

The development of the rake- from man of mode

[Technology](#), [Development](#)



Nothing at Face Value: The Mask in Para Ben's The Rover Para Ben's The Rover offers readers and viewers a play in which honesty and dishonesty are often one in the same. Thematically driven by masking, disguising, and misunderstanding, this dramatic "Comedy of Manners" employs thematic tricks to highlight the paradoxical nature of the ideas of honor, honesty and loyalty. Set in Naples during Carnivals, a time traditionally associated with shrouded mischief, The Rover clearly capitalizes on the symbol of the mask and its social implications, while still keeping fair distance from the society and court members it may be commenting on.

The imagery related to the mask pushes both the characters and the audience to reevaluate the "veneers" which we credit as true, while simultaneously commentating on the sexual double standards of the eighteenth century. Masking oneself allows a very simple transformation, that is, to become another person. In this play however, the idea of the mask is embedded far deeper than this initial transformation. These "viziers" take the forms of masks, disguises, and even social statuses.

Although Ben's characters use masks and disguises in order to facilitate a plot development that, as viewers and readers, we may root for, the mask itself remains deceitful. In this way, the idea of honesty is indelibly tied to an initial degree of dishonesty. And even more puzzling, is the fact that some of the most honest characters, or at least most perceivably understood, "hide" in plain sight. When you take all of this obscurity and add in the hectic and lustful setting of Carnivals in Naples, the plot thickens tenfold.

Although the frenzied, wanton nature of the setting further problematizes the truth, it also gives us a chance to play with the gender roles and double standards of the day, specifically by using the Neapolitan courtesans as "double agents". Angelica, despite her questionable profession, is not a dishonest character. If we can look past her startling occupation, we find a woman who is true to her word, compassionate, and who loves Willpower like Belville loves Florida. But in assuming the role of a courtesan, we find an easy comparison between her and Lucent.

These women, both prostitutes, wear the disguise of the upper class, and therefore honorable, women. So, it is no surprise that, in a society where the best prostitutes live lavishly in large homes with multiple servants, Willpower mistakes Florida for a courtesan. In the same way, it is no surprise that Blunt assumes Lucent to be a woman of quality. While all the while our heroes, men of questionable "honor", romp around Naples in the search for quick and cheap love.

Both of these misunderstandings, although presented in an almost impossibly humorous way, suggest a serious cultural dialogue about both the meaning of feminine quality and the sexual double standards of their respective society. As the play opens, we are presented with an exchange between Florida and Hellene in which the nature of love, especially as opposed to money, is discussed. Tater Pedro Darlings up Belle, and remarks "pay me I want you well in nor, out you must consider Don Venation's fortune and the jointures he'll make you" (1. . 90-93). Clearly, women of "quality" are to be purchased, and the currency is not the "jewels" of "[Believes] eyes

and his heart"(I. I. 98). This idea is especially relevant when considering a character like Angelica, who, like Florida, is for sale in many respects. The main difference however, is the way in which these women are perceived; the masks that stand between them and society. Although Florida is pure, and Angelica is anything but, they both are treated in a similar way as "merchants of love" (I. li. 89).

Although throughout the play, social status is repeatedly relied on to speak towards character, it is clear that the two do not go hand in hand. And as these women and men of "quality" assume the mischievous attitude of Carnivals, they put themselves on the same playing field as the rogues and cavaliers. This is why Willpower admits that upon finding Florida in the garden, sneaking to meet Belleville, he mistakes her for an "arrant harlot" (III. V. 27). For example, Hellene, despite her apparent fate of becoming a nun, clearly "loves mischief strangely" (30).

She is quick to take part in the disguising, dressing as her own page in order to foil Willpower's plot to court Angelica. Her social status does not necessarily denote a level of moral fiber. Likewise, Antonio, the son of the Viceroy and the favorite to marry Florida even attempts to proffer Angelica's services before his marriage to Florida, going so far as to say "Florida! Name not those distant Joys; there's not one thought of her will check my passion here" (II. 1. 192-194).

