

## ABSTRACT

“If I were a woman”:  
Gendered Artifice on the Shakespearean Stage

Courtney Bailey Parker, Ph.D.

Mentor: Maurice A. Hunt, Ph.D.

This is a dissertation about different types of cross-dressed performance in Shakespearean drama. Throughout this project, I argue for a more nuanced reading of the performance of female characters on the English Renaissance stage that not only categorizes cross-dressing along a spectrum of theatrical artifice, but also investigates how this range of artifice enriches our understanding of the plays. To demonstrate my argument, each chapter of this project will consider the degree to which the plays of Shakespeare and his contemporaries capitalize on a range of gendered artifice in their representation of female characters. I maintain that we cannot treat all women the same with respect to onstage cross-dressing, and that we must account for these differences in characters’ “artificial femaleness” with the play text as our guide.

"If I were a woman": Gendered Artifice on the Shakespearean Stage

by

Courtney Bailey Parker, B.A., M.A.

A Dissertation

Approved by the Department of English

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Kevin Gardner, Ph.D., Chairperson

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Approved by the Dissertation Committee

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Maurice A. Hunt, Ph.D., Chairperson

---

Luke Taylor, Ph.D.

---

Marion Castleberry, Ph.D.

---

Sarah Ford, Ph.D.

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Coretta Pittman, Ph.D.

---

David Jortner, Ph.D.

Accepted by the Graduate School  
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J. Larry Lyon, Ph.D., Dean

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## DEDICATION

To the memory of Donald Wythe Nixon (May 27, 1954 – February 8, 2016), arts administrator, advocate, performer, and mentor. He was a lovely example of the creative life well lived.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction: Towards a New Theory of Cross-Dressing on the English Renaissance Professional Stage

In her influential 1983 book, *Still Harping on Daughters*, Lisa Jardine opens her first chapter with this statement:

Every schoolchild knows that there were no women actors on the Elizabethan stage; the female parts were taken by young men actors. But every schoolchild also learns that this fact is of little consequence for the twentieth-century reader of Shakespeare's plays. Because the taking of female parts by boys was universal and commonplace, we are told, it was accepted as 'verisimilitude' by the Elizabethan audience, who simply disregarded it, as we would disregard the creaking of stage scenery and accept the backcloth forest as 'real' for the duration of the play. (Jardine 9)

Rhetorically, Jardine's matter-of-fact opening anticipates her claim that "young men actors" were indeed *not* "disregarded" by Elizabethan audiences, and that they actually provoked a great deal of "moral uneasiness" during the English Renaissance (9). Yet what is interesting about this introductory paragraph is that it articulates one of the most prominent ways Western culture perceives the original performances of Shakespeare's plays: if the taking of female parts by young male actors was simply "commonplace" during Shakespeare's time, then why should we question whether or not the verisimilitude was actually effective in performance? The problem inherent in this question is that it places quite a lot

of faith in the audience's own willing suspension of disbelief, to the point where we are left with little room to wonder if different female roles were performed with a range of performance strategies or by varying types of male actors. Was all theatrical cross-dressing on the English Renaissance professional stage basically the same? My impetus for this project is the speculation that it was not.

This is a dissertation about different types of cross-dressed performance in Shakespearean drama. Throughout this project, I argue for a more nuanced reading of the performance of female characters on the English Renaissance stage that not only categorizes cross-dressing along a spectrum of theatrical artifice, but also investigates how this range of artifice enriches our understanding of the plays.<sup>1</sup> While other scholars such as Jennifer Drouin have articulated the necessity of reading cross-dressed performance in light of the theoretical distinction between "drag" and "passing," there is yet little discussion of how these variances in representation are realized textually within English Renaissance drama generally.<sup>2</sup> To demonstrate my argument, each chapter of this project will consider the degree to which the plays of Shakespeare and his contemporaries capitalize on a range of gendered artifice in their representation of female characters. I maintain that we cannot treat all of these women the same with respect to onstage cross-dressing, and that we must account for these differences in characters' "artificial femaleness" with the play text as our guide.

For a brief illustration of what I mean by “range of gendered artifice,” consider the necessary difference in performance between Ursula in Ben Jonson’s *Bartholomew Fair*, a grotesque Falstaffian woman, and John Webster’s title character in *The Duchess of Malfi*. Both require male players to cross-dress as women, but the solemnity with which we treat the artificial femaleness of each character is starkly different. While Ursula describes herself as “all fire and fat” (much as Falstaff in *Henry IV Part 1* does) and seems to revel in her own grotesqueness, the Duchess of Malfi is an unnamed paragon of integrity whose dramatic power is attached to her status as a beautiful, Stoic woman of unshakeable virtue. By virtue of genre differences alone, there is an overt sense that these two roles (both of which necessitated cross-dressing in the historical situation of Renaissance England since women could not appear onstage) would be played in very different ways; indeed, Ursula’s representation in the text seems to invite a shamelessly mannish portrayal that would capitalize on her grotesque physical comedy.

Since we cannot literally sit in the audience of an Elizabethan production of a play like *Romeo and Juliet*, we will always struggle to draw conclusions about how gender appeared on Shakespeare’s stage. Our distance, then, from the dramaturgical world of this theatre affirms that our general assumptions about cross-dressed performance are well grounded. If female actors were not yet

acceptable on the English professional stage, then audiences had no reason to expect the realistic qualities of an actual young woman playing the part of the young Juliet Capulet.<sup>3</sup> But what if English Renaissance dramatists experimented with strategies that either increased or decreased the feminine artifice of their characters, despite the limitations of strictly male performers? Did playwrights create female characters in such a way that they encouraged their audiences to view these characters “as women” with varying degrees of seriousness? Were some roles written such that the female character more convincingly “passed” as a woman, while others did not shy away from highlighting the man beneath the dress? The audience who first experienced the stage plays of Shakespeare and his contemporaries certainly had a different understanding of realism than we do today, and yet the question of whether or not Renaissance theatre-goers possessed some desire for realistic qualities in theatrical representation is nonetheless compelling (and is the subject of a later discussion in this Dissertation).

With respect to the questions suggested above, we know that cross-dressing can and does occur with “various levels of artifice” in our own century’s all-male performances of Shakespeare’s plays; “various levels of artifice” is a phrase James C. Bulman employs to discuss the range of transvestism in Mark Rylance’s renowned 2002 production of *Twelfth Night* at the

Globe (since revived on Broadway in 2014) (Bulman 579). Rylance's *Twelfth Night* certainly offers a strong suggestion for how the female characters might be staged: Viola/Cesario must "pass" for a woman disguised as a man, Olivia (played by Rylance and arguably modeled after Queen Elizabeth I) displays the gestures of femininity yet is noticeably male, and Maria is something of a one man-woman drag act complete with a five o'clock shadow. Of Maria's character, played by Paul Chahidi in the 2002 production, Bulman remarks,

A stocky man whose Maria was middle-aged and matronly, [Chahidi] made no effort to disguise the rich timbre of his baritone voice nor, despite the white make-up which the Globe's program noted was authentically Elizabethan, to fully disguise his dark beard...The comedy of Chahidi/Maria's interactions with Sirs Toby and Andrew derived in part from his scarcely concealed masculinity, reminiscent not so much of cross-dressers who try to "pass" for women today as of comedians such as Dame Edna<sup>4</sup> who camp it up in women's clothing. (579)

By virtue of the contemporary Globe's performance laboratory, we see different shades of "femaleness" alive in a recent production that uses all-male casting. Indeed, the performance of Chahidi's Maria's "scarcely concealed masculinity" in the New Globe's production invites these questions: what is it about the characters themselves, as written in Shakespeare's text, that invites these "various levels of artifice," and what hypotheses can we formulate about this range of transvestism on Shakespeare's stage?

From a theoretical standpoint, the critical discussion surrounding cross-dressing (particularly as a disguised heroine) tends to emphasize the disorienting effects of gendered layering (i.e. a man playing a woman playing a man) or the inherent homoeroticism of cross-dressed, heterosexual characters. Lisa Jardine (*Still Harping on Daughters: Women and Drama in the Age of Shakespeare*), whom I quoted at the beginning of this introduction, argues that onstage cross-dressing satisfied homoerotic desires in male spectators, and that this attraction was a component of the boy player's continual appeal until the Restoration. Susan Zimmerman's excellent edited collection (*Erotic Politics: Desire on the Renaissance Stage*) likewise emphasizes the erotic impulses of the stage itself, particularly how the stage might be an arena for exploring and illustrating those impulses. Interestingly, these accounts of the erotic substrate to male theatrical cross-dressing reinforces the sentiments of Puritan contemporaries like Stephen Gosson.

Eroticism alone is not the primary concern of today's theorists, however. Laura Levine, Phyllis Rackin, and Catherine Belsey all indicate the malleable qualities of the cross-dressed player, especially with respect to the construction of gender and anxieties about whether that construction is fluid. In this case, the focus is less on sexuality and more on the fixed/unfixed understanding of gender. Levine (*Men in Women's Clothing: Anti-Theatricality and Effeminization*,

1579-1642) highlights the common protests of religious conservatives (like Gosson) who believed that boys-playing-women resulted in effeminization, which, she argues, indicates the protesters' intrinsic fear that an essential gender identity is ultimately absent. Rackin ("Androgyny, Mimesis, and the Marriage of the Boy Heroine on the English Renaissance Stage," *PMLA* 102) argues that androgyny was an avenue for upsetting an essentialist vision of gender, a point Belsey also affirms with a special focus on the comedies ("Disrupting Sexual Difference: Meaning and Gender in the Comedies," *Alternative Shakespeares*). Furthermore, Jean E. Howard ("Crossdressing, The Theatre, and Gender Struggle in Early Modern England," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 39.4), who places herself within the larger conversation about what cross-dressing signified during this period, contends that cross-dressing was indicative of "a sex-gender system under pressure" and that its appearance in the drama revealed a threat to the "normative social order" (418).

These critics' claims about the malleability of gender identity also underscore that the cross-dressed heroine is often a symbol of liberation. Juliet Dusinberre (*Shakespeare and the Notion of Women*), for instance, contends that the cross-dressed heroine was, by way of her disguise, able to explore gender identity freely; thus the trope of the woman disguised as a man was a liberating condition. This certainly feels true in the cases of disguised heroines such as



Viola or Rosalind, but whether or not Shakespeare himself saw these characters' disguises as a tool of "liberation" with respect to their gender is obviously unknowable.

Other critics endeavor to place their theoretical understanding of theatrical cross-dressing within the historical milieu of the English Renaissance. Stephen Orgel (*Impersonations: The Performance of Gender in Shakespeare's England*) has attempted to place the all-male preserve of the English Renaissance stage within the cultural-historical situation of Elizabethan England, claiming that theatrical cross-dressing on the English professional stage (even in spite of other European companies who employed female actresses) was a product of the erotic desires of the English theatre. And Michael Shapiro (*Gender in Play on the Shakespearean Stage: Boy Heroines and Female Pages*) focuses explicitly on the female page in Renaissance drama and connects this dramaturgical phenomenon with cross-dressing in the public sphere.

What this vast amount of scholarship on gendered performance reveals is that the conversation surrounding cross-dressing is not only on-going, but also contains widely different opinions about the meaning of theatrical cross-dressing for English Renaissance Drama. Is it an indication of a fluid perception of gender? Does it fulfill an erotic desire endemic to the English Renaissance sexual milieu? Or was it simply "the way they have always done it," and therefore

difficult to change? My intention in this dissertation is not to refute the claims of the many scholars who have come before me. Instead, I would like to add a new question to this discussion: have we over-theorized cross-dressing to the extent that we can no longer visualize how these female roles might actually have been played in their original content? And is there a way to recover that vision with the help of the play texts themselves? The structure of this dissertation seeks to answer these two questions, especially the latter. Over the course of five content chapters, I examine the different ways female characters might have been performed on the English professional stage. Throughout, my reading of these texts is deeply informed by the criticism surrounding them, but I nonetheless strive to establish my own distinct argument within the current scholarship.

In my first content chapter, I examine one of the most exciting versions of artifice in English Renaissance drama, which strips away all artifice in the first place: the popular trope of the heroine disguised as a young man. In these moments, the female character receives the most convincing disguise possible in the visage of an actual young man, a player whose onstage dress is likely not to be that different from his everyday garb. *Twelfth Night* and *As You Like It* both feature memorable heroines who choose to disguise themselves as men, but, other than delay the comic resolution, what other pragmatic reasons exist for these heroines to disguise their gender? In Chapter Two (“ ‘Were it not better...

That I did suit me all points like a man?': The Effectiveness of the Play-Boy and Castiglione's Shadow in Shakespeare's Cross-Dressed Comedies"), I argue that, by capitalizing on the representation of the "exposed" male player in the comedies listed above, we see how the paired characters of Cesario/Orsino and Ganymede/Orlando might complement one another in terms of Renaissance male courtesy. In other words, the trope of the disguised heroine in these two plays heightens our observance of how a female character's enactment of male courtesy, such as that outlined in Baldassare Castiglione's *The Book of the Courtier*, might adjudicate and correct any apparent lack of courtesy in the heroine's male counterpart.<sup>5</sup> In both of these pairings, the disguised heroine is in a position to advise and instruct her male companion within the context of friendship. The ultimate effect of this visual pairing is arguably this: the literal, onstage presence of the young male actors masquerading as Cesario and Ganymede accentuates the fact that Orsino and Orlando would have never accepted such instruction had their young friends not appeared so convincingly as men.

Truly, the connection between Shakespeare's body of work and *The Book of the Courtier* is not a new vein in studies of the English Renaissance, especially within studies of Shakespeare's history cycles.<sup>6</sup> As to the specific qualities of Renaissance male courtesy in Castiglione's text, Margaret M. Toole offers her own concise summary of "the courtier":

His purpose in life and his duty to his prince are to teach goodness, to encourage continency, to stimulate courage, to enact justice, and to suggest temperance. Never does he surpass the prince, who evinces diligence, gentleness, kindness, and liberality on all occasions. But he is the ideal and not the real gentleman. (Toole 87)

Toole's final comment in this passage, that the courtier "is the ideal and not the real gentleman," has special bearing on my own argument. The disguised heroines in *Twelfth Night* and *As You Like It*, after all, are not "real" gentleman within the context of their stories, despite the fact that male players perform them; in the worlds of each play, they are women disguised as gentlemen. Yet the ideals they represent in their respective plays (such as Cesario's empathy, and Ganymede's grounded vision of *Eros*) reveal the qualities they can model for their male counterparts. These heroines not only have greater access to their male counterparts by way of their disguise, but they also have the ability to model physically the ideals of Renaissance courtesy. (And, in both cases, these "ideals" are qualities that their male partners are evidently lacking.) Ultimately, within the range of gendered artifice that I have suggested, these female characters' onstage representations enact a *rejection* of artifice that accentuates the realistic qualities of the actual young male player, and I contend that this apparent attempt at onstage realism heightens these female characters' ability to model courtesy for their male counterparts.

As a London city comedy, Thomas Middleton and Thomas Dekker's *The Roaring Girl* celebrates the intriguing phenomenon of Mary Frith, a cross-dressing celebrity in her own right during the English Renaissance. Within my own discussion about realism and the theatrical effect of the cross-dressed heroine, *The Roaring Girl* presents an interesting case study since the starting place for the main character is an actual historical figure, one who was known for her unapologetic gender bending on the "stage" of the London streets. In Chapter Three ("An Amazon in the City: *The Roaring Girl*'s Theatrical Memorialization of Mary Frith"), I argue that, while *The Roaring Girl* has been criticized by feminist scholars for the way it undermines the powerful independence and gender transgression of the real Mary Frith (in the play, for instance, Moll Cutpurse tends to uphold a traditional vision of marriage rather than critique it), the play nonetheless attempts to memorialize the fascinating, real-life character of Mary Frith in a way that uses the most literal representation of her target costume (a real man).

In light of my larger argument about the range of gendered artifice in Renaissance drama, the case of Moll can help us demonstrate how onstage artifice can be used to not only explore a desire for realistic representation (Moll Cutpurse is played by a young male actor, and thus bears her moments of masculinity quite convincingly), but also to investigate how a particular literary

phenomenon (in this case, an “Arcadian” ideal) might be re-envisioned across different contexts. Specifically, if Moll were a character in an “Arcadian” romance similar to Sidney’s *The Countess of Pembroke’s Arcadia*, instead of a city comedy, then contemporary audiences would have viewed her quite differently. Moll’s mirth, her skill in fighting, her nobility, and her desire to see innocent love prevail would make her an ideal stand-in for the Amazon. Thomas Middleton himself indicates this effort at theatrical memorialization in The Epistle to the 1611 printed text of *The Roaring Girl*: “Worse things, I must needs confess, the world has taxed [Mary Frith] for than has been written of her; but ‘tis the excellency of a writer to leave things better than he finds ‘em” (Epistle 20-22).<sup>7</sup> In addition to using a male player to represent “Moll” onstage, Middleton and Dekker purposefully stray away from depicting her with the same level of criminal infamy that was most of the basis for her celebrity. As Michael Shapiro explains, “The play exploits the notoriety and sensual exploits of the real-life model, but throughout, and explicitly in the epilogue, it distinguishes her criminality from the more benign idiosyncrasy of the play’s heroine” (Shapiro 26). For rather than coming across as a criminal known mostly for her lasciviousness, the Moll Cutpurse of Middleton and Dekker’s play is a protector of female chastity, content to play the matchmaking Puck to the lovers’ qualms. Ultimately, Moll Cutpurse is a figure whose life seems to epitomize

what cross-dressing comedies celebrate: she transcends the limits of the female gender for the sake of accomplishing a noble or romantic goal, such as helping lovers who are divided by familial circumstances find their way to marriage.

An undergirding argument extending across both of the above chapter descriptions is that the dramatic trope of the heroine disguised as a young man was potentially a rejection of artifice on the Renaissance stage, thus satisfying a desire for theatrical performances with overtly realistic qualities. In other words, perhaps the reason this plot choice was so popular was not, in fact, because of the disorienting effect of layered gender identities, but instead because it afforded the character to speak through the vehicle of the most convincing costume the player had on hand: that of a real boy. This suggestion is a slight departure from popular theories of the disguised young heroine in Renaissance drama, which tend to emphasize the disorienting effects of gendered layering (i.e. a man playing a woman playing a man) or the inherent homoeroticism of cross-dressed, heterosexual characters.<sup>8</sup> My intention here is not to refute the claims of other scholars who have written extensively on the significance of onstage transvestism in the English Renaissance, particularly as it pertains to cross-dressed heroines. These studies have taught us how to read Shakespeare and his contemporaries' cross-dressed comedies with an appreciation for their comic complexities, their shameless layering, and their invincible attachment to

Renaissance men and women's fluid understanding of gender and sexuality. From the position of an analyst who is deeply indebted to these interpretations of onstage transvestism, I want to add to this ongoing discussion by highlighting the dramatically pragmatic choice of including a disguised heroine in plays driven by female characters.

How do powerful, tragic women in Renaissance drama fit into the spectrum of feminine artifice I have already suggested? When we consider the seriousness of their respective plots, we might deduce that these characters would likely be represented with a serious attempt at onstage femaleness (in other words, they should "pass" as women) despite the male players wearing the gowns. Their representation seems to stress artifice for the sake of accentuating their femininity and thus occludes the boy player. This emphasis on feminine artifice is very different from the disguised heroine trope, which exposes the boy player for the sake of accentuating realism, and the over-exaggerated "manly woman," whose masculinity is emphasized for the sake of comedy. Within this spectrum of gendered artifice, this in-between space is perhaps the most challenging subset of female characters to discuss because so many of Renaissance drama's women could fit into this category, even outside of the genre of tragedy. For instance, this group could include the likes of Hermia and Helena in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Miranda in *The Tempest*, Celia in *As You*



*Like It*, Perdita and Hermione in *A Winter's Tale*, Ophelia in *Hamlet*, Desdemona in *Othello*, etc. — all in the same category. Because of the size of this group, I have decided to limit myself to the genre of tragedy in the following chapter description, not only for the sake of narrowing my focus, but also to see if I can draw any genre-specific conclusions about male-as-female performance.

In Chapter Four (“Playing the Lady: Faithful Feminine Artifice in English Renaissance Tragedy”), my argument is that when Renaissance dramatists craft some tragic heroines, they employ strategies that detract audience attention away from the male player beneath the gown, and that these strategies for creating a sense of faithful feminine artifice manifest themselves in the play texts. The undergirding assumption of this chapter is that female impersonation in the original performances of English Renaissance tragedy is not accomplished *only* by the acting ability of an especially talented young male player, nor is it dependent upon the audience’s willing suspension of disbelief; rather, there are aspects of the dramas themselves that draw our eyes away from the dramaturgical reality of cross-dressed performance. My primary example is Webster’s Duchess of Malfi, a character whose speeches and behavior go so far as to resonate with the ideals of Stoicism, which is typically a male preserve. Subsequently, her enactment of traditionally masculine, Stoic qualities (such as her calm demeanor in the face of her execution in Act 4) raises suspicions about

whether this substrate of masculinity increases her onstage impact in her tragedy. Specifically, this sense of masculine Stoic honor combined with her onstage femaleness causes us to view her as a figure who transcends gender categorizations precisely because she represents an amalgam of both genders. Indeed, the fact that we never learn the Duchess's Christian name seems to cast her less as an individual and more as a monumental and transcendent figure. And, with respect to her presentation as a character who maintains a faithful attempt at feminine artifice, this emphasis on Stoic integrity effectively deflects attention away from the destabilizing effect of the male player who actually performs the role of the Duchess and directs our attention toward the powerful impact of the character herself. While the majority of this chapter pertains to the Duchess, I also plan to show how the Duchess, specifically, proves to be a potentially descriptive case for the onstage representation of other virtuous tragic heroines like Juliet in *Romeo and Juliet* and Lavinia in *Titus Andronicus*.

Turning away from tragedy to comedy, the final two chapters of this proposed dissertation explore whether some female characters are written such that they intentionally highlight the players' masculinity in a burlesque manner, with the ultimate effect being comic show or horrific representation.<sup>9</sup> In some ways, this is the easiest vision of female artifice to discuss since we can imagine some outlandish female characters in Renaissance drama garnering much of their

dramatic intrigue from a scarcely concealed masculinity. Retrospectively, if the first two iterations of gendered artifice outlined in this Introduction were “rejection of artifice” (the trope of the disguised heroine) and “faithful artifice” (tragic women of integrity), then this final version could be categorized as “intentionally sloppy artifice.”

Despite that fact that much of the humor of *A Midsummer Night's Dream's* fifth act arises from poor Francis Flute doing his absolute best to play Thisby, there are no existing theories about what the Pyramus and Thisby play-within-a-play implies about cross-dressing's comic potential in Renaissance drama. My argument in Chapter Five (“Cross-Dressing for Comic Effect: The Remnants of Francis Flute's Pitiful Thisby in the ‘New’ Globe Theatre's 2012 *Twelfth Night*”) is that the mechanicals' performance of “Pyramus and Thisby” purposefully suggests that it is possible to play a woman poorly, and that this ineptness is an intentional form of comic show. In some ways, this claim seems relatively obvious; of course Flute's less-than-convincing portrayal of Thisby is designed to be comic. But, by so explicitly demonstrating the comic potential inherent in a man playing a woman poorly, Shakespeare implies that cross-dressing can be a source of overt physical comedy. After establishing the ways in which this episode in *Midsummer* elucidates our understanding of how cross-dressing might be parodied for humorous ends, I demonstrate how an award-winning twenty-

first century production of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, performed by an all-male cast, can help us perceive the comedic dimensions of cross-dressing within the laboratory of live theatre.

Furthermore, there are many female characters throughout the corpus of Renaissance drama that we might conceive of as more mannish than others. Often marginal and presented primarily in comic vignettes, these characters offer an exaggerated artifice slightly more suited to spectacle than drama. Consonant with suggestions made in the previous chapter description, this spectacle is connected with physical comedy and appears to make few apologies about the male player masquerading as a woman. Thus my purpose in Chapter Six ("Female Falstaffs: Manly Women in English Renaissance Drama") is to identify possible comedic and/or grotesque instances of the "Man-Woman" in Renaissance drama, using the text of the plays as well as performance analyses from modern, all-male productions. Many of the characters I address in this chapter could be described as grotesque or vulgar, and much of our sense of these characters' presentation is founded upon what we learn about them from the play texts.

Perhaps the easiest character to visualize within this categorization is Ursula in Ben Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair*. For the sake of illustration, I will linger on the example of Ursula for a moment in order to demonstrate explicitly what I

mean by “Female Falstaffs.” The occasionally grotesque qualities of *Bartholomew Fair*’s carnival setting anticipates Ursula’s characterization as an ogreish woman in the first place, and her own actions throughout the comedy suggest that her revolting behavior is best suited to an onstage representation that comically highlights her mannishness. Her name, Ursula, which means “she-bear,” also implies that this woman was likely larger and more foreboding than normal. When she is first introduced at her booth at the fair, she begins by calling out for ale:

NIGHTINGALE: How now, Ursula? In a heat, in a heat?

URSULA: [*to Mooncalf*] My chair, you false faucet, you, and my morning’s draft, quickly, a bottle of ale, to quench me, rascal.

[*Mooncalf disappears*]

URSULA: [*to Nightingale*] I am all fire and fat, Nightingale. I shall e’en melt away to the first woman, a rib, again, I am afraid. I do water the ground in knots, as I go, like a great garden pot; you may follow me by the S’s I make. (2.2.48-55)<sup>10</sup>

The impression we get from her introduction is much like our first impression of Sir John Falstaff in *Henry IV Part I*, particularly the claim that she is “all fire and fat.” Falstaff is clearly fat, a quality we learn within his first moments on stage:

FALSTAFF: Now, Hal, what time of day is it, lad?

PRINCE HAL: Thou art so fat-witted with drinking of old sack, and unbuttoning thee after supper, and sleeping upon benches after noon, that though has forgotten to demand that truly which thou wouldest truly know. What a devil hast thou to do with the time of the day? (1.2.1-6)<sup>11</sup>

Indeed, reading these two introductions alongside each other subtly implies that the notion of Ursula as a “female Falstaff” is not too far off the mark. But what is most interesting about her introduction is its immediate evocation of the grotesque. Not only is she “all fire and fat,” but also she disgustingly “water[s] the ground with knots...like a great garden pot,” shamelessly urinating publicly. The grotesqueness we witness with Ursula’s characterization fits neatly with a theory of her performance that accentuates the player’s masculinity for the purpose of comedy. And this connection between the grotesque and burlesque masculinity seems similarly applicable to other female characters throughout Renaissance drama. Structurally, I have organized this chapter around several female figures, in addition to Ursula, whose characterizations in the text invite the suspicion of a comically or grotesquely “exposed” masculinity: Mistress Quickly in 1 and 2 *Henry IV*, Queen Margaret in *Richard III*, the Nurse in *Romeo and Juliet*, and the three Weird Sisters in *Macbeth*.

Amidst the great volume of excellent research on gendered performance in Renaissance drama, this dissertation ultimately attempts to offer a new theory of performance for the plays of Shakespeare and his contemporaries, one that among other things considers whether we can extract indications of performance practices from the text alone. Much of the well-known research on English Renaissance theatrical cross-dressing arose in the 1990s, during the advent of

Queer Studies and the maturation of New Historicism. The result of this combination of a historical question (such as Stephen Orgel's, "Why did the English stage take boys for women?") with a particular theoretical framework is that our speculations about authentic performance practices have been filtered almost exclusively through theory.

In aligning myself with this topic, I run the risk of appearing as though I believe the best performance of Shakespeare is the most historically accurate, cross-dressed casting and all. This just is not true. For me, one of the virtues of Shakespeare's body of work is its renewability. My goal in uncovering a theory of pragmatic performance practices in Shakespeare's original setting is an effort in building intimacy with these texts. I am not suggesting that this is the only way his works should be performed. What I hope to do with this project is not to reject that preceding theoretical framework, but instead to see if that framework can help us work backwards to a more faithful reading of these texts and their original performances.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> By “cross-dressing,” I am referring to male-as-female performance in general, not simply characters who cross-dress as a plot device.

<sup>2</sup> To my knowledge, Jennifer Drouin is the first scholar to articulate the necessity of a nuanced understanding of cross-dressing.

<sup>3</sup> It is important to note that women *did* in fact appear onstage during the age of Shakespeare, but typically only in masques at Court or in productions by theatrical companies from other European countries. Stephen Orgel makes this point about England’s unique emphasis on maintaining an all-male English theatre in *Impersonations: The Performance of Gender in Shakespeare’s England* (1996), which is listed in the bibliography of this Prospectus.

<sup>4</sup> “Dame Edna Everage” is a famous drag persona created by Australian comedian Barry Humphries. (“She” is known for her signature lavender hair and cat-eye glasses.) First appearing onstage in 1955, Dame Edna continues to appear in live performances and on television to this day.

<sup>5</sup> For the purposes of my argument in this chapter, *The Book of the Courtier’s* emphasis on the virtuous influence the courtier might have on his lord is of the greatest interest to me (this appears in Books III and IV of Castiglione’s text).

<sup>6</sup> I am thinking specifically of E. M. W. Tillyard (*Shakespeare’s History Plays*), who is (to my knowledge) the first scholar to explicitly connect Prince Hal in *Henry IV* Parts 1 and 2 to a vision of the *cortegiano* (Tillyard 275-9).

<sup>7</sup> Quotations from *The Roaring Girl* are from *English Renaissance Drama: A Norton Anthology*, edited by Bevington, Engle, Maus, and Rasmussen.

<sup>8</sup> I am thinking particularly of the works of Stephen Orgel, Marjorie Garber, and Michael Shapiro.

<sup>9</sup> This form of accentuated masculinity has a rather different purpose than that of the disguised heroine trope, which seems to use exposed masculinity as a vehicle for realistic onstage representation.

<sup>10</sup> Quotations from *Bartholomew Fair* are from *English Renaissance Drama: A Norton Anthology*.

<sup>11</sup> Quotations from *Henry IV* Part 1 are from *The Riverside Shakespeare*.



## CHAPTER TWO

### “Were it not better... That I did suit me all points like a man?”: The Effectiveness of the Play-Boy and Castiglione’s Shadow in Shakespeare’s Cross-Dressed Comedies

As captivating as Shakespeare’s disguised heroines are for twenty-first-century audiences (and also for actresses vying to play star vehicles like Viola or Rosalind), our historical awareness reminds us that it was simply easier for all-male companies during the English Renaissance to perform plays with “breeches” roles, particularly if a company wanted to feature an especially talented boy actor.<sup>1</sup> And when we consider that these first performances of plays like *Twelfth Night* or *As You Like It* allowed the disguised heroine to perform in the most “accurate” costume the company had on hand (an actual young man), we would do well to ask whether this momentary rejection of onstage artifice purposefully accentuates the playwright’s thematic agenda. Other than defer the comic resolution, what thematic implications could be behind the choice of Shakespeare’s comic heroines to disguise themselves as men, and thus to appear onstage in the most convincing costume available to English Renaissance players?<sup>2</sup>

What I intend to explore in this chapter is the effect of visually pairing the disguised heroine with her romantic counterpart on the Renaissance stage. Here, I argue that by encountering the presence of the “revealed” boy player in *Twelfth Night* and *As You Like It*, we recognize how the paired characters of Cesario/Orsino and Ganymede/Orlando might complete one another in terms of a vision of Renaissance courtesy.<sup>3</sup> In other words, the appearance of the disguised heroine (and, thus, the boy player as himself) helps us more clearly perceive how a female character’s enactment of courtesy, *a la* Baldassare Castiglione’s *The Book of the Courtier*, might adjudicate and correct any apparent lack of courtesy in her male counterpart.<sup>4</sup>

The ultimate effect of this visual pairing is arguably this: the literal, onstage presence of the young male actors masquerading as Cesario and Ganymede accentuates the fact that Orsino and Orlando would have never accepted such instruction had their young friends not appeared so convincingly as men. The performance itself seems to capitalize on what we, from our contemporary standpoint, might categorize as “realism.” Moreover, Castiglione is an appropriate lens for these two plays because Viola-as-Cesario and Rosalind-as-Ganymede both serve as types of “courtiers” to their male counterparts and thus act as complements: Cesario is literally a courtier in Count Orsino’s household, and Ganymede is a gentle, quick-witted young man whose

friendship with Orlando is built upon Ganymede offering advice to his friend about love.

While we cannot literally witness an original production of these plays in order to understand how the disguised heroine would have been performed by play-boys, we can use the cultural milieu of the Renaissance to speculate about the theatrical effects of this dramatic choice. I have structured this chapter in a way that privileges close reading of the play-texts in light of that milieu as a means toward reconstructing the original performance. For when we begin to view Cesario and Ganymede as young male courtiers, whose actions and advice help improve their lords, we see that there is a substantial benefit to letting the boy player appear as himself onstage. In particular, the heroine's cross-dressed disguise is not only convincing to the lord she serves, but also, perhaps more importantly, it is an extremely convincing "disguise" for the audience to perceive.

Although Sir Thomas Hoby's 1561 translation of Baldassare Castiglione's *The Book of the Courtier* (first published in Italian in 1528) is a significant text for understanding English Renaissance literature generally, the portions of *The Courtier* that appear in literature anthologies are usually limited to the brief description of *sprezzatura* in Book One and Peter Bembo's "Ladder of Love" speech in Book Four.<sup>5</sup> These are absolutely important segments of Castiglione's

book, but this choice of extracts somewhat dilutes *The Courtier's* structural and stylistic qualities. Presented as a transcription of conversations at the Court of Urbino between 1504-08, Castiglione's structure imitates the nonchalance, or *grazia*, that the text itself advocates. In other words, we do not learn about the qualities of the courtier through the form of a traditional conduct manual; instead, we overhear those qualities while eavesdropping on a court's conversation about the topic.

The qualities of the courtier are wide-ranging (the courtier should have a sense of "artlessness" or *sprezzatura* in his presentation, unaffected speech and behavior, physical liveness, an appreciation for music and art, the ability to read Latin and Greek, martial prowess, an interest in composing verse, etc.), but the undergirding goal is for the courtier himself to be a human manifestation of Aristotle's Golden Mean, or the appropriate median between the extremes of "excess" and "deficiency." J. R. Woodhouse, in his own commentary on *The Book of the Courtier*, describes the Mean in this way: "Between the peak of gracious excellence and clumsy ineptitude is a Mean (*il mezzo*) to which the less gifted may, with studious application, attain, by correcting in large part their natural defects" (73). The effect of representing the Aristotelian Mean in one's behavior (and I must stress that Castiglione *is* speaking only to men, save for a limited discourse on "gentlewomanly behavior" in Book III) is that the courtier will be

an ideal purveyor of truth and guidance to the lord he serves.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, there is a relatively subversive quality to the courtier; for in embodying the Mean and modeling it for his master, he teaches his lord how to rule. Lord Octavian, one of the discussants at the Court of Urbino, notes that the courtier's attention to "the meane of the qualities whiche these Lordes have given [the courtier]" enables him to serve as an advisor to the courtier's lord:

The ende therfore of a perfect Courtier (wherof hitherto nothinge hath bine spoken) I beleave is to purchase him, by the meane of the qualities whiche these Lordes have given him, in such wise the good will and favour of the Prince he is in service withal, that he may breake his minde to him, and always enfourme hym franklye of the trueth of everie matter meete for him to understande, without feare or peril to displease him. And whan he knoweth his minde is bent to commit any thinge unseemlie for him, to be bould to stande with him in it, and to take courage after an honest sort at the favour which he hath gotten him throughe his good qualities, to dissuade him from everie ill pourpose, and to set him in the waye of vertue. (Castiglione 297)

We cannot know for sure whether Shakespeare read every page of Hoby's translation of Castiglione, yet we have good reason to believe that he understood the central image of the courtier.<sup>7</sup> The word "courtier" and its variations ("courtiers," "courtier's") appear roughly 45 times in Shakespeare's body of work. This is a much smaller number than the several hundred appearances of the closely related "gentleman" and "gentle," but the sizable recurrence of "courtier" is nonetheless significant. Of all potential courtiers, Prince Hal from *Henry IV Parts 1 and 2* is perhaps the clearest vision of Castiglione's courtier in

Shakespeare's works. In *Shakespeare's History Plays*, E. M. W. Tillyard claims that Shakespeare makes Hal "the *cortegiano*, the fully developed man" and contrasts him with Hotspur, who is "the provincial, engaging in some ways, but with a one-track mind" (276).

