encompasses a whole smorgasbord of experience, but society offers a very limited menu. Manners pass for sound coin, the role for the self, the mask for the face. It takes a certain amount of seasoning to find a place in society and yet be shrewd enough not to buy into it without first going over the terms of the contract.

In the end, when Benedick announces that he intends to marry, he proclaims that "a college of wit-crackers" cannot make him change his mind. And though Beatrice consents to marry him, it is obvious that she will not compromise her independent spirit, nor muzzle her wit to do so. "I would not deny you," she tells him, "but, by this good day, I yield upon great persuasion, and partly to save your life, for I was told you were in a consumption."

This is the teasing of lovers, not jesters.

Who Was That Masked Man?

After much ado, the play's two couples have gained the courage to discard their masks and show their faces. Their identities are no longer secret.

David Hlavsa heads the theatre department at Saint Martin's College in Lacey, Washington.



Oregon Shakespeare Festival

Portland

The 1990-91 Season of Plays

M. Butterfly By David Henry Hwang (Nov. 3-Dec. 1)

Based on a phenomenal true story about a 20 year affair between a diplomat and a spy, *M. Butterfly* challenges the audience, to question the essential relationships of East and West, men and women, fantasy and reality.

The Recruiting Officer by George Farquhar (Dec. 8-Feb. 9)

This 18th century play is a brilliant comedy of love, deception, and conscription, as two officers of the Queen's army enter a small English town in search of draftees. The Captains and two fair young cousins are well-matched as they unknowingly strive for the same goal—marriage.

Our Country's Good by Timberlake Wertenbaker (Dec. 15-Feb. 9)

Lieutenant Ralph Clark of the Royal Marines, assigned to the prison colony of New South Wales in 1789, brings together a ragtag group of convicts to present an alternative to a hanging, their usual form of entertainment. In a hopeless place that was, at the time, the end of the world, a hopeless community begins to rehearse "The Recruiting Officer." As they speak the elegant language of Farquhar's play, these savage and desperate felons learn about a humanity far removed from their previous lives.

Glengarry Glen Ross by David Mamet (Feb. 16-Mar. 16)

This powerful modern fable by David Mamet won the 1984 Pulitzer Prize for Drama. Eloquent in a deeply American manner, Mamet's account of disreputable real estate salesmen makes striking statements about business, ethics and friendship. Through his dissolute characters, the playwright pricks the American business conscience.

The Tempest by William Shakespeare (Mar. 23-Apr. 20)

This magical romance represents Shakespeare's work at its most mature and fulfilling. It is a fairy tale of forgiveness and family, wherein the playwright explores the nature of beauty and provides an remarkable allegory for the art of theatre. In what may be a portrait of the playwright himself at the end of his career, Shakespeare engages the natural and human elements to gift his audience with a full-circle tale of redemption.

Join Us!
To Subscribe, call (503) 274-6588



C A M P A G N E

The flavors of Provence
in the heart of
Pike Place Market.



86 Pine Street Seattle 738-2800