Obviously, social strata does not correlate positively with honor in this play. These titles are merely namesakes, and do not connote any sort of moral constancy. Now, although the idea of social status as a sort of propped up

disguise is a feature of this play, the physical mask stands out as a more accessible symbol. The mask seems to be an escape into the anonymity of the setting, Carnivals. The masks allow both the men and the women to shed their obligations and manners and take art in the convoluted search for love and mischief that is the plot.

What is quizzical about this play is the fact that the masquerading does not necessarily manifest itself in any over-arching commentary about the moral quagmire it has created. Rather, the masking points towards the understanding that the mask simply is. The play seems to suggest that society has the potential to be deceiving, although the nature of this deceit can be either good or bad. And thus, the masking, mischief, and disguising in the play almost always leads to dire situations. Take for example Healer's endeavor to spy on Willpower and interrupt his and Angelica's trajectory.

As Willpower catches on, Hellene begins to panic, knowing she is undone. As Angelica begins to believe Willpower, who is playing with both of them at this point, Hellene realizes that if he swears he will not marry her to Angelica, "he'll be revenged on me indeed for all my rogues" (IV. li. 383-385). Willpower capitalizes on her compromising position, knowing that she has no way of intervening. Although the mask may shroud the character, it does not shroud their intentions, and they pay dearly for this. This is again repeated when Florida is caught in Believes quarters with the newly contemptuous Blunt.

It again appears that the mischief and false identities may lead to a compromising situation, and this time the stakes are much higher. After being cheated by Lucent, who, costumed as a young welt, tracker Blunt not

only out AT Nils " movables, out Nils very sealers t Blunt trusts no woman's honor or identity (V. I. 64-65). These seemingly honest and high-quality women, like Florida and Hellene are both almost undone by their masking. This is part of the genius of the play, because Been forces the audience to react and meditate on the nature of the deceit they have witnessed.

These instances of masking, mistaken identity, and dishonesty only force all of the characters to reevaluate their trust in each other, and truly anybody. This is why Willpower is such an interesting character. Within the context of a restoration " comedy of manners", Willpower, the rover, assumes the role of the rake hero. Although Willpower's actions, including rape, soliciting prostitution, and assault, establish him as a morally inconstant character, Willpower is one of the only harassers who does not don the mask.

In fact, Willpower seems to be the character who offers us the most honest look into the way that this play deals with love and honor. Take for example his telling exchange with Angelica after the duel between Belleville and Pedro. Angelica says " I know what arguments you'll bring up against me- fortune, and honor-" to which Willpower replies " Honor, I tell you, I hate it in your sex, and those that fancy themselves possesses of that foppery are the most impertinently troublesome of all womankind and will transgress nine commandments to keep one" (IV. . 385-391). Willpower, although a liar and a rogue, pushes back against the masked intentions and realities that the rest of the characters adopt. Willpower honestly states that " Love and mirth are my business in Naples", and so the fact that Hellene is willing to be mischievous and deviant in her attempt to give her love away is not a

problem to Willpower; in fact it may be just what he is looking for (I. I. 85-86). Hellene states in act three that her and Willpower's "business as well as humors are alike" (III. I. 225-226). And for this reason, despite his obvious moral flaws, Willpower does get what he deserves: a "young sinner" like Hellene, one "that has the generosity to give a favor handsomely to one that can ask it discreetly, one that has wit enough to manage an intrigue of love" (IV. II. 395-399).

Willpower obtains what he wants by being true to his intentions without the masks, something that actually makes these women more attracted to him. As we have hopefully established, the symbolism associated with the mask plays an ambiguous role in this play. Although the use of another's identity initially helps harassers, such as Florida, Hellene, Belleville and Lucent, the repercussions of this masking almost always leads to compromising situations.

The mistaken identities force characters to answer for the actions of others, instead of their own. The masks, although an interesting theatrical texture, do little to help along the intentions of these characters. Instead, the masks allow us as readers and viewers to meditate upon the implications of being anyone but themselves. If we can take any advice from this play, it would be that assuming the identity of someone else will not help the identity one has left behind.