Truly, the connection between Shakespeare's characters and *The Book of the Courtier* is no new vein in studies of English Renaissance drama. In one of the earliest articles on Shakespeare and Castiglione's *The Courtier*, Mary Augusta Scott identifies Castiglione's book as a potential source text for the verbal sparring between Beatrice and Benedick in *Much Ado About Nothing*. Since the publication of Scott's essay in 1901, several other scholars have found connections between *The Courtier* and Shakespeare, but the criticism has shifted from hunting source texts to thematic readings.<sup>8</sup> Peter Burke suggests that there is a "danger of seeing Castiglione everywhere," and yet, as Phillip D. Collington asserts, "Castiglione is 'everywhere'" in some of the texts of this period (Burke 27; Collington 284). Collington, in his excellent study of *The Book of the Courtier* in *Much Ado About Nothing* (in many ways, a reassessment of Scott's original inquiry using a more careful methodology), claims that "a reading of *Much Ado* alongside *The Courtier* evinces the English dramatist's skeptical examination of the source's courtier-ideal, presented in an accessible dramatic form" (Collington 283). This skepticism also appears at work in the cross-dressed comedies,

although I make no claims that *The Courtier* is a direct source for *Twelfth Night* and *As You Like It*. Rather, like Collington, I am more interested in reading the ideal of Castiglione's courtier alongside the cross-dressed heroines in *Twelfth Night* and *As You Like It*, with the ultimate objective of demonstrating how both Viola and Rosalind, as female characters, offer their own nuances to a traditional definition of courtesy.<sup>9</sup>

Viola and, to a lesser degree, Rosalind's literal self-fashioning as a young courtier likewise accentuates that both are mediating forces in their comedies.<sup>10</sup> (Rosalind, of course, appears in a rougher situation in the Forest of Arden, but Orlando nonetheless detects a gentle accent in Rosalind/Ganymede's speech.) The ability of a young courtier to direct his lord not only toward virtue, but also toward a Mean is of special interest in *The Courtier*, and that instruction appears primarily through the avenue of deep friendship. Sir Frederick, a discussant at Urbino, notes that the courtier must be "an especiall and hartie friende" to his lord (Castiglione 138). The end of Hoby's translation offers a list of the "chiefe conditions and qualities in a courtier," stating more explicitly the use of this "hartie friende": he must

become an Instructor and Teacher of his Prince or Lorde, inclining him to vertuous practises: and to be francke and free with him, after he is once in favour in matters touching his honour and estimation, always putting him in mind to follow vertue and to flee vice, opening unto him the commodities of the one and inconvenience of the other. (Castiglione 373)

There is no question that Viola-as-Cesario and Rosalind-as-Ganymede find themselves as “especiall” and “hartie” friends to Orsino and Orlando, and the instruction they offer mediates the behavior of their “lords” much like the courtier-ideal. Just as Viola challenges the self-pitying and self-interested melancholy of Orsino, Rosalind adjudicates Orlando’s elevated (and, in many cases, parodically Petrarchan) understanding of courtly love. Concerning *The Book of the Courtier*’s emphasis on the ability of the courtier to advise his lord, the mediating qualities of the two heroines make them excellent subjects for a discussion of Shakespeare and Castiglione’s courtesy manual.

The lovesick Duke Orsino of *Twelfth Night* is something of a perfect candidate for the practical instruction of Castiglione’s *The Book of the Courtier*. He is powerful, wealthy, ready to woo, and apparently is interested in enacting the qualities of courtly love. Furthermore, his interactions with Cesario demonstrate the central thesis of Castiglione’s work: a courtier (in this case, Cesario), who displays the qualities of Castiglione’s ideal, is capable of instructing his lord (Orsino) in virtue. As a man of virtue, though, our introduction to Orsino as a melancholy, self-interested bachelor suggests that his “courtesy” is lacking. Specifically, we learn in the very first scene of *Twelfth Night* that the Duke has few feelings of empathy for the grief of his beloved, Olivia.



Orsino has a strong distaste for grief, a grievance he announces within the first 50 lines of the comedy:

O, she that hath a heart of the fine frame  
To pay this debt of love but to a brother,  
How will she love when the rich golden shaft  
Hath kill'd the flock of all affections else  
That live in her; when liver, brain, and heart,  
These sovereign thrones, are all supplied and fill'd  
Her sweet perfections with one self king! (1.1.32-38)

Here Orsino disdains what he feels is excessive grief, claiming that Olivia's affections are wasted on a brother as opposed to a lover. Indeed, he strikes the audience as rather unsympathetic in these lines, particularly when we observe Viola's shipwrecked turmoil and her own thoughts on grief in scene 2. And yet he is the traditional vision of the courtier's lord, and he is therefore in a position to be a magnified vision of the courtier ideal: he is skilled in his speeches, aware of the self-elevating potential of idealized love, and careful in his presentation to others. But the Count Orsino lacks sympathy for grief. My contention is that Cesario's interactions with Orsino introduce a new requirement of courtesy: specifically, that the ideal courtier also demonstrates a genuine ability to empathize. In modeling the behavior of an attractive young courtier who can also feel deeply amidst the reality of personal loss, Cesario introduces Orsino to the pain of grief and instructs him in empathy—perhaps an under-acknowledged aspect of *grazia* at its best. In order to demonstrate *Twelfth Night's*

acknowledgement of the need for empathetic qualities in the courtier, the following pages consider a few scenes that announce not only the play's privileging of empathy, but also Viola/Cesario's ability to arouse pity in the unsympathetic Count.

While empathy is an under-acknowledged theme in *Twelfth Night*, it is not a new idea to discuss grief in the play, which, as Thad Jenkins Logan observes, includes thirty-seven references or allusions to death in the play text as a whole (Logan 236).<sup>11</sup> Logan acknowledges that "the world of [*Twelfth Night*] is a night world, and festivity here has lost its innocence" (236). As audience members and readers, we realize that this is a "night world" (or a world marked by sadness and grief) in the first few moments of the play. Immediately following our introduction to Orsino and his unrequited love, the sea captain informs the bereaved Viola (although we have yet to learn her name) of the Countess Olivia, who, as the audience already knows, is also in grieving for a deceased brother. But Viola ambiguously responds,

Oh, that I served that lady  
And might not be delivered to the world,  
Till I had made mine own occasion mellow,  
What my estate is. (1.2.41-44)

The sea captain then claims, "That were hard to compass, / Because she will admit no kind of suit, / No, not the Duke's" (1.2.44-6). But the meaning of the captain's response is noticeably vague—Olivia will not allow any uninvited

solicitation, he seems to say, but then the addition of “No, not the Duke’s” implies that this ban on “suitors” is only in reference to men. Viola, who evidently possesses enough gold to pay the captain for helping her disguise herself, could very easily have prepared herself in a suitable manner such that she could offer her service to Olivia. But Viola chooses manhood instead. Her reasoning seems to manifest itself in the lines quoted above, that she “might not be delivered to the world, / Till I had made mine own occasion mellow.”

There are a few possible readings of these lines, which provide hints as to why Viola chooses to cross-dress in the first place: on one hand, she seems to say that she would rather not reveal herself until she can more fully account for her social position, but, on the other hand, there is some indication that “mine own occasion mellow” is an allusion to her grieving process. Unready to re-enter the world at-large, her “occasion” of grief needs time to “mellow,” or ripen, with the passage of time. On the topic of grief in the play and Viola’s decision to disguise herself essentially as her dead brother, Suzanne Penuel claims that “[t]he twinning in *Twelfth Night* functions as a response to death,” specifically as an overt attempt at embodying the qualities of the deceased (Penuel 75). The morbid costume she adapts as the supposedly dead Sebastian serves as a haven for her in the midst of her grief.

But the costume has practical advantages as well in a foreign land. As Jean Howard suggests, “Viola adopts male dress as a practical means of survival in an alien environment and, perhaps, as a magical entry into the heterosexual arena until that brother returns” (Howard 431). On a performance level, this “magical entry” is also the moment in which the male actor playing Viola/Cesario can change out of his female gown and into the typical costume of a young man. The fact that this early scene immediately follows our introduction to the Count Orsino accentuates how the theme of grief is at the forefront of this comedy. But Viola’s introduction to the audience in *Twelfth Night* is a distinct counterpoint to Orsino’s. She has experienced one of the deepest forms of grief in losing her twin brother, and her enactment of mourning goes a step further than that of her foil Olivia. Instead of simply refusing the attraction of love during her grief, Viola chooses to embody her lost brother to the best of her ability and become a man herself. In many ways, this literal embodiment of her brother is an extreme form of empathy itself.

In general, most of *Twelfth Night*’s characters have little concern for Olivia’s grief, and this lack makes moments of pity, empathy, or attempts at comfort all the more noticeable. Only two scenes, both of which appear early in the play, contain characters revealing shades of pity for Olivia: the first is Viola/Cesario’s suggestion in 1.4 that Olivia will not hear Orsino’s suit if she is so

overcome with grief, and the second is Feste's reappearance to Olivia and her household in 1.5.<sup>12</sup> Comfortable with his friendship with Cesario, Orsino tasks his new page with delivering bold love messages to Olivia in spite of her mourning. Viola questions his strategy by subtly implying the inappropriateness of his timing, which highlights Orsino's own fixation on being in love as opposed to caring for his grieving beloved:

DUKE: Therefore, good youth, address thy gait unto her,  
Be not denied access, stand at her doors,  
And tell them, there thy fixed foot shall grow  
Till thou have audience.  
VIOLA: Sure, my noble lord,  
If she be so abandon'd to her sorrow  
As it is spoke, she never will admit me.  
DUKE: Be clamorous, and leap all civil bounds,  
Rather than make unprofited return. (1.4.15-22)

Orsino, who we already know has little patience for Olivia's grief, instructs Cesario to do whatever it takes to "act [his] woes" and intimate his passions (1.4.26). His style of presentation is also calculating, particularly when he suggests that Cesario will be a better messenger because "[Olivia] will attend it better in [Cesario's] youth / Than in a nuntio's of more grave aspect" (1.4.27-28). Despite Orsino's preoccupation with his own woes, this short exchange nonetheless reveals that Viola/Cesario is not blind to Olivia's sorrow, an important quality that will eventually reawaken Olivia when they meet in their subsequent duet.

Feste is another character who intentionally speaks comfort to Olivia, although the moment is veiled in wordplay and perhaps often overlooked:

CLOWN: Good Madonna, why mourn'st thou?

OLIVIA: Good fool, for my brother's death.

CLOWN: I think his soul is in hell, Madonna.

OLIVIA: I think his soul is in heaven, fool.

CLOWN: The more fool, Madonna, to mourn for your brother's soul, being in heaven. Take away the fool, gentlemen. (1.5.66-72)

Olivia's remark to Malvolio that she wonders if Feste "doth mend" suggests that this single comic exchange, one that gives Feste the opportunity to remind Olivia that her brother is indeed in heaven, has a comforting effect on Olivia. Indeed, that Feste gains immediate access back into the household suggests that Orsino would have done well to begin his courting of Olivia with condolences rather than clamors.

Aside from any expository remarks we hear at the beginning of the play about Olivia's plan for mourning her brother, Feste's and Viola's remarks are the only instances where characters thoughtfully and explicitly acknowledge her grief. The first scene between Olivia and the disguised Viola reveals that these small shows of comfort are not meaningless in the "night world" of *Twelfth Night*. This scene between the play's two female protagonists indicates that courtesy on its own is not enough. In addition to courtesy, one must have some sensibilities appropriate for a given context, and the context of Olivia's household is one of mourning. This ability to adapt to varying contexts is indeed one of the qualities of the courtier recorded by Castiglione. In *The Courtier*, Sir Frederick declares,

let him consider wel what the thing is he doth of speaketh, the place wher it is done, in presence of whom, in what time, the cause why he doeth it, his age, his profession, the ende whereto it tendeth, and the meanes that may bring him to it: and so let him apply himself discreatly with these advertisementes to whatsoever he mindeth to doe or speake. (Castiglione 112)

In *Twelfth Night*, Orsino is unable to adapt to the specific circumstances of the courtship he seeks; in fact, he is negligent of (and resentful towards) this context (one of grief and mourning) altogether. Another substrate to Orsino's failed courtship of Olivia is the fact that he never appears to her in person, at least within the world of the play, until Act 5. The artfulness he attempts to convey to his "beloved" is mediated by Viola-as-Cesario, who does the courting for him.

In the pages that follow, then, I offer an extended discussion of Viola/Cesario's interaction with Olivia in 1.5. My goal in this short section within the present chapter is to demonstrate that Olivia herself is cognizant of the specific qualities of a Renaissance courtier; also, I illustrate here that Olivia's mourning requires a particular kind of wooing, one that is empathetic to her condition of grief. Indeed, this particular scene (1.5) anticipates 2.4 (between Viola/Cesario and Orsino) in its acknowledgment of grief and its focus on empathy. Viola/Cesario's interactions with Olivia are successful in 1.5 precisely because she possesses some qualities of courtesy that her lord Orsino lacks. In this case, the ability to connect with a person in grieving through the avenue of pity and empathy reveals Viola/Cesario as an adaptable courtier, able to

genuinely and gracefully convey sensibilities that are appropriate to the occasion.

With respect to the topic of “courteousness” having the ability to “hide one’s art,” Olivia reveals that she has little patience for artfulness in general, something she reveals when Cesario announces that s/he “took great pains to study” the love speech and that it is “poetical” (1.5.195). Olivia’s opinions about how one might “woo” in this scene demonstrate that Olivia herself has some sense of what qualities the “courtier” might possess. For instance, when Viola/Cesario notes that she will present the Countess with words that are “poetical,” Olivia replies with, “It is the more like to be feign’d, I pray you keep it in” (196-7). In other words, Olivia possesses a distrust of obvious artfulness, something the courtier would want to conceal. We hear Olivia’s distrust of artfulness once more when Cesario introduces the argument employed by the first several of Shakespeare’s sonnets, that one’s legacy of beauty can only be memorialized in the form of a child:

VIOLA: Lady, you are the cruell’st she alive  
If you will lead these graces to the grave,  
And leave the world no copy.

OLIVIA: O, sir, I will not be so hard-hearted; I will give out divers schedules of my beauty. It shall be inventoried, and every particle and utensil labell’d to my will: as, *item*, two lips, indifferent red; *item*, two grey eyes, with lids to them; *item*, one neck, one chin, and so forth. Were you sent hither to praise me? (1.5.241-9)

Olivia mocks this argument for procreation, and her sarcastic response indicates



that this is something she has heard before, not an original and heart-felt declaration. She's evidently heard these types of appeals before; to her, they are unoriginal and therefore unconvincing. If the courtier is to be effective in the art of persuasion, especially when it comes to wooing women, then he must have original material, not a well-known conceit such as "you are the cruell'st she alive / If you will leave these graces to the grave" (1.5.241-42).

In spite of Orsino's conveyance (through Cesario) of this poetry, Olivia still goes on to acknowledge that Orsino possesses all of the superficial qualities of Castiglione's courtier, but she nonetheless admits that she "cannot love him":<sup>13</sup>

OLIVIA: Your lord does know my mind, I cannot love him,  
Yet I suppose him virtuous, know him noble,  
Of great estate, of fresh and stainless youth;  
In voices well divulg'd, free, learn'd, and valiant,  
And in dimension, and the shape of nature,  
A gracious person. But yet I cannot love him.  
He might have took his answer long ago. (1.5.257-63)

In these lines, she implies that Orsino is himself a courteous individual, and she even calls him "gracious," evoking language that is reminiscent of Castiglione's claims in translation. This catalogue of courteous qualities says little about why exactly Olivia refuses him, other than the simple admission that she is not (and likely never will be) in love with Orsino. But the exchange we have just witnessed between Olivia and the disguised Viola implies that there is something missing in Orsino's charms. Specifically, Olivia is critical of over-

practiced performances of love, performances that are easily copied from lover to lover. Instead, she is interested in the matter itself, as opposed to the poetical manner in which it is packaged.<sup>14</sup> Although poetical presentation is one of the dominant qualities of the courtier, Olivia's seems most preoccupied with poetical language's risk of appearing "feigned." A detection of pretense in the speech of the courtier is indicative of his failure to carry himself with the ever-desirable qualities of *sprezzatura*.

Once Viola/Cesario announces, "I see you what you are," the language shifts immediately from prose to verse, a formal transition that I argue indicates the characters' congruent understanding. Interestingly, this moment of mutual understanding seems to be initiated by Viola/Cesario's declaration that she comprehends a particular quality of Olivia's character: "you are too proud" (1.5.250). This momentary connection between the two characters makes Viola/Cesario's word-picture of the willow cabin all the more impactful. To wit, the speech capitalizes on the sense of connection between the two characters by taking it a step further and inviting Olivia to consider what it would be like to pity Cesario. (This same invitation to pity occurs in 2.4, in which Orsino and Viola/Cesario have an intimate conversation about the strength of women's love.) And the language our disguised heroine employs here reveals that she does indeed know how to empathize with someone who is also "contained,"

whether by the physical structures of a household or by gendered social strictures. Indeed, the Viola/Cesario's cross-dressing seems to empower her to critique Olivia's behavior in a more pronounced manner.

On the sense of containment inherent in the "willow cabin" speech, as well as Viola's later ruminations on "Patience on a monument," Martha Ronk writes, "[t]he willow cabin emblem pictures the lover as shut up and unable to move, even as the statue of Patience" (Ronk 385). Ronk continues, "the representation is of something constructed, pictorial, and located strikingly 'elsewhere'—out there in an abstract space utterly foreign to the more specific households of the play" (385). In addition to this sense of containment, a quality that both Olivia and Viola seem to feel, the speech also benefits from its efforts at prompting empathy in Olivia. In particular, the word picture Viola creates shows rather than tells how she might love "in [her] master's flame," and the picture she draws for Olivia is ultimately directed toward inviting pity, which is just a slight step away from empathy (1.5.264). It seems, too, that Viola's cross-dressed presentation allows for her to use the language of wooing freely in her "masculine" form, and this form seems to heighten Olivia's attentions toward Viola/Cesario. For if "empathy" is the ability to comprehend and appreciate another's feelings, then Viola succeeds by not only provoking a sense of

sympathy in Olivia (“you should pity me!”), but also by inviting her to contemplate images that resonate with a woman in mourning:

VIOLA: Make me a willow cabin at your gate,  
And call upon my soul within the house;  
Write loyal cantons of contemned love,  
And sing them loud even in the dead of night;  
Hallow your name to the reverberate hills,  
And make the babbling gossip of the air  
Cry out “Olivia!” O, you should not rest  
Between the elements of air and earth  
But you should pity me! (1.5.267-76)

Indeed, the immediate usage of “willow cabin” connects this short speech with both unrequited love and the loss of a loved one.<sup>15</sup> Instead of references to a simple willow garland, though, Viola takes the image a step further by constructing a cabin itself made of willows, a rooted structure of containment marked with grief. The progression of images in this speech suggests that the lover remains inside of the cabin, writing songs about “contemned love” and singing them in the darkness of night, all for the sake of provoking pity in the beloved.

Viola’s cross-dressing likewise draws attention to the fact that the poetry of the “willow cabin” speech is arguably superior to Orsino’s own declarations of love. Viola/Cesario’s poetry, following prescriptive guidelines such as those in Sidney’s *Defense of Poesy*, relies on word pictures for arousing delight—her speech shows rather than tells, and with great force, too, for Olivia decides that

Cesario is indeed “a gentleman” (“I’ll be sworn thou art; / Thy tongue, thy face, thy limbs, actions, and spirit / Do give thee a fivefold blazon”) (1.5.291-3).<sup>16</sup>

Furthermore, the dramaturgical reality that the young male player himself, by virtue of him playing a “breeches” role, is able to appear onstage “without art” only underscores the scene’s endorsement of hidden art in the courtier’s presentation. And Viola/Cesario’s enactment of empathy through the willow cabin speech (a word picture that is rife with images of grieving and pity appropriate to Olivia’s current state) demonstrates implicitly that the phenomenon of grief connects the two character in a way only shared feelings can.<sup>17</sup>

This emphasis on the need for not only empathy within “courtesy,” but also a thoughtful awareness of the condition of grieving in general, is stressed further in 2.4. Specifically, we realize Orsino’s detachment from the reality of grieving when he incorrectly analyzes the song Feste will sing for Orsino and Cesario. Orsino asks Feste to play “the song we had last night,” describing the song as “old and plain” and that “[i]t is silly sooth, / And dallies with the innocence of love, / Like the old age” (2.4.42-3, 46-8). Feste’s song (“Come away, death”), however, is much darker than the simple truth (“silly sooth”) Orsino claims it to be, and while it may be “old and plain,” it illustrates morosely the sense of isolation and detachment that can inevitably arise from great grief. The

second stanza, in particular, anticipates another of Viola's most popular speeches, in which she describes herself as "a blank" (2.4.110):

Not a flower, not a flower sweet  
On my black coffin let there be strown.  
Not a friend, not a friend greet  
My poor corpse, where my bones  
shall be thrown.  
A thousand thousand sighs to save,  
Lay me, O, where  
Sad true lover never find my grave,  
To weep there. (2.4.59-66)

The central image of this stanza is one of erasure, and the bereaved speaker (who is apparently killed by rejected love) seeks oblivion. In one sense, this is an appropriate song for Orsino to request because it feeds his own melancholic disposition, and yet the song's cry for erasure in the face of grief is more appropriately aligned with Viola and Olivia, both of whom attempt to enact a sense of isolation and oblivion in their responses to mourning: Viola erases her identity by cross-dressing and resurrects herself as her brother, and Olivia closes herself off from romantic pursuits until she has observed a (long) period of mourning. This song, as well as Orsino's spiteful claims about the inconstancy of women (2.4.93-103), prompts Viola to not only combat Orsino's remarks, but also invites her description of the "sister" who herself "lov'd a man" (2.4.107):

VIOLA: A blank, my lord; she never told her love,  
But let concealment like a worm i' th' bud  
Feed on her damask cheek; she pin'd in thought,  
And with a green and yellow melancholy

She sate like Patience on a monument,  
Smiling at grief. Was not this love indeed?  
We men may say more, swear more, but indeed  
Our shows are more than will; for still we prove  
Much in our vows, but little in our love. (2.4.110-18)

The great ambiguity of this speech is bound up in the duality of its implications: is Viola/Cesario speaking from a position of a sister mourning for a lost brother, or is she mourning for the fact that Orsino does not know her actual state as a woman? The “concealment” she enacts as “Patience on a monument” seems more likely associated with her decision to disguise herself as her brother until, as we hear her say in 1.2, her “own occasion mellow / what [her] estate is” (1.2.43-4). Interestingly, 2.4 is one of only a few instances in the play where Orsino asks direct, personal questions to Cesario in the spirit of friendship. The questions Orsino asks in this scene (“What dost thou know?”, “And what’s her history?”, and “But died thy sister of her love, my boy?”) are indicative of a desire to feel alongside his young page, and the image-rich responses Viola/Cesario provides encourage Orsino to visualize the results of bereavement and grief (2.4.104, 109, 119). And, indeed, Orsino would not be capable of connecting with Viola/Cesario in this moment if she had appeared as a woman. Her cross-dressed presentation makes these images accessible. Thus, Viola/Cesario succeeds in this moment at provoking empathy in Orsino through (once again) the use of a vibrant word picture that tangibly represents the

condition of grief. And interestingly, at the end of this duet scene, Viola/Cesario has to be the one to remind Orsino, who appears caught up in the moment of connection between himself and his courtier, about the suit to the Countess Olivia.

At the end of *Twelfth Night*, there is little indication of whether Count Orsino has truly learned anything from Viola/Cesario's empathetic qualities, and the fact that we do not see the Count onstage again until Act 5 offers no opportunity to recognize any substantial formation in his character.<sup>18</sup> And yet Viola/Cesario's interactions with Orsino in these early sections of the play demonstrate the degree to which the exposed boy player in a "breeches" role might accentuate the comparisons we can draw between the man meant to be the "gentleman/lord" (in this case, Orsino) and his young courtier (Viola/Cesario). By virtue of the apparent rejection of artifice bound up in the image of young male actor playing Viola/Cesario, we are invited to compare her/him to the man who *should* be the real gentleman, Orsino. But this paired presentation reveals Orsino's own lack of empathy within his courtship of Olivia, a discourteous trait that finally leaves him on the outskirts of much of the main action of the play.

As I have already suggested, in light of the basic practicalities of performing on the English Renaissance stage, the heroine disguised as the boy page was a pragmatic choice employed by dramatists and companies, especially



since the player is stripped away of all potential distractions of dramatic cross-dressing. Katherine Kelly similarly affirms the possibility that plays featuring a boy player in “breeches” were comfortable highlighting the reality of the player’s actual boyishness. Kelly claims that “the parts Shakespeare wrote for his boy actresses were likely conceived and played without the kind of respect for unvarying illusionism typical of nineteenth- and twentieth-century acting conventions,” and that “[m]ovement between levels of stylization and intensities of dramatic irony allowed for a greater ambiguity in reading the actor in the role and the role in the actor” (Kelly 82-3). In a sense, then, roles like Viola or Rosalind allow the young men playing the heroines to perform onstage almost as themselves, and thus the actor himself is purposefully presented in service of the playwright’s own purposes. Furthermore, their disguises are ultimately convincing precisely because they deny artifice, and these female characters are thus permitted to speak through the vehicle of the perfect physical manifestation of their target disguise: a real young man.

Like Viola’s own “slippages” in *Twelfth Night* (a helpful term used by Jennifer Drouin to describe the boy player’s accidental exposure while striving to “pass” as another gender), Rosalind in *As You Like It* playfully acknowledges the dramaturgical reality that a boy player performs her character.<sup>19</sup> Once the Duke banishes Rosalind from court, she reasons quickly why she should disguise

herself as a man:

Were it not better,  
Because that I am more than common tall,  
That I did suit me all points like a man? (1.3.121-3)

Granted the accompaniment of Touchstone, Celia and Rosalind are not exactly in need of a male chaperone, and the Forest of Arden is hardly threatening to female honor. Rosalind's remarks suggest that her decision to "suit [her] all points like a man" is better characterized as a moment of play, not of necessity. This playfulness ignites *As You Like It's* own representation of the exposed boy player in the figure of Rosalind.

As with Viola's demonstration of courtesy tempered with empathy in *Twelfth Night*, I argue that Rosalind reveals her own amendments to traditional male courtesy, and the disguise she assumes as a young, inherently noble, male forester only accentuates her ability to model courtesy for her male counterpart. Specifically, Rosalind-as-Ganymede argues for a grounded vision of courtly love that is sympathetic to the perspective of the female "beloved"; and the chief recipient of Rosalind's instruction is, of course, her counterpart Orlando. But while Cesario and Orsino are romantic counterparts positioned on different points of a social spectrum (Orsino, after all, is Cesario's "lord"), Ganymede and Orlando are positioned as social equals, even in their banished states. Though Rosalind/Ganymede attempts to pass herself off as a forest-dweller, the audience

is aware that both are ousted/absent from court, both have prominent fathers, and both appear to possess a natural sense of gentility. Orlando even detects her gentle qualities and does not seem convinced when she argues otherwise.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, the ways in which Rosalind/Ganymede guides her partner in the development of courtesy are accentuated simply because her counterpart appears almost as her mirror image (thanks to her disguise as a young forester), much more so than Orsino and Cesario in *Twelfth Night*. While Rosalind is disguised as Ganymede, the two would-be lovers meet one another in the forest as equals—here, the young male actor cast as Rosalind-Ganymede comes face to face with what is (presumably) another young male actor playing Orlando.<sup>21</sup>

The young Orlando, like the Count Orsino, is an ideal subject for the instruction of Castiglione's *The Courtier*. Even though he has been denied a formal education by his brother Oliver, Orlando nonetheless possesses an innate sense of gentility that sparks Rosalind's interest in Act 1. Shakespeare is careful to remind his audience that Orlando is of gentle birth, a condition even his treacherous brother Oliver cannot ignore:

Yet he's gentle, never school'd and yet learned, full of noble device,  
of all sorts enchantingly belov'd, and indeed so much in the heart  
of the world, and especially of my own people, who best know  
him, that I am altogether mispris'd. (1.1.166-71)

In addition to being one who is "enchantingly belov'd" by the people, Orlando also possesses one of the more under-acknowledged *physical* qualities of the

courtier: the ability to wrestle well. Book One of the *The Courtier* contains the Count's suggestion that the courtier "know the feate of wrastling, because it goeth much together with all weapon on foote" (53). But Orlando's wrestling is not only a physical marker of courteous qualities. It is also, as Maurice Hunt has suggested, a sign of the urge to wrestle one's way toward the virtue of temperance (Hunt 8-9).<sup>22</sup> In light of my own suggestion that Rosalind is a mediating force within her comedy and is capable of tempering Orlando's excessive passion with a more realistic understanding of love, the notion that temperance is already signified in *As You Like It* places Rosalind within this thematic framework. Celia's early comment to Rosalind after meeting Orlando that she must "wrestle with thy affections" also underscores this theme, positioning both Rosalind and Orlando as wrestling figures who seek a temperate Mean, perhaps within the ultimate context of marriage (1.3.20). And *As You Like It's* "exposure" of the young male player acting as Rosalind-Ganymede likewise reinforces her/his ability to encourage the development of courtesy in Orlando's personage.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, *il mezzo*, or the Mean, is the ideal vision of balance within the courtier's countenance and carriage. In the case of Orlando, his noble-born status puts him in an appropriate position to be instructed in the attainment of *il mezzo*. Orlando, as we learn from his resentful

brother, possesses a natural grace that makes him beloved by others, and he also happens to have an affinity for wrestling men who are twice his size. Although Orlando does well in these two areas, his untutored condition leaves him with little ability to express himself gracefully when confronted with Rosalind's attentions. Indeed, the necklace she gives him after the wrestling match literally renders him speechless.<sup>23</sup> This is no fault of his own, but the fact that Orlando is untutored means that his attempts to put his passionate feelings toward Rosalind into words are poorly constructed, relying on absurd similes and excessive language that appears to parody the conventions of courtly love and Petrarchanism. The disconnect between Orlando's honest affections and his rude attempts at love poetry reveal his need for instruction in a deeper, more temperate understanding of romantic love, one that Rosalind—with not only her wit, but also her perspective as the female beloved—is in the ideal position to correct. (The ideas of correction and instruction in *As You Like It* have already been articulated in an excellent essay by Marjorie Garber, "The Education of Orlando."<sup>24</sup> Garber's focus is on why Rosalind chooses to keep herself disguised; specifically, she claims that Rosalind-as-Ganymede has the ability to instruct Orlando in an authentic vision of love. I differ from Garber slightly in that I believe Rosalind models for Orlando the actions and behavior of a courtier.)

One of the most prominent themes in *As You Like It* is the struggle to connect poetry and “poetical” language with one’s actual feelings: as examples, the absurdity of Orlando’s verses and the violent language of Silvius’s appeals to Phebe both constitute two instances where the male lover attempts to construct pleasing poetry, only to be criticized and adjudicated by the more realistic beloved. This is the same criticism Olivia directs toward Viola/Cesario during their first scene together, in which she notes that “poetical” speeches are more likely to be “feigned” (1.5.195-7). Viola/Cesario, however, is able to transcend this superficial poeticism with her “willow cabin” speech, but only after she is prompted by Olivia. In *As You Like It*, Touchstone and Audrey also discuss the connection between words that are poetical and their tendency to be contrived:

TOUCHSTONE: When a man’s verses cannot be understood, nor a man’s good wit seconded with the forward child, understanding, it strikes a man more dead than a great reckoning in a little room.

Truly, I would the gods had made thee poetical.

AUDREY: I do not know what “poetical” is. Is it honest in deed and word? Is it a true thing?

TOUCHSTONE: No, truly; for the truest poetry is the most feigning, and lovers are given to poetry; and what they swear in poetry may be said as lovers they do feign. (3.3.12-22)

Although these lines underscore the poor poetry of Orlando that he hangs on the forest trees, they also communicate the play’s general distrust toward excessive proclamations of transcendent love. The first bit of Orlando’s poetry that we hear demonstrates his lack of poetical skill:

From the east to western Inde,  
No jewel is like Rosalind.  
Her worth, being mounted on the wind,  
Through all the world bears Rosalind. (3.2.88-91)

This “tedious homily of love,” in Rosalind’s opinion, smacks of the deified vision of womanhood more commonly witnessed in Petrarch’s sonnets to Laura, a point which Marjorie Garber has already explored in the literature surrounding *As You Like It*. But this moment also reinforces the transcendent understanding of courtly love espoused by Peter Bembo’s famous “ladder of love” speech in *The Book of the Courtier*, although Orlando’s understanding of Neoplatonic love strikes the reader/audience as juvenile. What is unique about *As You Like It*, though, is that it gives the female beloved the ability to speak back to the lover, and in the cases of both Phebe and Rosalind, the lover is not impressed. In the case of Rosalind, whose cross-dressing presents her to her lover as a man, she is enabled to speak candidly to Orlando thanks to her disguise.

Phebe offers one of the first rejoinders to this elevated love-speak when she castigates Silvius’s overuse of violent, murderous imagery in his courtship of her:

PHEBE: I would not be thy executioner;  
I fly thee for I would not injure thee.  
Thou tell’st me there is murder in mine eye:  
‘Tis pretty, sure, and very probable,  
That eyes, that are the frail’st and softest things,  
Who shut their coward gates on atomies,  
Should be called tyrants, butchers, murtherers! (3.5.8-14)

Here Phebe highlights the absurdity of Silvius's poetic comparisons, claiming that it is not flattering for a woman to be told, as the cliché goes, that her "looks could kill." Rosalind-as-Ganymede likewise systematically deconstructs Orlando's attempts to describe his love for Rosalind. During one of the instructional sessions she offers to Orlando in Act 4, Orlando claims, "[Rosalind's] frown might kill me," and Rosalind/Ganymede replies, "By this hand, it will not kill a fly" (4.1.110-11). Taking advantage of the freedom her male costume provides her, Rosalind also reminds Orlando in this scene that "men have died from time to time, and worms have eaten them, but not for love" (4.1.107-8). In both of the instances in which the emotive male lover exaggerates his proclamations of love, the female counterpart corrects his excess. Rosalind, however, is more effectual because she benefits from her disguise as Ganymede.

Rosalind's words echo one of the dominant shifts in the Elizabethan understanding of courtly love, which found its most overt revision in the sonnet tradition. While still indebted to the Petrarchan prototype, the Elizabethan sonnet bears a few modifications. Thematically, the Petrarchan sonnet fixates on Neoplatonic love in its representation of the beloved. Laura, for example, is an unattainable, transcendent figure of human perfection whose beauty allowed the poet-lover to contemplate the divine beauty of God. The Elizabethan sonnet, while similar to the Petrarchan, has its own stanza form and often varies between



practitioners. With respect to theme, the Elizabethan sonneteers still demonstrate an interest in Platonic love, but the English sonnets tend not to deify women. Instead, the process of wooing is often simpler, and this ideal vision of love is carefully placed within the context of human death and decay. J. W. Lever, in *The Elizabethan Love Sonnet*, notes that Shakespearean drama specifically rejects the notion of the deified mistress. He writes,

Shakespeare's heroines are quite lacking in the saintly qualities of the Petrarchan mistress. Far from raising their lovers' thoughts above 'base desire,' Rosalind teaches Orlando how to woo, and Juliet reciprocates Romeo's ardour so frankly that he promptly forgets the chaste attractions of his former ladies. [...] Providence and salvation no longer operate from on high or await the soul in the outermost sphere of heaven: they emanate from the human spirit and function through the power of human love. (Lever 142)

In light of Lever's assertion, we recognize that Rosalind instructs Orlando in what I contend is an *Elizabethan* vision of courtly love, and she therefore offers an updated understanding of the courtier's enactment of courtship.<sup>25</sup> In other words, the older courtier in the school of Castiglione privileged this deification of a beautiful woman as an avenue for the soul's ascension. The new Elizabethan courtier, Rosalind reveals, may love and woo from a more realistic standpoint: the new courtier acknowledges the reality of death and decay within romance, rejects the deification of the female beloved, and pursues the courtship's worldly resolution through (preferably companionate) marriage.

Although Rosalind is able to correct Orlando's naïve assumptions about love by interrogating his poetry, something she is able to do because of the freedom allowed her by her disguise, the Elizabethan sonnet tradition surrounding the performance date of *As You Like It* supports her correction. Edmund Spenser's *Amoretti* sequence, for example, presents a narrative of a real-life courtship that culminates in the resolution of marriage. The *Amoretti* conflict with the traditional Petrarchan model insofar that these sonnets concern themselves with Elizabeth Boyle/Mrs. Edmund Spenser, rather than with some distant, idealized lady like Petrarch's Laura. Secondly, while Spenser does indeed reveal his own Neoplatonic sympathies in this sonnet cycle by frequently highlighting the gap between the spiritual and the physical, he (in the words of Alexander Dunlop, in his introduction to the *Yale Edition of the Shorter Poems of Edmund Spenser*) "remains a poet of this world" (Dunlop 589). By allowing marriage to act as the resolution of the sonnet cycle (in the form of the *Epithalamion*, which would have been published alongside *Amoretti*), Spenser's sequence carefully rejects the Neoplatonic desire to transcend the earthly. Sonnet 13 is an excellent example of Spenser's acknowledgment of the tension between Neoplatonic transcendence and the earthly reality of mortality:

In that proud port, which her so goodly graceth,  
whiles her faire face she rears up to the skie:  
and to the ground her eie lids low embaseth,  
most goodly temperature ye may descry,

Myld humblesse mixt with awful majesty,  
for looking on the earth whence she was borne,  
her minde remembreth her mortalitie:  
what so is fairest shall to earth return.  
But that same lofty countenance seemes to scorn  
base thing, and think how she to heaven may clime:  
treading down earth as loathsome and forlorn,  
that hinders heavenly thoughts with drossy slime.  
Yet lowly still vouchsafe to look on me,  
such lowliness shall make you lofty be.<sup>26</sup>

The octave presents the central problem of this sonnet: “mild humbleness mixed with awful majesty.” The flesh is a humble, low space of mortalities, and the heavens are the realm of majesty. Elizabeth Boyle physically positions herself between the two, caught between the idea that her soul could ascend (“and think how she to heaven may clime”), but it is unfortunately trapped by the “drossy slime” of the earth. The final couplet suggests that Elizabeth Boyle should embrace the lowliness of the situation and look upon her lover, but he reminds her that the lowliness of marriage between a man and woman will “make [her] lofty be.” Indeed, this sonnet hints at Spenser’s thesis throughout the sequence: a marriage of reciprocal love will help us imitate the love of Christ, who is the ultimate model for lovers. Certainly, this conclusion reaffirms Spenser’s own Protestantism, but it also allows for a kind of divine ascension comparable to the ideal Neoplatonists stressed.

