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Manifestation: Masculinity on the Female Body in Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama

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Doctor of Philosophy

University of Edinburgh

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## Declaration of Own Work

I declare that this thesis has been composed solely by myself and that it has not been submitted, in whole or in part, in any previous application for a degree. Except where stated otherwise by reference or acknowledgment, the work presented is entirely my own.

## Acknowledgements

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## I. Introduction

In the annex of Michael Shapiro's *Gender in Play*, the author includes a "Chronological list of Plays with Heroines in Male Disguise" (221).<sup>1</sup> Starting at the advent of the trope in 1570 and concluding in 1642 (the year of public theater closures), this list catalogs early modern plays that feature a female character who wears a masculine disguise at some point in the play (Bawcutt 181). Focusing on plays which appear in the Elizabethan and Jacobean eras, this thesis seeks to examine how those characters reflect and respond to developing concepts of gender and representation in early modern England, and in one case, Scotland. The purpose for limiting this project is twofold. The Elizabethan and Jacobean plays demonstrate the establishment of generic patterns for heroine crossdressers, which reflect expectations for gender presentation, and the eventual progressions in trends as the trope becomes increasingly popular. The second reason is practical; due to that popularity, fifty-three plays appear before 1625 and a further twenty-six in the following two decades. The scope of this project is logistically constrained to the foundational years of heroine crossdressing; however, the continued growth of the trope beyond the years covered in this work illustrates an enduring fascination with it. While only twelve plays that feature crossdressed heroines were written and produced before c. 1600, more than forty further examples were created in the first two and a half decades of the new century (Shapiro 221). Collectively, this means more than sixty different characters had appeared on stages across England by 1625. The first fifty-five years of the trope developed a series of standard conventions, with new evolutions emerging near the turn of the century and the subsequent start of the Jacobean period. Patterns in plot, character, and style emerge as playwrights increasingly feature crossdressed heroines. Collectively, this cohort of characters who

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<sup>1</sup> This thesis uses MLA 9<sup>th</sup> edition.

perform multiple gender identities enable us to identify the characteristics that define early modern concepts of masculinity and femininity.

Michael Shapiro uses a passive phrase to describe the characters who appear in the plays on his list: heroines in male disguise. His use of ‘heroines’ is broad, and his list includes plays where only very minor characters disguise themselves as men, meaning that heroines are, in fact, any female character. The second important word here is ‘disguise’ which insinuates that these characters are dressing as men with the purpose of hiding their female identities, and thus are not wearing masculine clothing openly or with others being generally aware of their female identity. Well into the 2010’s Marjorie Garber uses the term ‘transvestite’ to specifically refer to crossdressing, though she acknowledges that it is not the term preferred by either the transgender or drag queen communities (she uses the term ‘transsexual,’ Garber, *Vested* 4). While she notes that this term harbors connotations of compulsion and mental illness that should not apply to modern identities, Garber persists in using the term broadly; however, ‘transvestite’ is now a largely defunct term.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, there are two remaining ways to refer to this act of a female character who wears masculine clothing: cross-dresser or crossdresser. Though the terms appear similar and are frequently used interchangeably, Simone Chess provides an explanation of the distinction and her preference noting,

while cross-dress is more common in academic publications, crossdress seems to be the more common use within online and in-person crossdressing communities. The compound term mirrors other compounds in gender and sexuality discourses, including “cisgender” and “transgender”; like those

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<sup>2</sup> Winfried Schleiner also address the problematic links between Freudian definitions of transvestism (specifically that only cismen are included in such definitions), crossdressers, literary analysis, and mental illness but continues to utilize the term nonetheless (607).

terms, crossdresser indicates a category of queer identity, more than simply modifying “-dressing” with the idea of crossing binary gender. (*Or* 145)

This divide between an identity-based term, ‘crossdressing,’ and a term focused on the action without identity, ‘cross-dressing,’ raises questions of identity in these early modern characters. Do they see crossdressing as part of their identity or is it merely a tool or action? Do the actions taken in crossdress contribute to their own sense of identity or to how they are identified by the community? Can these characters be queer if they exist in a society that only acknowledges binary identities and speaks only in binary terms? Like Chess, I will use ‘crossdress’ both because it provokes these questions and because these characters are grouped together because of this action: they are all crossdressing female characters. The question is: does crossdressing impact their gender identity; and if so, how?