Like Spenser’s *Amoretti*, *As You Like It* ends on a firm note of resolution with four marriages, but the courtships leading up to at least two of those

marriages (Rosalind/Orlando and Phebe/Silvius) are marked by several reminders for the lovers to understand what love is and what it is not: it is not something unreachable and deified, but instead is something earthbound (and nonetheless delightful). Rosalind, as a female character in *As You Like It*, acknowledges that a “modern” (read Elizabethan) understanding of courteous, courtly love must concede that the female beloved is indeed human and has the capacity to respond to the proclamations of the male lover. This idea presents itself most clearly in her long statement to Orlando about the nature of love (it “is merely a madness”). Though she is disguised as Ganymede in this moment, she is able to communicate to Orlando the ludicrousness of a base understanding of love that relies entirely on externals and disregards reason:

ROSALIND: But are you so much in love as your rhymes speak?

ORLANDO: Neither rhyme nor reason can express how much.

ROSALIND: Love is merely a madness and, I tell you, deserves as well a dark house and a whip as madmen do; and the reason why they are not so punished and cured is that the lunacy is so ordinary that the whippers are in love too. Yet I profess curing it by counsel.

ORLANDO: Did you ever cure any so?

ROSALIND: Yes, one—and in this manner: he was to imagine me his love, his mistress, and I set him every day to woo me. At which time would I, being but a moonish youth, grieve, be effeminate, changeable, longing ad liking, proud, fantastical, apish, shallow, inconstant, full of tears, full of smiles; for every passion something and for no passion truly anything, as boys and women are for the most part cattle of this color; would now like him, now loathe him, then entertain him, then forswear him, now weep for him, then spit at him; then I drave my suitor from his mad humor of love to a living humor of madness, which was to forswear the full stream of the world and to live in a nook merely monastic. And thus I cured

him, and this way will I take upon me to wash your liver as clean as a sound sheep's heart, that there shall not be one spot of love in it. (3.2.361-83)

In this long passage, Rosalind outlines the inconsistency of one driven to madness by love, and she encourages Orlando to envision how this changeable and unreasonable disposition is not necessarily an accurate vision of real love; indeed, this sort of condition is merely agitation ("merely a madness"). The argument of this moment is that heightened manifestations of love's characteristics are perhaps untrustworthy with respect to their volatility. Moreover, the cross-dressed disguise Rosalind assumes in *As You Like It* enables her to instruct her lover in an effective way. Specifically, had she appeared only as herself, as the female Rosalind, then the message may have never been received.

At the beginning of this chapter, I suggested that the revealed boy player in comedies like *Twelfth Night* and *As You Like It* seemed to satisfy an implicit desire for theatrical realism, long before "theatrical realism" was a dramaturgical concern. Jeffrey Hatcher's 1999 play of the Restoration stage, *Compleat Female Stage Beauty*, offers a surprising acknowledgment of this realistic sentiment.<sup>27</sup> Set in 1660s England, after Charles II has lifted the long-standing ban on English actresses and announced, "No He shall ere again upon an English stage play She," the actor Edward Kynaston comes to terms with the realization that his

long career of playing female characters is at a depressing end (Hatcher 46). In a conversation with Kynaston, the diarist Samuel Pepys acknowledges his own love of watching Kynaston play “britches” roles:

PEPYS: You know, Mr. K., the performance of yours I always like best? Well, as much as I adored your Desdemona and your Juliet, I always loved best the “britches” parts. Rosalind, f’rinstance. And not just because of the woman stuff, but also because of the man sections. Your performance of the man stuff seemed so right, so true, that I suppose I felt it was the most real in the play.

KYNASTON: You know why the man stuff seems real? Because I’m pretending. You see a man through the mirror of a woman through the mirror of a man; take one of those reflecting glasses away and it doesn’t work; the man only works because you see him in contrast to the woman he is; if you saw him without the her he lives inside, he wouldn’t seem a man at all.

PEPYS: (*Blinks at that.*) You have obviously thought longer on this question than I. Well. (*Stands.*) Must home to my wife. Pleasure to see you, Mr. K. (Hatcher 49)

The pragmatism of Pepys’ comment is convicting, despite the fact that it is a fiction composed by a twentieth-century playwright. For it raises this question: is it possible to over-theorize cross-dressing on the Renaissance stage, as Kynaston seems to do? On a practical level, this quote reminds us that breeches roles were truly pragmatic for companies to use in their productions, since they gave the troupe the opportunity to both cut down on onstage artifice (and all the costuming that goes with it) and feature an especially talented young male actor. But the appearance of the revealed male player in breeches roles also introduces a thematic dimension to the cross-dressed comedies, one that both satisfies a

craving for theatrical “realism” and introduces “realistic” nuances to the connotations of courtesy encouraged by Elizabethan England’s forbearers from the Italian Renaissance.

In both of these cross-dressed comedies, the realistic representation we see onstage in the forms of Cesario and Ganymede underscores the more authentic vision of courtesy Shakespeare advocates in these two plays: if a courtier is going to be “adaptable,” then he must also be adaptable to grief, and if a courtier is to love, he must do so within the realistic confines of the human world. And the only way for the male character to truly receive this instruction, within the context of these plays, is through the form of the young man (Cesario or Ganymede) that he sees before him. Finally, the “slippages” throughout *Twelfth Night* and *As You Like It*, in which the cross-dressed heroines seem to point to the boy player beneath the gown, remind us of our own reality as readers or theatre-goers, too: we are experiencing a play text that self-referentially, and often playfully, acknowledges the reality of its initial all-male preserve.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> W. Robertson Davies (*Shakespeare's Boy Actors*. London: J. M Dent & Sons, 1939) notes this pragmatism explicitly: "The comedy heroines are written to be played easily, and to make them easy for boy actors Shakespeare has written them with restraint and a number of devices designed to keep the actor within his technical resources" (43).

<sup>2</sup> From a theoretical standpoint, the critical discussion surrounding the boy player (particularly as a disguised heroine) tends to emphasize the disorienting effects of gendered layering (i.e. a man playing a woman playing a man) or the inherent homoeroticism of cross-dressed, heterosexual characters.

<sup>3</sup> One challenge of writing clearly about the disguised heroine trope in Shakespeare's comedies is choosing what to call the characters. In this essay, I vacillate between the heroines' Christian names, their dual presentation (i.e. Viola/Cesario or Rosalind/Ganymede), or their pseudonyms. My choice of which name to use shifts depending upon the context in which the character finds herself. Additionally, my use here of the phrase "revealed male player" is a theoretical attempt, as Marjorie Garber has suggested, to look "at the cross-dresser" rather than "through" (Garber 9). Indeed, the historical reality of the boy player in the age of Shakespeare, which Garber observes in her extensive study of cross-dressing as cultural phenomenon, pushes viewers to see the transvestite rather than a single gender categorization. In the cases of Viola and Rosalind, who spend the vast majority of their respective plays in disguise, looking "at the cross-dresser" (and thus acknowledging the transvestite) necessitates that we consider what themes arise when the actual male character (Orsino or Orlando) is paired with the exposed boy player (Cesario or Ganymede). Garber offers her own reading of the complicated attraction of Rosalind's cross-dressing in *As You Like It* (76-77). In particular, she emphasizes that not only does Rosalind return to her female costume when introduced by Hymen, but she also reminds the audience of her cross-dressing in the epilogue ("If I were a woman...").

<sup>4</sup> For the purposes of my argument, *The Book of the Courtier's* emphasis on the virtuous influence of a courtier on his lord is of the greatest interest to me (this appears in Book IV of Castiglione's text). In the two pairings I suggested above, the disguised heroine is in a position to advise and instruct her male companion within the context of friendship (which is the case between Cesario/Orsino and Ganymede/Orlando)



<sup>5</sup> The Norton Anthology, for example, only includes these two segments. *The Norton Anthology of English Literature: Volume B, The Sixteenth-Century/The Early Seventeenth-Century, Eighth Edition*. Eds. George M. Logan, Stephen Greenblatt, Barbara K. Lewalski, and Katherine Eisaman Maus. (New York: W.W. Norton, 2006), 645-61.

<sup>6</sup> Surely, the female discussants at the Court of Urbino demonstrate an adeptness at intellectual conversation, something we certainly see in the wits of both Viola and Rosalind.

<sup>7</sup> In Walter Raleigh's introduction to Hoby's translation (*The Book of the Courtier From the Italian of Count Baldassare Castiglione: Done into English by Sir Thomas Hoby ANNO 1561*. Ed. W. E. Henley London: Tudor Translations 23, 1900), he notes explicitly that "it is not clear that Shakespeare knew THE COURTIER," but Raleigh nonetheless suggests that courtesy books could certainly have inspired the verbal wit of many of Shakespeare's heroes and heroines (Raleigh lxxix, lxxxiv).

<sup>8</sup> To my knowledge, there are no other studies on *The Book of the Courtier's* thematic appearance in *Twelfth Night* or *As You Like It*, but there are several pieces on other plays. See Adam Max Cohen, "The Mirror of all Christian Courtiers: Castiglione's *Cortegiano* as a source for *Henry V*." *Italian Culture in the Drama of Shakespeare and His Contemporaries: Rewriting, Remaking, Refashioning*. Ed. Michele Marrapodi. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007: 39-50; Cajsca C. Baldini, "A Courtier or a Prince: Shakespeare's *Richard II* as a Dramatization of Conflicting Paradigms of Political Craftmanship." *Forum Italicum* 37 (2003): 56-69; Viviana Comensoli, "Music, *The Book of the Courtier*, and Othello's Soldiership." *The Italian World of English Renaissance Drama: Cultural Exchange and Intertextuality*. Ed. Michele Marrapodi. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1998: 89-105; Donatella Baldini, "The Play of the Courtier: Correspondences between Castiglione's *Il libro del Cortegiano* and Shakespeare's *Love's Labour's Lost*." *Quaderni d'Italianistica* 18 (1997): 5-22; Barbara A. Johnson, "The Fabric of the Universe Rent: *Hamlet* as an Inversion of *The Courtier*." *Hamlet Studies* 9 (1987): 34-52; C. L. Gent, "Measure for Measure and the Fourth Book of Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano*." *Modern Language Review* 67 (1972): 252-6.

<sup>9</sup> Margaret M. Toole offers a succinct interpretation of the courtier's goal when she claims that he is "the ideal and not the real gentleman" (Toole 87). Toole's distinction between the "ideal" and "real" gentleman has special bearing on my own argument here. The disguised heroines in *Twelfth Night* and *As You*

*Like It*, after all, are not “real” gentleman within the context of their stories, despite the fact that male players perform them. In the worlds of each play, they are women disguised as gentlemen. Yet the ideals they represent in each play (such as Cesario’s empathy and Ganymede’s grounded vision of courtly love) reveal the qualities they can model for their male counterparts. And, in these two cases, these “ideals” are qualities that their male partners are evidently lacking. Like Scott’s early essay, Toole’s 1934 piece strikes the reader as a catalogue of indirect references to *The Courtier*, references that seems to be compiled for the sake of identifying a source text. Margaret M. Toole, “Shakespeare’s Courtiers,” *The Shakespeare Association Bulletin* 9.2 (1934), 87.

<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, the female discussants at Urbino are mediating forces in the *The Book of the Courtier*’s discourse. They offer comic relief when tensions rise, they remind the discussants of their original purpose (to describe the courtier), and they generally keep the conversation from ignoring the wit and gentility of noble women in a discussion that primarily concerns a vision of the ideal gentleman. Nearly every time the Duchess or Lady Emilia offer a remark, the text shows that they speak that remark with a laugh. The women also regularly shut down Gaspar, the court’s token misogynist, with biting humor. Cesar Gonzaga, remarks specifically on women as mediating forces at court: “no Court, how great ever it be, can have any sightlinesse, or brightnesse in it, or mirth without women, nor anie Courtier can be gracious, pleasant or hardye, nor at anye time undertake any galant enterprise of Chivalrye onlesse he be stirred wyth the conversacion and wyth the love and contentacion of women” (214-5).

<sup>11</sup> Logan catalogues, “by my count, there are twenty-nine references to madness in the play, twenty-two references to disease, twenty-five to devilry, and thirty-seven to destruction and death” (236).

<sup>12</sup>As early as scene 4 of Act I, Orsino implies that the friendship between himself and Cesario has grown to an intimate level. Orsino says to Cesario, “Thou know’st no less but all. I have unclasp’d / To thee the book even of my secret soul” (1.4.13-4).

<sup>13</sup> The only explicit remark we receive about why Olivia is not interested in the Count is spoken by Sir Toby Belch: “She’ll none o’ th’ Count. She’ll not match above her degree, neither in estate, years, nor wit; I have heard her swear’t” (1.3.109-11). The suggestion here, of course, is that Olivia plans to protect her autonomy as a fatherless and brotherless woman by marrying a social inferior. In some ways, her fascination with Cesario is perhaps a subtle

punishment for her desire to remain autonomous. Jean Howard suggests that this is actually why cross-dressing is not necessarily a transgressive act in *Twelfth Night*; Viola/Cesario still honors hierarchy even though she has some liberation in her disguise, and yet the undisguised Olivia attempts to subvert hierarchy so that she can maintain her independence. Howard puts it this way: “the play seems to me to applaud a crossdressed woman who does not aspire to the positions of power assigned men, and to discipline a non-crossdressed woman who does (Howard 431).

<sup>14</sup> Consider her request to Cesario to “[c]ome to what is important in [the speech]. I forgive you the praise” (1.5.190).

<sup>15</sup> The *OED*’s entry on the allusive qualities of “willow” lists “to wear the willow,” “to wear the willow garland,” and “to wear the green willow” as oft-referenced phrasing containing a substrate of grief.

<sup>16</sup> These lines also imply that Olivia has some attraction to Cesario, likely because of “his” apparently feminine qualities. It is important to note, however, that although Olivia praises Cesario’s appearance, she does not articulate the specific feminine qualities that Malvolio or Orsino seem to catalogue (see 1.4.30-4; 1.5.155-62).

<sup>17</sup> Although Viola and Olivia never explicitly realize that both have lost a brother (and, indeed, Olivia still remains brotherless at the end of the play, while Viola’s brother is restored to her), the audience/reader does thanks to the closely connected expositions in 1.1 (Orsino gripes that Olivia is mourning her brother and will not accept suitors) and 1.2 (Viola grieves for her brother being in Elysium).

<sup>18</sup> Interestingly, the only moment where Orsino appears to realize finally the gravity of Viola’s relationship with him is when he says, “Boy, thou has said to me a thousand times / Thou never shouldst love woman like to me” (5.1.267-8). Ever so slightly, Orsino’s use of “thousand” echoes not only Viola/Cesario’s earlier line, “And I most jocund, apt, and willingly, / To do you rest, a thousand deaths would die,” but also “[a] thousand thousand sighs to save” from Feste’s song (5.1.132-33; 2.4.63). These lines comprise three of the five uses of “thousand” in *Twelfth Night* (the other two are spoken by Sir Toby). If these lines are to illustrate anything, perhaps they are indicative of Orsino himself finally perceiving the romantic machinations that surround him.

<sup>19</sup> Jennifer Drouin ("Cross-Dressing, Drag, and Passing: Slippages in Shakespearean Comedy." *Shakespeare Re-Dressed: Cross-Gender Casting in Contemporary Performance*. Ed. James C. Bulman. Crabury, NJ: Rosemont Publishing, 2008) describes important distinctions between cross-dressing, drag, and passing, which are often easily detectable in single-gender contemporary casting of Shakespeare plays. Drouin suggests that "[r]eading Shakespeare in light of contemporary queer theory and practices reveals that these characters are, in fact, passing and occasionally slipping, or almost slipping, into drag; moreover, this potential slippage between the states of passing and drag is precisely what produces the dramatic tension of his gender-bending comedies" (23).

<sup>20</sup> After meeting Rosalind-as-Ganymede initially, Orlando remarks, "Your accent is something finer than you could purchase in so remov'd a dwelling" (3.2.341-2).

<sup>21</sup> This mirroring is especially overt in a 2010 production of *As You Like It* at London's Globe Theatre, directed by Thea Sharrock, which literally puts Orlando and Rosalind/Ganymede in the same brown leather outfit, tassels and all.

<sup>22</sup> In particular, Hunt connects *As You Like It* with Book 2 of Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, the Legend of Temperance. (The meaning of Guyon's name is "wrestler.")

<sup>23</sup> ORLANDO: "Can I not say, I thank you? My better parts

Are all thrown down, and that which here stands up

Is but a quintain, a mere liveless block. (1.2.249-51)

[...]

What passion hangs these weights upon my tongue?

I cannot speak to her, ye she urg'd conference. (1.2.257-8)

<sup>24</sup> Garber, Marjorie. "The Education of Orlando." Comedy from Shakespeare to Sheridan: Change and Continuity in the English and European Dramatic Tradition: Essays in Honor of Eugene M. Waith. Eds. A. R.

Braunmuller and James C. Bulman. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1986. 102-12. Print.

<sup>25</sup> The fact that the forest itself is called the Forest of Arden, and therefore directly reminiscent of Shakespeare's family's land ownership, makes this play seem even more "English."

<sup>26</sup> Quotations from Spenser's Amoretti are from The Yale Edition of the Shorter Poems of Edmund Spenser.

<sup>27</sup> For an excellent review of the 1999 world premiere of *Compleat Female Stage Beauty*, see Nelson Pressley's "Pepys Show: 17<sup>th</sup>-Century Drag Hits Shepherdstown with *Compleat Female Stage Beauty*" (*American Theatre* 16.10 [1999]: 67-9). The play has since been adapted into a film, *Stage Beauty*, starring Billy Crudup and Claire Danes.

## CHAPTER THREE

### An Amazon in the City: *The Roaring Girl's* Theatrical Memorialization of Mary Frith

Since this dissertation is a reassessment of the cross-dressed performance of female characters on the English Renaissance stage, my project would be flawed if I did not include a discussion of one of the most famous cross-dressers of the period, memorialized as Moll Cutpurse in Middleton and Dekker's *The Roaring Girl*. While the previous chapter claimed that the male disguises of Viola and Rosalind, which allowed the young male actor to play as himself onstage, made it possible for these two female characters to impart instruction to their romantic counterparts, the current chapter takes up as its subject the theatrical representation of cross-dressing as a cultural phenomenon in the realistic backdrop of London itself. Within my new paradigm of feminine theatrical artifice, the disguised heroine trope introduces a surprising thematic dimension to our discussion of the plays. Specifically, what effect does the disguised heroine trope have on other characters in a play or on the audience watching the play? In Chapter Two, I argued that theatrical realism (although an anachronistic term) is finally a byproduct of the disguised heroine trope; thus, in *Twelfth Night* and *As You Like It*, this onstage realism of the boy actor accentuates

the fact that Orsino and Orlando never would have listened to the advice of the female characters had they not appeared so convincingly as men. But if the disguised heroine, as I have suggested, is an attempt at heightened realism in Renaissance drama, then how might this trope change when the setting itself becomes strikingly realistic, such as a London city comedy? And how might my argument for this project change when the character in question presents herself not as a cross-dresser, per say, but more intentionally as a transvestite?<sup>1</sup>

I contend that Middleton and Dekker capitalize on the apparent realism of the disguised heroine trope in their representation of Moll Cutpurse. And, in doing so, they highlight the degree to which an audience's craving for realism might be revised and proven inconsistent across different genres and character types. The inconsistency exists primarily within the bounds of class distinctions. For instance, Rosalind and Viola are captivating in their cross-dressing, but their noble statuses appear to protect them from any unsavory implications in the eyes of spectators. In the cases of Rosalind and Viola, they cross-dress as an act of self-protection, but they also use their disguised status as an exploration of inwardness—Viola uses cross-dressing as an extension of her grief and Rosalind uses it as an opportunity to interrogate the realistic qualities of love, both within her own mind and the mind of her beloved. Quite different from her predecessors, Moll Cutpurse in *The Roaring Girl* uses cross-dressing not only as a

distinct marker of her personal sense of quasi-celebrity, but she also employs it as an instrument of playfulness.

*The Roaring Girl* has been criticized by feminist scholars for the way it undermines the powerful independence and gender transgression of the real Mary Frith (in the play, for instance, Moll Cutpurse tends to uphold a traditional vision of marriage rather than critique it), and yet the play nonetheless memorializes the fascinating, real-life character of Mary Frith in a way that uses the most literal representation of her occasional target costume (a real young man).<sup>2</sup> Thomas Middleton himself indicates this effort at theatrical memorialization in The Epistle to the 1611 printed text of *The Roaring Girl*: “Worse things, I must needs confess, the world has taxed [Mary Frith] for than has been written of her; but ‘tis the excellency of a writer to leave things better than he finds ‘em” (Epistle 20-22).<sup>3</sup> Thus, Middleton and Dekker purposefully stray away from depicting her with the same level of criminal infamy that was most of the basis for her celebrity.<sup>4</sup> For rather than coming across as a criminal known mostly for her lasciviousness, the Moll Cutpurse of Middleton and Dekker’s play is a protector of female chastity, content to play the matchmaking Puck to the lovers’ qualms. Even Sebastian, the young lover Moll will help in the play, claims that her only real sin is mirth:

SEBASTIAN: Here’s her worst:  
Sh’ has a bold spirit that mingles with mankind,



But nothing else comes near it, and oftentimes  
Through her apparel somewhat shames her birth;  
But she is loose in nothing but in mirth.  
Would all Molls were no worse! (2.2.180-5)

Ultimately, this fictional Moll Cutpurse is a figure whose life seems to epitomize what cross-dressing comedies celebrate: she transcends the limits of the female gender in Renaissance England for the sake of accomplishing a noble or romantic goal, such as helping lovers who are divided by familial circumstances find their way to marriage. In light of my larger argument about the range of gendered artifice in Renaissance drama, the case of Moll can help us demonstrate how onstage artifice can be used to not only explore a desire for realistic representation (Moll Cutpurse is played by a young male actor, and thus bears her moments of masculinity quite convincingly), but also to investigate how a particular literary phenomenon (in this case, an “Arcadian” ideal) might be re-envisioned across different contexts. Specifically, if Moll were a character in an “Arcadian” romance similar to Sidney’s *The Countess of Pembroke’s Arcadia*, instead of a city comedy, then contemporary audiences would have viewed her quite differently. Moll’s mirth, her skill in fighting, her nobility, and her desire to see innocent love prevail would make her an ideal stand-in for the Amazon, the mythical warrior woman who, at this point in London’s history, could very well have “died out” with Elizabeth I.<sup>5</sup> The figure of the Amazon, of course, is not confined to texts similar to Sidney’s *Arcadia*, but the appearance of Amazon-like

women (or men disguised as women) in Sidney's prose romance, as well as Amazons in Spenser's epic romance *The Faerie Queene*, suggest that they are a character type that appears with much more frequency in the genre of romance. Throughout this chapter, I prefer the terminology of "Arcadian romance" to "pastoral romance," primarily because I believe it is slightly more inclusive for the types of texts I discuss.<sup>6</sup>

In this chapter, then, I argue specifically that Middleton and Dekker use *The Roaring Girl* to highlight the potential of what the actual "Moll Cutpurse," Mary Frith, could represent within the English Renaissance literary imagination (the "Amazon"); but, in removing their cross-dressing heroine from the realm of the Arcadian romance (which is an imaginative space quite conducive to and accepting of gender fluidity) and placing her in a "city comedy," Middleton and Dekker expose the degree to which the literary trope of the Amazon is problematic in the realistic world of the London streets.<sup>7</sup> I have structured this chapter on *The Roaring Girl* around a few touchstones that are indicative of Middleton and Dekker's creative and subversive presentation of Moll Cutpurse. First, I connect Moll with earlier iterations of the Amazon woman during the reign of Elizabeth I (in some ways, the ultimate Amazon), particularly in Sir Philip Sidney's *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia* and in Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*. Next, I make the case that these older versions of the Amazon

woman underscore Moll's quasi-pastoral nostalgia in *The Roaring Girl*. I end by highlighting one of the most problematic components of Moll's representation in *The Roaring Girl*, a quality that finally separates her from other cross-dressing heroines in English Renaissance drama: although she certainly seems to be a vision of the Amazon, her misplacement within a city comedy effectively renders her asexual.

In romance, such as Sidney's *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia*, our perception of the cross-dressing Pyrocles (who disguises himself as the Amazon woman Zelmane) is filtered through the story's genre: the pastoral romance is set in a parallel other-place, complete with its own rules of attraction, sexuality, and disguise. But a London city comedy like *The Roaring Girl* cannot hide behind the veneer of a parallel "Arcadia," a pastoral world where nobles go to escape from the demands of court.<sup>8</sup> A city comedy draws its performance appeal from its realism; it includes real places, real scenes, and (as is the case with Middleton and Dekker's play) real people who audiences would recognize. Realism, then, is a distinct quality of the city comedy, even though the actual term "realism" is not a word Renaissance theatre-goers would have used. Wendy Griswold describes the realistic setting of the city comedy as a thoroughfare for recognizable London character types to both reinforce and subvert the status quo:

The genre [of city comedy] celebrates the adventures of urban and urbane rascals operating in the wide-open economic milieu of Renaissance London. Its characters demonstrate skills appropriate to an age of expanding opportunities, as they unblushingly lie, scheme, take risks, ignore propriety, flout conventional morality, fleece the gullible, and enjoy themselves hugely all the while. (Griswold 14)

Within a similar discussion of realism in the genre of city comedy, Brian Gibbons writes, "The realism of the significant plays [...] is essentially in transforming typical elements of city life into significant patterns, expressing consciously satiric criticism but also suggesting deeper sources of conflict and change" (Gibbons 4).<sup>9</sup> These "significant patterns" and "consciously satiric criticism[s]," wherein audiences watch themselves cast as character-types, allow the city comedy (at its best) to generate the possibility of "transcendence... not on the stage, but in the audience," as Theodore Leinwand has suggested (Leinwand 6). He continues, "The theater enacts the roles in which we cast one another, and we, as spectators, may see our typecasting for what it is" (6).<sup>10</sup> Thus, within the realistic boundaries of the London city comedy, Middleton and Dekker capitalize on the requirement of a young male actor playing Moll Cutpurse by using this character as a tool for destabilizing what we understand to be "realistic." In other words, Moll's ability to switch between representations as a masculine woman (as she appears in 2.1, wearing a men's jacket and a women's riding skirt) and as an actual man (as she does in 3.1, where she tricks Laxton before

challenging him to a fight) reveals the instability of a “realistic” setting like the London streets. Even though London would seem to be a setting that is *not* conducive to gender-switching and tricking people with disguise (after all, the fact that it is set in a real location would seem to expose artifice more readily), the young male actor playing Moll Cutpurse gives us access to the anxiety of things not being as they seem, even in a place as familiar as London.<sup>11</sup>

Although the Amazon was often an attractive figure during the English Renaissance, made especially popular by Zelmane in Sidney’s *The Countess of Pembroke’s Arcadia* and Spenser’s Britomart in Book III of *The Faerie Queene*, the Amazonian woman historically carried grotesque overtones that cast her as something monstrous.<sup>12</sup> Even when Queen Elizabeth herself appeared before her troops at Tilbury (some accounts claiming she wore full armor), reports circulated that her Amazon-like appearance was terrifying.<sup>13</sup> Of Amazons in general, Robert Fulton notes that they were a symbol of “chaos”: “the Amazon represented an inversion of male and female roles extending from the personal through the political sphere” (Fulton 288). But the Amazon woman also has a reputation for being wildly captivating in English Renaissance literature. Mary Villeponteaux, for example, notes that “Amazons were almost always portrayed positively on stage, possibly because they potentially alluded to the queen,” an allusion also supported by Winfried Schleiner (Villeponteaux 213).<sup>14</sup>

The young prince Pyrocles (who disguises himself as the Amazon princess Zelmane in order to gain access to his beloved) in Sidney's *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia* is a striking example of just how attractive the Amazon can be: not only does "Zelmane's" presence threaten to dismantle the marriage between Gynecia and Basilius, but her masculine femininity also proves engrossing to their daughter, the young Philoclea.<sup>15</sup> Pyrocles' decision to call himself Zelmane specifically is a tribute to his deceased lady, an actual Amazon princess he used to serve. While the sexual overtones of Pyrocles/Zelmane are complex (and, at times, very confusing within *Arcadia*), the Amazon figure is not represented grotesquely. As a composite of both genders, the Amazon in *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia* is attractive to both men and women, and Pyrocles/Zelmane seems to achieve a sense of Platonic transcendence simply in his/her representation as an androgyne. When Musidorus first discovers Pyrocles-as-Zelmane in the Arcadian forest, Sidney provides a description of the beautiful, powerful Amazon warrior woman that Musidorus seems to see:

Well might he perceive the hanging of her hair in fairest quantity in locks, some curled and some as it were forgotten, with such a careless care and an art so hiding art that she seemed she would lay them for a pattern whether nature simply or nature helped by cunning be the more excellent: the rest whereof was drawn into a coronet of gold richly set with pearl, and so joined all over with gold wires and covered with feathers of divers colours that it was not unlike to an helmet, such a glittering show it bare, and so bravely it was held up from the head. (Sidney 130)<sup>16</sup>

Interestingly, *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia's* version of the Amazon is described in relation to the *sprezzatura* Philip Sidney would have been quite familiar with, thanks to the popularity of Castiglione's *The Book of the Courtier* during the Renaissance (first published in Italian in 1528 and later translated into English in 1561). Zelmane's hair is described as possessing "such a careless care and an art so hiding art" — these lines are immediately reminiscent of the artlessness Castiglione outlines in his own courtesy manual.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, the images Sidney presents in the passage quoted above emphasize the natural qualities of the Amazon woman. Her appearance, which is beautifully careless and unaffected, seems to be an improvement upon nature itself. As the initial description of Zelmane continues, we also learn that her presence is so commanding that she hardly needs a weapon to begin with. After describing an adornment on her armor that includes the phrase "Never more valiant," the narrator also notes, "On the same side, on her thigh she ware a sword which, as it witnessed her to be an Amazon or one following that profession, so it seemed but a needless weapon, since her other forces were without withstanding" (131). The mention of "her other forces" in these lines seems to imply that her physical presence alone has the power to incapacitate aggressors, and the speaker's main intention is to highlight her absolute beauty.<sup>18</sup>

Another vision of the attractive Amazon is Britomart in Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, although it's clear that the physicality of Britomart is quite different from the physical presence of Pyrocles/Zelmane (after all, "she" is an actual man). Like Pyrocles/Zelmane, though, Britomart remains attractive even when she is cross-dressed. In Canto 1 of Book III, the evil woman Malecasta finds herself engrossed with Britomart, whom Malecasta believes to be a male knight. Of Malecasta's attraction to Britomart, Spenser writes,

Whom when the Lady saw so faire a wight,  
All ignorant of her contrary sex,  
(For shee her weend a fresh and lusty knight)  
Shee greatly gan enamoured to wex,  
And with vaine thoughts her falsed fancy vex:  
Her fickle hart conceiued hasty fyre,  
Like sparkes of fire, that fall in sclender flex,  
That shortly brent into extreme desyre,  
And ransackt all her veines with passion entyre. (3.1.47)

The fact that Malecasta perceives a "fresh and lusty knight" in the personage of the disguised Britomart reveals just how well Britomart passes in this situation. Not only is she attractive; she also emanates a sexual quality that "ransackt all [Malecasta's] veines with passion entyre."

The obvious similarities between Pyrocles/Zelmane and Britomart are their beauty and their ability to "pass" as the opposite sex when the need presents itself. Even when they switch genders, they remain physically captivating either way and their suitors are convinced of whichever gender they



choose to adopt. In *The Roaring Girl*, this ability to pass either way is true of Moll Cutpurse, too. But Moll differentiates herself from earlier literary cross-dressers by more explicitly reveling in her transvestite representation; to wit, although Moll can “pass” when she wants to trick people, she also enjoys being a woman in men’s clothing—obviously a woman, but nonetheless enjoying the effect of men’s fashion.

This flexibility underscores one of the prominent qualities of the androgyne: that their physical representation might illustrate an ideal, even though they do not fit into a resolute gender category. Stephen Orgel notes, for example, that although the Renaissance period consistently tried to delineate clear gender boundaries, it nonetheless “continually—one might even say compulsively—produced figures who overstepped or violated them” (Orgel 13).

He continues,

The hermaphrodite or androgyne appears as an ideal in various philosophical and poetic texts; the hero who plays the woman’s role, modeled on the figure of Hercules with Omphale, reappears as an epic *topos* in Sidney and Spenser; the heroic woman is variously represented, sometimes (like Bradamant and Britomart) in male disguise, sometimes (like the Amazonian heroines through whom Jonson celebrated the Jacobean court in *The Masque of Queens*) overtly female, but in the military personae that declared their mastery of the male role as well. (Orgel 13)

On the topic of Mary Frith, Orgel continues, “in a Jacobean context the most striking aspect of Mary Frith was probably not her successful manipulation of

the gender codes, but her ability to manipulate them from within her lower-middle-class status" (13). Here Orgel highlights one of the key distinctions between the Moll Cutpurse of Middleton and Dekker's play and the Amazonian figures who predate her: Moll is of a very different social class from Pyrocles and Britomart. In fact, her social class differs from nearly all other cross-dressed heroines in Renaissance drama, including the likes of Rosalind, Viola, and Portia. But genre, in addition to class, plays a key role in Mary Frith's resilient reputation within the annals of Renaissance cross-dressing. For even though she may very well be a figure easily aligned with her Amazonian predecessors, *The Roaring Girl* consistently relies on the language of the "monstrous" to describe Moll Cutpurse, and this predilection seems compounded by the fact that Moll appears in a city comedy, not a pastoral romance.

Many characters in Middleton and Dekker's play (including those who call themselves Moll's friends) consistently describe Moll as a kind of monstrous creature; this language is indicative of Moll's separateness from the older tradition of the attractive literary Amazon, which would include figures like Zelmane and Britomart. The young lover, Sebastian, whose father thwarts his engagement to the beautiful Mary Fitzallard, proposes to exploit his connection with Moll for the sake of enraging his miserly father. But although Sebastian stands to gain from his stratagem with Moll, and therefore must be in her good

opinion, he nonetheless describes her as a kind of “creature.” To Mary, he explains,

There’s a wench  
Called Moll, Mad Moll, or Merry Moll—a creature  
So strange in quality, a whole city takes  
Note of her name and person. All that affection  
I owe to thee, on her, in counterfeit passion,  
I spend to mad my father. (1.1.99-104)

Sebastian’s initial description of Moll as “a creature / So strange in quality” underscores his presumption in thinking how easily he might include Moll in his stratagem. Indeed, Moll is not recruited to help Sebastian knowingly until Act 3. Sebastian’s remarks in the lines quoted above also echo his father’s later claim that she is

...a thing  
One knows not how to name; her birth began  
Ere she was all made. ‘Tis woman more than man,  
Man more than woman, and—which to none can hap—  
The sun gives her two shadows to one shape.  
Nay, more, let this strange thing walk, stand, or sit,  
No blazing star draws more eyes after it.  
SIR DAVY: A monster, ‘Tis some monster. (1.2.129-36)

Later in the same scene, Sir Alexander will repeat a similar sentiment, likening Moll to a “mermaid”:

SIR ALEXANDER: This wench we speak of strays so from her kind,  
Nature repents she made her. ‘Tis a mermaid  
Has tolled my son to shipwreck. (1.2.216-18)

These comments situate Moll's grotesqueness within her inability to be categorized, as well as her "unnaturalness," and yet some of Sebastian's lines are surprisingly reminiscent of the theatrical effect of the disguised heroine trope. In particular, his claim that "[t]he sun gives her two shadows to one shape" appropriately describes the onstage effect of characters like Rosalind and Viola, who, by virtue of the fact that they are both played by boy players and are both subject to various "slippages," possess "two shadows to one shape." But we are not in the Forest of Arden or Illyria. *The Roaring Girl* proudly takes place in London, and the romantic qualities of the disguised heroine trope do not manifest themselves in Moll's character because she appears to have no romantic sensibilities. What we learn from watching Moll as an Amazonian shadow in this London play is that the Amazon woman is no longer attractive when she appears in a realistic comedy. In the genre of pastoral romance, an Arcadian playground of the mind, the Amazon has a distanced quality to her. She is either safely abstracted as a single virtue (like Britomart) or vice (like Radigund), or she is a delightful and beautiful plot device designed to not only move forward a romance, but also to reinforce how the androgyne might represent some glimmer of poetic transcendence (like Zelmane). Yet the Amazon is exposed in the city comedy. In this genre, she cannot hide behind abstraction or poetic ideals. And so, as is the case with Moll Cutpurse, she becomes an anomaly and a monster.

But despite others' comments on her monstrosity, Moll's displacement as a displaced Amazon in the city underscores her nostalgia for quasi-pastoral values in *The Roaring Girl*. Throughout the play, she references her longing for an older form of chivalric courtship, in which men and women avoid basing their relationship on shallow assumptions. Many of her remarks, too, stress the lack of fulfillment present in a culture saturated with economic concerns. The economics of the London setting is most overtly referenced in this play by the overabundance of buying and selling (of goods and of people), as well as the onstage representation of the different shopkeepers. Moll, however, remains on the outskirts of these aspects of the city setting, and she regularly voices her skepticism about the worth of what she sees. As a city-dwelling Amazon figure, Moll's representation in *The Roaring Girl* demonstrates another valence of Middleton and Dekker's exploration of the cross-dressed heroine trope in the new genre of the London city comedy: as a vestige from other comedies like *As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night* that employed the cross-dressed heroine for romantic (and usually pastoral) ends, Moll's character in *The Roaring Girl* reveals how the cross-dressing woman might become a cultural commentator.

When we finally meet Moll Cutpurse in 2.1, she quickly reveals herself to be the most noble and resilient of all her company, which is a stark counterpoint to Sir Alexander's ravings about her in the opening scenes. Surrounded by men

who ignobly mooch off the female shopkeepers, Moll presents herself as uninterested in their exploits. Although Moll appears to be accepted—perhaps even embraced—by these men, she is still discriminated against by the female shopkeeper, Mrs. Openwork. Middleton and Dekker, thus, are quick to show that Moll is not universally accepted by the common city dwellers. Moll's exchange with Mrs. Openwork specifically illustrates Moll's ability to avoid harboring resentment against those who disdain her, an important illustration if we are to view Moll as the play's most noble character. Even though Moll tells Mrs. Openwork that she "come[s] to buy," the crude shopkeeper still replies with, "I'll sell ye nothing. I warn ye my house and shop" (2.1.241-44). Moll's response to Mrs. Openwork reveals her ability to see the female shopkeeper as pathetically trapped within her own economic and social situation; indeed, these remarks sound like cultural commentary on the part of Moll. By replying in verse, contrasted to Mrs. Openwork's prose, Moll's language immediately indicates an innate superiority:

MOLL: You, Goody Openwork, you that prick out a poor living  
And sews many a bawdy skin-coat together,  
Thou private pand'ress between shirt and smock,  
I wish thee for a minute but a man;  
Thou shouldst never use more shapes. But as th'art,  
I pity my revenge. Now my spleen's up,  
I would not mock it willingly. Ha! Be thankful.  
Now I forgive thee. (2.1.245-52)

The innuendo of these lines suggests that Moll considers Mrs. Openwork to be castrated ("I wish thee for a minute but a man; / Thou shouldst never use more shapes"), an ironic jab since we (and the contemporary audience) realize that a cross-dressed male player performed Mrs. Openwork.<sup>19</sup> But Moll does not dwell on Mrs. Openwork's resentment. Instead, she reminds herself out loud that Mrs. Openwork is something to be pitied, and thus Moll's anger dissipates. One of the well-crafted qualities of this particular scene is that Moll's suggestion that Mrs. Openwork is a figure of castration is followed immediately by Moll drawing her rapier against the fellow with the "swine's face" (2.1.256). While Mrs. Openwork's character is a typical image of a pathetic woman as an incomplete man, Moll's superior swordsmanship casts her as the opposite.

It is also important to note that Moll first appears onstage in mostly feminine clothing with masculine accents, not necessarily in a complete male costume.<sup>20</sup> By introducing Moll to the audience in this manner, Middleton and Dekker begin their play by reaffirming that the woman they seek to commemorate, Mary Frith, is not exactly concerned with "passing" as a man in her everyday activities. Instead, she is exactly what characters believe her to be: a masculine woman who can protect herself in a rough city. By refusing to "pass" in her day-to-day existence, she more squarely occupies the position of Amazon. But the character of Moll Cutpurse in Middleton and Dekker's play is

also a stand-in for sartorial anxieties during the Jacobean period. The phenomenon of women experimentally wearing men's clothing (without, it is important to add, completely hiding the fact that they are women) would come to a head in the eventual 1620 publication of *Hic Mulier*, a diatribe against women in men's clothing.<sup>21</sup> Although published nearly a decade after *The Roaring Girl* saw its first performances, the arguments of the anonymous author of *Hic Mulier* still resonate with characters' responses to Moll Cutpurse. In addition to thinking her monstrous, characters also have deep suspicions about her lasciviousness; indeed, the fact that she wears men's clothing (either wholly or in part) is most of the reason Laxton pursues Moll for sexual favors at the play's midpoint.<sup>22</sup> The author of *Hic Mulier* writes that the man-woman is guilty of

exchanging the modest attire of the comely Hod, Cawle, Coyfe, handsome Dresse or Kerchiefe, to the cloudy Ruffianly broad-brim'd Hatte, and wanton feather, the modest upper parts of a concealing straight gowne, to the loose, lascivious civill embracement of the French doublet, being all unbutton'd to entice all of one shape to hide deformitie, and extreme short wasted to give a most easy way to every luxurious action. (*Hic Mulier* sigs. A4r-A4v)

In other words, a woman who dons the "loose, lascivious civill embracement of the French doublet" with several of her buttons undone has an obvious agenda aside from making a fashion statement. Of the sexual overtones of the actual Mary Frith's fashion choices, Stephen Orgel writes, "Mary Frith's



masculine attire was felt to be lewd and lascivious; and what was lewd and lascivious about it was precisely the provocation it offered to the masculine libido" (Orgel 18). The overall complaint of the *Hic Mulier* argument is that women who wear masculine dress (or simply accoutrements) are flaunting their sexuality in a reprehensible way. But the Moll Cutpurse of *The Roaring Girl* does not appear interested in inviting sexual propositions. She seems decidedly cold. Moreover, the title page of the 1611 quarto of *The Roaring Girl* seems to deliberately emphasize the buttoned-up quality of this representation of Moll. Fully covered, Moll holds a broadsword in one hand, leaned against her shoulder, and a long cigar in the other (two objects that undoubtedly have emblematic resonances). Covered up to her neck in full men's attire, her jerkin is draped in a loose cape, adding another layer of coverage. The only point of display seems to be her legs, which appear to be covered in stockings, but it is difficult to tell simply from the illustration. With the finishing touch of a broad-brimmed hat (complete with the "wanton feather" the writer of *Hic Mulier* so disdains), the Moll we see on the title page is strikingly conservative. Her image is tough, potentially dangerous (the sword is a clear focal point), and evidently confident; yet none of these descriptors seem akin to the sexualized masculine dress disparaged in *Hic Mulier*.

My reason for lingering on this point about Moll's dress is important for my own claims about her connection to the literary Amazon warrior woman. Positive representations of the Amazon such as Britomart in *The Faerie Queene* do not necessarily display their sexuality through the avenue of dress. Britomart herself, for instance, remains in full armor for most of her time in *The Faerie Queene*. Although the other characters in *The Roaring Girl* often respond to Moll's male dress as something sexually suspicious, Moll's own behavior suggests that the clothing is not lascivious at all. Instead, her choice of clothing connects her with the fierceness of the Amazonian warrior, something that the 1611 quarto's title page absolutely reinforces.

If she is a kind of Amazon, then it follows that her own ideological understanding of her surroundings might be grounded in nostalgia. To put it another way, perhaps Moll understands that her presence as an Amazon-like figure is displaced within a London city comedy, and she therefore expresses nostalgia for a setting more akin to the pastoral romance of *The Faerie Queene* or *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia*. Many of Moll Cutpurse's nostalgic ruminations have to do with a lost ideal of courtship, a point that pushes her even further away from accusations of lasciviousness. Indeed, one of the most distinct qualities of Moll is her distaste for the present condition of London and the disparate relations between men and women, a trait that distinguishes her

from nearly all the other characters in *The Roaring Girl*. In a long aside to the audience, Moll specifically bemoans the state of courtship:

MOLL: Oh, the gallants of these times are shallow lechers! They put not their courtship home enough to a wench; 'tis impossible to know what woman is throughly honest, because she's ne'er thoroughly tried. I am of that certain belief there are more queans in this town of their own making than of any man's provoking. Where lies the slackness then? Many a poor soul would down and there's nobody will push 'em.  
Women are courted but ne'er soundly tried;  
As many walk in spurs that never ride. (2.1.326-35)

Moll is nostalgic for a brand of courtly love more suited to a romance like *The Faerie Queene*, in which women are emboldened by the chivalry of their suitor and men are captivated by the chastity of their beloved. Granted, Moll's rather traditional vision of courtship is one of the qualities of *The Roaring Girl* that has attracted feminist criticism. Specifically, Moll upholds traditional gender roles even amidst her own gendered transgression, making her a rather uncanny mouthpiece for male headship and female submission. But the couplet at the end of this aside suggests that Moll is not necessarily concerned with whether or not lovers play their particular parts; instead, she seems more affected by the ill effects of pretense. This final couplet claims that men are masquerading as something that they are not, and this falseness has a base effect on the women they court. When people are not what they seem to be, marriages cannot be avenues for a mutual cultivation of virtue.

Moll's long tirade against Laxton in 3.1, which at first glance seems to be an angst-ridden speech denouncing men's treatment of women, smacks of this same frustration with pretense, but in this instance Moll is concerned with men's false presumptions about female opinion. In a world where people's perceptions of one another are already "shallow" (as Moll cites in her long aside quoted above), it follows that these shallow presumptions would cause members of the opposite sex to get the wrong idea about one another:

MOLL: Thou'rt one of those  
That thinks each woman thy fond flexible whore.  
If she but cast a liberal eye upon thee,  
Turn back her head, she's thine; or, amongst company,  
By chance drink first to thee, then she's quite gone,  
There's no means to help her; nay, for a need,  
Wilt swear unto thy credulous fellow lechers  
That thou'rt more in favor with a lady  
At first sight than her monkey all her lifetime. (3.1.73-81)

Moll's rant is a study in male misinterpretation, and her fixation here is on how shallow relationships between people cause them to misread one another's intentions. She denounces men who assume that a woman is a "fond flexible whore" if all she does is "cast a liberal eye" in the man's direction. Her frustration is with false presumption, a quality she seems to believe has arisen thanks to the decline of chivalry and honorable courtship. I claim that these lines finally cast Moll as a nostalgic figure. If she is, as I have already suggested, an Amazon in the city, then it is appropriate that she is agitated by a default

assumption that women are easily “fond flexible whore[s]” if they only look in the direction of a man. For instance, noble Amazon-like woman like Britomart from *The Faerie Queene* would never be considered a “fond flexible whore.”

Of all the characters in *The Roaring Girl*, the villain Trapdoor seems to have the clearest understanding of Moll’s nostalgia, and he attempts to capitalize on her longing for an older time in their first encounter. Trapdoor appeals to her nostalgic sensibilities by telling her that he wishes to serve her because of “[t]he love I bear to your heroic spirit and masculine womanhood” (2.1. 363-4). Here Trapdoor speaks to her as if she is a kind of Britomart, a noble vision of the Amazon warrior who is worthy of service. While Moll is skeptical of everyone who seems to want something from her, Trapdoor’s appeal helps him gain initial access to Moll (although she eventually shuts him down when he proves dishonest). This interaction gives us insight into what Moll values: she is comfortable with her “masculine womanhood,” and her deep wish is to use her “heroic spirit” for a meaningful end. The meaningful end she chooses is to correct the thwarted relationship between Sebastian and Mary Fitzallard, a pairing that Moll seems to believe contains its own vestiges of a noble vision of love.

Indeed, this trio of Sebastian, Moll, and Mary constitutes a small community of acceptance within *The Roaring Girl*. Although Sebastian begins the

play by referring to Moll as a kind of “creature” (1.1.100), he eventually seems to accept her as a friend and companion in 4.1 when the three characters collude together in Sebastian’s father’s chamber (a place where they believe they will remain unnoticed). What’s interesting about this scene is that it does not contain much scheming; the characters do not, in fact, discuss elaborate plans about how they will deceive Sir Alexander. Instead, they enjoy one another’s company and ask Moll to play them a song. Sebastian even directly remarks on the lack of care one might give to gossipers who denounce Moll’s character:

SEBASTIAN: Pish, let ‘em prate abroad. *Thou’rt here where thou art known and loved.* There be a thousand close dames that will call the viol an unmannerly instrument for a woman, and therefore talk broadly of thee, when you shall have them sit wider to a worse quality.

MOLL: Push, I ever fall asleep and think not of ‘em, sir; and thus I dream.

SEBASTIAN: Prithee, let’s hear thy dream, Moll. (4.1.97-104; my emphasis)

Although this small exchange is playful, containing its fair share of sexual innuendo, Moll’s mention of her “dream” as an alternative to acknowledging those who “prate abroad” is suggestive of the same nostalgia she reveals earlier. The ethereal quality of this comment (“and thus I dream”) is escapist, but the song she sings to her companions next (which Sebastian refers to as her “dream”) does not necessarily transport the listener to another locale or way of being in the

world. Instead, the song is a commentary on a lack of fulfillment, told in relation to the present time. Moll sings,

I dream there is a mistress,  
And she lays out the money.  
She goes unto her sisters;  
She never comes at any.  
She says she went to th'Burse for patterns;  
You shall find her at Saint Kathern's,  
And comes home with never a penny. (4.1.105-11)

Using the London landscape as a background by mentioning the Royal Exchange ("th'Burse") and "Saint Kathern's," the song describes a loose woman who not only cannot make money ("comes home with never a penny"), but also cannot seem to acquire anything beyond money, such as pleasure or fulfillment ("She never comes at any"). Again, Moll's intrinsic nostalgia expresses itself in her concern that the current world, saturated with economy and commodification, is ultimately unfulfilling and lacks any capacity for transcendence. The pure Platonic love of Philoclea and Pyrocles/Zelmane in *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia*, for example, could easily serve as a placeholder for the ideal Moll herself holds dear.

As a counterpoint to Moll's ideal of romantic love and courtship, the analogous action of Mr. and Mrs. Gallipot accentuates the failure of a marriage to uplift both parties in virtue (in this case, it is a marriage on a lower social tier than the relationship of the focal couple, Sebastian and Mary). Mrs. Gallipot

describes her husband as a “cotquean,” or domesticated man, bemoaning that she “cannot abide these apron husbands” (3.2.32-3).<sup>23</sup> And Gallipot himself fawns over his wife with trite sayings and permissive claims, going so far as to say that he will ignore her faults, even if she is adulterous:

GALLIPOT: I'm Gallipot thy husband.—Pru! Why, Pru!  
Art sick in conscience for some villainous deed  
Thou wert about to act? Didst mean to rob me?  
Tush, I forgive thee. Hast thou on my bed  
Thrust my soft pillow under another's head?  
I'll wink at all faults, Pru; 'las, that's no more  
Than what some neighbors near thee have done before. (3.2.114-20)

Although the Gallipots have limited stage time in *The Roaring Girl*, their presence underscores Moll's poor opinion of the current state of marriage. As merchants, and therefore part of the burgeoning middle class, the Gallipots offer a representation of marriage that has no grounding in a mutually uplifting, more romantic vision of love. What's more, the play's focal couple, Sebastian and Mary Fitzallard, offer very little in the way of redeeming marriage in the world of the play. Mary herself speaks barely a dozen lines in all of *The Roaring Girl*, and Sebastian's time on stage shows him more apt to express interest in Moll as opposed to his beloved.

As I hope I have demonstrated in this section, throughout *The Roaring Girl*, Moll Cutpurse is the mouthpiece for nostalgia. In a sense, she longs for the values of the idyllic Arcadian landscape, but she finds herself in the economically



driven (and often morally reprehensible) world of Renaissance London. But as a figure that resembles the valiant Amazon found in stories of an idyllic Arcadia, she is an appropriate spokeswoman for this romantic nostalgia.

Although she may be an Amazonian mouthpiece for older ideals, my final point in this chapter is that Middleton and Dekker make an interesting and complex sacrifice in Moll's characterization with respect to her sexuality. At no point in *The Roaring Girl* does Moll express sexual or romantic longing; thus, if she is indeed an Amazon, then she is an asexual Amazon. This is a strong divergence on the part of Middleton and Dekker from Mary Frith's fame for sensual exploits. Moll does not have any of her own sexual longing in *The Roaring Girl*, a point she famously affirms when she says, "I have no humor to marry. I love to lie o'both sides o'th'bed myself" (2.2.37-8). By consistently emphasizing this quality in Moll, Middleton and Dekker seem to imply that, while men and women in the English Renaissance may have been comfortable with (or even excited by) a sexualized Amazon when she appears in a pastoral setting (such as Pyrocles/Zelma in *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia* or Britomart in *The Faerie Queene*), perhaps the realistic setting of a London city comedy necessitates that the Amazon be asexualized. Thus, Middleton and Dekker's memorialization of this actual gender-bending woman is problematic insofar that *The Roaring Girl* invites the question of whether or not the idyllic,

asexual Moll of this play allows this character to occupy a very different position from disguised heroines like Viola and Rosalind.

The larger implication of this reading of Moll is that setting matters immensely for gendered artifice, to the extent that a particular setting (i.e. urban versus pastoral) can either charge a character with sexual energy or entirely deplete that energy. In order to preserve the image of the Amazon, she must not only be noble, but she also must be asexual. This is what sets her apart. But as a noble Amazon, protected from impressions of lasciviousness through her asexual position in the play, Moll Cutpurse appears as a vestige from a Medieval romance. She uses her vantage point as a pastoral character in a city comedy to comment upon and preserve what she believes is an older and (in her view) superior picture of courtly love.

Furthermore, the necessity of the boy player underscores this nostalgia for the pastoral romance, in which cross-dressing is beautiful and captivating, as it is in the case of Pyrocles/Zelma in *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia*. When Pyrocles disguises himself as an Amazon warrior woman, he does so with a romantic goal in mind and, as a “woman,” proves to be almost indescribably beautiful. Additionally, Pyrocles’ cross-dressing does not take away his sexuality; in an odd way, it seems to heighten it.<sup>24</sup> This is part of why Moll Cutpurse’s apparent asexuality in *The Roaring Girl* is so surprising. Indeed, the

figure of Moll Cutpurse/Mary Frith more squarely occupies the position of the “third sex,” which Marjorie Garber describes at length in her important study, *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Identity*. On the topic of the third sex and our cultural tendency to place a person in the either/or categories of male and female, Garber writes,

This tendency to erase the third term, to appropriate the cross-dresser ‘as’ one of the two sexes, is emblematic of a fairly consistent critical desire to look away from the transvestite as transvestite, not to see cross-dressing except as male or female manqué, whether motivated by social, cultural, or aesthetic designs. And this tendency might be called an *underestimation* of the object. (Garber 10; emphasis in original)

In light of Garber’s claims about the “underestimation” of the “transvestite as transvestite,” Middleton and Dekker’s choice to portray Moll Cutpurse separate from any sensual exploits associated with the actual Mary Frith suggests some anxiety about her status as a member of the third sex. By removing her sexuality from their theatrical representation entirely, the playwrights render Mary Frith as less threatening to a gender binary, while still attempting to celebrate her mirth. There are certainly implications in *The Roaring Girl* that Moll is sexually desirable, including Laxton’s interest in her and Sir Alexander’s ability to believe that she and Sebastian could very well be married, even though Sir Alexander finds her disgraceful. Based on the actual Mary Frith’s purported birth date (it is slightly contested), she nonetheless would have been in her mid-to-late twenties

at the time of *The Roaring Girl's* London premiere. This is not to say, of course, that one's twenties are the peak of one's attractiveness, but it seems relevant that the cross-dressing Moll Cutpurse of *The Roaring Girl* nonetheless occupies the same age range as other Renaissance ingénues like Rosalind, Viola, Desdemona, Hermia, and others.

Ultimately, Moll's asexuality in the *The Roaring Girl* appears to delineate the terms by which a contemporary audience will accept the Amazon woman when she walks along their own London streets. Although she is fascinating and mirthful, she is nonetheless monstrous, even to those who seem to care for her. Although she helps good people achieve their romantic goals, she never fully gains acceptance into their larger community. And although she cares deeply for older ideals of romance and courtship, she seems to have no urge to pursue those ideals for herself. While Renaissance works like *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia* and *The Faerie Queene* are situated within an Arcadian landscape, charged with magic and mythological elements and therefore more a playground of the mind, *The Roaring Girl* is grounded in realism: Mary Frith was a living person when Middleton and Dekker performed the play, and the setting is London itself. As a shadow of the Amazon warrior woman, then, Moll Cutpurse looks strikingly out of place in a setting that does not know what to do with her.

At the end of *The Roaring Girl*, Moll Cutpurse appears not in her usual gender-bending attire, but instead in full women's garb. After the mask trick she performs with Sebastian in order to fool Sir Alexander into thinking that his son has taken a proper bride, she does not leave the stage again until the play is complete. Interestingly, then, the most recognizable component of Moll's celebrity is stripped away in a final Epilogue, perhaps with the intention of underscoring the Epilogue's discourse on the struggles of artistic representation.

The beginning of the Epilogue, spoken by Moll herself, reads:

A painter having drawn with curious art  
The picture of a woman—every part  
Limned to the life—hung out the piece to sell.  
People who passed along, viewing it well,  
Gave several verdicts on it. Some dispraised  
The hair; some said the brows too high were raised;  
Some hit her o'er the lips, misliked their color;  
Some wished her nose were shorter; some, the eyes fuller;  
Others said roses on her cheeks should grow,  
Swearing they looked too pale; others cried no. (Epilogue, ll. 1-10)

The poor painter, scurrying to please all of the viewers who will pass by his stall, finally ends up creating something that is "so vile, / So monstrous, and so ugly, all men did smile / At the poor painter's folly" (ll. 12-14). For the artist, this inability to please generates the frustration of creating something others could deem "realistic" in a realistic setting. A young male player, even when he is dressed impeccably in women's clothing and make-up, will never quite live up to the reality of a real woman. This is why it is all the more interesting that the

final lines of the Epilogue promise that the real Mary Frith will appear onstage in the following weeks, evidently superseding any past failures in representation on the part of the playwrights.

In this chapter, I demonstrated how a particular setting—in this case, the city of London itself—can alter the ways in which a play embraces the trope of the cross-dressing heroine. Indeed, if Moll Cutpurse is something of a contemporary Amazon for Middleton and Dekker, then *The Roaring Girl* reveals that the realistic world of the London streets does not quite know what to do with her. Although there was and continued to be a grand fascination with the Amazon within the literary Arcadian ideal, the new stage convention of theatrical realism, which made drama out of theatergoers' everyday worlds, suddenly changes the status of mythical figures. In light of my larger argument about the range of feminine artifice on the English Renaissance stage, the case of Moll Cutpurse illustrates the playwrights' anxieties about gendered representation, openly exploring in *The Roaring Girl* the limits of authentic representation not just onstage, but also in the city itself.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Jennifer Drouin offers a very helpful taxonomy of terms that reflect best practices for discussing “passing,” “cross-dressing,” and “drag.” The term “transvestite” has a particular connotation of appearing as both male and female and therefore is more closely aligned with “drag.” See Drouin’s “Cross-Dressing, Drag, and Passing: Slippages in Shakespearean Comedy.” *Shakespeare Re-Dressed: Cross-Gender Casting in Contemporary Performance*. Ed. James C. Bulman. Cranbury, NJ: Rosemont Publishing, 2008. 23-56.

<sup>2</sup> Mary Beth Rose, for example, offers a reading of Moll as a liberating character, who ultimately desires “greater freedom for women and equality between the sexes” (Rose 385). But Rose points out that Moll is never really accepted by the community she’s in, even though she succeeds in upholding the social contract. “Women in Men’s Clothing: Apparel and Social Stability in *The Roaring Girl*.” *English Literary Renaissance* 14.3 (1984): 367-91.

<sup>3</sup> Quotations from *The Roaring Girl* are from *English Renaissance Drama: A Norton Anthology*, edited by Bevington, Engle, Maus, and Rasmussen.

<sup>4</sup> As Michael Shapiro explains, “The play exploits the notoriety and sensual exploits of the real-life model, but throughout, and explicitly in the epilogue, it distinguishes her criminality from the more benign idiosyncrasy of the play’s heroine” (Shapiro 26). *Gender in Play on the Shakespearean Stage: Boy Heroines and Female Pages*. Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 1996. Additionally, most of what we know of the real Mary Frith comes from an anonymous biography, *The Life and Death of Mrs. Mary Frith*, published in 1662. (Mary Frith died in 1659, around age 74.)

<sup>5</sup> It is worth noting here that there is not an extensive body of research in existence on the “Amazon” myth generally. In my own research for this chapter, I discovered that critical discussions of the Amazon woman are primarily compartmentalized within literary-historical pockets, and rarely do these discussions appear in book-length studies. In fact, there is no book-length study on the Amazon woman in Renaissance literature. In terms of general introductions to the figure of the Amazon in history and literature, see Adrienne Mayor’s *The Amazons: Lives and Legends of Warrior Women Across the Ancient World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2014) and William Blake Tyrell’s *Amazons: A Study in Athenian Mythmaking* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1984). Although written for a popular audience, Lyn Webster Wilde’s *On the Trail of the Women Warriors: The Amazons in Myth and History* is also a helpful overview of the

cultural history of the Amazon myth (New York, NY: Thomas Dunne Books, 1999).

<sup>6</sup> The terms “pastoral” and “Arcadian” are obviously related, but I believe the use of “Arcadian” keeps my reading more squarely grounded in the literary period in which *The Roaring Girl* would have been received. And, indeed, the popularity of Sidney’s *Arcadia* and Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene* (which also drew influences from Sidney) likewise makes “Arcadian” an appropriate term.

<sup>7</sup> My argument in this chapter is anticipated by Katherine Eiseman Maus, who, in her introduction to *The Roaring Girl in English Renaissance Drama: A Norton Anthology*, briefly suggests that Moll might be considered an Amazon in the same vein as *The Faerie Queene*’s Britomart.

<sup>8</sup> Maurice Evans, in his introduction to *The Countess of Pembroke’s Arcadia*, is careful to note that “[n]o one ever mistook the Arcadian idyll for reality; it was always the embodiment of man’s yearning for a simpler less artificial life than that imposed by civilization. For the Renaissance, a period extremely rich in the poetry of pastoral idyll, Arcadia was specifically a country of the mind through which the poets projected their vision of an innocent happiness where love and poetry are the only serious matters” (Evans 36).

<sup>9</sup> Jean Howard notes the importance of the actual topography of the London city as a key component of the city comedy. In *Theater of a City: The Places of London City Comedy*, Howard writes, “In creating fictions in which these issues figure prominently and by situating them in particular places such as Gresham’s Royal Exchange, the notorious debtors’ prisons known as the Counters, or the ubiquitous bawdy houses that not only ringed but permeated the city proper, dramatists gave their stories a local habitation and name” (Howard 3). For more on *The Roaring Girl*’s specific engagement with the London city, see Kelly J. Stage’s “*The Roaring Girl*’s London Spaces.” *SEL* 49.2 (2009): 417-36.

<sup>10</sup> George Rowe, in a study of Middleton’s plays in general, reinforces this same point when he writes, “[Middleton’s plays] contain characters and events which seem familiar; yet, at the same time, they deny us our familiar responses” (Rowe 5). *Thomas Middleton and the New Comedy Tradition*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1979.



<sup>11</sup> Moll Cutpurse is, of course, not the only character in *The Roaring Girl* that required a cross-dressed male actor. Mary Fitzallard (the love interest of Sebastian) and the female shopkeepers also require cross-dressed male actors in the performance situation of Renaissance England.

<sup>12</sup> Celeste Turner Wright offers a strong list of Amazon characters in Renaissance literature, which is worth noting here: See Wright's "The Amazons in Elizabethan Literature." *Studies in Philology* 37 (1940): 433-56.

<sup>13</sup> J. E. Neale writes that, when Elizabeth was encouraging her troops at Tilbury, people noted that she looked "like some Amazonian empress" (Neale 308). Although some later accounts claim that she was actually wearing armor, Stephen Orgel notes, "there is in fact no evidence that Elizabeth wore armour on this or any other occasion. The contemporary account says only that she was on horseback and carried a truncheon" ("Subtexts of *The Roaring Girl*," Orgel 15).

<sup>14</sup> See Schleiner's "*Divina Virago*: Queen Elizabeth as an Amazon." *Studies in Philology* 75 (1978): 163-80.

<sup>15</sup> Pyrocles, of course, is not the only man in Renaissance literature who disguises himself as a woman in order to achieve a certain objective. He is however, one of only a few who choose the disguise of an Amazon woman, as opposed to just a lady. For a longer discussion of male-as-female disguise in Renaissance romance, see Winfried Schleiner's "Male Cross-Dressing and Transvestism in Renaissance Romances." *Sixteenth Century Journal* 19.4 (1988): 605-19. Another helpful source for the trope of transvestism in Renaissance fiction is Walter R. Davis's *Idea and Act in Elizabethan Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1969).

<sup>16</sup> For a longer discussion of the sources of this passage, see Hester Lees-Jeffries' "Sidney's Zelmane and the *Songe de Poliphile*." *Sidney Journal* 21.1 (2003): 67-75.

<sup>17</sup> For example, the Count in Castiglione's *The Courtier* describes *sprezzatura* as a somewhat feigned disposition of recklessness: "And that is to exchew as much as a man may, and as a sharp and daungerous rock, Affectation or curiosity and (to speak a new word) to use in every thyng a certain Reckelesness, to cover art withall, and seeme whatsoever he doth and sayeth to do it wythout pain, and (as it were) not myndyng it" (59). See *The Book of the Courtier From the Italian of Count Baldassare Castiglione: Done into English by Sir*

*Thomas Hoby ANNO 1561*. Ed. W. E. Henley. London: Tudor Translations 23, 1900.

<sup>18</sup> Although Sidney's *Arcadia* is not the focal text of the present chapter, there is much to be said about Sidney's implementation of transvestism in his prose romance, especially the ways in which transvestism is presented textually. See, for example, Robert H. F. Carver's "'Transformed in Show': The Rhetoric of Transvestism in Sidney's *Arcadia*." *English Literary Renaissance* 28 (1998): 323-52.

<sup>19</sup> This claim also underscores basic medical assumptions from the period. For more on the Early Modern understanding of women as anatomically underdeveloped men, see Ian Maclean's *The Renaissance Notion of Woman* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge UP, 1980). Ironically, too, Moll's use of the verb "prick" to describe Mrs. Openwork's "poor living" is also suggestive of Mrs. Openwork's actual masculinity.

<sup>20</sup> The stage directions specifically note that she wears "a frieze jerkin and a black safeguard," meaning a man's jacket and a woman's skirt.

<sup>21</sup> For a longer discussion of the relationship between cultural notions of cross-dressing and its relationship with the theatre, see Jean Howard's important article, "Crossdressing, the Theatre, and Gender Struggle in Early Modern England." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 39.4 (1988): 418-40.

<sup>22</sup> Jane Baston also affirms that the claims of *Hic Mulier* seem particularly resonate in *The Roaring Girl*, despite the difference in publication time. For more on the ways in which Moll's defiant behavior (including her dress) is actually circumvented by the status quo that surrounds her, see Baston's "Rehabilitating Moll's Subversion in *The Roaring Girl*." *SEL* 37.2 (1997): 317-25.

<sup>23</sup> Mrs. Gallipot's comments here about her husband as a domesticated man are also a counterpoint to Moll as a masculine woman.

<sup>24</sup> Specifically, Pyrocles/Zelmane suddenly finds himself attractive to both sexes alike, drawing the attentions of almost an entire royal family (Basilius, Gynecia, and Philoclea). Pamela only has eyes for Musidorus.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Playing the Lady: Faithful Feminine Artifice in English Renaissance Tragedy

How do powerful, tragic women in Renaissance drama fit into the spectrum of cross-dressed feminine artifice I have already suggested? When we consider the seriousness of their respective plots, we might deduce that these characters would be represented with a serious attempt at onstage femaleness (in other words, they should “pass” as women) despite the necessity of cross-dressed male players in English professional troupes during the Renaissance.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the representation of these tragic female heroines seems to stress artifice for the sake of accentuating their femininity and thus occludes the boy player.

This emphasis on female impersonation is very different from the disguised heroine trope, which exposes the boy player for the sake of accentuating realism, and the over-exaggerated “manly woman,” whose masculinity is emphasized for the sake of comedy. Within this spectrum of gendered artifice, this in-between space is perhaps the most challenging subset of female characters to analyze because so many of Renaissance drama’s women could fit into this category, even outside of the genre of tragedy. For instance, this group could include the likes of Hermia and Helena in *A Midsummer Night’s*

*Dream*, Miranda in *The Tempest*, Celia in *As You Like It*, Perdita and Hermione in *A Winter's Tale*, Ophelia in *Hamlet*, Desdemona in *Othello*, etc. — all in the same category. Because of the size of this group, I have decided to limit myself in the present chapter to the genre of tragedy.

Not only is this subset of female characters difficult to categorize in terms of original performance, but it also seems that this was one of the most challenging types of female roles for young male players to perform during the English Renaissance. Interestingly, Lady Mary Wroth is one of the only contemporary commentators to suggest that boy players were not quite convincing when it came to playing noblewomen. In her criticism of the “overacting” of a high-class woman in *Urania*, she claims that the woman appears “more like a play-boy dressed gaudily up to show a fond loving woman’s part, than a great lady” (Wroth 160).<sup>2</sup> The prospect of playing “a great lady,” then, is a challenge, particularly when you have actual noblewomen evaluating your performance. What I hope to show in this chapter is that Renaissance dramatists were aware of this challenge, and that they sought to overcome it in creative ways.

My argument is that when Renaissance dramatists craft some tragic heroines, they employ strategies that detract audience attention away from the male player beneath the gown, and that these strategies for creating a sense of

faithful feminine artifice manifest themselves in the play texts. I have structured this chapter around what I believe are four dominant tactics used by Renaissance dramatists to enhance the realistic femininity of these tragic heroines, and I illustrate each tactic with examples from Shakespeare and his contemporaries. The undergirding assumption of this chapter is that female impersonation in the original performances of English Renaissance tragedy is not accomplished *only* by the acting ability of an especially talented young male player, nor is it dependent upon the audience's willing suspension of disbelief; rather, there are aspects of the dramas themselves that draw our eyes away from the dramaturgical reality of cross-dressed performance. Admittedly, this is a speculative performance theory, but I am convinced that proposing these dramatic strategies can open up a conversation about the ways in which tragic heroines were depicted onstage during the English Renaissance. In terms of primary texts for this argument, I focus on Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* and several plays by Shakespeare, including *Romeo and Juliet*, *Othello*, *Titus Andronicus*, and *Antony and Cleopatra*.

The first dramatic strategy is this: female characters who are presented with unshakeable (sometimes even transcendent) grandeur or integrity reap the benefits of that same presentation obfuscating our concerns with their gender. In other words, we are less likely to worry about the gendered representation of a

character when we are fixated on their theatrical impressiveness. One of the primary ways this is achieved goes beyond the behavior of the character herself; instead, the words of other characters help construct this perceived grandeur or integrity, something I hope to show specifically with Webster's title character in *The Duchess of Malfi*, Cleopatra in *Antony and Cleopatra*, and, to a lesser degree, Desdemona in *Othello*.

The second strategy is to infuse a female character with traditionally masculine qualities (though neither masculine physical attributes nor qualities that would make the woman appear anomalous or grotesque) and then, at a climactic moment in the drama, seriously undercut that masculinity with an act of subjugation from other authority figures in the play. Here I offer both the Duchess in *The Duchess of Malfi* and Juliet in *Romeo and Juliet* as examples. Both women put forth a traditionally masculine effort in initiating their marriages, and both are chastised (and, in the case of the Duchess, murdered) by family authority figures when they resist that authority. The effect of this harsh subjugation is that, as an audience, we see the female character confidently enact an aspect of male power (in this instance, proposing marriage), and then we are reminded harshly of the character's femaleness when that act of power is undercut.

The third strategy is to present other female characters in conjunction with the tragic heroine whose representations could easily fall into the playfulness of drag, as opposed to faithful feminine artifice.<sup>3</sup> For this strategy, consider the effects of visually pairing the Nurse with Juliet onstage in *Romeo and Juliet*. The occasionally grotesque or comedic qualities of a secondary female character potentially make our perception of the heroine more believable by comparison. Finally, the fourth strategy I suggest here is remarkably pragmatic: if a playwright wants to detract attention away from a cross-dressed female character whom he would like to represent with faithful artifice, then he might drastically limit her stage time and number of lines. This particular tactic seems most overt in the cases of characters like Lavinia in *Titus Andronicus* and Cordelia in *King Lear*. Poor Lavinia Andronicus is literally rendered voiceless following her rape and mutilation, and we rarely see Cordelia once she is exiled from her father's kingdom. Nonetheless, these women are meant to be the paragons of feminine virtue in their respective plays, vividly acting as foils to less virtuous women.

In proposing these dramatic tactics, I recognize that a comprehensive evaluation of their appearance in all of Renaissance tragedy is a task more suited to a book-length study than a single chapter. But, within my larger argument

about the spectrum of feminine artifice, “faithful” feminine artifice is indeed just one point on that spectrum and warrants attention here.