### *Sex, Gender & Crossdressing in Early Modern England*

The issue of crossdressing reaches beyond the theatre: substantial examples in both fictional and non-fictional prose, and connections with medical and alchemical theory and practice inform the context of plays being created in a time generally fascinated with the body and its expression. A cultural insecurity surrounding the instability of biology relied heavily on maintaining gender binary through the control of certain actions which were linked with one or the other gender. The early modern pseudoscience, alchemy, is known for the belief that one metal could be transformed into another through a specific process of adding ingredients through secret formulas (Long, *Gender* 3; Knapp 575). This philosophy extended to alchemists’ understanding of human physiology and it was believed that the human body could accidentally or purposefully transition to the opposite gender if too many traits or behaviors attributed to the opposing gender were introduced to the body through

action (Kavey 236). The separation of action and body is, therefore, less distinct for early modern understandings of the structure of a body; as such, these gendered actions could change a person's physical form. Scientists that operated outside of alchemy often subscribed to Aristotelian and Galenic theory that differed significantly in mechanics but culminated in the same result. A common anatomical theory consisted of a belief that the uterus was an inverted penis and that if the 'colder' female bodies became too warm, like a male body was believed to be, the uterus could expel itself and form a penis. The assistant to renowned anatomist Andreas Vesalius, Baldasar Heseler, detailed the theory: "The organs of procreation are the same in the male and the female... For if you turn the scrotum, the testicles and the penis inside out you will have all the genital organs of the female" (Heseler 181). This belief in such a fragile physical divide between male and female bodies contributed to an anxiety that gender identity was equally unstable and could cause change in sexual organs.

As a second prominent scientist, Ambroise Paré, explains: "Thus, all women are potential men" (43). Female bodies caused a greater concern than male bodies, as it was expounded that those bodies were more vulnerable to spontaneous transition. Allison Kavey summarizes: "[a]ll females could theoretically become male, in accord with the one-sex humoral/Galenic model of the body. Some held that males could likewise become female, whereas others maintained that, being more perfect by definition, males could not thus change gender and supposedly degenerate in that sense, even if they were already effeminate" (236). As Kavey iterates, for some like Paré the fear of this physical change was specific to women. The one-sex model occasionally argued that such a transition was a biological attempt to correct failings or weaknesses in the female body. If the female body is considered undeveloped, then it can perhaps continue the developing process. Paré uses this logic to explain why only female bodies hold the potential to transition while male bodies have no

reason to create the same social anxieties. He claims, “[W]e therefore never find in a true story that any man ever became a woman, because Nature tends always towards what is most perfect and not, on the contrary, to perform in such a way that what is perfect shall become imperfect” (Paré 33).

Jacques Duval, a surgeon, argues that certain conditions, such as imprisonment can shape the body, causing it to adapt to feminine or masculine physical traits. If a body is treated as a gender; it can adopt that gender (Long, *Hermaphrodites* 84). Duval, however, does not subscribe to a belief in full genital transition, only a state of limbo which is potentially a greater social concern to him and his mass readership. Kathleen Long’s chapter on Duval summarizes his concession that performative behaviors can contribute to gender identity, even physically, but emphasizes his hesitation to believe in a complete spontaneous sex change. According to Long, “[Duval] links the surface presentations of gender to aspects of sexual difference that we might call performative... And he argues that these performative aspects can also, to some extent, alter the underlying structures” (*Hermaphrodites* 80). The influence of these European scientific theories on English drama is textually traceable as most texts (coming out of Italy, France, and even Belgium) were translated into English and disseminated on a large scale due to the entertainment value that any graphically physical and sexual material provided (Fudge 156).

While the potential extent of transformation differs for the various theories, this “flexibility of sex” becomes a motivation to prohibit circumstances where women might pose a threat of transitioning to male or at least neutralize masculine traits on female bodies (Kavey 228). This alchemical fear is spurred by the parallel concern that women could change physical substance through witchcraft. As Lyndal Roper notes, the influence women had over bodies and healing could be interpreted as dangerous magic:

As the ones who bore children, nursed the sick and cared for the dying, they had access to mysterious bodily products such as cauls, dead infants, milk and blood; but often they needed substances from others to work their magic. They collected herbs which could transform both taste and bodily states, they were mistresses of the chemistry of cooking, and, having captured men's seeds in their wombs, they carried out the alchemy of turning food into nourishment for the foetus and blood into milk for the newborn. Women were mistresses of transformational science. (*Stealing* 15)

The changes women's bodies themselves perform, along with their care for others' bodies, mixed with scientific theories to create the perception that women were responsible for extreme bodily shifts.

Just as the extent to which a body might change is debated, the extent to which early moderns subscribed to such beliefs is also contended. Simone Chess notes evidence of a departure from this theory by this time while Elizabeth Lane Furdell extensively details the dissemination of Galenic theories well into and beyond the Jacobean period, including required lectures at Oxford University as late as 1634 (Chess, *Or* 164; Furdell 14). Furthermore, Furdell emphasizes that this is a transitional period of thought fueled by publication and access to medical texts expounding both Galenic and anti-Galenic theories (14). *Hic Mulier*, reflects these enduring fears that masculinity might impact a woman physically. The anonymous author categorically condemns women who sacrifice their body to masculine clothing, "she that will give her body to have her body deformed will not stick to give her soul to have her mind satisfied" (127). Though a one-sex theory is being challenged by this point, that challenge contributes to public awareness and interest in the debate and potentials for the body. The period covered in this thesis, 1570-1625, becomes increasingly interested in and anxious about the female body and its relationship with

performing gender; scientific debates of gender and sex seep into the popular conscious and the creative sphere of drama. The presumption that female bodies are more susceptible to change creates a particular catalyst for scrutiny and imaginative scenarios.