Much of the critical discussion surrounding the portrayal of noblewomen by boy players juxtaposes Renaissance drama’s tragic heroines with court masques. Actual noblewomen appeared in court masques alongside boy players, so the notion of performance influence is certainly plausible. Roberta Barker, for instance, suggests that the court masque tradition gave boy players access to noblewomen in their own theatrical space of the court. Barker contends that “[s]uch a comparison between the verbal and physical rhetoric of masques and those of public theater dramas may allow us to glimpse shared codes of class and gender embodiment across a range of performance cultures,” a point which reminds us that performance genres often exist in confluence with one another, even when they are performed separately (Barker 84). Lisa Jardine, conversely, turns her attention away from the actors and looks to the audience for answers about how these performers might have been perceived. Jardine, in one of the earliest and most influential studies on the apparent homoeroticism endemic to the English Renaissance stage, suggests that the “eroticism of the boy player is invoked in the drama whenever it is openly alluded to,” a convention that appears most frequently in comedy because disguise is a stand-by of the genre (Jardine 23). Jardine believes that “in tragedy, the willing suspension of disbelief



does customarily extend...to the taking of female parts by boy players" (23). In other words, audiences perhaps treated their observance of tragic noblewomen played by young men with the same attitude reserved for comic women. Additionally, there is some discussion that the boy players actually had little interest in faithfully impersonating women in the vein of "theatrical realism" that we value today. Reminding us that our modern conventions of "realistic" acting are separate from the world of Early Modern theatrical culture, Carol Rutter notes that boy player's performances of women would be more grounded in rhetorical conventions, not necessarily a play-by-play imitation of the gestures of actual women.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, Lesley Wade Soule suggests that "every female character was, to some degree, presented in a distanced way" in Renaissance drama, implying that audiences may not be overly concerned with gendered representation if the character herself seems aloof as a subject (Soule 135). Although it is perhaps a stretch for Soule to suggest that *all* female characters were "presented in a distanced way," this claim does underscore the theatrical leap that a male actor must make in order to play a woman convincingly.

On the topic of actual women onstage, James Stokes is careful to point out that although women were indeed seen onstage during this period, their absence from English professional troupes "has encouraged the view that women's performance was marginal," when perhaps English culture did not view it as

marginal (Stokes 9). Women performed with European theatrical troupes, as dancers and singers, and as performers in court masques quite regularly in the English Renaissance. Sophie Tomlinson prefers uniting the appearance of the European actress more specifically with the “Baroque” period (1580 to about 1700), as opposed to the “Renaissance” in general.<sup>5</sup> And yet during the pre-Restoration period, the ban on female players remained the norm for professional troupes such as the King’s Men. This ban on women, although a social custom, also had practical benefits as well, a point Natasha Korda explores in *Labors Lost*. Significantly, Korda explains that women were a massive component of the day-to-day functions of the professional theatre (costuming, theatre management, dressing, properties, etc.), and their exclusion from the stage was perhaps a strategy for legitimizing “playing as...manly work” (Korda 1). In other words, a gendered division of labor helped define playing as an actual career for men. Restrictions on female playing in professional troupes aside, what certain historical information reveals is that women were regularly seen onstage as players in European companies and court masques, though not in the commercial sense that dominated Shakespeare and his contemporaries’ bodies of work.

The critical accounts I have overviewed reveal how conflicted scholars’ opinions are of “faithful feminine artifice” in Renaissance drama. But nearly all

of these studies are grounded in historical and cultural suppositions about the theatre during this time period. In the pages that follow, I am more interested in investigating how the play texts themselves reveal strategies for heightening the feminine qualities of their characters.

The first strategy I suggest is that Renaissance dramatists emphasize a tragic female character's innate grandeur, integrity, or transcendence as a way of distracting an audience from the obvious onstage cross-dressing. A secondary character who gives an account of the female character's reputation often mediates this emphasis. For instance, before we even meet John Webster's Duchess of Malfi herself, we get a sense of her grandeur simply from the speeches that precede her introduction, much like we would in a court masque.<sup>6</sup> Roberta Barker, for instance, notes how the Duchess's initial silence on stage proves to be a masque-like presentation, and the flattering description that Antonio supplies only compounds this effect (Barker 90-91).<sup>7</sup> Truly, Antonio is something of an expository reporter in the opening scene of *The Duchess of Malfi*, also explaining to Delio everything he knows about the Cardinal, Ferdinand, and Bosola. By the end of the play, of course, the audience understands that Antonio's initial assessments of these men are quite well founded. But it is his description of the Duchess herself that offers the audience a first impression of her qualities:

But for their sister, the right noble Duchess:  
You never fixed your eye on three fair medals,  
Cast in one figure, of so different temper.  
For her discourse, it is so full of rapture  
You only will begin then to be sorry  
When she doth end her speech, and wish, in wonder,  
She held it less vainglory to talk much  
Than her penance to hear her. (1.1.187-94)

Antonio begins by offering the Duchess an epithet ("right noble") that fits within the iambic pentameter of his blazon, and he then employs a slightly punning metaphor of tempering a metal "medal" in a forge to describe how strange it is that the Duchess emerged as a "different temper" in spite of the fact that the siblings are "[c]ast in one figure." His criticism is veiled by his metaphor, of course, since the play on "temper" can mean both the finishing procedure for a metal object in a forge or the emotional "temper" of the three siblings. In the lines that follow, it is clear that the Duchess's "discourse," which is "so full of rapture," seems to be the key characteristic that separates her demeanor from her brothers. The fact that her discourse appears to be filled with "rapture" implies that her communication is fueled by an energetic quality that likewise has the ability, ostensibly, to enrapture others. (This is, of course, very true for Antonio.) What is interesting about Antonio's description is that he says very little about the Duchess's physical attractiveness. Her "discourse" and her "speech" are her primary attractive qualities, at least for Antonio. In this same speech, he will go on to claim that "Her days are practiced in such noble virtue / That sure her

nights—nay, more, her very sleeps—are more in heaven than other ladies’ shifts,” but again he does not fixate on her appearance (1.1.201-3). We learn two things from this passage: that evidently the Duchess has a command of speech that sets her apart from other women and that she has a deep sense of integrity, a quality that seems to be a clear through-line in the play.<sup>8</sup> In terms of aiding her feminine representation in Webster’s play, Antonio’s remarks set the audience up to view the Duchess *not* through the lens of physical attractiveness. Instead, he calls upon the audience to view her in a more character-oriented dimension, and that character involves grandeur and integrity. Even Bosola will go on to describe her in a complimentary light in 4.1, immediately before she is murdered:

I’ll describe her:  
She’s sad, as one long used to’t, and she seems  
Rather to welcome the end of misery  
Than to shun it—a behavior so noble  
As gives a majesty to adversity. (4.1.2-6)

Again, the Duchess’s actions and behaviors are the focus of other characters’ descriptions, not her appearance. Bosola’s description above also emphasizes the Duchess’s Stoicism, something that we see even more overtly in the Duchess’s conversation with Bosola before she is executed. In this passage, Bosola attempts to harangue the Duchess with unnerving images and statements; but the Duchess remains unmoved:

DUCHESS: Who am I?

BOSOLA: Thou art a box of wormseed, at best but a salvatory of green mummy. What's this flesh? A little crudded milk, fantastical puff paste. Our bodies are weaker than those paper prisons boys use to keep flies in—more contemptible since ours is to preserve earthworms. Didst thou ever see a lark in a cage? Such is the soul in the body. This world is like her little turf of grass; and the heaven o'er our heads, like her looking glass, only gives us a miserable knowledge of the small compass of our prison.

DUCHESS: Am I not thy duchess?

BOSOLA: Thou art some great woman, sure, for riot begins to sit on thy forehead, clad in gray hairs, twenty years sooner than on a merry milkmaid's. Thou sleep'st worse than if a mouse should be forced to take up her lodging in a cat's ear. A little infant that breeds its teeth, should it lie with thee, would cry out as if thou wert the more unquiet bedfellow.

DUCHESS: I am the Duchess of Malfi still. (4.2.121-38)

Here, her enactment of traditionally masculine, Stoic qualities in spite of Bosola's railings about the baseness of the human body raises suspicions about whether this substrate of masculinity increases her onstage impact in her tragedy.

Specifically, this sense of masculine Stoic honor combined with her onstage femaleness causes us to view her as a figure who transcends gender categorizations precisely because she represents an amalgam of both genders.

Although a very different female character from the Duchess, we see a similar emphasis in complimentary descriptions of Desdemona in *Othello*, particularly in Cassio's praises. Like the Duchess of Malfi, Desdemona is a character that we approach with deep seriousness. She may be a casualty of Othello's tragic fall, but she is also a focal character in the play. Her nobility and

her apparent attractiveness to others in *Othello* gives us good reason to believe that she also would have been presented with a faithful attempt at onstage femininity. Cassio's early adulations of Desdemona cast her as the ultimate female, drawing upon imagery usually reserved for the Virgin Mary.<sup>9</sup> When Montano inquires whether the general is "wiv'd," Cassio responds:

Most fortunately: he hath achieved a maid  
That paragon descriptions and wild fame;  
One that excels the quirks of blazoning pens,  
And in th' essential vesture of creation  
Does tire the ingener. (2.1.60-5)

Calling her "divine Desdemona," Cassio welcomes Desdemona herself off the ship in this way:

O, behold,  
The riches of the ship is come on shore!  
You men of Cyprus, let her have your knees.  
Hail to thee, lady! and the grace of heaven,  
Before, behind thee, and on every hand,  
Enwheel thee round! (2.1.82-7)

Although we have already met Desdemona by this point in the play, Cassio's adulation reveals to us that she's attractive and impressive to men other than Othello. Furthermore, his connection of Desdemona and the Virgin Mary ("Hail to thee, lady! and the grace of heaven...") offers a picture of Desdemona as a figure of feminine grandeur and holiness that manages to occlude the boy player. Desdemona will go on to prove her virtuousness later in the play, especially in her conversations with Emilia before the infamous bedroom murder, but these

initial remarks—like the ones Antonio makes in *The Duchess of Malfi*—set the audience up to view her as something akin to a transcendent figure.

Ultimately, the effect of this first dramatic tactic is not exactly “deflection.” Instead of merely distracting the audience from the cross-dressing, the text of the play (especially in *The Duchess of Malfi*) focuses its energy on crafting the female protagonist in a way that emphasizes a sense of greatness or transcendence. While Cassio’s remarks about Desdemona certainly initiate a similar dramatic effect, Desdemona does not quite have the same amount of force as the Duchess. Perhaps the reason for this is because the Duchess’s presentation contains a more sustained emphasis on their positions as transcendent figures in their plays, and the characters that surround them are not shy about exhorting their grandeur.

The second dramatic strategy for heightening feminine artifice in Renaissance tragedy appears in the construction of the female characters themselves: often a female character is temporarily infused with traditionally masculine qualities (such as initiating a marriage or leading a political stratagem), but then her enactment of that power is subsequently undercut by other forces in the play. Dramatically, this moment of sudden subjugation reminds us, as audience members and as readers, that these characters are women, despite any masculine qualities they may have adopted. In what follows, I go into considerable detail about Juliet in *Romeo and Juliet* as a primary



example of this sudden subjugation, but this seems to be a common trend among tragic heroines as well as female tragic villains.

One of the earliest insights into Juliet's character the audience receives is contained in her rather forceful courtship of Romeo. Unknowingly underscoring his earlier surface-level infatuation with Rosaline, Juliet challenges him to use his words honestly in his declarations of love. She speaks with a sense of authority perhaps a little uncharacteristically for a fourteen-year-old, and she does not waste any time posing the question of love:

JULIET: Dost thou love me? I know thou wilt say, "Ay,"  
And I will take thy word; yet, if thou swear'st,  
Thou mayest prove false: at lovers' perjuries  
They say Jove laughs. O gentle Romeo,  
If thou dost love, pronounce it faithfully;  
Or if thou thinkest I am too quickly won,  
I'll frown and be perverse, and say thee nay,  
So thou wilt woo, but else not for the world.  
In truth, fair Montague, I am too fond,  
And therefore thou mayest think my behavior light,  
But trust me, gentleman, I'll prove more true  
Than those that have more coying to be strange. (2.2.90-101)

In the lines above, she interrogates the typical behavior of a woman when she is wooed and suggests that she is above such "coying": "I'll prove more true / Than those that have more coying to be strange." And only a few dozen lines later, she speedily brings up the topic of marriage:

JULIET: If that thy bent of love be honorable,  
Thy purpose marriage, send me word to-morrow,  
By one that I'll procure to come to thee,

Where and what time thou wilt perform the rite,  
And all my fortunes at thy foot I'll lay,  
And follow thee my lord throughout the world. (2.2.143-8)

I am certainly not the first reader of *Romeo and Juliet* to point out how resolutely she takes charge of the conversation, as well as how quickly she moves their interchange to a discussion of marriage. She is an exacting initiator in this scene, doing the traditionally masculine task of proposing marriage. Of course, much of this interchange comes as a surprise to the audience because of her stated ambivalence about marriage in earlier scenes (of marriage, Juliet says, "It is an honor that I dream not of") (1.3.66). Regardless of what she has said of marriage before, though, her pronouncements in 2.2 are the impetus behind the dramatic events of the rest of the play.

The Duchess of Malfi also initiates her marriage to her steward, Antonio; indeed, she practically officiates their hand-fast ceremony. The dramatic thrust of *The Duchess of Malfi* is that her brief exertion of power turns out to be the one thing Ferdinand and the Cardinal wish to punish her (fatally) for. Like Juliet, then, the Duchess finds her momentary autonomy seriously undermined by family authority, and, in both of these cases, the female characters' harsh return to subjugation reminds us narratively that they are indeed women within the world of the play and are subject to the social forces that surround them. In this intimate scene in the first act, the Duchess leads Antonio in a covert marriage

ceremony. Interestingly, the marriage itself is never confirmed in a church.<sup>10</sup>

After suggesting that one of Antonio's "eyes is bloodshot," the Duchess offers her ring as a kind of healing talisman (1.1.405). She continues,

DUCHESS: *[She gives him a ring.]*

They say 'tis very sovereign. 'Twas my wedding ring,  
And I did vow never to part with it  
But to my second husband.

ANTONIO: You have parted with it now.

DUCHESS: Yes, to help your eyesight.

ANTONIO: You have made me stark blind.

DUCHESS: How?

ANTONIO: There is a saucy and ambitious devil  
Is dancing in this circle.

DUCHESS: Remove him.

ANTONIO: How?

DUCHESS: There needs small conjuration when your finger  
May do it: thus. *[She puts the ring on his finger.]* Is it fit?

ANTONIO: What said you?

*[He kneels.]* (1.1.406-417)

Even with the slight folly of the sexual pun in these lines, the pair will go on to kneel together seriously and speak their vows to one another in front of Cariola, thus making the marriage (at least, in the opinion of the Duchess) legitimate. The stage directions in this scene are careful to visually reflect the exchange happening onstage: Antonio kneels when she puts the ring on his finger, the Duchess physically raises him up as she asserts that their relationship will lift him socially (an ironic point, though, since the relationship is never public), and then both kneel together to represent their mutual submission to the vows of marriage. Truly, the specificity of the visuals in this scene reveals just how much

Webster desired that the exchange between the Duchess and Antonio emphasize her command of the situation. Perhaps we could say the same thing about the visual effect of presenting Juliet on the balcony and Romeo below. In both cases, the physicality of the scene could accentuate the fact that the female character seems to maintain the most control of the courtship.

In *Romeo and Juliet*, further underscoring Juliet's arguably "masculine" initiation of their marriage, the overall effect Juliet seems to have on Romeo is effeminization, at least in the opinion of his friends. Before Romeo learns that Mercutio is dead, he remarks to himself, "O sweet Juliet, / Thy beauty hath made me effeminate" (3.1.113-4); and later, when he finds himself in a heap of sobs on Friar Lawrence's floor, the Friar rebukes him by saying,

Art thou a man? Thy form cries out thou art;  
*Thy tears are womanish*, thy wild acts denote  
The unreasonable fury of a beast.  
*Unseemly woman in a seeming man*,  
And ill-beseeming beast in seeming both,  
Thou hast amaz'd me! (3.3.109-14; my emphasis)

Using language that evokes the reverse of traditional Renaissance theatrical cross-dressing (i.e., a man playing a woman), Friar Lawrence compares Romeo to an "unseemly woman" disguising herself as a man, and he goes on to claim that this amalgamation of genders that he sees in Romeo's grief makes him appear beastly. By Romeo's own admission, the cause seems to be his excessive love for Juliet.

Although the first half of the play reveals a Juliet who seems to be in control of her relationship with Romeo, as well as evidently making him effeminate through her influence, the turn in her characterization appears when she is suddenly chastised for her disobedience. The romantic power she enacts during her quick courtship with Romeo, which was mastered mostly by her wit, falls short when posed to Lord Capulet, who is angrily frustrated over the disobedience of his daughter:

CAPULET: Does she not give us thanks?  
Is she not proud? Doth she not count her blest,  
Unworthy as she is, that we have wrought  
So worthy a gentleman to be her bride?  
JULIET: Not proud you have, but thankful that you have.  
Proud can I never be of what I hate,  
But thankful even for hate that is meant love.  
CAPULET: Now how, how how, chopp'd logic! What is this?  
"Proud," and "I thank you," and "I thank you not,"  
And yet "not proud," mistress minion you?  
Thank me no thankings, nor proud me no prouds,  
But fettle your fine joints 'gainst Thursday next,  
To go with Paris to Saint Peter's Church,  
Or I will drag thee on a hurdle thither. (3.5.142-55)

And still later in this scene Lord Capulet remains stuck on her attempts at arguing against his will with her carefully chosen words. He makes sure Juliet remembers that it is his house she lives in:

CAPULET: And then to have a wretched puling fool,  
A whining mammet, in her fortune's tender,  
To answer, "I'll not wed, I cannot love;  
I am too young, I pray you pardon me."  
But and you will not wed, I'll pardon you.

Graze where you will, you shall not house with me. (3.5.183-8)

While Juliet begins the play in a position of authority (at least, as much authority as she is able to wrangle through her command of language), the second half of the play strips all authority away. The performance effect of watching a tragic heroine undergo this transformation is this: any visual or behavioral markers of masculinity in our heroine's representation are suddenly undercut when other social powers confront that masculinity. Juliet, although she is resolute and powerful in her relationship with Romeo, suddenly finds herself the subject of parental aggression when she confronts the authority of her parents. Her wordplay and wit have no power in the social exchange. This sudden subjugation occurs in *The Duchess of Malfi*, too, in which the Duchess is murdered for remarrying without her brothers' consent. The performance effect of this shift is that we, as an audience, are forcefully reminded of these characters' femininity in these moments of subjugation, and so the boy player is occluded by the actions we see onstage. We are more likely to observe them as tragic heroines when their masculinity is emphasized thanks to the male-subjective priorities of tragedy; but we are also apt to see Juliet and the Duchess more clearly as faithfully represented women (despite the male player) when all of this traditionally masculine behavior is upset.

This dramatic strategy appears forcibly in characters like Tamora in *Titus Andronicus*, as well. Although it's easy to imagine virtuous female characters in the middle of this spectrum of gendered artifice, we have to remember that many of the wicked women in Renaissance drama would likely fit in the middle as well. Despite their depravity, these women must arguably "pass" as women, particularly when they are cast as romantic interests for the tragic male lead. As a brief example, consider how Tamora in *Titus Andronicus* is able to avoid imprisonment (and probably also execution) at the beginning of her tragedy by virtue of her beauty.<sup>11</sup> Although she is base, she is nonetheless physically attractive. Using her attractiveness, she schemes to destroy the Andronici once she rises to power, in a vicious attempt to revenge the death of her son. What is interesting about the cases of villainous women is that while they do indeed seem to exhibit the forceful (and, unfortunately, fleeting) autonomy of protagonists like Juliet and the Duchess, the subjugation they experience is often self-imposed. Tamora, admittedly, meets a bloody end at the hands of the Andronici. Before her death, however, Tamora exposes her own apparent anxiety and initiates her ultimate fall when she presents herself to Titus as "Revenge." Interestingly, she conspires to shift the genre of the drama to a Morality Play in the final act. Disguising herself as Revenge, and her sons as Rape and Murder, she seems to try to separate herself from the reality of her

tragedy by dressing up as a vice. And since she is evidently unaware of her own downward spiral from a captive queen to a revenging blood-fiend, her scene as Revenge is awkward and unconvincing. Tamora announces to Titus,

Know, thou sad man, I am not Tamora;  
She is thy enemy, and I thy friend.  
I am Revenge, sent from th' infernal kingdom  
To ease the gnawing vulture of thy mind,  
By working wreakful vengeance on thy foes.  
Come down and welcome me to this world's light;  
Confer with me of murder and of death.  
There's not a hollow cave or lurking-place,  
No vast obscurity or misty vale,  
Where bloody murther or detested rape  
Can couch for fear, but I will find them out,  
And in their ears tell them my dreadful name,  
Revenge, which makes the foul offender quake. (5.2.28-40)

The figure of Revenge also appears in Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*, but his role is as a commentator, not as an active participant in the drama. "Revenge" in *The Spanish Tragedy* also appears right at the play's beginning, and so, as viewers, we are willing to accept his presence as a normal part of Kyd's play. But the fact that Tamora attempts to insert personification into the final act of *Titus Andronicus* makes us question her stratagem. In a play so enthralled with gory realism and pain, the appearance of a personified Revenge is unexpected and specious—this, of course, is part of the reason Titus (despite his deteriorating mind) can still detect her ruse. In light of this second dramatic strategy I've suggested, Tamora does a surprising thing in this moment



by pushing her power into the domain of genre switching. And she fails.

Whereas Juliet and the Duchess find their acts of autonomy undercut by the authority figures that surround them, Tamora brings about her subjugation through her own misguided actions.

The third dramatic strategy I propose Renaissance dramatists employed to enhance faithful feminine artifice is to present a tragic female heroine alongside an older, more comedic female character of lower social standing whose representation is slightly reminiscent of drag. The effect here is one of visual and performative comparison: when another female character presents herself onstage in an unattractive manner, sometimes to the extent of alluding to a sense of grotesqueness, then the central female protagonist appears more seriously represented by contrast. To wit, onstage comparison can effectively increase or decrease a character's realistic representation, especially when it is juxtaposed with something akin to intentionally "sloppy artifice" like drag.

Benvolio in *Romeo and Juliet* describes the general effect of comparison to Romeo, when he proposes they attend the Capulet party for the sake of comparing Rosaline to the other beautiful women:

BENVOLIO: At this same ancient feast of Capulet's  
Supps the fair Rosaline whom thou so loves,  
With all the admired beauties of Verona.  
Go thither, and with unattainted eye  
Compare her face with some that I shall show,  
And I will make thee think thy swan a crow.

[...]  
Tut, you saw her fair, none else being by,  
Herself pois'd with herself in either eye;  
But in that crystal scales let there be weigh'd  
Your lady's love against some other maid  
That I will show you shining at this feast,  
And she shall scant show well that now seems best. (1.2.82-7, 94-9)

Of course, Benvolio is trying to convince Romeo to consider other *beautiful* women in comparison to Rosaline. He is not concerned with comparing women at the Capulet party with other women who are on a lower social standing.

Benvolio's remarks to Romeo immediately precede the audience's first introduction to Juliet, who is presented as a stark contrast to both the Nurse and Lady Capulet. The Nurse herself, whom I discuss more thoroughly in a later chapter, begins with a long discourse about Juliet's upbringing, filled with innuendo and jocundity. One of the highlights of this long speech is the Nurse's body humor, jokes and suggestions about an old nursemaid's body that become even more ironic when we remember that this is actually a male player.

We learn only a bit about the Nurse's physical representation throughout *Romeo and Juliet*, but it is enough to make us wonder about how a male player cast as the Nurse might emphasize her slight grotesqueness. When confirming Juliet's age to Lady Capulet, for example, the Nurse puns on the number of her teeth ("I have but four") (1.3.13). Later, the Montague company will also apparently make fun of her size when the Nurse and her assistant, Peter, go in

search of Romeo. First, Romeo famously refers to her as “a sail,” a line that not only indicates that she brings news, but also indicates her rotundity (2.4.102). Then Mercutio interjects, “Two, two: a shirt and a smock,” to create the double reference to both the Nurse and Peter *and* to the reality that the Nurse herself is an actual “man-woman” (2.4.103). When the Nurse asks Peter for her fan, Mercutio also jokes, “Good Peter, to hide her face, for her fan’s the fairer face” (2.4.107-8). With these few references alone, the message is clear that the Nurse’s physical appearance welcomes the harsh jests of the young men, to the extent that we, as audience members and readers, cannot help but picture her with an element of grotesqueness (despite her virtues as an aid to the lovers). When the Nurse appears in this way, it encourages the audience (and readers) to view Juliet as a beautiful woman when compared to the Nurse’s buffoonery.

Even the Nurse’s own sense of humor accentuates how we perceive her. While detailing her love for Juliet in her earlier conversation with Lady Capulet, the Nurse does not hold back when it comes to describing the experience of weaning the baby Juliet:

For I had then laid wormwood to my dug,  
Sitting in the sun under the dove-house wall.  
My lord and you were then at Mantua—  
Nay, I do bear a brain—but as I said,  
When it did taste the wormwood on the nipple  
Of my dug and felt it bitter, pretty fool.  
To see it teachy and fall out wi’ th’ dug! (1.3.26-32)

The effect of hearing a male actor (cross-dressed as a woman) referring to breastfeeding certainly has the potential for comedy, especially when we already have a sense of this woman's unattractiveness. Truly, the lines above are endearing, for, on a character level, they reveal the contrast in "mothering" between the Nurse and Lady Capulet. But they also allow for self-reflexive comedy on the part of the male player acting as the Nurse, especially when it comes to acknowledging this character's forwardness when speaking about the body. In light of these physical and behavioral characteristics, we can go on to remember that the Nurse is Juliet's closest companion, and only in a few scenes do we see Juliet without the Nurse as a companion; thus, it follows that our visual understanding of Juliet (and the young male player portraying her) is complemented by the presence of the Nurse. Ultimately, we see the young Juliet's femininity in a heightened manner when we are encouraged to compare her with the Nurse.

The fourth and final dramatic strategy I suggest in this chapter is rather simple: if a dramatist does not wish to draw attention to the reality of male-as-female cross-dressing when it comes to his most serious female characters, then he can carefully limit their stage time and number of lines. Moreover, if a playwright puts his energy into creating a character whose time onstage is more oriented toward visual spectacle, then that character will have fewer chances to

reveal the male player beneath the gown. Overall, these dramatic strategies are most closely aligned with the masque tradition, since the players' visual and emblematic presence onstage is emphasized over the words that they speak.

Within Shakespeare's tragedies, the character of Lavinia in *Titus Andronicus* is perhaps the strongest example of a playwright turning a female character into a taciturn emblem. While we do get to see her in action in 2.3, in which she fights against the violent lust of Tamora's sons, she is silenced for the rest of the play when they mutilate her by cutting out her tongue and lopping off her hands. Her mutilation, however, does not prevent her from being a visual spectacle for the rest of the play. When Marcus Andronicus first discovers his niece after the attack, his own speech underscores the heightened visual presence of the bloody Lavinia and also emphasizes her newfound silence:

MARCUS: Speak, gentle niece: what stern ungentle hands  
Hath lopp'd and hew'd, and made thy body bare  
Of her two branches, those sweet ornaments  
Whose circling shadows kings have sought to sleep in,  
And might not gain so great a happiness  
As half thy love? Why dost not speak to me?  
Alas, a crimson river of warm blood,  
Like to a bubbling fountain stirr'd with wind,  
Doth rise and fall between thy rosed lips,  
Coming and going with thy honey breath.  
But sure some Tereus hath deflow'ed thee,  
And lest thou shouldst detect him, cut thy tongue.  
Ah, now thou turn'st away thy face for shame!  
And notwithstanding all this loss of blood,  
As from a conduit with three issuing spouts,  
Yet do thy cheeks look red as Titan's face

Blushing to be encount' red with a cloud.  
Shall I speak for thee? (2.3.16-33)

Marcus does “speak” on behalf of Lavinia for the audience in these lines, cataloging her striking visual traits in poetic terms and heightening our perspective of her physical condition. Like Antonio’s initial descriptions of the Duchess in *The Duchess of Malfi* that praise her integrity and grandeur, Marcus’s speech here describes Lavinia’s attractive traits while juxtaposing her beauty with her mutilation. In this scene, Lavinia becomes a character to watch instead of a character to hear. She maintains this position throughout the remainder of the play, relying on gestures and writing in the dirt (with a stick in her mouth) to communicate with her family. In light of the dramatic strategy I have suggested above, Lavinia’s silent presence in *Titus Andronicus* keeps the audience focused on her as a Philomel-like symbol of ravished maidenhead and draws our eyes away from the cross-dressing artifice we cannot help but perceive. When the female characters become slightly abstracted, as they would in a court masque, we arguably pay less attention to their gender.

While Lavinia has a great deal of silent stage time in *Titus Andronicus*, Cordelia in *King Lear* spends most of her time offstage. The female stars of *King Lear*, after all, are the vicious Goneril and Reagan. Their more virtuous, younger sister makes a quick exit in the opening scene and does not appear again until the fourth act. By literally keeping the ingénue offstage for as long as possible, we

have fewer opportunities to pay attention to “her” as a player who is attempting to carry off a faithful feminine impersonation. The character of Cordelia becomes something set apart, an aloof foil to her more gruesome sisters.

Outside the genre of tragedy, this particular strategy of keeping noblewomen absent or mostly silent also seems at work in Shakespeare’s history plays. Consider how briefly we see characters like Kate Percy in *Henry IV Parts I and II* compared to those plays’ long scenes featuring Doll Tearsheet and Mistress Quickly. The same might be said of Anne’s presence in *Richard II*, or even that of Katherine of France in *Henry V*. Outside of Shakespeare’s canon, Christopher Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus* and *Tamburlaine Parts I and II* shows audiences another playwright very carefully including noblewomen in his tragedies. Zenocrate’s lines are quite limited in *Tamburlaine Part I*, and there are barely any women at all in *Doctor Faustus*, aside from Helen of Troy, who, conveniently does not speak at all and is only onstage for a brief moment. (Truly, Helen’s masque-like appearance in *Doctor Faustus* appropriately underscores Faustus’s distance from reality and the detached state of his soul.) In many of these moments listed above, though, there is a sense that all these supposed female protagonists (aside, perhaps, from Helen) are actually ancillary, and their limited stage time keeps their onstage presence as faithfully represented women more controllable and compact.

Certainly the dramatic strategies I have suggested in this chapter are speculative, although I am confident that the examples given are suggestive enough to propose that speculation is warranted. Because we cannot literally sit in the audience of an Early Modern production of *The Duchess of Malfi*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Othello*, *Titus Andronicus*, or *Antony and Cleopatra*, our claims about the nature of their original performances will always be hypothetical. And much of our hypothesizing is grounded in theoretical assumptions. For example, in the past twenty years of theorizing on original performances of Shakespeare, the overarching tendency has been to discuss the homoerotic substrate of all-male performances during the English Renaissance. Although many critics have convincingly argued for the endurance of all-male casting in England's professional troupes based on this substrate, we must be careful to remember our inherent historical distance from the Renaissance. As Bruce Smith reminds us,

We can never know, of course, what went on inside the heads of people who have been dead for four hundred years, or even if everyone thought and felt the same [as one another] [...] Any erotic element in boys' impersonations of women must surely have varied from actor to actor, from author to author, from play to play. (Smith 149-50)

With respect to the argument of this dissertation, I might also add "character to character" to Smith's list. The question of how Renaissance dramatists and production companies formed characters who faithfully impersonated noblewomen on stage is nearly unreachable given our incredible distance from



the historical moment. But what I have sought to do in the present chapter, however, is suggest that there are elements in the play texts themselves that arguably gave professional troupes during Shakespeare's time the opportunity to more faithfully imitate female noblewomen. The texts of these plays, after all, are the surest artifacts we have left.

I will end this chapter by noting that the search for an "authentic performance" of Renaissance drama is a quest more typically suited to actual performance companies, rather than academic essays. While academics may attempt to recreate a text's historical moment in conjunction with a theoretical supposition, contemporary production companies put our theories into practice. Perhaps the strongest example of this is London's New Globe Theatre, which has established itself as the premier theatrical company for staging "authentic" performances of Shakespeare.<sup>12</sup> Of one of the first all-male performances from the New Globe, a 1997 production of *Henry V*, Pauline Kiernan offers a concise assessment of how viewing a performance can force us to reassess our preformed academic notions about how Shakespearean performance would have occurred in its original form. Kiernan writes that from "the experience of seeing a young man in the part of Katherine in *Henry V*, it would seem that some recent scholarship's emphasis on homoerotic effects on the original audiences [...] may have to be reassessed" (41-2). Likely, Kiernan is thinking of the writings of

Stephen Orgel, Lisa Jardine, or Michael Shapiro, whose studies on gendered performance would have been recognized among scholars in advance of the 1997 *Henry V* production. Regardless of whether these readings of gendered performance need to be reassessed, Kiernan's brief remark about how a theatrical experience can alter our approach to a text is well taken. Specifically, it reminds us that the text itself, which is also the starting place for actors and directors, offers some of the most compelling evidence we have for deducing an "authentic" performance.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Another consideration when writing about cross-dressed performance is the relatively large age range of “boy” actors. David Kathman, for example, claims that pre-Restoration actors were usually no younger than twelve and no older than twenty-two. Kathman goes on to suggest a median age of sixteen or seventeen. See Kathman’s “How Old Were Shakespeare’s Boy Actresses?” *Shakespeare Survey* 58 (2005): 220-46. Print.

<sup>2</sup> Roberta Barker has suggested that it makes sense for Wroth to be critical of play-boys, particularly since they might threaten the “real” representation of a woman. Barker writes, “Such a view has obvious resonance for the elite woman, whose education has fitted her for—and whose very existence may depend upon—her matchless embodiment of courtly femininity” (93).

<sup>3</sup> In the following two chapters, I offer a more thorough examination of “drag” in conjunction with the overarching argument of this dissertation.

<sup>4</sup> See Rutter’s “Learning Thisby’s Part—or—What’s Hecuba to Him?” *Shakespeare Bulletin* 22.3 (2004): 5-30.

<sup>5</sup> See Tomlinson’s *Women on Stage in Stuart Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005. Print); Tomlinson also elaborates the baroque aesthetic further in “The Actress and Baroque Aesthetic Effects in Renaissance Drama.” *Shakespeare Bulletin* 33.1 (2015): 67-82. Print.

<sup>6</sup> The masque-like qualities of Webster’s *The Duchess of Malfi* are not a new vein of study. See, for example, David Carnegie’s “Theatrical Introduction to *The Duchess of Malfi*.” *The Works of John Webster*. Ed. David Gunby, David Carnegie, and Antony Hammond. Vol. 1. Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 1995. 411-49; Coddon, Karin S. “*The Duchess of Malfi*: Tyranny and Spectacle in the Jacobean Drama.” *Madness in Drama*. Ed. James Redmond. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993. 1-17; Ekeblad, Inga-Stina. “The ‘Impure Art’ of John Webster.” *Review of English Studies* 9 (1958): 253-67. For a more general overview of women in masques during the Early Modern Period see Suzanne Gossett’s “‘Man-Maid, Begone!’: Women in Masques” (*English Literary Renaissance* 18.1 [December 1988]: 96-113), Claire McManus’s *Women on the Renaissance Stage: Anna of Denmark and Female Masquing in the Stuart Court (1590-1619)* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2002), or Mario Wynne-Davies’ “The Queen’s Masque: Renaissance Women and the Seventeenth-Century Court Masque” in *Gloriana’s Face: Women, Public and Private, in the English Renaissance* (Ed. S. P.

Cerasano and Mario Wynne-Davies. New York and London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992. 79-104).

<sup>7</sup> Roberta Barker picks out the young male actor Richard Robinson as “the likeliest boy among the King’s Men to have created the title role of Webster’s *Duchess of Malfi*” (89). Barker notes that “[i]n *The Devil is an Ass*, [Ben] Jonson particularly praises Robinson’s quasi-aristocratic elegance: he is not only ‘an ingenious youth,’ but dresses himself the best! Beyond / Forty o’your very ladies!’” In light of these remarks from Jonson himself, Barker claims that this “ability skillfully to imitate, not merely a lawyer’s wife, but one of ‘your very ladies’ would have been crucial to success as Webster’s noble heroine” (89). For more, see Lucy Munro’s entry on Richard Robinson (c.1595-1648) in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford UP, 2007. Web) as well as John Astington’s entry on Robinson in *Actors and Acting in Shakespeare’s Time: The Art of Stage Playing* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010, p. 213).

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, the Duchess’s remark to Bosola about integrity even in impoverished conditions: “Say that he was born mean; / Man is most happy when ‘s own actions / Be arguments and example of his virtue” (3.5.121-23). The final lines of the play likewise drive home the theme of integrity: “Integrity of life is fame’s best friend, / Which nobly, beyond death, shall crown the end” (5.5.138-39).

<sup>9</sup> Greg Maillet points out the Marian resonances in *Othello* in his essay, “Desdemona and the Mariological Theology of the Will in *Othello*,” in *Marian Moments in Early Modern British Drama*. Ed. Regina Buccola and Lisa Hopkins. Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2007. 87-110.

<sup>10</sup> Later in this scene, the Duchess affirms that, since the “ceremony” occurred in the presence of her servant Cariola, then the marriage is legitimate. She explains, “I have heard lawyers say, a contract in a chamber / *Per verba de presenti* is absolute marriage” (1.1.479-80).

<sup>11</sup> Tamora, for instance, is evidently beautiful enough to tempt Saturninus after his failed pursuit of Lavinia. Saturninus says to Tamora,

“And therefore, lovely Tamora, Queen of Goths,

That like the stately Phoebe ‘mongst her nymphs

Dost overshadow the gallant’st dames of Rome,

If thou be pleas'd with this my sudden choice,  
Behold, I choose thee, Tamora, for my bride,  
And will create thee Empress of Rome. (1.1.315-320)

<sup>12</sup> Rob Kronkie's *The Globe Theatre Project: Shakespeare and Authenticity* is an excellent overview of the new Globe's purpose in pursuing "authenticity." (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2006). See also James Bulman's "Queering the Audience: All-Male Casts in Recent Productions of Shakespeare" in *A Companion to Shakespeare and Performance*, as well as Bulman's edited collection *Shakespeare Re-Dressed: Cross-Gender Casting in Contemporary Performance*.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Cross-Dressing for Comic Effect: The Remnants of Francis Flute's Pitiful Thisby in the 'New' Globe Theatre's 2012 *Twelfth Night*

In the first several chapters of this dissertation, I demonstrated aspects of my new paradigm for understanding cross-dressing on the English Renaissance stage that relate overtly to the disguised heroine or the female tragic protagonist. Chapters Two and Three considered how the disguised heroine trope gave the young male player the opportunity to perform in the most “convincing” costume available to Renaissance professional troupes, making the disguised heroine trope into an instrument of theatrical realism. Chapter Four proposed several dramatic strategies that Renaissance dramatists arguably employed to heighten the feminine realism of their cross-dressing players. In the final two chapters of this dissertation project, my argument moves to female characters whose presentation in the text seems to indicate that they were performed in a way that highlighted the man underneath the gown for comedic or grotesque purposes. (In Chapter Four, I hinted at this distinction in my discussion of Juliet and the Nurse in *Romeo and Juliet*.) The overarching goal of the following two chapters is to investigate what textual qualities (character descriptions, dialogue, comedic

moments, etc.) indicate that particular female characters were performed in a manner in which the reality of theatrical cross-dressing was accentuated as a vehicle for comedy or parody.

In this chapter, I make the argument that Shakespeare demonstrates cross-dressing's comedic potential in the famous "Pyramus and Thisby" play in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. With respect to the memorable performance of Peter Quince's amateur theatre troupe, I claim that the case of Francis Flute's version of "Thisby" suggests that it is possible to play a woman poorly within the theatrical imagination of Renaissance England, and that this ineptness is an intentional form of comic show. After establishing the ways in which this episode in *Midsummer* elucidates our understanding of how cross-dressing might be parodied for humorous ends, I demonstrate how an award-winning twenty-first century production of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, performed by an all-male cast, can help us perceive the comedic dimensions of cross-dressing within the laboratory of live theatre. A larger goal of this chapter is to unite my theoretical speculation about the original performances of Shakespeare with contemporary performance companies who claim to produce "authentic" stage versions of Shakespeare. In including a detailed reading of an actual performance of all-male Shakespeare from our own century, my hope is that the reader will acknowledge how contemporary directors of historically authentic Shakespeare

productions often intuit these distinctions in gendered representation without anyone telling them to do so.<sup>1</sup>

My structure for this chapter is as follows: first, I establish that much of the comedy of the “Pyramus and Thisby” episode in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* depends upon the inadequacy of the mechanicals as actors, especially Francis Flute’s portrayal of Thisby, and that this inadequacy can help us speculate about the comedic potential of cross-dressing more generally for Renaissance drama. Interestingly, scholars frequently take this scene for granted. The episode is often discussed as a play-within-a-play that adds a meta-theatrical element to the closing of the show, and little more. With respect to my overarching argument about the range of representation of female characters, my sub-argument in this chapter is that the “Pyramus and Thisby” play reveals that cross-dressing, as a theatrical event, is capable of being a genuine source of comedy, something analysts perhaps take for granted in their general assessment of Renaissance theatrical cross-dressing. I then test this claim specifically in light of the renowned 2012 London production of *Twelfth Night* by the New Globe Theater, which uses all male casting in certain series of productions. (This production has since been revived on Broadway in 2014.) The focal character for my discussion of *Twelfth Night* is Maria, who in this particular performance is represented in a manner more accurately described as drag.



In some ways, this claim seems relatively obvious; of course Francis Flute's less-than-convincing portrayal of Thisby is designed to be comic. But in so explicitly demonstrating the comic potential inherent in a man playing a woman poorly, Shakespeare in this relatively early work implies that cross-dressing can be a source of overt theatrical comedy. If Shakespeare felt inclined to parody cross-dressing in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, then it is reasonable to believe that some (certainly not all) instances of cross-dressing maintained both parodic and generally comedic ends within Renaissance drama. (See Chapter Six of this dissertation, "Female Falstaffs," for more discussion of specific female characters who seem to fall within this category of female characters whose femininity might be portrayed parodically.)

Of all the theoretical terms most appropriate for this version of cross-dressing, "drag" seems to be the most apt. Defining drag is essential, particularly since the word itself has multivalent connotations in and out of the academy. Although often considered a colloquial (and even derogatory) term that seldom appears in academic writing, the word drag is actually very useful in describing the effect of sloppy or less-than-adequate female impersonation. Jennifer Drouin, in her helpful taxonomy of the terms "cross-dressing," "drag," and "passing," describes drag as

self-referential and sometimes parodic [...] The context of drag shows, or plays and films in which drag is central to the plot, is

usually comedic; and unlike people who pass, drag queens and drag kings tend to highlight their artificiality rather than conceal it. (Drouin 26)

If a performer presents him- or herself in drag, then he/she only halfway impersonates the opposite gender, often drawing attention to the fact that the costume is inadequate. As Drouin remarks above, the purpose of this halfway impersonation is often parody or comedy. (In my earlier discussion of Moll Cutpurse in Middleton and Dekker's *The Roaring Girl*, I briefly suggest that the real Mary Frith, by our modern standards, would have been described as dressing in drag. After all, Mary Frith did not always attempt to conceal her actual femininity.) If the actual gender is apparent to a viewer, then the performing subject is not attempting (or succeeding) at "passing" as the target gender. Drouin's discussion of drag is appropriately anticipated by Judith Butler, especially Butler's discussion about the potentially subversive (and sometimes not subversive at all) qualities of drag. Indeed, Drouin is very careful to articulate the heart of Butler's claims about drag, which emphasize that drag, as a mode of representation, accentuates the performative qualities of gender, all while suggesting that our sense of gender's reality is more accurately described as an illusion built upon a series of appropriate performative acts.<sup>2</sup>

For my purposes in this essay, I am not so much concerned with the ways in which drag highlights the performative qualities of gender, which is a primary

concern for Butler; instead, my use of the term stems from drag's connection to comedic and parodic potential within the realm of the theatre.<sup>3</sup> To my knowledge, no one has yet explored how certain roles within Renaissance drama could easily fall into the category of drag in light of clues we receive in the texts themselves. Any references to the potential for "drag-like" performances in Shakespeare are usually retrospective and only reference contemporary productions (rather than also allowing the text to stand by itself as an indicator). My interest here is in speculating about the original performances of Shakespearean drama, not necessarily in making new claims about gender as a performative act.

Significantly, a consideration of cross-dressing that aligns itself more overtly with the comedic qualities of drag is a strong departure from major critical strains in Renaissance drama. Analysts' interests in cross-dressing, in general, tend to gravitate toward the disorienting effects of gendered layering as it relates to the sex-gender system of Renaissance England, particularly with respect to the disguised heroine trope.<sup>4</sup> There is also substantial critical interest in cross-dressing's ability to satisfy a homoerotic impulse in male spectators, an apparent attraction that helped maintain the boy player's popularity until the Restoration.<sup>5</sup> More recently, a special issue of *Shakespeare Bulletin* (March 2015) guest-edited by Clare McManus and Lucy Munro takes up the subject of

women's presence within the realm of the English Renaissance professional theatre, offering several articles on the vast array of connections between women and theatrical culture.<sup>6</sup> This continual interest in how female characters were represented onstage and what responses these performances elicited from audiences must also take into account the incredible range of possibilities contained within the representative conditions of cross-dressing. As this chapter aims to demonstrate, one of those possibilities is the appearance of cross-dressing as a vehicle for comedy.

In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the audience follows the mechanicals into the forest as they rehearse their version of *The most lamentable comedy and most cruel death of Pyramus and Thisby*. If the title of their chosen play is any indication, we can confidently guess that the paradoxical inclusion of "lamentable comedy" hints that this play may be beyond their dramatic capability—or any company's capability, for that matter. But beyond their ambitious choice of play, the exposition of the mechanicals in Act 1, Scene 2 suggests that their dramaturgical problems are likely grounded in the physical qualities of the players themselves. The player I am most interested in, of course, is Francis Flute:

QUINCE: Francis Flute the bellows-mender.

FLUTE: Here, Peter Quince.

QUINCE: Flute, you must take Thisby on you.

FLUTE: What is Thisby? a wand'ring knight?

QUINCE: It is the lady that Pyramus must love.

FLUTE: Nay, faith; let me not play a woman; I have a beard coming.  
QUINCE: That's all one; you shall play it in a mask, and you may speak as small as you will.  
BOTTOM: And I may hide my face, let me play Thisby too. I'll speak in a monstrous little voice, "Thisne! Thisne! Ah, Pyramus, my lover dear! thy Thisby dear, and lady dear!"  
QUINCE: No, no, you must play Pyramus; and, Flute, you Thisby.  
BOTTOM: Well, proceed. (1.2.34-47)<sup>7</sup>

Because of Flute's remark that he has "a beard coming," we know that he is likely a young man who is old enough to possess a trade (we do not, after all, hear him referred to as an apprentice) but still does not have at least one of the physical marks of manhood. Flute expresses clear disdain over playing the woman ("let me not play a woman"), and his primary frustration seems to be that Quince does not acknowledge his own burgeoning manhood in the form of a beard. There is a sense, too, that Francis Flute has disdain for the fact that, even though he seems to be the youngest of the group, he will nonetheless have to wear a mask as Thisby.<sup>8</sup> As we learn when Bottom chimes in, "I may hide my face, let me play Thisby too," the role almost appears interchangeable by virtue of the female mask Peter Quince seems to envision for the play. This brief exchange reveals two sides to playing the woman: first, an untrained producer-manager, like Quince, thinks that all that must be done to make Flute a convincing woman is a mask and a high voice; and second, playing a woman is conversely presented as a performance feat, which we see in Bottom's exuberant

desire to take on Thisby himself. Francis Flute does not receive another opportunity to combat Quince's choice in this exposition of the mechanicals; he does not speak again for the remainder of the scene.

Overall, the mechanicals (or, as the stage directions call them, "clowns") have a fundamental misunderstanding of the uses of theatre. Much of this is evident when we realize they have little notion of how audiences often suspend their disbelief as a matter of course when attending a play. For example, the discussion of the need for a prologue to explain who each of the players is in real life is of utmost importance during their first rehearsal. In response to Starveling's remark that it may be best to "leave the killing out" of the play, Bottom replies with his solution:

Not a whit! I have a device to make all well. Write me a prologue, and let the prologue seem to say we will do no harm with our swords, and that Pyramus is not kill'd indeed; and for the more better assurance, tell them that I Pyramus am not Pyramus, but Bottom the weaver. This will put them out of fear. (3.1.15-20)

Bottom reveals here that he is assured of the ability of declarative speech in a prologue to ameliorate any potential fears in the audience. The comedy of this moment, of course, comes from the fact that Bottom's proposal for a prologue effectively strips away all theatrical artifice, particularly since the prologue asks the noble spectators to consider Bottom as a humble weaver before ever indulging him for his performance of Pyramus. During the group's subsequent

discussions about how best to represent the lion (without frightening the ladies), Bottom goes a step further in his recommendations. We now have an additional prologue, which will be set within the action of the play itself (as opposed to the beginning), and the goal of this new prologue is to not only state the player's name, but also to make sure the audience sees the player's face. Bottom explains, "you must name his name and half his face must be seem through the lion's neck" (3.1.32-3). In light of Quince's earlier remark that Francis Flute will need to wear a mask in order to play Thisby, the company's desire to expose the artificiality of their lion and their hero would only seem to heighten the possibility that Flute's Thisby makes no concerted effort to accurately perform as a woman.

There also appears to be much confusion over the actual title of their play: *The most lamentable comedy and most cruel death of Pyramus and Thisby*. In this same rehearsal, Bottom points out, "There are things in this comedy of Pyramus and Thisby that will never please," and he goes on to suggest that all of the killing makes this play into something "which the ladies cannot abide" (3.2.8-10).<sup>9</sup> Bottom clearly understands that there are aspects of this "comedy" that do not necessarily seem comic, and yet he does not seem concerned with the fact that the play may not be a comedy after all. There is a clear sense that this choice of title on Shakespeare's part is designed to comically foreshadow how, when the

play is finally performed in Act 5, the play becomes an actual comedy for the spectators in spite of the fact that it was supposed to be “lamentable.”

These clear misunderstandings about the actual medium of theatre have substantial implications for how Quince’s company goes about handling the issue of cross-dressing. On the one hand, they seem reasonably aware of classical dramatic conventions, such as prologues and masks (especially when actors are representing women). Because of this, there appears to be a small amount of dramatic literacy that they bring to their work. And, considering the fact that the play is set in ancient Athens, the dramatic conventions that they do understand fit within the parameters of classical drama.<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, the concerns these players voice to one another reveal a clear lack of sophistication in their dramatic taste (which is expected) as well as basic confusion over what a theatrical event is capable of accomplishing artistically.

The playful exposition of the woefully untalented mechanicals in Acts 1 and 3 anticipates their show-stopping performance in the play’s final act. Peter Quince’s company disperses in horror after their “Pyramus” is discovered with an ass’s head, but they are finally reunited in time to perform the play for Theseus and Hippolyta’s wedding. Michael Dobson notes that the play-within-a-play of Act 5 is “the one chunk of Shakespeare almost guaranteed to get laughs” (120). This is probably why many amateur companies take on



*Midsummer* so regularly. After all, it's hard not to laugh one's way through that final act. Chronicling a few of the more famous "amateurs" of the Pyramus and Thisby vignette, Dobson continues,

This is the bit of Shakespeare that has been performed not only by the likes of Charles Kean or the RSC but by the Crazy Gang, and indeed by those four loyal disciples of the Goons, the Beatles, who in honour of Shakespeare's 400th birthday in 1964 played it as a sketch on a television special. (The Pyramus was Paul; Ringo was Lion, John, Thisbe; George, suitably enough, was Moonshine; and Trevor Peacock made a guest appearance as Wall). (Dobson 120)

For a primetime television special, it makes sense that the producers chose such a popular parodic moment in Shakespeare for the Beatles to act out. The scene is recognizable, the poor acting written into the text is easy to capitalize on in terms of humor, and the prospect of seeing John Lennon as Thisby is obviously entertaining. Dobson's point is well taken, however, since it underscores the enduring comedic power of this scene, one that builds on the entertainment value of watching performers flop.

Although relatively short with respect to playing time, it is significant that the mechanicals are allowed to perform the entirety of "Pyramus and Thisby," even with the addition of their prologue and the rather extended death scene from Bottom's over eager Pyramus. The four lovers and the newly married Hippolyta and Theseus offer their own commentary throughout the play, but the

play itself still proceeds regardless of these comments from the audience. All of this is preceded by Peter Quince's awkward and bumbling prologue:

If we offend, it is with our good will.  
That you should think, we come not to offend,  
But with good will. To show our simple skill,  
That is the true beginning of our end.  
Consider then, we come but in despite.  
We do not come, as minding to content you,  
Our true intent is. All for your delight  
We are not here. That you should here repent you,  
The actors are at hand; and, by their show,  
You shall know all, that you are like to know. (5.1.108-117)

In what is evidently confusion on the part of Peter Quince about the chronological ordering of his lines, we realize that even though Quince understands the purpose of a prologue (i.e., to prevent an audience from taking offense and to offer a summary of the play's events), he self-consciously struggles to shift his speech from prose to verse. Flummoxed at this new way of speaking, Quince's intentions in the prologue fall apart under the pressure of verse. Quince, in these lines, essentially communicates that they come to "offend" with "good will," and that their primary goal is to show their "simple skill" as performers ("That is the true beginning of our end"). His introductory remarks end by indicating that the performers are "not here" for the nobles' "delight", and that the actors themselves will tell them everything "they are like to know" about the quality of the show.

For the purpose of reinforcing my claims about the mechanicals' comedic presentation of cross-dressing, it is worth noting that Quince's prologue reveals two primary qualities of their performance: (1) the prologue's topsy-turvy structure intimates that the mechanicals have only a cursory understanding of dramatic form, and they seem to believe that simply adhering to the conventional form itself is of greater importance than being mindful of the "Pyramus and Thisby" play's content. And (2) the prologue (and subsequently the play-within-a-play itself) offers a wonderful example of Shakespeare experimenting with nearly indecipherable and purposefully bad verse. With respect to Francis Flute's cross-dressing as Thisby, we can then assume that the mechanicals treat cross-dressing as merely a formal requirement of drama, not as something that must be performed with dramatic skill in order to be effective. We might also assume that this prologue announces the poor quality of any of the writing that follows—specifically, the intentionally bad verse that fixates on avoiding subtext or theatrical artifice. Indeed, it also shows their lack of imagination. For example, Snout's performance as Wall works diligently to articulate who he is both as a person (Snout the craftsman who occasionally acts in plays) and as a talking set piece:

WALL: In this same enterlude it doth befall  
That I, one Snout by name, present a wall;  
And such a wall, as I would have you think,  
That had in it a crannied hole or chink,

Through which the lovers, Pyramus and Thisby,  
Did whisper often, very secretly.  
This loam, this rough-cast, and this stone doth show  
That I am that same wall; the truth is so;  
And this the cranny is, right and sinister,  
Through which the fearful lovers are to whisper. (5.1.154-63)

So much of what is comedic about this moment is Snout/Wall's attempts to over-clarify what he represents within the play. Believing that it is not enough simply to announce, "I, one Snout by name, present a wall," Snout goes on to detail how his physical costume ("This loam, this rough-cast, and this stone") is carefully chosen to help confirm that he is indeed the wall. The nobles comment sarcastically on the lack of nuance in Wall's presentation. In response to Theseus's own jibe ("Would you desire lime and hair to speak better?"), Demetrius mockingly refers to Snout/Wall as "the wittiest partition that ever I heard discourse" (5.1.164-6). Wall's hilarious lack of nuance indicates the mechanicals' discomfort with too much artifice. They implicitly distrust the audience to imagine that "[t]his loam, this rough-cast, and this stone" represent a wall, and so they attempt to overcompensate whenever something of significance must be portrayed onstage. (The irony of this with Wall, of course, is that they very easily could have set up a literal wall and done away with the extra part altogether. But then what part would Snout play?)

This overcompensation in the early section of the play-within-a-play anticipates our introduction to the star-crossed (or Wall-crossed) lovers, Pyramus

and Thisby, whose own overcompensation amounts to dialogue that incorrectly references other famous lovers and often contradicts the claims of each other's speeches. Pyramus, upon hearing Thisby when she first enters, famously offers his paradoxical exclamation, "I see a voice! Now will I to the chink, / To spy and I can hear my Thisby's face" (5.1.190-1). The lovers will go on to incorrectly reference Limander (for Leander) and Helen (for Hero), as well as Shafalus (for Cephalus) and Procrus (for Procris). Thisby's choice of Helen instead of Hero reconfigures her line to mean something completely different when she responds to Pyramus:

THISBY: My love thou art, my love I think.

PYRAMUS: Think what thou wilt, I am thy lover's grace;  
And, like Limander, am I trusty still.

THISBY: And I, like Helen, till the Fates me kill. (5.1.193-5)

In an attempt to heighten the romance of their covert encounter at the wall, the lovers drop names of other famous lovers, only to find Thisby ironically referencing Helen (presumably Helen of Troy) as a bastion of constancy. Thisby will once again contradict herself when she promises to meet Pyramus at Ninny's tomb. She says to Pyramus, "'Tide life, 'tide death, I come without delay," a comment that nonsensically suggests that even if she is dead she will come to Ninny's tomb "without delay" (5.1.202). With the lovers' secret meeting complete, Wall helpfully explains that his part is finished, provoking the new Queen Hippolyta to remark that "[t]his is the silliest stuff if ever I heard"

(5.1.207). Theseus's immediate reply to his bride, although phrased as a joke, reveals the nobles' posture for viewing theatre, one that privileges a suspension of disbelief:

THESEUS: The best in this kind are but shadows; and the worst are no worse, if imagination amend them.

HIPPOLYTA: It must be your imagination then, and not theirs.

THESEUS: If we imagine no worse of them than they of themselves, they may pass for excellent men. (5.1. 208-12)

Theseus claims that the "best in this kind [i.e., actors] are but shadows," but he reminds Hippolyta that a strong "imagination" can correct the poor performance of a bad actor. Hippolyta, who matches him in wit in this moment, points out that all of the imaginative work falls on the part of the spectator with performances this bad. This short exchange between Theseus and Hippolyta indicates their willingness as an audience to let their imaginations do most of the work when watching a play. And if the play is less than satisfactory, as is the case with this one, then imagination has the potential to fill a theatrical experience with laughter.

In light of the terrible performance quality of the "Pyramus and Thisby" play, it seems significant that the nobles only slightly make fun of the spectacle, rather than belligerently deride it. This good humor carries through the entirety of the performance, even through Francis Flute's dismal portrayal of a woman. Many of the remarks that precede Thisby's final suicide speech indicate this

scene is miserable to watch, including Demetrius's exclamation, "he for a man, God warr'nt us; she for a woman, God bless us," which uses two phrases commonly used to ward off evil omens (5.1.308-9). Thisby's long speech garners much of its comedy from the unimaginative rhymes the compose it:

Asleep, my love?  
What, dead, my dove?  
O Pyramus, arise!  
Speak, speak! Quite dumb?  
Dead, dead? A tomb  
Must cover thy sweet eyes.  
These lily lips,  
This cherry nose,  
These yellow cowslip cheeks,  
Are gone, are gone!  
Lovers, make moan;  
His eyes were green as leeks.  
O Sisters Three,  
Come, come to me,  
With hands as pale as milk;  
Lay them in gore,  
Since you have shore  
With shears his thread of silk.  
Tongue, not a word!  
Come, trusty sword,  
Come, blade, my breast imbrue!  
    *[Stabs herself.]*  
And farewell friends;  
Thus Thisby ends;  
Adieu, adieu, adieu. (5.1.312-35)

Using exactly the same meter as Pyramus in his own suicide speech, Thisby's final lament is characterized primarily by repetition (both of words and grammatical structure) and rhymes that are hilarious in part because of their

juvenility (i.e., love/dove, cheeks/leeks, milk/silk, etc.). Many of the images Thisby presents are ludicrous when taken at face value, such as the suggestion that death has literally taken away Pyramus's lips, nose, and cheeks ("These lily lips, / This cherry nose, / These yellow cowslip cheeks, / Are gone, are gone!"), rather than just their color. Also, her grotesque request to "O Sisters Three" to come to her and place their "hands as pale as milk" in her "gore" only adds to the silliness of this moment.

Recent film and stage adaptations of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* have experimented with different portrayals of Flute's "Thisby" in Act 5, in some cases interpreting the final scene in such a way that Francis Flute miraculously develops acting skills that enable him to portray Thisby with great seriousness and feminine panache. Michael Hoffman's popular 1999 film version of *Midsummer* (featuring a star-filled cast with the likes of Rupert Everett, Stanley Tucci, Kevin Cline, Michelle Pfeiffer, and Calista Flockhart) makes this exact choice in its representation of Thisby in Act 5, a surprising decision in light of Francis Flute's exposition in the film.<sup>11</sup> In the early scenes of Hoffman's *Midsummer*, Flute (played by Sam Rockwell) appears as an awkward performer who struggles to speak in a "monstrous small voice" as Thisby, much as we would expect him to act if we were only reading the play text rather than watching a film. Hoffman's version of the Act 5 play-within-a-play, however,



offers an unexpected interpretation of the mechanicals' performance, and this new reading hinges on Hoffman's attempt to extrapolate how the actor playing Thisby might respond to the audience's laughter. Throughout the "Pyramus and Thisby" episode in this film adaptation, Flute finds himself the subject of murmuring laughter every time he appears onstage or attempts to speak in a falsetto as Thisby. His costume is also ridiculous, and he is noticeably frustrated as he tries to progress through the play. Near the conclusion of the "Pyramus and Thisby" play, once Pyramus himself has enjoyed his lingering death scene, Flute suddenly lowers the register of his voice and begins to speak Thisby's lines simply and seriously. Removing his wig to indicate that he has placed aside all artificiality, Flute's performance transfixes the nobles and ostensibly redeems the immaturity of the mechanicals' performance.

Connecting Thisby's dramatic reversal in Hoffman's version to the film's apparent desire to emphasize the love plot (for the sake of satisfying popular culture), Sarah Mayo offers her own nuanced description of the play-within-a-play's final scene:

Flute, as Thisbe, quietly drops his ridiculously exaggerated falsetto, takes off his large and cumbersome wig and delivers a valedictory speech worthy of Juliet. Silence descends upon the auditorium, more than one tear is surreptitiously brushed away, and, after an emotionally charged pause, the silence erupts into thunderous applause. The tone of 'Pyramus and Thisbe,' whose performance has earned such derision from Theseus and his fellows with

Lysander and Demetrius, is transformed from comedy to pathos: very tragical mirth becomes very tragical tragedy. (Mayo 296)

Mayo's suggestion that this dramatic choice underscores Hoffman's plans for the film to participate in traditional Hollywood love plots for mass-market appeal is indeed consistent with Hoffman's own remarks about his characters. In an introduction to the published screenplay, Hoffman explains, "Everyone in the play wants to be loved" (Hoffman vii). This "everyone" seems to also include Francis Flute, who, within this interpretation, has a deep desire to offer a genuinely tragic performance in exchange for the audience's affection.

More recently, Julie Taymor's experimental 2013 *Midsummer* for Theatre for a New Audience uses this same dramatic choice in her Act 5 play-within-a-play.<sup>12</sup> Following Pyramus's excessive death scene, in which Bottom draws out his suicide for much longer than necessary, Taymor's direction of Thisby likewise turns the moment into one of great seriousness. During the long speech quoted above in Taymor's production, Francis Flute (as in Hoffman's version, too) removes his feminine wig and bears a short chopped haircut. (In neither Hoffman's film version nor Taymor's stage production do the Francis Flutes wear masks.) Flute then delivers the speech with gravity, performing it as if he were lamenting like Juliet in her own final moments, a point Mayo also emphasizes in her description of the scene in Hoffman's film. When interviewed about this dramatic choice, Taymor explains,

There is a point where the court which is mocking them and laughing get[s] engaged, and it is that last speech of Thisby that turns the page... And finally the court is quiet because they have seen a measure of truth. That is the power of theatre right there.<sup>13</sup>

Taymor does not cite any specific lines that indicate this shift in the court's attention. She is correct to note that the nobles are silent during Thisby's full speech, but they were likewise silent during Pyramus's lines (lines that are equal in length to Thisby's). Sustained attention without the need for interruption is not something of which the court is incapable, and, while they do laugh at the performance, they are generally good humored and supportive of the poor players throughout. Yet Taymor's choice, which is anticipated by Michael Hoffman's 1999 film, is admittedly satisfying for audiences, mainly because it celebrates the mechanicals' amateurism by displaying a brief moment of theatrical transcendence. Taymor herself claims that the mechanicals perform their play "with utter sincerity," and so a brief moment where Francis Flute suddenly reveals an ability to play a woman with great skill takes that "sincerity" to a new level.<sup>14</sup>

Although it is not exactly supported by the text, Taymor and Hoffman's choice here is nonetheless compelling for the sake of my argument. To wit, this choice, as a divergence from traditional readings of this scene, reveals that our default vision of Flute-as-Thisby is that he is an incompetent actor who struggles to play the woman with any semblance of skill. While it is satisfying to imagine

Francis Flute suddenly acquiring the skills necessary to play a woman seriously, this performance shift is unmarked by the play text, which presents Thisby's death scene in a fashion that is textually parallel to Pyramus's. The meter, the amount of speech, the ludicrousness of the images, and the audience's responses suggest that these two deaths do not stray too far from one another in presentation. Ultimately, both Hoffman and Taymor's interpretations are indicative of our own modern desires to see male-as-female Elizabethan cross-dressing done in earnest. What we do not account for in enjoying this modern satisfaction is that Elizabethan audiences would have already been familiar with serious cross-dressed performance, and that they likely would not have sought out that theatrical experience in a moment so cunningly designed to use cross-dressing as a comic vehicle.

Despite the grand humor of Flute-as-Thisby in this scene, there are no existing theories about what Act 5 of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* implies about cross-dressing's comic potential within the performance milieu of Renaissance England. In the remainder of this chapter, then, I demonstrate how cross-dressing might be employed for comedic or parodic ends in a contemporary, all-male production of Shakespeare. My primary goal is to reveal how a minor character (whose own language and behavior gravitate toward the bawdy) might use the text to intuit a performance more closely aligned with "drag," as opposed

to serious “passing” as a woman. The choice of the New Globe Theatre’s filmed 2012 production of *Twelfth Night* as my performance subject is intentional for several reasons. Not only has this performance gained considerable popularity through national theatrical awards and a substantial body of performance criticism (which mostly addresses an earlier performance of the production from the early 2000’s), but it is also now widely accessible by way of the Globe On Screen. Directed by Tim Carroll, this *Twelfth Night* bills itself as an “all-male Original Practices” production, a categorization that immediately invites discussion about the Globe’s efforts at reconstructing “authentic” Shakespearean performance. Judith Rose, in her discussion of the technologies necessary for creating the Globe’s “authentic” performance, stresses that the costuming and makeup of Carroll’s production accentuates the artificiality of cross-dressing in general. For example, on the subject of white face powder worn by the production’s female characters, Rose notes that “[t]he effect, then and now, is one of high artificiality, which, of course, is common to the critiques of female ‘face painting’ in the period” (Rose 213). But Rose concedes that “perhaps the very artificiality of the makeup and costuming was exactly the point—both underlined the indeterminacy of the body beneath the disguise” (213). For twenty-first-century audiences who are more used to the homoerotic underpinnings of female actors playing the women in productions of *Twelfth*

*Night*, this emphasis on artificiality heightens an audience's understanding of the performativity of gender, a concept anticipated by theorists like Butler.

Interestingly, the Carroll production invites this recognition of artificiality before the play even begins, allowing the audience to watch the actors dress themselves and put on their make-up, including the white face (for women and some of the men, including Sir Andrew and Sebastian) noted above. In light of these dramaturgical choices, Tim Carroll's *Twelfth Night* has gained its considerable notoriety in large part because of its willingness to defamiliarize audiences from the *Twelfth Night* they think they know with a *Twelfth Night* that presents itself as close to the original as possible.

Because much has already been written about how Carroll's "Original Practices" version of *Twelfth Night* enhances our understanding of the play in general (especially its homoerotic underpinnings), my intention here is to narrow the focus to a single character: the bawdy and love-lorn trickster Maria. The great value of having access to a widely released, high-quality recording of an award-winning production like this one is that it allows us the opportunity to interrogate a particular performance apart from the constraints of real-time viewing. (To be sure, this method of watching a recording does, however, extract us from the joys of a live theatrical experience.) The reader has likely noticed by this point that my specific interest in Maria stems from the

implications of the first half of this chapter: Francis Flute's hilarious cross-dressed performance as Thisby suggests that male-as-female cross-dressing was occasionally a vehicle for comedy, to the extent that less-than-convincing cross-dressing (i.e., drag) may have been a dramaturgical tendency for some comedic female characters during the English Renaissance. My conviction is that Paul Chahidi's performance as Maria in Carroll's *Twelfth Night* is the ideal performance vehicle for interrogating this theory.

I am certainly not the first to notice the overall mannishness of Paul Chahidi's Maria. James C. Bulman, for example, offers an excellent general description of Chahidi from the 2002 production. (It is quoted below.) At this point, it is important to re-emphasize that my reference point for the present chapter is a *revival* of the production Bulman cites. Although there are a few significant differences in performance choices between the 2002 and 2012 productions (which I highlight in the pages that follow), the continuity of Chahidi's interpretation of Maria is reasonably consistent between the two productions. Bulman's general description of Chahidi's Maria offers a concise summary of the performance effect:

[T]he actor playing Maria, Paul Chahidi, drew much of the humor of his performance from drag. A stocky man whose Maria was middle-aged and matronly, he made no effort to disguise the rich timbre of his baritone voice nor, despite the white make-up, which the Globe's program noted was authentically Elizabethan, to fully disguise his dark beard. [...] The comedy of Chahidi/Maria's

interactions with Sirs Toby and Andrew derived in part from his scarcely concealed masculinity, reminiscent not so much of cross-dressers who try to “pass” for women today as of “a nineteenth-century pantomime Dame” or comedians such as Dame Edna who camp it up in women’s clothing. Drag is a sly parody of femininity: at once exaggerated and conscious of its own theatricality, it does not expect to be taken seriously. The delight spectators took in Maria’s performance sprang from the parodic nature of her disguise, which made little effort at mimetic credibility. (Bulman 238)<sup>15</sup>

This “scarcely concealed masculinity” is emphasized before the play even begins.

Upstage windows at the Globe Theater reveal the actors putting the finishing touches on their costumes, allowing the audience to see the literal change these male actors make into their female personages. Another factor that heightens the artificiality of the female characters is the age of the players. Perhaps because the version of *Twelfth Night* that I am investigating was revived nearly a decade after its initial debut at the Globe, the players are noticeably older than what we might expect for a reproduction of the original practices of the Renaissance stage. This age gap is most recognizable in the celebrated performance of Mark Rylance.

Although he is inarguably hilarious as the grieving Olivia, his pursed falsetto and his careful posture cannot eliminate the reality that he is a man in his mid-fifties. Thus, it is also important to note that the age of the actors playing women in Carroll’s *Twelfth Night* is likely a strong departure from the age range of “boy” actors that probably appeared on Shakespeare’s stage. As David Kathman has suggested, the age range for boy actors was probably quite large,



with boy players no younger than twelve and no older than twenty-two.

Kathman goes on to suggest a median age of sixteen or seventeen. The question, however, of the age of the male player who tended to play older female roles, such as Lady Capulet, Macbeth's Witches, Juliet's Nurse, Queen Margaret, or Mistress Quickly is still unanswered within the realm of textual and historical evidence. It is still possible to speculate that the nature of these particular female characters perhaps necessitated an older player—in other words, an actor who was no longer a “boy.” Mark Rylance himself believes in a wider age range, a significant claim considering the fact that he played Olivia while in his fifties.

In an interview with Susan Craig, Rylance explains,

Would you use a young boy to play the role of Juliet? Yes, you would. And the nurse? No! I don't think so. Some [boy actors] would have remained interested in playing women as they got older. But if I am to play a woman again, it would be a part like the nurse [...] I think there was a range in the ages of boys playing women.<sup>16</sup>

This assumption present in Rylance's remarks coincides with Tim Carroll's decision to cast the middle-aged Paul Chahidi as Maria. To wit, this is not a vision of Maria that could be replicated by a sixteen or seventeen year-old boy actor. For Carroll's production, this is a part for a man.

Chahidi's initial entrance as Maria, in which the character rebukes Sir Toby (“By my troth, Sir Toby, you must come in earlier o' nights. Your cousin, my lady, takes great exceptions to your ill hours”) actually earns the first laugh

in this production (1.3.3-5). The content of the lines Maria speaks contains no punch lines. Instead, they serve the very practical function of naming the character we have just met (Sir Toby) and casually explicating to the audience his relationship to her lady (cousin). The lines also introduce Sir Toby's qualities as a character: he stays out late, presumably reveling, and he is somewhat dependent upon the hospitality of Maria's "lady," who is indeed the authority figure in the house. If the line itself is purely informative, then the laugh it garners from the audience can only come from the appearance of the player that delivers it. In his first moments on stage, Chahidi appears as the second cross-dressed player the audience has seen thus far. Already introduced to Viola, a young Johnny Flynn who presents his female character with shyness and stillness, the audience views the appearance of this second cross-dressed player in relation to the seriousness of the first. Like the description Bulman provides above, Chahidi's Maria is "stocky" and noticeably male. But the performance choice that garners this initial laugh is the way in which Maria simply crosses the stage. While Viola's movements are unremarkable in her first conversation with the Sea Captain, Maria walks fluidly on her tiptoes, creating a visual effect of the female servant gliding across the stage thanks to the full coverage of her gown.<sup>17</sup> This obviously contrived vision of how noblewomen walk (which Rylance's Olivia also replicates with great comedic effect) is what spurs the audience to

laughter, and this first moment with Maria onstage sets up the rest of the audience's reception of "her" as an obviously contrived and mildly over-exaggerated vision of female carriage.