This hatred of masculinely dressed women reaches a climax in the Jacobean period, a phenomenon which rests on the foundation of a generation of staged Elizabethan heroine crossdressing. Masculine warrior queen Elizabeth I is venerated in lookalike characters. The poetic epic *The Faerie Queene* fictionalizes and historicizes its Britomart (who is, not inconsequentially, the Knight of Chastity) and her masculinity into a distant other that transcends gender and its limitations through religious dedication (Berger, H. 196, 198). The adventurous Bess Bridges in *The Fair Maid of the West*, gains agency through her masculinity but is ultimately idealized by her reliance on femininity rather than military prowess to achieve her political goals. Images of Elizabeth I are used to play out hypothetical dangers and limitations of feminine leadership. Efforts to glorify the ordained masculine power of a female monarch are carefully tempered. Shakespeare's Joan of Arc is stymied by maternity. Masculine power and authority are granted through unwavering dedication to God, service, and virginity. As the trope popularizes and faces exponential growth in the Jacobean decades, sensationalized potentials are played out via onstage heroines who test the boundaries of gender expression, which allows questions about the permeability of gender and biology to be explored publicly. Elizabethan pamphlets praised legendary crossdressers such as Long Meg of Westminster; but in response, Jacobean anti-crossdressing opinion found foothold in the pamphlets of the 1620s (Clark, S. *The Controversy* 157; Dugaw 32). As Sandra Clark explains in detail, the distaste for masculine women spread from King James' own disdain, demonstrated through his own letters and appointments in 1620 (*The Controversy* 166).

James largely based his hostility towards crossdressing on his interpretation of scripture. Valerie Lucas notes,

James I himself argued that the transvestite female undermined a God-given natural order and threatened male authority. Although James I's campaign to control them was only partially successful, the literary versions of the transvestite female offered the consolations of a fantasy resolution to the problem (80).

Though James appealed the Elizabethan sumptuary laws, he loudly advocated for strictly gendered clothing (Rose, B. 65). *Hic Mulier* reflects this use of religious imagery to influence gender representation and “locates the first sumptuary law in the Garden of Eden, where God's decree stipulates not social rank, but proper gender roles” (Lucas 71). In fact, *Hic Mulier* was published just two weeks after James instructed clergy to forbid female crossdressing and masculinity, a practice not uncommon in medieval saint traditions<sup>3</sup> (Rose, B. 69). Rachel Trubowitz marks the ties between this religious impulse and Jacobean xenophobic racism.

If cross-dressing highlights the ‘masculine’ sexual liberty or ‘Harlotry’ deviantly proclaimed by the bare-breasted female transvestite, it also underscores the exotic nature of the cross-dressed woman's appropriation of men's erotic freedom. As the author of *Hic Mulier* maintains, the gender boundaries transgressed by the cross-dressed garments of the female transvestite signal the sexual, moral, and political unruliness of ‘wild’ and ‘rude’ (anti-)nations. (193)

This sentiment is also expressed in seminal religious publications; influencers whose names still resonate in modern theological rhetoric argued for bodies to visually reflect sex and

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<sup>3</sup> This includes St. Margaret who cuts her hair and poses as a monk to avoid marriage (Crane 305).

gender via distinctively binary clothing. Among them was John Calvin, “who explained in his *Sermons on Deuteronomy* (1556) that ‘God intended to show us that every bodies attiring of themselves out to be such, as there may be a difference between men and women’” (Bendall 5). It seems unlikely to be coincidental that James’ interest in codifying binary gender roles and associated clothing arises when playwrights are infusing their narratives with increasingly diverse and transgressive representations.

After embodying masculine qualities, women become blatant defilers of a supposedly natural order. While typically unable and largely unwilling to fully transition into a male, but performing qualities culturally reserved for men, early modern crossdressing characters remain in a grey area that is outside of the socially recognized binary. Although, with the exception of John Lyly’s *Gallathea*, heroine crossdressers all eventually return to their initial feminine identity, the very fact of their masculine performance potentially challenges their internalized feminine identity. In modern terms, Judith Butler summarizes a similar societal fear: are those who cannot be labeled as a gender within a binary system, in fact, people?

Inasmuch as ‘identity’ is assured through the stabilizing concepts of sex, gender, and sexuality, the very notion of ‘the person’ is called into question by the cultural emergence of those ‘incoherent’ or ‘discontinuous’ gendered beings who appear to be persons but who fail to conform to the gendered norms of cultural intelligibility by which persons are defined. (17)

Though Butler considers a contemporary discomfort with gender instability, this ambiguity is at the core of reactions to those who do not meet the binary cultural expectation for early modern society.

Indeed, in early modern discourse, the term monster frequently appears in reference to people who exhibit characteristics that defy expectations of a binary division of gender or biologic traits. William Averell’s 1588 pamphlet, “A Marvelous Combat of Contrarieties,”

directly refers to female crossdressers as monsters and questions their claim to manhood or womanhood:

Yet I meane not all but the worst, and such as entertaine your pride, who from the top to the toe, are so disguised, that though they be in sexe Women, yet in attire they appeare to be men, and are like *Androgini*, who counterfaying the shape of either kind, are in deede neither, so while they are in condition women, and woulde seeme in apparrell men, they are neither men nor women, but plaine Monsters. (Averell)

This fear of crossdressers becoming a body without binary sex or gender extends to the demonization of those born with or later developing physical traits traditionally assigned to both sides of the binary. Labeled as hermaphrodites in this period and in criticism until the modern shift to the term intersex, ambiguously gendered or physically identified people are consistently characterized as monstrous (Park 22; Sytsma 1). This characterization permeates early modern literature and reflects the fear and discomfort of a society deeply uncomfortable with the potential for people and bodies to exist outside of established patriarchal binaries (Mann 70). David Cressy lists several of the moral concerns that arise for early modern crossdressers, most of which are focused on the deception of the act,

If it was unsettling, in an age of ambitious self-fashioning, that people used clothing to mis-represent their social status, it was downright disturbing if they mis-represented their gender by dress. It was unconscionable that the sign should mis-signify, the costume deceive. Worst of all was the unnatural impiety involved, in violation of the law of God, since outward apparel intimated inward characteristics and the wearer of cross-sexed clothing trod the slope to monstrous degeneration. (442)

This bodily unknown can be explored theoretically without the hypothetical real-life consequences that pamphlets warn of by fabricating stage characters who are confronted with ambiguously gendered situations, a particular fear of anti-theatricalists (Levine 4). Early modern drama provides case studies for the ways in which female characters can present as masculine through performance; specific gender and binary expectations of an early modern society are played out in the crossing of gender, marked by involuntary and voluntary actions, clothing, and speech.

Literary examples of female to male crossdressing include seminal titles such as *Huon of Bordeaux*, *La Fleur Lascive Orientale*, *Orlando Furioso*, *The Faerie Queen*, and *Arcadia*. These works share substantive commonalities in theme and structure. Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* and Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* present heroines who embody questions of class, ambition, and autonomy (Shattuck 210). Likewise, Britomart as the Knight of Chastity mirrors the values of Shakespeare's Joan of Arc as holy virgin defender (Stump 97). *As You Like It* owes the name Orlando and satiric themes to Ariosto's epic poem *Orlando Furioso* and Robert Greene's version by the same name; its heroines, Bradamante and Marfisa, also serve as knights, wearing armor that is representative of masculinity and violence (McLucas 37; Shackford 54).<sup>4</sup> *Arcadia* draws from Ovid's *Metamorphosis* and the male crossdressing of Callisto, a source used by several playwrights featured in this thesis, but especially favored by Beaumont (Carver 326; Finkelppearl, *Court* 114). The *New Arcadia*'s infamous crossdressing hero, Pyrocles, takes his feminine identity from a crossdressing woman, Zelmane, who resembles many onstage heroines. Sue Starke summarizes "Zelmane leaves her father's household and disguises herself as a male page, Daiphantus, in order to accompany Pyrocles, with whom she has fallen in love" (19). When she is dying, Zelmane

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<sup>4</sup> Robert Greene's c. 1588 English adaptation of *Orlando Furioso* into a play erases these heroines in armor and replaces them with "persecuted" women (McNeir 788).

shares her identity with Pyrocles who assumes the deceased girl's identity in order to rescue her father. Furthermore, the *New Arcadia* presents Erminia, who also uses her disguise to become a knight but enters the service of a man she loves, a plot seen in *The Four Prentices of London*, *The Faithful Friends*, *Ram Alley*, *Clyomon and Clamydes*, *The Fleire*, *The Wise Woman of Hogsdon*, *More Dissemblers Besides Women*, and *Philaster* (Jeny 3; Starke 19).<sup>5</sup>

In addition, dramatized reports of historical women who crossdressed were disseminated. Mary Ambree, Long Meg of Westminster, and Moll Cutpurse all appeared in popular ballads in the very early 17<sup>th</sup> century (Dugaw 32; Mulholland, *The Date* 19; Waage 105). The popularity of and fascination with heroine crossdressing is mirrored in these efforts; however, the multiple attempts playwrights make at creating these characters reveals the evolution of the trope. Shakespeare creates four comedic crossdressed heroine plays, one romantic (or perhaps tragic), and two decidedly masculine heroines in his history plays; Heywood invents three such plays with increasing attention paid to his heroines; Middleton, Dekker, and Webster collaborate on nine, and a whopping eleven are attributed to Fletcher and Beaumont. More than double this number are from playwrights who produced just one play with a heroine crossdressing, meaning that dozens participated in the creation of this new genre. The dramatic texts of these periods have a unique ability to not only demonstrate the variety of approaches taken in the invention of heroine crossdressers but also burgeoning narrative traditions across a single medium.