The audience in the Globe on Screen's recording of Carroll's *Twelfth Night* seems to enjoy every opportunity to laugh at Maria's obvious mannishness in her first scene. Surprisingly, Sir Toby garners a laugh merely for admonishing Maria with "What, wench!"; and so does Sir Andrew when he remarks to Maria, "Bless you, fair shrew" (1.3.39, 43). The audience finds these feminine diminutives hilarious when applied to the obviously male and big-bodied Paul Chahidi. Admittedly, these first comedic moments arise primarily from the audience's lack of familiarity with witnessing onstage cross-dressing. It is easy to intuit that many of these initial laughs are indebted to the novelty of seeing a decidedly unfeminine man attempt to be feminine. And yet the performers go on to capitalize on the audience's willingness to laugh at Maria's mannishness almost immediately in the exchange between Sir Andrew and Maria:

SIR ANDREW: An you part so, mistress, I would I might never draw sword again. Fair lady, do you think you have fools in hand?

MARIA: Sir, I have not you by th' hand.

SIR ANDREW: Marry, but you shall have, and here's my hand.

MARIA: Now, sir, thought is free. I pray you, bring your hand to th' buttery-bar and let it drink.

SIR ANDREW: Wherefore, sweetheart? What's your metaphor?

MARIA: It's dry, sir.

SIR ANDREW: Why, I think so. I am not such an ass but I can keep my hand dry. But what's your jest?

MARIA: A dry jest, sir.

SIR ANDREW: Are you full of them?

MARIA: Ay, sir, I have them at my fingers' ends. Marry, now I let go your hand, I am barren. (1.3.58-72)

Frequently glossed as a sexually charged jest between Maria and Sir Andrew, Maria's suggestion that Sir Andrew "bring [his] hand to th' buttery-bar and let it drink" carries the implication that the "buttery-bar" is her bosom. Chahidi's Maria, following the words "buttery-bar," slowly looks down at her breasts and then returns her gaze to Sir Andrew before uttering huskily, "and let it drink." Bulman reports that in the earlier 2002 production, Maria literally puts Sir Andrew's hand on her obviously male bosom (a sort of grotesque "man cleavage," if you will allow the coarseness of the phrase), which provokes Andrew to a state of shock over his sudden awareness that there are no real female breasts to be found (Bulman 238). Significantly, there is no groping in this recording of the 2012 revival, a directorial choice that suggests that (1) there is comedy enough in the lines themselves or (2) that perhaps it is better to preserve some of Maria's feminine dignity instead of having her perform what Bulman calls a "brazenly unfeminine" action (238). Even without this "brazen" physicality, however, the exchange still manages to garner several laughs on the basis of the lines' apparent acknowledgement of Maria's maleness. Because "she" is actually a "he," the "buttery-bar" cannot help but be "dry," as Maria retorts. Even Maria's final remark that she is "barren" doubly refers to the fact

that she has let go of Sir Andrew's hand and the reality that, since a man plays her, she is "barren" as a woman.

Maria's cross-dressed comedy is also apparent in the trio scene of 1.5, in which Maria and Olivia receive the disguised Viola, who carries declarations of love from the Count. In his direction, Carroll chooses to interpret Viola/Cesario's confusion over who is the lady of the house as an opportunity to highlight Maria's unattractiveness. When Viola inquires after "the honorable lady of the house," Olivia replies, "Speak to me. I shall answer for her" (1.5.156-57). While Maria is seated in Olivia's preferred seat, Rylance's Olivia (covered in her veil) sits off to side. Poor Viola struggles to address Maria as a "[m]ost radiant, exquisite, and unmatchable beauty," and the audience cannot help but laugh at the fact that these praises are addressed to the matronly Maria (1.5.158). Later, the mannishness of Maria is referenced when Viola, to Olivia, asks for "[s]ome mollification for [her] giant," evidently referring to the size of Chahidi's Maria (1.5.188).<sup>18</sup>

One directorial choice that remains intact between the 2002 production and the filmed revival in 2012 is a kiss between Sir Toby and Maria in 2.3. Sir Toby remarks to Maria, "Good night, Penthesilea," and then kisses her softly before she departs. There is no such stage direction in the play text itself, but Tim Carroll's directorial choice nonetheless capitalizes on the comic potential of

the cross-dressed Chahidi. In his account of this moment in *Shakespeare Re-Dressed*, James Bulman writes that “[t]he view of a soused Sir Toby kissing a drag Maria was funny enough; but his looking puzzled by the kiss—perhaps because he had felt the beard—won applause” (239). There is no five o’clock shadow to be found on Chahidi’s Maria in the 2012 revival. Indeed, the high-resolution quality of the film itself gives viewers the opportunity to see the actors under a microscope. Perhaps in preparation for the filming, Chahidi’s face is smooth and shiny, with the only “male” marker on his face being a slight glimpse of short cut side-burns that peek out from under his wig. Even these side-burns are noticeable only because we, as film viewers, are privy to a close-up. Beards (or no beards) aside, the 2012 version capitalizes on the comedy of Chahidi’s cross-dressing in this moment by slightly different means. Following the kiss itself, Chahidi turns downstage to smirk in the direction of the audience. On his nose and cheeks is a generous smudge of red make-up, transferred from Sir Toby’s face (the red make-up on Sir Toby is meant to imply his drunkenness).<sup>19</sup> With his smirking face newly smudged with red makeup, Chahidi offers a deep baritone “heh” to the audience, a sound indicative not only of surprise, but also perhaps of male conquest. Compared to the 2002 production, in which Sir Toby’s confusion in this moment seems to provoke most of the humor, the 2012 production evidently turns the comedic focus to Maria, making her veiled

masculinity the source of the audience's laughter. Also significant in this brief scene is Sir Toby's decision to call Maria "Penthesilea," or Queen of the Amazons. While a note to *The Norton Shakespeare's* text of the play suggests that this is "a joke about Maria's small size," the fact that Sir Toby calls Maria an Amazon takes on new significance when Maria herself is clearly a man-woman—or, an "Amazon" in the deepest sense of the word.<sup>20</sup>

The character of Maria has limited stage time in the middle section of *Twelfth Night*, appearing briefly to drop the letter she feigns for Malvolio in the garden (2.5) and then also to report that the letter has produced the intended effects on the poor steward (3.2 and 3.4). But Tim Carroll's direction deliberately ignores Shakespeare's stage directions in the final scene of the play, which typically leave Maria offstage. Carroll instead keeps Maria onstage even longer than Sir Toby, very nearly all the way to the end. While Fabian's final speech in 5.1 is usually viewed as a messenger speech, one that accounts for the actions of characters who are no longer onstage, Carroll accompanies Fabian's narration with the presence of Maria herself. To Olivia, Fabian explains,

FABIAN: Good madam, hear me speak,  
And let no quarrel nor no brawl to come  
Taint the condition of this present hour,  
Which I have wondered at. In hope it shall not,  
Most freely I confess myself and Toby  
Set this device against Malvolio here,  
Upon some stubborn and uncourteous parts  
We had conceived against him. Maria writ

The letter at Sir Toby's great importance,  
In recompence where of he hath married her. (5.1.343-52)

By this point in the speech, Carroll's direction has Fabian bringing Maria forward by the hand so that she is facing downstage. At the mention of "he hath married her," Fabian pauses, allowing Chahidi's Maria to glibly exclaim, "hooray," in low and less than enthusiastic tones. This added speech gains a hearty laugh from the audience, in part because Maria's presence onstage lets us visualize what it really would be like for this particular Maria to marry the Sir Toby we have grown to know over the course of the play.

Despite the overall comedy of Chahidi's Maria in this 2012 production, Chahidi also imparts moments of great seriousness into his characterization of Olivia's chambermaid. To be frank, there are instances where Chahidi slips away from a parodic performance akin to drag and instead offers the audience a surprisingly accurate portrayal of a matronly and slightly awkward, but nonetheless earnest, vision of middle-aged womanhood. The fact that this 2012 performance resists the comedic opportunities of allowing Chahidi to perform with a five o'clock shadow (he is deftly clean shaven in the recorded performance) or the absence of the blocking choice to have Maria literally put Sir Andrew's hand on her "breasts" (which Bulman reports occurs in the 2002 iteration) suggests that Tim Carroll's direction has backed off from the relentless pursuit of comedy by means of cross-dressing. For instance, in her first scene,



with a voice crack that implies she is on the brink of tears, Maria earnestly rebukes Sir Toby when she says, “That quaffing and drinking will undo you” (1.3.13). Chahidi’s delivery communicates Maria’s genuine regard for Sir Toby’s well-being, even in spite of his own carelessness. Maria is also noticeably chastened by Malvolio’s rebukes to her in 2.3, in which he threatens to tell Olivia of Maria’s behavior. While many productions of the play employ her response, “Go shake your ears,” as a comic jab at Malvolio once he exits, Chahidi instead delivers this line with a sense of anguish, suggesting that Maria really is threatened by Malvolio’s rebuke (2.3.116). These small breakthrough moments in which the audience is encouraged to treat Maria with deep seriousness are small in number, but they nonetheless affect an audience’s reception of cross-dressed performance. These moments of seriousness also align with the overall tone of Carroll’s production, which thoughtfully emphasizes the strange tones of mourning and sadness that underscore *Twelfth Night*.

All in all, though, Tim Carroll’s *Twelfth Night* proves just how much comedy a director can rouse from the use of cross-dressed performance, and this is evidenced by the performances of both Mark Rylance as Olivia and Paul Chahidi as Maria. In beginning this chapter with a discussion of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*’s clear use of cross-dressing for comic effect, my intention has been to anticipate the types of choices directors might make when they stage plays

within the dramaturgical constraints of cross-dressing. Of course, we cannot know exactly how the original production of *Twelfth Night* treated cross-dressing, but we can make some sound speculations based on our awareness of instances that include comedic cross-dressing, such as the Pyramus and Thisby play in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (which clearly revels in the mishaps of playing “the lady” poorly) and our attention to dialogue between male characters and female characters that seems to openly acknowledge the bodily reality of the players (such as Maria’s suggestion to Sir Andrew that he come to the “buttery-bar and drink”). What is fascinating about the New Globe’s attempts at “Original Practices” productions is that they seem to intuit the comic potential of cross-dressing in ways Shakespeare scholars have perhaps left under-acknowledged.

The Globe’s performance laboratory allows contemporary theatregoers and scholars to question what new insights the actual practice of performance can teach us about the Shakespearean texts we think we already know. When these performances are read alongside the text itself, we can better perceive the choices a director can make in our century as well as in Shakespeare’s own. The subject of theatrical cross-dressing on the English Renaissance professional stage has the opportunity to be further elucidated when we unite performance studies with a careful reading of the text. Surprisingly, Mark Rylance himself has acknowledged the role Renaissance scholars can play in uplifting performance

laboratories such as the New Globe. In a 2008 interview with Susan Craig for *Shakespeare Newsletter*, he reflects on Sam Wanamaker (the former Artistic Director of the Globe) and the desire to stage performances based on Renaissance theatrical practices:

Sam Wanamaker wanted the Globe to be a challenge—to be something new, and he really went to extreme pains that it would be built in original materials with original craft. That costs a lot more, and he had no money. So when he died, we got the job—my wife Claire and the designer of the Globe, Jenny Tiramani. I said that we can't be lazy about this; we have to push into new territory...that's what he wants us to do, we thought: to take chances. The all-male stuff, all of the clothing...men playing women—the stuff critics mocked completely at the time...well, we just felt that was the brief of the place. We believed in what we were doing... But the scholastic world was the first to embrace that. Sam was an actor, but when he sought support, he got enormous support from the scholastic world, who had been interested for ages about what playing was like at the Globe. I only wish my fellow actors were as interested as the scholastic world because I think there is an enormous amount to be gained.<sup>21</sup>

Rylance's reflections here are indicative of a desire to better understand Shakespeare's plays in their original performances, an honorable desire shared between theatre practitioners and scholars alike. As I hope I have established clearly over the course of the present chapter (and in the chapters that precede it), my intention in proposing a new paradigm for theatrical cross-dressing in the English Renaissance is to offer readers of Shakespeare a more nuanced conception of what we might have seen on Shakespeare's original stage. Even though we cannot literally sit in an original production and witness for ourselves

how cross-dressing was carried out in all-male companies, we can honor the text that is left behind by acknowledging its amphibious qualities as a piece of dramatic literature. One of the most overt ways we can pay reverence to that plurality is by offering sustained critical attention to how contemporary “Original Practices” productions might be understood alongside that text. As Rylance himself says, “there is an enormous amount to be gained.”

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The subject of “authenticity” in contemporary performances of Shakespeare is explored at-length in Rob Conkie’s *The Globe Theatre Project: Shakespeare and Authenticity*.

<sup>2</sup> Drouin cites Butler specifically on this point. In *Gender Trouble*, Butler writes, “drag fully subverts the distinction between inner and outer psychic space and effectively mocks both the expressive model of gender and the notion of a true gender identity” (174). See also David Cressy’s “Gender Trouble and Cross-Dressing in Early Modern England.” *Journal of British Studies* 35.4 (1996): 438-65.

<sup>3</sup> Marjorie Garber’s excellent book, *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety*, offers a thorough discussion of “drag” from the Renaissance to today.

<sup>4</sup> See, for instance, Jean Howard’s influential essay, “Crossdressing, The Theatre, and Gender Struggle in Early Modern England” (*Shakespeare Quarterly* 39.4 [1988]: 418-440), in which she claims that cross-dressing was indicative of “a sex-gender system under pressure” (418). Also significant for understanding the possible function of cross-dressing in a society anxious about gender fluidity are the works of Laura Levine (*Men in Women’s Clothing: Anti-Theatricality and Effeminization, 1579-1642*. New York: Cambridge UP, 1994), Phyllis Rackin (“Androgyny, Mimesis, and the Marriage of the Boy Heroine on the English Renaissance Stage.” *PMLA* 102 [1987]: 29-41), and Catherine Belsey (“Disrupting Sexual Difference: Meaning and Gender in the Comedies.” *Alternative Shakespeares*. Ed. John Drakakis. London: Methuen, 1986: 166-90).

<sup>5</sup> For example, see Lisa Jardine’s influential *Still Harping on Daughters: Women and Drama in the Age of Shakespeare* (Totowa, NJ: Barnes and Noble Books, 1983) or Stephen Orgel’s *Impersonations: The Performance of Gender in Shakespeare’s England* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1996).

<sup>6</sup> Three articles from this special issue that specifically address the question of how noblewomen might have been performed are Roberta Baker’s “The ‘Play-Boy,’ the Female Performer, and the Art of Portraying a Lady,” James Stokes’ “The Ongoing Exploration of Women and Performance in Early Modern England: Evidence, Issues, and Questions,” and Sophie Tomlinson’s “The Actress and Baroque Aesthetic Effects in Renaissance Drama.”

<sup>7</sup> All quotations from Shakespeare's plays are from *The Norton Shakespeare*, Third Edition.

<sup>8</sup> Interestingly, there is no indication that Flute actually wears a mask during the rude mechanicals' performance at the end of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. We are left to assume, perhaps, that this detail gets pushed to the wayside as the play progresses.

<sup>9</sup> Connecting the rude mechanicals to *Midsummer's* literal context of Renaissance England, Marcia McDonald points out that "[w]hile these scenes are often highlighted as evidence of the mechanicals' ignorance about the theater, the scenes actually reveal an awareness of the 'facts' of the stage for the mid-1590s: handling words and the icons of State (lions and moonshine) could quite likely arouse someone's attention. In the first rehearsal, the 'lion's part' galvanizes their concern; if they 'fright the duchess and the ladies,' they fear being hanged" (McDonald 95).

<sup>10</sup> Perhaps because the "Pyramus and Thisby" episode is overwhelmingly designed to be a comedic interlude in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, it has seldom been considered in light of the established dramatic theory of the classical setting Shakespeare chooses for his play: Aristotle's *Poetics*. We have no clear evidence that Shakespeare himself read the *Poetics*, but it is reasonable to speculate that he was familiar with its basic principles. Indeed, Shakespeare's oeuvre indicates that he understood many of the key components of the classical tragic form; what we do not know, however, is whether he learned these formulas through imitation of other Renaissance playwrights or if he internalized the prescriptions of the *Poetics* on his own. Regardless of whether Shakespeare himself was fluent in Aristotle's dramatic theories, the mechanicals do seem to be aware of the fact that Aristotle preferred tragedy as a superior form, that only men can be actors (even if they must play women while wearing masks), and they do understand the necessary care with which they must treat the cathartic death scenes of Pyramus and Thisby respectively. But the mechanicals' chief concerns in their discussions of the play are connected to spectacle, not to the play's content. They are worried about how they will represent the lion and his roar, how they will affect Thisby's femaleness through the use of a mask, how they will embellish their prologues, and how they plan to represent moonshine if the moon itself will not be full on the night of their performance. Of the six components of tragedy Aristotle describes in his *Poetics*, "spectacle" (or, *opsis*) is deemed the least artistic, and yet spectacle, for our country players, seems to be foundational aspect of what makes a play a play. As a potential parody of

Aristotle's *Poetics*, then, the "Pyramus and Thisby" play-within-a-play makes itself a prime focal point for Shakespeare's own critiques of dramatic performance within the theatrical situation of the English Renaissance. With respect to my own argument about what this episode can teach us about the comedic potential of cross-dressing, Shakespeare's apparent attempt to connect this hilarious play-within-a-play with a poor reading of the *Poetics* suggests that cross-dressing is a theatrical art which requires great skill to accomplish. Conversely, the mechanicals' pitiable understanding of the *Poetics* allows for Shakespeare to also demonstrate the comedic value of playing the woman poorly, and this phenomenon's appearance in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* suggests that the spectacle of "drag" is a useful humorous strategy for plays in general.

With respect to whether or not Shakespeare was literate in the conventions of classical drama, T. W. Baldwin's *Shakespeare's Small Latine and Lesse Greeke* (1944) offers a strong overview of the grammar school education Shakespeare might have received, one that would have included a general introduction to classical drama.

<sup>11</sup> Hoffman's 1999 film has produced a reasonable amount of critical literature on the topic of adapting *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Stephen Buhler notes that the aesthetic of the film, and its treatment of comedy, is indebted to Kenneth Branagh's brand of Shakespearean film, particularly the choice of setting. Buhler notes that "neither Hoffman nor Branagh wish to give audiences any further excuse to stay away from Shakespeare," and that one of the primary ways these two directors adapt Shakespeare is by casting "exceptionally nice, sensitive guys" as the male players, thereby heightening the impact of the play's female characters (50). Related to Buhler's claim, Sarah Mayo has noted Hoffman's attempts at negotiating *Midsummer* for the context of popular culture; Mayo suggests that while Hoffman's film attempts to please popular Hollywood culture by emphasizing the traditional love plot, he nonetheless couches his film within the semiotics of high culture (especially classical referents) (296). For a general discussion of popular culture within the *Elizabethan* context of *Midsummer*, see Mary Ellen Lamb's "Taken by the fairies: fairy practices and the production of popular culture in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 51.3 (2000): 277-312. For a concise critical treatment of Hoffman's film whose publication is concurrent with the film's release, see Jim Welsh's "'Ill met by moonlight': Michael Hoffman's *Dream*." *Literature-Film Quarterly* 27.2 (1999): 159-61.

<sup>12</sup> For more on Taymor's specific understanding of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, see her interview with Rob Rosenbaum in *Smithsonian Magazine* (December 2013). Her ideograph (central image) for the play itself is a bedsheet, which comes to life in the play's design. Speaking to Rosenbaum, Taymor explains, "The audience is on three sides and it's basically a magic black box, like a Japanese lacquered black box, that has holds and windows and traps. But we're using the idea there's a prologue which is a bed. [...] This character [Puck] is sleeping in a bed and from out of the earth trees push the mattress up and it floats, and then the bedsheets get attached and the mechanicals—the real mechanicals, my workmen—pull out the sheet and it becomes a canopy which becomes the sky. What I'm trying to do is what I think the play does so brilliantly—it goes from the poetic to the mundane, from the magical to the banal, kind of gossamer and intangible to the concrete and, you know, gaudy and real."

<sup>13</sup> This interview with Julie Taymor appears in "A *Midsummer Night's Dream* with Hugh Bonneville," from *Shakespeare Uncovered, Season Two*.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> For the sake of clear citation methods, I should note that this passage originally appears (in a slightly different form) in Bulman's contribution to *A Companion to Shakespeare and Performance* (Ed. Hodgdon and Worthen), titled "Queering the Audience: All-Male Casts in Recent Productions of Shakespeare." Bulman also includes a much expanded version of this chapter in his own edited volume, *Shakespeare Re-Dressed*, titled "Unsex Me Here: Male Cross-Dressing at the New Globe." This quotation is from the latter version of the piece.

<sup>16</sup> This interview appears in the Spring-Summer 2010 issue of *Shakespeare Newsletter*. In its digitally archived form, no specific page numbers are available.

<sup>17</sup> In the interview with Susan Craig for *Shakespeare Newsletter* (quoted toward the end of this essay), Mark Rylance suggests that the "walk" of the women in the play was inspired by Japanese theatrical representations of women.

<sup>18</sup> The note to "giant" in *The Norton Shakespeare* suggests that its use is "mocking Maria's diminutive size," and yet there is not necessarily any indication in the text that Maria is meant to be of small stature. Nonetheless, "giant" cannot help but be comic when applied to a stocky Maria such as the one



represented by Chahidi. (For the specific note, see *The Norton Shakespeare, Third Edition*, page 1928).

<sup>19</sup> This same instance of smudged makeup between the lovers happens when Olivia kisses Sebastian (whom she thinks is Cesario) later in the play. Again, these stage directions are not in the play text; they are Carroll's additions.

<sup>20</sup> This joke *would* be ironically funny if the actor playing Maria were of small stature. In the case of Paul Chahidi as Maria, it seems to knowingly acknowledge the obvious cross-dressing.

<sup>21</sup> The entirety of this excellent interview reveals a great deal about Rylance's preparation for playing female roles, particularly Cleopatra and Olivia. Somewhat serendipitously, this interview occurred only a few weeks after Rylance earned his first Tony Award; now, Rylance has a second Tony Award (from 2014) for his performance of Olivia in *Twelfth Night* on Broadway.

## CHAPTER SIX

### Female Falstaffs: Identifying the “Man-Woman” in English Renaissance Drama

There are many female characters throughout the corpus of Renaissance drama that we might conceive of as more mannish than others. Often marginal and presented primarily in comic vignettes, these characters offer an exaggerated artifice slightly more suited to spectacle than drama. Consonant with suggestions made in the previous chapter, this spectacle was connected frequently with physical comedy and appears to make few apologies about the male player masquerading as a woman.<sup>1</sup> We see this in the intentional comic show of the “Pyramus and Thisby” vignette in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, and, in our own century, we see it in Paul Chahidi’s performance as Maria (and even Mark Rylance’s Olivia) in the New Globe Theatre’s 2012 *Twelfth Night*. In these instances from the previous chapter, the appearance of theatrical cross-dressing becomes a vehicle for comedy that is supported by the text itself, and the comedy of these characters seems to gain considerable traction from the noticeability of the male player performing as a woman. Thus, my purpose in this final chapter is to extend the interests of the previous section to identify other possible comedic and/or grotesque instances of the “man-woman” in Renaissance drama.

Chapter Five (“Cross-Dressing for Comic Effect”) claimed that the term “drag” was the most appropriate designation for this particular strain of theatrical cross-dressing, and I intend to continue using it for this final chapter. For drag, as Jennifer Drouin explains, is “self-referential and sometimes parodic,” designed to garner laughs or self-consciously invite suspicions about the performativity of gender; Drouin continues, “unlike people who pass [as the opposite gender], drag queens and drag kings tend to highlight their artificiality rather than conceal it” (Drouin 26).<sup>2</sup> Perhaps surprisingly, the term “drag” has been used in reference to Early Modern male players as early as 1968, at which time Roger Barker published *Drag: A History of Female Impersonation on the Stage*. My central argument in this chapter is that we can recognize instances of drag (as opposed to merely cross-dressing) by way of language that directly or indirectly invites the audience to meditate on the literal body of the “man-woman” in question. Specifically, these instances arise when the female characters themselves or their surrounding characters point to physical characteristics that are distinctly unfeminine, at least when compared to more faithful depictions of (mostly) noblewomen characters (see Chapter Four: “Faithful Feminine Artifice in English Renaissance Tragedy”).<sup>3</sup> Many of the characters I address in this chapter could be described as grotesque or vulgar, and much of our sense of

these characters' presentation is founded upon what we learn about them from the play texts.<sup>4</sup>

In the introduction to this dissertation, I suggested that one of the easiest characters to visualize within this categorization is Ursula in Ben Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair*. The occasionally grotesque qualities of *Bartholomew Fair*'s carnival setting anticipate Ursula's characterization as an ogreish woman in the first place, and her own actions throughout the comedy suggest that her revolting behavior is best suited to an onstage representation that comically highlights her mannishness. Her name, Ursula, which means "she-bear," also implies that this woman was likely larger and more foreboding than normal. When she is first introduced at her booth at the fair, she begins by calling out for ale:

NIGHTINGALE: How now, Ursula? In a heat, in a heat?

URSULA: [*to Mooncalf*] My chair, you false faucet, you, and my morning's draft, quickly, a bottle of ale, to quench me, rascal.  
[*Mooncalf disappears*]

URSULA: [*to Nightingale*] I am all fire and fat, Nightingale. I shall e'en melt away to the first woman, a rib, again, I am afraid. I do water the ground in knots, as I go, like a great garden pot; you may follow me by the S's I make. (2.2.48-55)<sup>5</sup>

The impression we get from her introduction is much like our first impression of Sir John Falstaff in *Henry IV Part I*, particularly the claim that she is "all fire and fat." Falstaff is clearly fat, a quality we learn within his first moments on stage:

FALSTAFF: Now, Hal, what time of day is it, lad?

PRINCE HAL: Thou art so fat-witted with drinking of old sack, and unbuttoning thee after supper, and sleeping upon benches after noon, that thou has forgotten to demand that truly which thou wouldst truly know. What a devil hast thou to do with the time of the day? (1.2.1-6)<sup>6</sup>

Indeed, reading these two introductions alongside each other subtly implies that the notion of Ursula as a “female Falstaff” is not too far off the mark. But what is most interesting about her introduction is its immediate evocation of the grotesque. Not only is she “all fire and fat,” but also she disgustingly “water[s] the ground with knots...like a great garden pot,” shamelessly urinating publicly. The grotesqueness we witness with Ursula’s characterization fits neatly with a theory of her performance that accentuates the player’s masculinity for the purpose of comedy. And this connection between the grotesque and burlesque masculinity seems similarly applicable to other female characters throughout Renaissance drama.

Structurally, I have organized this chapter around several female figures whose characterizations in the text invite the suspicion of a comically or grotesquely “exposed” masculinity: Ursula in *Bartholomew Fair*, Mistress Quickly in the Second Henriad, and, to a lesser degree, the witches in *Macbeth*.

Furthermore, to accentuate my suggestion that our imagistic understanding of these women’s bodies is a vehicle for perceiving their transvestism, I incorporate the earliest visual rendering of Mistress Quickly, which reveals that artists

potentially took the text to heart in representing these women visually. With respect to my larger argument for a new paradigm of understanding cross-dressing on the English Renaissance professional stage, these findings further destabilize the narrow assumption that all theatrical cross-dressing was treated the same, whether a male actor, for example, played Juliet or the Nurse.

The title of this chapter, “Female Falstaffs,” is intentional for several reasons. First and foremost, in all of Renaissance drama there is no character whose representation in the text invites more reflection on his grotesque and corpulent body than Sir John Falstaff.<sup>7</sup> And perhaps more significantly, Falstaff himself briefly introduces the comic potential of cross-dressing in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, in which he is dressed as “the fat woman of Brentford” by the conniving Mistresses Ford and Page, only to discover that Master Ford “swears she’s a witch, forbade her [Mistress Ford’s] house, and hath threatened to beat her” (4.1.64, 75-6). This is exactly what happens when Falstaff enters as the “fat woman”:

FORD: I’ll prat her! [*FORD beats FALSTAFF with a cudgel.*] Out of my door, you witch, you rag, you baggage, you polecat, you runion, out, out! I’ll conjure you! I’ll fortune tell you! (4.1.161-3)

While we do not know exactly how this woman has offended Master Ford to the point of such fury, we do know that he has a general dislike of her as a “witch” (“I’ll conjure you! I’ll fortune tell you!”). The “fat woman of Brentford’s”

corpulent appearance, which evidently matches the size of Falstaff himself, underscores her precarious position as a fortune-telling witch. In a joke that anticipates the bearded representation of *Macbeth's* own Weird Sisters, we learn that Falstaff's barely concealed beard only accentuates Ford's and Evans' perception of him as a woman who is grotesque and dangerous:

FORD: Hang her, witch!

EVANS: By yea and no, I think the 'oman is a witch indeed. I like not when a 'oman has a great peard; I spy a great peard under his muffler. (4.1.188-71)

Were the cross-dressed character anyone other than the reprehensible and noticeably bearded Falstaff, this somewhat violent scene might evoke pity from the audience; because it is Falstaff, though, the silliness of his cross-dressing and the cudgeling it provokes only serves to enhance the idea that cross-dressing might be intentionally used as a comic vehicle. Just as the case of Thisby in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* can help us speculate about the comic potential of cross-dressing, so can Falstaff's own momentary drag show in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* help us realize the hilarity of sloppy cross-dressing.<sup>8</sup>

One strong point of significance shared between most of the female characters in the pages that follow is their social class: all are of the lower classes. Overall, it seems natural that a grotesque vision of femininity is relegated to lower social stations, for, practically, this choice allows for dramatists to infuse their plays with bawdiness without running the risk of offending their more

noble patrons. Furthermore, the decline in propriety is believable among women who work for a living, either in fairs, taverns, brothels, or, in the case of *Macbeth's* witches, in the wilderness. Class distinctions aside, what I most hope to accomplish in this chapter is a general assessment of female characters whose scarcely concealed masculinity might prove to be a vital, and critically overlooked, component of their onstage presentation in Renaissance England.

Since I began this chapter by highlighting the significance of Ursula from Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair*, it makes sense to linger on why this particular character seems so pivotal to this dissertation's central argument that female characters were represented along a spectrum of theatrical artifice on the English Renaissance professional stage. In so many ways, the character of Ursula is quite anomalous within Renaissance drama generally, and situating her along a spectrum of feminine representation requires that I also account for the intentionality with which Jonson presents her grotesque femininity. Katherine Eisaman Maus, in her introduction to the play in *English Renaissance Drama: A Norton Anthology*, asserts that Ursula, within a play that gains so much of its dramatic tension from the economic trade of women in marriage, "both ratifies and challenges this misogynistic state of affairs" by way of not only engaging in the gross appetites of fair life (gluttony, uncleanness, sexual pleasure, etc.), but also making her living off of those appetites (Maus 965). Maus continues,



Gargantuan, sweaty, lowborn, foulmouthed, domineering, promiscuous, and uninhibited by anything resembling principle, Ursula represents everything early modern Englishmen ordinarily thought they despised, especially in a woman. But in the topsy-turvy world of the fair, the pig-woman rules. “Thou shalt sit i’ thy chair, and give directions, and shine Ursa Major, “ declares the horse-dealer Knockem (2.5.186-7). (Maus 965)

Maus’s brief catalogue of Ursula’s traits certainly feels similar to a general description of Sir John Falstaff, but what is more interesting here is the fact that these descriptors, all of which find their revelation in the play text itself, require a very particular type of male player to pull off the role of Ursula, one that is evidently akin to a pre-1600 Will Kemp, dressed up as the “fat woman of Brentford” while playing Falstaff in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. A faithful understanding of Ursula, then, brings to the forefront one of the common critical assumptions propounded by scholars of Early Modern performance practices (that all female roles were played by “boy” actors) and complicates it resoundingly. What boy player, even if we adhere to David Kathman’s assertion that the term “boy” probably designated an average age of about 16, could play Ursula in light of the role’s physical requirements, including a massive (even corpulent) size and a grotesqueness more suited to a dockside brothel than a theatre? This is the exact question we must ask ourselves when considering the original cross-dressed performance of a character like Ursula, a character whose comedy seems vastly dependent upon the type of player who performs her.

Even if we do allow that such a boy player existed who could play Ursula, the text of *Bartholomew Fair* nonetheless creates a vision of Ursula that contradicts much of what we claim to know about boy players (specifically, that they were primarily cast as women because of their age and size). Ursula, however, is no Juliet. We are reminded of this almost immediately after meeting her, when she demands Mooncalf to bring her a chair:

URSULA: [*To Mooncalf*] Come, sir, set it here. Did not I bid you should get this chair let out o'the sides for me, that my hips might play? You'll never think of anything till your dame be rumpgalled. 'Tis well, changeling: because it can take in your grasshoppers' thighs, you care for no more. Now, you look as you had been i'the corner o'the booth, fleaing your breech with a candle's end, and set fire o'the fair. Fill, stoat, fill! [*Mooncalf adjusts her chair and serves her a drink.*] (2.2.66-73)

Even without the help of seeing a live performance, we know the mere physical dimensions required for a character like Ursula thanks to her statements here.

Evidently, she is massive, requiring a chair with the sides let out so that her "hips might play." But beyond simply noting her size with these comments, Jonson also provides her with dialogue that makes her a source of crude body humor, particularly when Ursula remarks to Mooncalf, "You'll never think of anything till your dame be rumpgalled." The mental image of Ursula's chafed behind, all thanks to her attempts to squeeze a large rear into a small chair, quickly associates her with a sense of gratuitous grotesqueness, a quality that will only be compounded as *Bartholomew Fair* continues. Joan Fitzpatrick suggests that the

grotesqueness associated with Ursula's body can go even further when we consider how closely related she is (as "the pig-woman") to the actual pigs she prepares. Fitzpatrick writes,

The focus on Ursula's huge body and the fact that she sweats is undoubtedly meant to be funny but also suggests that part of her body is going into the food she prepares: her sweat can be imagined dripping onto the meat that she bastes and then serves. It is a kind of cannibalism that the "pig-woman," above termed "mother of pigs" [by the character Knockem in 2.5.73], serves up part of herself in the pork her customers will consume. (Fitzpatrick 45-6)

Fitzpatrick goes on to connect Ursula's sweaty, porous body with that of Sir John Falstaff, who himself "sweats to death, / And lards the lean earth as he walks along" (*Henry IV Part I*, 2.2.97-8).<sup>9</sup> Both Ursula and Falstaff, then, garner their physical presence and much of their comedic effect from the gross nature of their bodies. The key point for my argument is that Ursula, by all accounts, is a woman; and yet her characterization seems to suggest that we need a male player who could also portray a convincing Falstaff.<sup>10</sup>

Also, keeping well in line with the topsy-turvy nature of fair life, Ursula's introductory scene likewise reveals her effeminizing dominion over the young, lean men who attend her, Mooncalf and Nightingale. Described in the *dramatis personae* as a tapster and a ballad singer respectively, they wait upon her like small henchmen: feeding her, making her comfortable, finding information for her, and helping with her business affairs. Indeed, the fact that Ursula refers to

Mooncalf as a “changeling” with “grasshoppers’ thighs” suggests that Mooncalf is perhaps closer to a boy than a young man. And Nightingale’s name itself implies his youth by way of his apparently high-pitched singing voice. The contrast of the massive female Ursula with the tiny “men” who surround her heightens her own masculine features, and, as readers, we get a strong sense that the player performing Ursula is capitalizing on the comedic appeal bound up in a scarcely concealed masculinity. But Ursula is also a bit of an extreme herself, an extension of the wildness of the fair and thus easily aligned with a vision of Falstaff’s “fat woman of Brentford.” If a form of cross-dressing that is more accurately described as modern day “drag” existed in the Renaissance professional theatre, then we ought to be able to account for other female characters who, while not as outlandish as Ursula from *Bartholomew Fair*, would still fit within this point on the cross-dressing spectrum.

Outside the world of the fair (though still not very far removed from the world of commerce), we have, of course, the recurring comic character of Mistress Quickly. As the apparent general manager of the Boar’s Head Tavern in Eastcheap, Mistress Quickly (or, the Hostess) is nearly always presented in conjunction with the other frequenters of Eastcheap, not the least of whom is Sir John Falstaff himself. Visually, then, Mistress Quickly is grouped among the lower class ruffians whose primary purpose in *Parts I and II of Henry IV* (and to a

lesser degree in *Henry V* and *Merry Wives of Windsor*) is comedic. Because of this onstage grouping, we can make some fairly solid speculations about how this female character would have been performed; indeed, Mistress Quickly's general participation in so many of the comic interludes of the *Henry IV* plays leads one to believe that much of her own comedy might come from physical grotesqueness, a quality only heightened by characters like Falstaff, Bardolph, and Pistol, who likewise gain much of their comic appeal from physical jests. In terms of the Hostess's actual appearance, however, the play texts themselves give us little to go on. Linda Hopkins suggests that the only direct textual reference to Mistress Quickly's physical appearance is in *Henry IV Part I*, in which Falstaff compares her to an otter (Hopkins 563). I would add, though, that the entire exchange in which the otter remark appears offers more than a few references to the physical representation of the Hostess, to the extent that we may intuit not only a sense of androgyny, but also a self-referential awareness of the theatrical cross-dressing at work in the literal performance of the role. Below is the exchange in its entirety, couched within Falstaff's accusations that the inhabitants of the Boar's Head have robbed him of "[t]hree or four bonds of forty pounds apiece and a seal ring of my grandfather's" (3.3.92-3):

PRINCE: A trifle, some eightpenny matter.

HOSTESS: So I told him, my lord, and I said I heard your grace say so; and, my lord, he speaks most vilely of you, like a foulmouthed man as he is, and said he would cudgel you.