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<sup>5</sup>Mikaela Warner posits Zelmane (the *New Arcadia*'s male Pyrocles' female alter ego) as an independent genderqueer identity supported by the character's "inwardness" or internalized identity (25).

*Crossdressing on the Tudor and Stuart Stage*

Furthermore, it was during this period that London theatres themselves began to proliferate. According to Andrew Gurr, “between 1574 and 1642 the London playhouses found their audiences amongst a population growing from about 200,000 to nearly 400,000 people” which included roughly 10,000-15,000 theatre attendees by the turn of the century (Gurr, *The Shakespearean* 260; Jowitt, *Introduction* 11). With playhouses being built as early as 1567, crossdressing heroines appear on stages very quickly with *Clyomon and Clyamdes* circa 1570 (Gurr, *Playgoing* 11). Examples of well recorded performances of heroine crossdressing and their stages include: Boar’s Head (*How a Man May Choose a Good Wife from a Bad* c.1602), Red Bull (*Four Prentices of London* c.1615), St. James’ Palace (*Cupid’s Revenge* c.1637), The Rose Playhouse (*Englishmen for my Money* c.1698), Middle Temple (*Twelfth Night* c.1602), the Paul’s company (*Antonio and Mellida* c.1599–1601), The Globe (*Philaster* 1609), The Whitefriars (*A Christian Turn’d Turk* 1612), and at court (*The Pilgrim* 1622 and *The Night Walker* c.1634) (Dyce B2; Gurr, *The Shakespeare* 46; Records of Early English Drama; Schiffer 17; Vanwagoner 305). This variety attests to the general popular desire to see heroine crossdressers onstage. Though playhouses frequently catered to the tastes of their audiences, female characters in crossdressed appealed to diverse groups. As Mark Bayer describes, “Londoners chose what theatres to attend based on the type of drama staged there and the types of people they tended to attract” (*Theatre* 68). As such these viewers were educated in the tropes, patterns, and developments that appeared before them; consequently, as Andrew Gurr explains, playwrights could manipulate and cater for their audience’s tastes and test “fresh devices... in the confidence that they would be welcomed as novelties” (*Playgoing* 40). Importantly, Gurr suggests that, especially in “plays composed between about 1590 and 1610,” a major concern is the “exploration of the new possibilities

seen in this direct relationship between poet and playgoer” (*Playgoing* 40). This desire to evolve established traditions and appease the interests of audiences is particularly evident in the development of heroine crossdressing narratives.

The period between 1570-1625 witnessed a change in acting companies which transitioned from a more migratory style to more permanent and established locations (Bayer 25). This change certainly impacted plays with crossdressing heroine characters which were featured by many of the major companies. The scope of reach for these playwrights is easily seen in the number of companies they worked with, both as actors and writers. Shakespeare is associated with the Lord Strange’s Men, the Sussex’s players, the Lord Chamberlain’s Men (later the King’s Men), and likely the Pembroke’s Men (Holland 11). Heywood worked with the Lord Admiral’s company, Lord Southampton’s, the Earl of Derby’s, and the Earl of Worcester’s Players (later the Queen’s Servants) (Pollard 213). Middleton and Dekker notably wrote for the King’s Men, Prince Henry’s Men, Lady Elizabeth’s Men, and Prince Charles’ Men (O’Callaghan 12). Beaumont and Fletcher plays benefited the Children of the Queen’s Revels and the King’s Company (McMullan, *Fletcher* 10). As the companies develop their identities and begin to cater to specific audiences, patterns emerge in how playwrights treat and evolve their heroine crossdressers.

Through the first decades of their appearance, these female characters are used to create a recognizable trope that redefines gender roles on stage. Characters that are designated female or male are inherently associated with femininity or masculinity; however, crossdressing characters address contradictions of gender through conflicting gender performance and their attempt to assimilate the opposing state of gender. This designation is entirely authorial, playwrights label their characters as either male or female in various ways. A character may appear under the *Dramatis Personae* as a female character and be denoted by their female name throughout the text. Alternatively, a character can be textually hidden

while they appear as a male character throughout the drama, until that character reveals a female identity. Editorially this has created occasional problems. Some traditions have been established; *Twelfth Night*'s Viola appears as Viola despite her use of the name Cesario for the majority of the play. *The Nightwalker* has seen less consistency; the 1661 quarto and 1989 critical edition denote the character as 'Boy,' while the 1778 edition uses the character's name, Alathe, which does not otherwise appear textually until the end of the play. As in these examples, when the character is identified as female early in the play and a female name is provided, modern editions use that name to identify her without difficulty; however, characters who do not reveal their feminine identity until late in the play complicate the issue. Like *The Nightwalker*, plays including *Anything for a Quiet Life* and *Philaster* face similar irregular naming conventions in their various editions. These heroines inform their audiences and communities that they are female characters and have only been in disguise throughout; yet this knowledge is reserved from audiences prior to such revelations. Some editors attempt to preserve this surprise for readers while others acknowledge the ultimate identity of the character.

### *Character and Gender Performance*

For these heroines who don masculine clothing, any physical action performed must be related to either the internalized female identity or associated with the new, assumed masculine persona. It is gender signifiers that signal the identity the characters wish to portray (or cannot help but to portray) to the societies within which they function. Those signifiers take the form of passive visual elements such as clothing or occupational accessories (e.g., an unused weapon) associated with masculinity or actions (e.g., violence) which are presumed to be the sole purview of men. Will Fisher calls these qualities

“prosthetics,” a gender signifying attribute that may be put on or off. He argues, “sex was materialized through an array of features and prosthetic parts. A list of some of these parts would have to include the beard and the genitals, but would also have to include clothing, the hair, the tongue, and weapons such as swords or daggers (to name just a few)” (157). Bendall remarks on the ease of creating a visually female form through the physical trappings of feminine dress,

Bodies and busks transformed the torso into a uniformed conical shape underneath the bodice of the gown, while the farthingale created exaggerated hips and backside underneath the skirts, both reshaping the silhouette of the body underneath outer clothing. This created a socially recognizable female body on top of a male sexed body on the Elizabethan stage. (36)

It is the ability or inability of these female characters to successfully demonstrate masculinity that offers insight into what constitutes masculinity or femininity in early modern England.

This character identity is independent of any actor identity. As Lisa Jardine glibly states, “Every schoolchild knows that there were no women actors on the Elizabethan stage; the female parts were taken by young male actors” (*Boy 1*).<sup>6</sup> Yet the body of the boy and any impact of his body on performance is separate to the manufactured woman character.<sup>7</sup> While analysis of gender performances on the boy and man bodies of actors provides insight into identities expressed on stage, this project is focused on that constructed character (Bly, *The Boy 2*).<sup>8</sup> I find Pamela Allen Brown’s reminder, “Boy players brought these flamboyant new roles to life, but the playwrights who wrote their parts based them on stories and plays from

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<sup>6</sup> Though some nuance may need to be applied to this statement as continental travelling performances, Mary Frith’s appearance at the Fortune, and *England’s Joy*, a play written for women actors that was never staged contend (Brown 146, 151; Hutchings 94).

<sup>7</sup> Kevin Curran offers insight into Jacobean female performances of masques and their impact on gender representation, particularly that of Queen Anne (34).

<sup>8</sup> Courtney Bailey Parker offers a particularly interesting speculation on the ages of these bodies (18). Parker also suggests that the popularity of the heroine crossdressing trope may be owed in some part to allowing boy actors to play the “easier” role of a boy (27).

the continent, where the star actresses led the way” helpful in ideologically separating the character from the body for a moment (146). A character created as a woman represents a social understanding or expectation for the behaviors and presentation of a woman. What characteristics are defining of a woman for these plays and how are these characters identified? The factors of male authors and actors contributes to gender presentations in these plays being created as social ideals of manhood and womanhood, masculinity and femininity.<sup>9</sup> These concepts of gender exist as a patriarchal construct of how each gender is supposed to act and appear. Such depictions of women are a touchstone for larger topical definitions and reflect progressions in cultural ideals and tolerances for presentations of women and womanhood.<sup>10</sup>

In her foundational book *Shakespeare and the Nature of Women*, Juliet Dusinberre speaks to this idea as a sort of blank slate on which to explore theoretical womanhood without influence of an actual woman. She explains that the effect is twofold; a character without the hinderance of a woman actor can provide a patriarchal idealized womanhood or a female character can be made to perform any behavior without consideration of an actress’ theoretical reputation: “The boy actor gave the dramatist more freedom to imagine what women were like without having to accommodate their imagined likeness to the whims and preconceptions not only of a woman actress, but of the audience, about what it was proper for a woman to say whoever she might be acting” (*Shakespeare* 270). It becomes possible for a character to represent only what a playwright thinks a woman should be or perhaps what might be possible if a woman were to become masculine in the extreme.