PRINCE: What? He did not.  
 HOSTESS: There's neither faith, truth, nor womanhood in me else.  
 FALSTAFF: There's no more faith in thee than in a stewed prune,  
 nor no more truth in thee than a drawn fox, and, for womanhood,  
 Maid Marian may be the deputy's wife of the ward to thee. Go you  
 thing, go!  
 HOSTESS: Say, what thing, what thing?  
 FALSTAFF: What thing? Why, a thing to thank God on.  
 HOSTESS: I am no thing to thank God on. I would thou shouldst  
 know it. I am an honest man's wife, and, setting thy knighthood  
 aside, thou art a beast to say otherwise.  
 FALSTAFF: Setting thy womanhood aside, thou art a beast to say  
 otherwise.  
 HOSTESS: Say, what beast, thou knave thou?  
 FALSTAFF: What beast? Why, an otter.  
 PRINCE: An otter, Sir John? Why an otter?  
 FALSTAFF: Why? She's neither fish nor flesh; a man knows not  
 where to have her.  
 HOSTESS: Thou art an unjust man in saying so. Thou or any man  
 knows where to have me, thou knave thou! (3.3.94-118)

There are at least three allusions to the Hostess's ambiguous gender within this squabble: the reference to Maid Marian, Falstaff's claim that she is a "thing," and Falstaff's categorization of her as an otter ("She's neither fish nor flesh; a man knows not where to have her"). A note to the "Maid Marian" reference in the *Norton Shakespeare's* anthologized edition of *Henry IV Part I* correctly claims that Falstaff is comparing the Hostess to the Maid Marian of May Day celebrations, which included a cross-dressed man playfully donning a Maid Marian costume in the carnivalesque revels so disdained by Puritans. With this insult, Mistress Quickly's "womanhood" is directly associated with the parodic and comedic cross-dressing of May Day, an association that invites the reader/viewer to

perceive Mistress Quickly's "femininity" in a manner that makes merriment out of her evident cross-dressing. Secondly, Falstaff's admonition, "Go you *thing*, go," plays on a euphemistic insult of the time period, referring to Mistress Quickly's genitals. The comedy here, of course (since we have already been reminded of Quicky's mannishness from the Maid Marian reference moments before), is that there is no literal "thing" to refer to on this player's body, at least in female terms. Thus, Quickly's frantic reply of "I am *no* thing to thank God on" only reinforces Falstaff's insult. The double euphemism of "thing" and "no thing" (the same pun from *Much Ado About Nothing*), both of which apparently refer to female genitalia, means that Mistress Quickly cannot escape the insults the cause spectators to meditate on what is actually beneath her female costume. Finally, Falstaff's claim that she is an "otter," and that "a man knows not where to have her," confirms the confusing qualities of the Hostess's sex. Along this same line of thought, Lina Perkins Wilder notes the somewhat contradictory qualities of "neither fish nor flesh" and "otter"; she writes,

On the one hand, she is understood (facetiously) as "neither fish nor flesh" —she cannot be located with any stability in either category but also, in a different sense, she inhabits neither category—but on the other, she is also an "otter," a creature that combines the habits of creatures from two categories. (Wilder 60)

In other words, even Falstaff's wordplay both places her definitively (an "otter") and then declares her ambiguity ("neither fish nor flesh"). His final blow that "a

man knows not where to have her” underscores this general confusion in a grossly specific manner.<sup>11</sup>

To be sure, Falstaff’s curses to this woman may be exaggerated by his anger (let’s not forget that Falstaff does not have a credible record of truth-telling within the Boar’s Head), and so, as readers, we ought to take their implications for Quickly’s physicality with a grain of salt. And yet, in the world of the *Henry IV* plays, it is common for other characters to accurately comment upon the physical appearance of their fellow characters. Consider Hal’s famous remark to Falstaff, while impersonating King Henry IV, that “[t]here is a devil haunts thee in the likeness of an old fat man,” or even the characters’ repeated remarks about Bardolph’s red and pimple-ridden face (2.4.406-7). In light of many of the physical jibes directed at the Hostess, we can also reasonably suspect that Mistress Quickly is advanced in age, since, in *Part II*, she notes that she has known Falstaff “twenty-nine years, come peascod time,” although there is no indication when the acquaintance actually began (2.4.380). What we can say with some degree of certainty is that Falstaff’s insults have genuine implications for the physical representation of Mistress Quickly, to the extent that we might visualize her with the same ambiguous presentation as Ursula from *Bartholomew Fair*.



Indeed, the earliest artistic rendering of Mistress Quickly (included in the following pages) in the century following the original productions of *Henry IV Parts I and II* suggests that artists perceived the Hostess with a sense of ambiguity, to the extent that she appears rather masculine. Linda Hopkins notes that the first visual appearance of Mistress Quickly is “in the frontispiece to *The Wits*, a collection of drolls,” published in 1662 (560). These drolls, or, as the OED calls them, “farcical compositions,” are heralded on the frontispiece by several comic figures from pre-Restoration drama, including Sir John Falstaff and Mistress Quickly, who is labeled simply as “The Hostess.” Her proximity in the drawing to Falstaff makes it clear, however, that this is indeed the Hostess of the Second Henriad, and not some other comic figure. Of the Hostess herself, Hopkins writes,

[I]t is interesting to note that the Hostess is not only the sole female character represented, but also that she has a rather androgynous appearance. In earlier times, a male player would have taken the role; and it is arguable that, at the time of publication of *The Wits*, revivals of the play will also have seen the role taken by a male player. (Hopkins 561)

After considering Samuel Pepys’ own diary records of when he first saw female players, Hopkins goes on to suggest that “it is entirely possible that *The Wits* illustrator might also have witnessed a male performer in the role of the Hostess” (562). Indeed, the image itself of the “Hostess” on *The Wits*’ frontispiece suggests, even if the illustrator never saw a man play her, that he nonetheless

envisioned her in a strikingly anti-feminine way. Positioned downstage center (the “wits” themselves are arranged on a large stage), the Hostess is turned in profile, facing Falstaff himself. Falstaff faces the audience, proudly holding a massive goblet (likely filled with sack) that is larger than his own head. With her arms raised, presumably in protest against Falstaff’s excessive drinking, the Hostess’s attention appears focused on both Falstaff and the goblet he holds. An alternative reading, of course, is that her arms are raised as an appeal to share in the drink, and Falstaff’s outstretched arm, which holds the goblet, is meant to tease her; this reading could possibly account for why the Hostess’s tongue protrudes from her open mouth.

Aside from the characters’ positioning on the stage, however, the visual depiction of the Hostess’s face and body are the most striking arguments for her masculine features. Because she is drawn in profile, we are able to see her puggish, rounded features: a bobbed nose, protruding lips, and sallow eyes framed by thick, rounded brow bones. No hair falls out of her headscarf, but the apparent shadow produced by the scarf itself is suggestive of a “five o’clock shadow.” Although this figure wears a woman’s work gown, her arms are unusually thick compared to the size of her body, and the shading on her arms looks rather similar to thick body hair. All in all, this drawing’s masculinity is rooted in this figure’s proportion and the illustrator’s focus on covering up any

potentially feminine markers. We cannot, for example see either her hair or the outline of her bust. The pointy crown at the top of her headscarf further implicates the inherent silliness of the crude Hostess in the eyes of *The Wits'* illustrator. If this illustration is designed to be a faithful depiction of a tavern-keeping woman, then she is clearly an unattractive one.

The primary reason why seventeenth-century visual depictions such as *The Wits'* frontispiece are helpful in discussing the range of cross-dressing on the Renaissance stage is that they offer readers of Shakespeare real interpretations of how these “women” might have appeared in productions of the time period. The illustration of the Hostess from *The Wits*, though not authoritative, is nonetheless a legitimate interpretation of her character. And from the perspective of this particular illustrator, she truly is “neither fish nor flesh” because of her evident gender ambiguity. More significantly, however, it is important to remember that the evident androgyny of this visual rendering, even while it postdates the original productions of the *Henry IV* plays, is still supported by Shakespeare’s text. Indeed, we can confidently assert that the femininity of Mistress Quickly is much less apparent than, say, that of the noble Lady Percy, who we might presume would be presented onstage with a faithful attempt at passing as female. We cannot rely entirely upon visual representations for arguments about cross-dressing on the Renaissance stage, but

we can allow them to inform what the text has already offered us; in the case of Mistress Quickly, *The Wits* frontispiece (which, again, is the earliest recorded image of Mistress Quickly and Falstaff) only confirms what readers already suspect about her: if “a man knows not where to have her,” then whatever feminine qualities the character might have are decidedly downplayed.

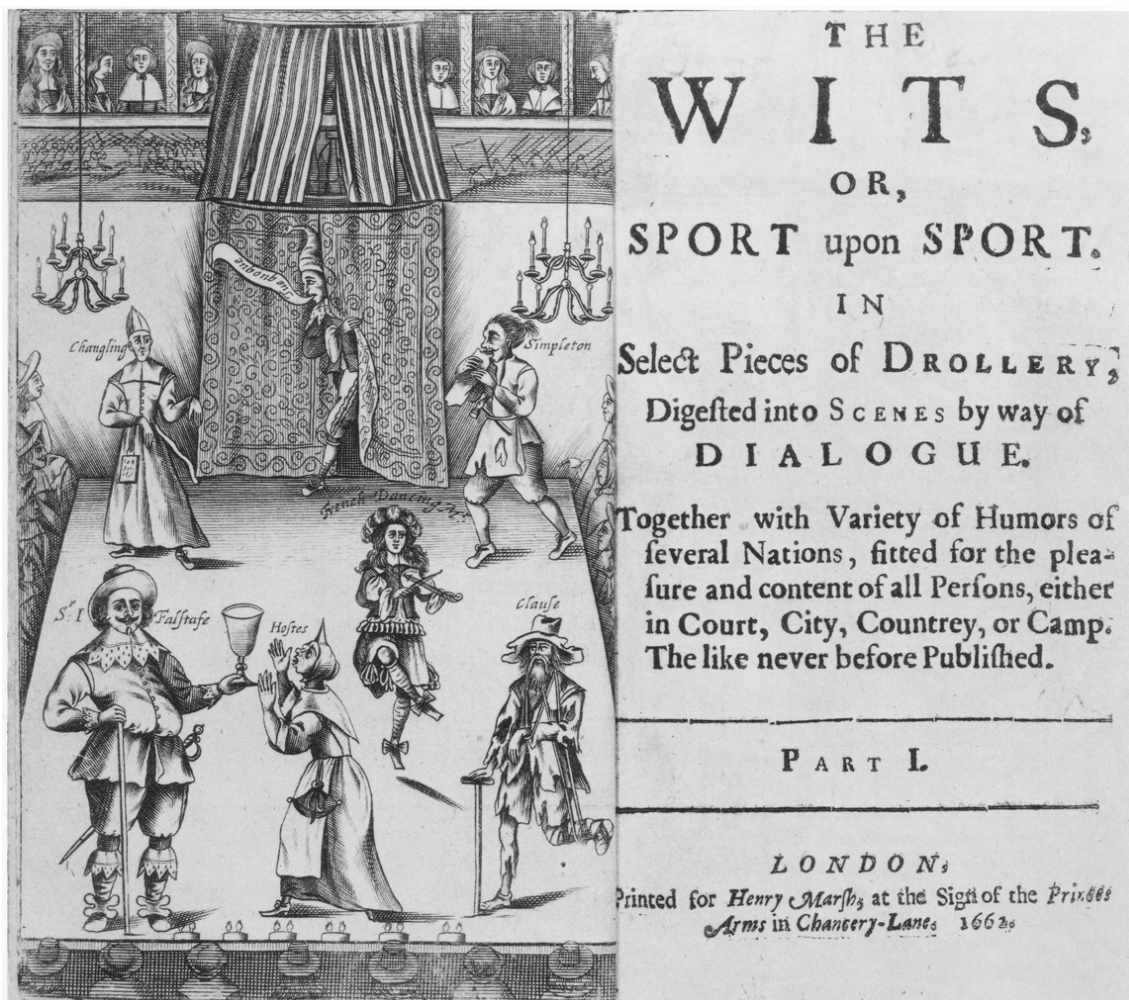


Figure 6.1. *The Wits, or Sport Upon Sport*, 1662. Image is attributed to Francis Kirkman. (Public Domain)

Both Ursula and Mistress Quickly appear in their respective plays as comedic vehicles, and their dialogue is consistently directed toward garnering laughs; but their categorization as female characters who are presented with a scarcely concealed masculinity also puts them in the same league as characters like the witches in *Macbeth*. For if drag can be useful for comedy or parody, then it can also be used as a means toward generating horror through grotesqueness. We certainly get a sense of the effects of vulgarity when we observe Ursula's behavior in *Bartholomew Fair*, but Ursula is primarily meant to be a source of comedy in the play, albeit a gross comedy. The witches of *Macbeth*, however, seem to be a divergent version of cross-dressing that emphasizes the players' masculinity in an effort to terrify the audience. As Banquo comments when he and Macbeth first encounter the witches, their appearance seems more masculine than feminine:

BANQUO: What are these,  
So withered and so wild in their attire,  
That look not like th'inhabitants o'th' earth,  
And yet are on't?—Live you? Or are you aught  
That man may question? You seem to understand me  
By each at once her choppy finger laying  
Upon her skinny lips. You should be women,  
And yet your beards forbid me to interpret  
That you are so. (1.3.40-48)

Much like Falstaff's derogatory comments toward Mistress Quickly, Banquo notes that he cannot discern whether the witches are men or women, and

the reference to their “beards” has some resemblance to Evans’ comments about “the fat woman of Brentford’s” “peard” (pronounced in the Welsh accent) in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. Banquo’s remarks, however, seem much more ominous. He, of course, portentously adds that the witches seem to not be of this world, to the point where they may be “aught / That man may question” (1.3.43-4). Unlike the characters of Ursula or Mistress Quickly, the ambiguous presentation of the witches (which is evidently accomplished by the scarcely concealed masculinity of the male players) utilizes drag-like cross-dressing to an end very different from comedy. Their strange ambiguity, both with respect to their gender and whether they are even “inhabitants o’th’ earth,” makes them terrifying within the world of *Macbeth*. When Macbeth himself encounter the witches once more in Act 4, his address to them bears witness to the fearfulness the witches might evoke:

MACBETH: How now, you secret, black, and midnight hags?  
What is’t you do?

ALL WITCHES: A deed without a name.

MACBETH: I conjure you by that which you profess,  
Howe’er you come to know it, answer me.

Though you untie the winds and let them fight  
Against the churches, though the yeasty waves  
Confound and swallow navigation up,  
Though bladed corn be lodged and trees blown down,  
Though castles topple on their warders’ heads,  
Though palaces and pyramids do slope  
Their heads to their foundations, though the treasure  
Of nature’s germens tumble all together

Even till destruction sicken, answer me  
To what I ask you. (4.1.47-60)

Macbeth's speech above does not describe the appearance of the witches; we already know what they look like thanks to Banquo's initial assessment earlier in the play. Here, we only hear Macbeth address them as "secret, black, and midnight hags." The power of the imagery in this speech is that it suggests what these witches are capable of. Not only are the visually terrifying, then, but they are also capable of generating extreme natural disaster, which would constitute yet another moment of terror for the audience. Thus, if we are to concede that drag-like cross-dressing occurred on the Renaissance stage in the presentation of comedic (especially bawdy) female characters, then we must also consider how drag might also be employed to instill terror.<sup>12</sup> In the case of the witches, the supernatural horror within their capabilities is only heightened when we consider their grotesque appearance on the stage.

Furthermore, after considering the witches from *Macbeth*, what are we to do with characters like old Queen Margaret from *Richard III*, who, while she is obviously a noblewoman, is described as a raging, elderly madwoman by the other characters? It is possible to make the argument that her physical appearance is reflective of something not too far off from the Weird Sisters of *Macbeth*, particularly since both she and Richard offer harsh descriptions of one another's physical traits. Richard, for example, immediately calls her a "[f]oul

wrinkled witch” when she steps forward to offer her curse (1.3.163), and he continues to degrade her appearance as she speaks:

GLOUCESTER: Have done thy charm, thou hateful withered hag?  
QUEEN MARGARET: And leave out thee? Stay, dog, for thou shalt hear me.  
[...]  
Thou elvish-marked, abortive, rooting hog,  
Thou that wast sealed in thy nativity  
The slave of nature and the son of hell;  
Thou slander of thy mother’s heavy womb,  
Thou loathed issue of thy father’s loins,  
Thou rag of honor, thou detested — (1.3.211-12, 224-229)

We have no reason to believe that Richard’s derogatory comments about Queen Margaret’s age and appearance are false. While Richard is the only one in the scene who attacks her physical appearance, no one else in the court defends her. Margaret, of course, is not afraid to fight back with her own attack against Richard’s physicality, and, interestingly, these parallel attacks encourage the audience to reflect on both speakers’ appearances. Truly, the example of Queen Margaret, whose withered age probably needed to be represented by an older male player, is an appropriate transition to moments of seriousness in the bawdy characters I have already put forth. For what is surprising about the Shakespearean man-women discussed in this chapter is that these comic vehicles occasionally have moments of great seriousness in their characterizations. Shakespeare, it seems, was not opposed to allowing these comedic, mannish women moments of dark lucidity, in which whatever comedy might be gained



from their onstage presentation is overshadowed by the seriousness of what they must say. Perhaps the strongest example of this seriousness among the women I have discussed in this essay so far is Mistress Quickly's brief appearance in *Henry V*, wherein she feelingly conveys the news of Falstaff's death. This scene in Eastcheap is significant for many reasons, not the least of which is that it confirms resolutely that the world of *Henry V* is a world without the boisterous and folly-filled presence of Sir John Falstaff. Prince Hal, now King Henry V, has finally "banished plump Jack," and, evidently, sent him to a grief-induced death.

Further distancing Falstaff from the new King Henry's world, Shakespeare makes the dramatic choice to keep Falstaff's death offstage. What this requires, though, is the use of a messenger speech, in which another character appears onstage to report on the missing character's death. The Hostess's messenger speech is tender, and it reveals that, despite all of the trouble Falstaff has caused her (including, perhaps, calling her "neither fish nor flesh"), he nonetheless deserves the reverence given to one whose death has brought him to "Arthur's bosom":

BARDOLPH: Would I were with him, wheresome'er he is, either in heaven or in hell.

HOSTESS: Nay, sure, he's not in hell. He's in Arthur's bosom, if ever man went to Arthur's bosom. 'A made a finer end, and went away an it had been any christom child. 'A parted e'en just between twelve and one, e'en at the turning o'th' tide. For after I saw him fumble with the sheets, and play with flowers, and smile upon his fingers' ends, I knew there was but one way. For his nose

was as sharp as a pen, and 'a babbled of green fields. "How now, Sir John?" quoth I. "What, man! Be o'good cheer." So 'a cried out, "God, God, God," three or four times. Now I, to comfort him, bid him 'a should not think of God; I hoped there was no need to trouble himself with any such thoughts yet. So 'a bade me lay more clothes on his feet. I put my hand into the bed and felt them, and they were as cold as any stone. Then I felt to his knees, and so up'ard and up'ard and all was as cold as any stone. (2.3.9-23)

The Hostess describes how the normally raucous Falstaff has fallen into his own second childishness, "fumbl[ing] with the sheets, and play[ing] with flowers, and smil[ing] on his fingers' ends," as if he were engrossed in an infantile delirium.

There is also a suggestion that Falstaff is trying to recall the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm as he "babbled of green fields." But perhaps the saddest portion of this messenger speech, though, is the Hostess's gradual meditation on each part of Falstaff's cold body, a meditative progression that finally confirms that the fiery Falstaff we have known from the earlier plays has lost his flame. There is nothing funny about the Hostess's words here; it is ultimately a deeply mournful moment that will initiate an exodus of many of the male inhabitants of Eastcheap, who are now bound for a war on French soil.

The Hostess's lines in the passage quoted above shape her character into something more than a drag-like performances that is primarily limited to parody or comedy. This is a moment of seriousness, and it reveals the full range of her character: not only is she funny within her plays, but she also has the opportunity to represent a multi-faceted characterization, one that includes

genuine mourning. The Hostess's brief moment of seriousness is powerfully significant within the Second Henriad, and it is important to note that this is not the only messenger speech that Shakespeare writes in the extremely productive year of 1599. (My use of the term "messenger speech" is meant to signify a speech in which one character accounts for significant actions of another character. In many cases, it is an account of a death.)

In order to demonstrate why I believe it is so important to pay heed to the Hostess's mournful messenger speech, it is helpful to view her words alongside those of another Shakespearean woman who almost certainly would not have been portrayed in a manner similar to "drag": Queen Gertrude from *Hamlet*. A character like Gertrude, though she would have been performed by a male actor, seems to be better suited to a faithful representation of femininity. Not only is a noblewoman, but she also appears in a deeply serious tragedy. Gertrude's own messenger speech, which reports the death of Ophelia, can help us understand the significance of the Hostess's messenger speech. Specifically, it can allow us to view the Hostess as a character whose representation is not limited to parody.

Although written in verse, and in the midst of a tragedy instead of a history play, Queen Gertrude's account of Ophelia's death in *Hamlet* contains more than a few similarities with the Hostess's more pedestrian messenger speech:

QUEEN: There is a willow grows askant the brook  
That shows his hoary leaves in the glassy stream;  
Therewith fantastic garlands did she make  
Of crowflowers, nettles, daisies, and long purples  
That liberal shepherds give a grosser name  
But our cold maids do dead men's fingers call them.  
There on the pendant boughs her crownnet weeds  
Clamb'ring to hand, an envious sliver broke,  
When down her weedy trophies and herself  
Fell in the weeping brook. Her clothes spread wide  
And mermaid-like awhile they bore her up,  
Which time she chanted snatches of old lauds  
As one incapable of her own distress,  
Or like a creature native and endued  
Unto that element. But long it could not be  
Till that her garments, heavy with their drink,  
Pulled the poor wretch from her melodious lay  
To muddy death. (4.4.165-82)

Like Falstaff's childlike behavior as he gets closer to his death, that of Gertrude reveals that Ophelia's madness manifests as excessive childishness in her final moments, during which she makes garlands out of wildflowers, climbs trees, and sings "snatches of old lauds." While Falstaff evidently fiddles with flowers on his bedsheets as he gets closer to death, Ophelia weaves real flowers into garlands. And while Falstaff smiles absently on "his fingers' ends," Ophelia plays with flowers called "dead men's fingers," the more appropriate name that young ladies might use for the obviously euphemistic "long purples." Although these two messenger speeches are different for several reasons, not the least of which is the fact that one is spoken in verse by a noblewoman and the other in prose by a tavern mistress, they nonetheless bear similarities in tone. There is

also a faint sense that Shakespeare is reusing the form of the messenger speech, one that he had used in *Henry V* and would go on to use (in the same year, no less) in *Hamlet*. By comparing Mistress Quickly's account of Falstaff's death with Gertrude's, we see clearly that this character is not trapped within a purely comedic role; the range of Mistress Quickly, in particular, suggests that cross-dressing, while often dictated by archetypal aesthetics, did not have to always be archetypal. With respect to my larger argument about the range of theatrical cross-dressing required for playing female characters, this comparison between the messenger speeches of Mistress Quickly and Queen Gertrude reveals that the women who we might categorize as "female Falstaffs" (such as Mistress Quickly, Ursula, or even the Weird Sisters—not, of course, Queen Gertrude) are not entirely limited in the range of dramatic moments they can affect; in other words, even though they may be presented in a drag-like manner, they are not completely constrained to the world of parody or comedy.

What I hope I have accomplished in this final chapter is a thorough reflection on the full range of performance possibilities for female characters in English Renaissance drama. The physical descriptions alone of characters like Ursula and Mistress Quickly suggest that we must think beyond our typical vision of "the boy player" when we imagine who would have played these characters. The term "female Falstaffs," which I use in the title of this chapter,

suggests that our understanding of the original performances of Renaissance drama might do well to consider how moments such as Falstaff's cross-dressed appearance as "the fat woman of Brentford" could inform our vision of cross-dressing's comedic uses.

Over the course of this dissertation, my focus has been on nuancing our approach to theatrical cross-dressing on the English Renaissance professional stage, to the extent that we might categorize instances of cross-dressing along a spectrum of seriousness. Although this final category of "female Falstaffs" seems to be the least "serious" of all, the degree to which we imagine the richness of performance possibilities for female characters only heightens how seriously we conceive of these women. For when we treat the presentation of these women as opportunities for skilled players to execute a particularly difficult performance (indeed, to play a completely different gender *well*), then we can perhaps also move toward a deeper reverence for Shakespeare's female characters in their original contexts, rather than looking forward to the historical moment when real women took to the stage.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> In our contemporary setting, research on all-male productions of Shakespeare is a developing field of study. Perhaps most helpful as an introduction to “single-gender” or “cross-gender” casting in contemporary productions of Shakespeare is James C. Bulman’s *Shakespeare Re-Dressed: Cross-Gender Casting in Contemporary Performance* (Madison, WI: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 2008). With respect to all-male casting at the New Globe Theatre, see Rob Kronkie’s *The Globe Theatre Project: Shakespeare and Authenticity* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2006).

<sup>2</sup> Drouin’s new argument is indebted to the work of Judith Butler, particularly Butler’s claims about the performativity of gender. See Butler’s *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1999).

<sup>3</sup> For more on the concept of “drag” in today’s popular culture, see Marjorie Garber’s *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (New York: Routledge, 1992), a text that was cited repeatedly in the previous chapter.

<sup>4</sup> As I have indicated throughout this dissertation, most of the scholarship surrounding theatrical cross-dressing on the Renaissance stage concerns itself with the literary trope of the “disguised heroine” (Viola, Rosalind, Portia, etc.). Somewhat surprisingly, almost nothing has been published that concerns female characters whose presentations in the text suggest that the actual masculinity of the player was emphasized for the sake of comedy. Jean Howard, in her seminal article “Crossdressing, the Theatre, and Gender Struggle in Early Modern England” (*Shakespeare Quarterly* 39.4 [1988]: 418-40), claims that theatrical cross-dressing carried significance for a world in which the sex-gender system was under immense pressure. But Howard’s focus is on cross-dressing generally, not on the unique subset of cross-dressing that we now categorize as drag. Similarly, scholars like Susan Zimmerman, in her excellent collection *Erotic Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1992), emphasizes the stage’s ability to explore the erotic substrate of theatrical cross-dressing, but, again, this does not account for drag-like performances. Also relevant to a conversation about cross-dressing that is preoccupied with the eroticism of men playing women are works by Lisa Jardine (*Still Harping on Daughters: Women and Drama in the Age of Shakespeare*, Totowa, NJ: Barnes and Noble Books, 1983), Laura Levine (*Men in Women’s Clothing: Anti-Theatricality and Effeminization, 1579-1642*, New York: Cambridge UP, 1994), Stephen Orgel (*Impersonations: The Performance of Gender in Shakespeare’s England*, New York: Cambridge UP, 1996), and Michael Shapiro (*Gender in Play on the*

*Shakespearean Stage: Boy Heroines and Female Pages*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1994). Since I have already discussed many of these scholars in previous chapters of this dissertation, I will not linger on them here.

<sup>5</sup> Quotations from *Bartholomew Fair* are from *English Renaissance Drama: A Norton Anthology*.

<sup>6</sup> Quotations from *Henry IV Part 1* are from *The Riverside Shakespeare*. All other quotations of Shakespeare are from *The Norton Shakespeare*, unless otherwise noted.

<sup>7</sup> Falstaff's enormous size is indeed the direct link between his personality and his metaphorical relation to excess and gluttony. For more on the imagistic resonances of obesity in Early Modern England, see Elena Levy-Navarro's *The Culture of Obesity in Early and Late Modernity: Body Image in Shakespeare, Jonson, Middleton, and Skelton*. (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

<sup>8</sup> For more on "the fat woman of Brentford's" evocation of the grotesque body, particularly with respect to "carnival," see Jonathan Hall's "The Evacuation of Falstaff (*The Merry Wives of Windsor*)" in *Shakespeare and Carnival*. Ed. Ronald Knowles. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998: 123-51.

<sup>9</sup> Ursula's public urination and constant sweating likewise connect her with Falstaff on the basis of human waste. Will Stockton, in *Playing Dirty: Sexuality and Waste in Early Modern Comedy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), argues that scatology and eroticism are intrinsically connected in low comedy in the Renaissance, an argument he supports specifically with a discussion of Falstaff's presence in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. Like Falstaff, Ursula's bodily excrement (urine, sweat, etc.) seems connected to her excessive sexuality, at least in terms of provoking a repellent response on the part of the audience.

<sup>10</sup> Aside from comparisons to Falstaff, one of the more surprising comparisons between Ursula and a character from Shakespeare's plays is that of Rosalind from *As You Like It*. See, for example, Michael J. Bugeja's "Rosalind's Rival: Ursula as the Fallen Eve," *RE: Artes Liberales* 11.1 (1984): 1-10.

<sup>11</sup> There's some satisfaction, too, in noting the loose pun between "otter" and "Other," but that sort of connection mostly derives from our contemporary reading practices, not the play's original context.



<sup>12</sup> The eeriness of the witches is certainly connected to their bodily presence, a point Diane Purkiss expounds in “Body Crimes: The Witches, Lady Macbeth, and the Relics” (*Female Transgression in Early Modern Britain: Literary and Historical Explorations*. Eds. Richard Hillman and Pauline Ruberry-Blanc. Burlington, VA: Ashgate, 2014). In film versions of *Macbeth*, the physical appearances of the witches are increasingly varied. See, for example, Susan Gushee O'Malley's “*Macbeth's* Witches: Nurses, Waitresses, Feminists, Punk Gore Groupies” in *Shakespeare on Screen: Macbeth* (Eds. Sarah Hatchuel, Nathalie Vienne-Guerrin, and Victoria Bladen. Rouen and the Hague: Presses Universitaires de Rouen et Du Havre, 2013: 69-80).

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### Coda

In the summer of 2010, I attended an Atlanta-area regional theater performance of Joe Calarco's *Shakespeare's R&J*, an all-male adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* set in a boys' boarding school. In Calarco's adaptation, a cast of six, plaid-uniformed young men double and triple cast themselves in a covert midnight performance of Shakespeare's tragedy, using only a billowy red shawl as a prop, set piece, and occasional costume. Indeed, the actual text of this adaptation rarely strayed from Shakespeare's own, choosing instead to make its re-contextualization in a boys' boarding school as its primary adaptive quality. At the beginning of the play, we watched the young men reciting Latin conjugations and marching around the stage in unison. When the marching stoped, however, they silently produced a copy of *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare* and began an impromptu performance of *Romeo and Juliet*.

Although *Shakespeare's R&J* is primarily concerned with desensitizing an audience to the homoeroticism inherent in our modern reception of all-male Shakespeare performance, this particular adaptation of a Shakespeare play (especially in its original 1997 staging in New York City) can offer us great

insight into our own speculations about Elizabethan verisimilitude. To put it another way, how might we view Early Modern theatergoers' understanding of men playing women when we ourselves experience it in twenty-first-century productions? To be sure, the major conceit of Calarco's *R&J* is that the actors do not literally cross-dress; indeed, they do not have to if their performances are entertaining enough and the audience is willing to suspend their disbelief.

In Calarco's introduction to the playscript for *Shakespeare's R&J*, he discusses what it was like for the actors to "play women" in the original performance of his play:

This was by far the most challenging aspect of the project. The most rewarding comments we got for the New York production dealt with this gender issue; many people said that they quickly forgot the one gendered nature of the cast and that they never saw the actors as women or as men playing women. They forgot about gender all together. This is the goal. (Calarco 7)

Contemporary adaptation of Shakespeare is not the subject of this dissertation, but Calarco's point about the "goal" of the audience "forget[ting] about gender all together" is an interesting comment in light of the content that precedes this Coda. For Calarco's statement raises the question about the effect of high quality performers who are able to perform so well that an audience becomes more preoccupied with the story than with the players themselves.

This regional production of *Shakespeare's R&J* was my first experience witnessing a Shakespeare performance, albeit a slight adaptation, within the

constraints of an exclusively male cast. But this production, performed at the Serenbe Playhouse in Chattahoochee Hills, Georgia in 2010, revealed that exclusively male-casting was anything but constraining for the players. While the players did not literally cross-dress (they remained in school uniforms throughout the performance), their gestures, their delivery of the lines, and their movements communicated clear differences between male and female characters.

When scholars claim that Elizabethan audiences simply accepted as a commonplace that men played women, they leave little room to wonder about the qualities of the actual actors playing the women. Do the actors give a convincing performance when they play women, for instance? Or do they emphasize their masculinity for the sake of comically playing a woman? Since we can never sit in an Early Modern production of Shakespeare's plays, we will never really know the exact nature of these performances. But I believe it does these Elizabethan actors credit to speculate that their all-male performances of women relied on much more than an audience's willing suspension of disbelief. In this dissertation, I have demonstrated that "playing the lady" *well* not only required textual support from the playwright, but also required actors capable of supporting the language of the play texts. Moreover, the range of female characters on the Renaissance professional stage (from the Ursulas to the Juliets)

suggests that different types of female characters were played in varying ways by varying types of players.

The central claim of this dissertation and the research questions that support it have been with me for several years. Well into my graduate studies in English, I took a seminar on English Renaissance drama excluding Shakespeare with Dr. Maurice Hunt, who now serves as my advisor. During one of our seminar discussions, I brought up the idea of a “spectrum of seriousness” for the female characters. Some of these women, I suggested, seem much more “manly” than others, and that manliness appears intentional. When we discussed *Bartholomew Fair*, I brought up how Ursula the pig woman seemed like she would be more hysterical and grotesque if the man underneath the dress was emphasized. As the reader knows, this suspicion formed the basis of one of the primary research questions for this dissertation.

In that same seminar meeting, a friend and colleague pushed back on my claim. “This is just how they did it—boys played the women,” she said, “and so we can't really speculate about whether or not some were more ‘manly’ than others.” At that particular moment in my formation as a literary scholar, I honestly could not argue with her. All I had was a general sense that performance practices were more complicated than we would like to imagine (especially from our vantage point in a PhD seminar), and yet I had no way of

proving it. But I kept returning to this idea as I became more deeply entrenched in Shakespeare studies. As it turns out, a good sense that one of your own ideas might be right is the perfect starting place for a research question, and thus this dissertation project began.

I felt comforted, however, when I began my initial research and found a quotation from Stephen Orgel (a scholar I would go on to cite repeatedly in this project) that seemed to help me contextualize my approach to this research question:

However responsible we undertake to be in our texts and their contexts, we can look only with our own eyes, and interpret only with our own minds, which have been formed by our own history. All historical claims, even the most tactful and unpoliticized, are ultimately concerned to make the past comprehensible, usable and relevant to our own interests—to make it, that is, present. Even for documentary historians (as even historians are beginning to be aware) the Renaissance changes with every generation. (Orgel 64)

This passage reminded me that writing this dissertation as a twenty-first-century junior scholar necessitated that I acknowledge how my particular “generation” affected my perception of this literature. Methodologically, I had to recognize that the surge in Gender Studies and New Historicism, two theoretical frameworks that consistently engage with the question of gendered performance in the Renaissance, actually reached their peak of productivity in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The writing of this dissertation, then, basically took place a

quarter of a century after the topic of cross-dressing seemed to be out of vogue.

With that distance in mind, the goal of *"If I were a woman": Gendered Artifice on the Shakespearean Stage* has been to unite the previous criticism on cross-dressing with a new close reading of the plays. This new close reading, as I hope the reader has recognized, now stands as the basis for a fresh paradigm for understanding cross-dressing on the English Renaissance professional stage.

I will end this dissertation by offering an explanation of my choice of title: "If I were a woman." The phrase comes from Rosalind's final speech in *As You Like It*, in which she offers the Epilogue to the play:

ROSALIND: It is not the fashion to see the lady the epilogue, but it is no more unhandsome than to see the lord the prologue. If it be true that good wine needs no bush, 'tis true that a good play needs no epilogue. Yet to good wine they do use good bushes, and good plays prove the better by the help of good epilogues. What a case am I in, then, that am neither a good epilogue nor cannot insinuate with you in the behalf of a good play? I am not furnished like a beggar; therefore to beg will not become me. My way is to conjure you, and I'll begin with the women: I charge you, O women, for the love you bear to men, to like as much of this play as please you. And I charge you, O men, for the love you bear to women—as I perceive by your simpering, none of you hates them—that between you and the women, the play may please. If I were a woman I would kiss as many of you as had beards that pleased me, complexions that liked me, and breaths that I defied not. And I am sure, as many as have good beards or good faces or sweet breaths will for my kind offer, when I make curtesy, bid me farewell.  
(5.4.190-209)

What I find so delightful about this Epilogue is Rosalind's frank awareness of the theatrical event that has just taken place. Indeed, the fact that the player says,

“If I were a woman I would kiss as many of you as had beards that pleased me” reveals that we are perhaps no longer listening to Rosalind; instead, we are listening to the young male player himself. The “if” in this line has served as the basis of this dissertation. How would an actor perform *if* he were a woman? And what types of female characters necessitate different types of performances? What sort of “conjuring” took place (to use Rosalind’s word choice) in order to create a canon of female performances that do justice to the quality and perseverance of Shakespeare’s plays? Of course, to offer speculative answers to questions such as these requires the analyst to consider just what it takes to “conjure” an audience. Whether the answers in this dissertation “may please” is left to the assessment of the reader.



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