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<sup>9</sup> Presumably the authors of all these plays are men, though some do remain unattributed and anonymous. Mary Wroth, the prolific female writer of *Urania*, includes a male to female crossdresser in her prose work but no female to male crossdressing (Starke 25).

<sup>10</sup> Elizabeth Klett discusses the converse in modern productions with all female casts, noting the anxieties that arise when masculinity (or femininity) is placed on bodies that are identified as the opposing gender: “Women’s cross-gender performances can be threatening because they reveal that masculinity is not the exclusive property of biologically male bodies. By highlighting the instability of masculinity, these re-productive performances undo the cultural myth that sex, defined as the anatomical differences between males and females, dictates gender, which refers to the cultural meanings that are assigned to sexed bodies” (12).

The nature of creating characters as female and changing them into representations of men is inherently a binary act. The core experience of these characters is confrontation with a binary set of expectations for gender which create the potential crisis of blurring the binary. This thesis is intentionally searching for that binary, the definitions for male and female; masculine and feminine for these characters as they appear. That is not to say that there are no acts or identities that flout the binary, but rather that the language and concepts of gender in the early modern period are bound by binary ideologies. However, this work cannot ignore the fact that gender and sexuality, and therefore the terms that relate to them, have changed since the early modern era, and must be somehow reconciled in contemporary discussions.

*Gender Studies: Terms and Debates* discusses traditional uses of binary gender terms by explaining that,

As a sociological or anthropological category, gender is not simply the gender one is, that is, a man or a woman, but rather a set of meanings that sexes assume in particular societies. The operation of gender in our society takes up these sets of meanings, organised them as masculinity or femininity, and matches or lines them up with male and female bodies. Received opinion about gender would have it that a female body produces feminine behaviours, a feminine identity (Cranny-Francis 3).

Therefore, masculinity and femininity are an affected set of signifiers that are expected to denote the male-ness or female-ness of a body. Sex (being male or female) is supposedly inherent, and masculinity and femininity are that which is socially constructed. These gender terms are less defined throughout scholarship and certainly in the plays themselves; male, manhood, and masculinity are often used interchangeably, or different definitions are posited. Valerie Traub intentionally uses sexuality, sex, and eroticism vaguely to emphasize ambiguity (*Thinking* 9). For the early moderns, sex and gender are synonymous in these

plays, without these modern distinctions. Elizabeth Foyster notes that the term masculinity did not even appear until the mid-eighteenth century, though it has certainly been used in criticism ever since (5). Archaic and undefined terms used in plays and literature contemporary to their performance necessarily find their way into this thesis through direct quotation; however, when masculinity is defined as the affected traits expected or assumed of gender and male as the internalized self-identity of one's own gender, it is possible to nuance the relationship between gender, sex, and identity through use of these clarified and specific definitions.

Furthermore, these complications are not limited to the language of the early modern era but extend to modern critical discourses. According to Frances Timbers, "Masculinity refers to the interior self-perception of a man, regardless of whether the man possesses the attributes of full manhood" (36). This definition of masculinity contradicts *Gender Terms*, and thus reflects the difficulties of these terms in modern scholarship; however, it does provide a useful concept of manhood and the culmination of masculinity and the male body. If masculinity is a representation characterized by signifiers, something that is seen, felt, or performed, then it can be represented on any given body. If these signifiers of masculinity can be identified, then they can be reproduced, potentially disingenuously. Potentially, if those signifiers of masculinity (e.g., masculine indicating clothing or weaponry) appear on a definitively female body, this appropriation necessarily does not equate to manhood while the mixture of male and masculine does equal manhood. A woman can be masculine while maintaining an integral female identity; she feels female and identifies so internally but projects masculinity. When these characters use disguise to present a gender opposite to the character's identity, the qualities that define these genders are made explicit. What makes a character defined as female convincingly present as a man? *Gender Terms* refers to gendered behaviors and traits as being "coded" by a particular society as masculine or feminine (for

example, the color blue or holding hands) may be characterized differently in other cultures (3). So, for these early modern plays, which attributes signal gender? On a character designated as female, but dressed as man, that which makes them appear or perform convincingly as a man, must be made explicit. That which is deemed masculine, or fails to prove so, is clearly revealed.

As characters created as female engage with masculinity, their interaction with society illuminates expectations for the performance of gender in men and grapples with the contradictions of characters who identify as female but present as masculine in a society expecting binary identities, bound by binary ideologies and language. When asking these identity questions, the appropriate pronouns for these characters must also be addressed. In a similar fashion to my use of modernly derived definitions of masculinity, manhood, and male, I will lean heavily on modern conventions for pronouns. These characters are designated by their authors as female when they are not in disguise and most of these characters refer to themselves with she/her pronouns when they are not actively maintaining their disguise (for example in internal dialogues, or when they revert to a publicly female identity). Therefore, I will use the pronouns by which the characters consistently refer to themselves. In any exceptions to this general rule, where a character may choose to live and identify as a man persistently, I will address the use of that character's pronouns specifically. As this is a discussion of binary characters, created as women who are dressed as men, I will correspondingly use the nonbinary they/them sparingly and with intention in context.

As has been suggested in foundational criticism on the subject, gender is performative. Gender is enacted in a series of layers, emphasizing gender as an action-based identity. For Judith Butler,

gender is not a noun, but neither is it a set of free-floating attributes, for we have seen that the substantive effect of gender is performatively produced and

compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence. Hence, within the inherited discourse of the metaphysics of substance, gender proves to be performative—that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing. (24)

In other words, gender is the culmination of actions and behaviors. For early modern society, these behaviors are expected to signify one or the other binary gender and this theory can be applied in the extreme. The infamous diatribe against masculine women, *Hic Mulier*, worries that women are or will be “man in body by attire, man in behavior by rude complement, man in nature by aptness to anger, man in action by pursuing revenge, man in wearing weapons, man in using weapons” (Anonymous, *Hic* 128). Performances of gender are expected to correspond to the internalized identity of the body and external sexual organs; any alternative is feared and condemned. Masculine actions should be associated with a male body; masculinity coupled with a male body produces manhood, the perfect combination of masculinity and male. When this is not the case, the actions that constitute masculinity for this society are made obvious by the conflict such actions create on a female body. A female body should not generate masculine action for fear of forcing that body into manhood. Where clothing can sit on any particular body and be removed without permanent affect, actions impact and potentially change the identity of the body; a body is culpable in the actions it performs.

Actions become more than simply a signifier of gender and instead play a role in defining it; actions necessarily contribute to and construct identity. By breaking down performance into specific actions, those actions which early modern society attempts to forbid to women can be used to define masculine action as they are expected to belong only to men. Agency and authority are frequently byproducts of disguise for female crossdressers, traits from which female characters can benefit when projecting masculinity. Characters find

the ability to interact in situations barred to their feminine persona: *The Merchant of Venice*'s Portia practices law and Bess Bridges of *The Fair Maid of the West Part One* captains a ship. Independence and physical safety are also motivating benefits of masculinity for a female character in distress; Leocadia of *Love's Pilgrimage* travels freely on her own and *Gallathea*'s two heroines escape imminent death through their ability to leave home and live independently. David Cressy contends that a crossdressed heroine might also find the ability to, "plead at law, regain a fortune, or practice a profession barred to women; to advance a stratagem, win back lovers, or fight a duel; to travel alone, avoid rape or molestation, and to have adventures" (440).

Heroines achieve certain privileges of masculinity: power, safety, autonomy through the response of others to their semblance of a man. Society affords patriarchal benefits to what it sees as a man. The privileges gained are things the heroines want to accomplish as women and can perform as women but require the hindrance of their feminine appearance to be removed. Women travel independently when the danger of predatory men is removed through masculine appearance; women can lead if they are respected as men through the assumption that they are men; women can advocate for themselves and others if they are allowed into spaces reserved only for those who appear to be men. But direct masculine action performed by a female character becomes particularly complicated with reference to violence, which is revealed to be the key determiner of masculinity in early modern drama.

It is perhaps no accident that the overwhelming majority of Elizabethan and Jacobean crossdressed heroines appear in comedies. The conventional structure of comedies lends itself to a resolution well suited to addressing early modern anxieties; comedies conclude with reunions, restorations, and marriage, and as Harry Berger observes,

The reader is offered an image shadowed by hints of transgressive desire, but the image is comical. The disordered passion evoked by the Malecastan

associations is self-subverting and bound to fail; the danger is laughed away, and the reader is soothed. This represents a strategy by which the ideological police try to keep the reader in line, whereas the other interpretation emphasizes the displacement of anxiety to the police. (210)

This effect is achieved by presenting heroines who revert to their feminine identity and rejoin society in a role adjacent to the one they held before taking up their disguise. Or, as Leo Salingar claims, “comedy is essentially an instrument for moral correction” that is relatively light-hearted (1). Therefore, comedies solve crossdressing with amicable endings; however, such resolution is not guaranteed, nor can it be expected, in history plays or tragedies. Although moral or social failings are frequently corrected there also, the results are generally less harmoniously achieved. Narratives in these genres include social consequences and moralism that do not ignore the transgressions of female characters who occupy masculine positions. It is, therefore, also significant that tragicomedies predominantly develop in the latter part of the Jacobean era (McMullan, *Introduction* 1).

Many of these crossdressing heroines contribute to an established form for the new subset of character, becoming conspicuously homogenous in motive and plot, while others build on these traditions as they develop and introduce increasingly bold progressions. By studying these commonalities and generic themes, patterns of gendered expectations and an agenda to emphasize these standards becomes clear against which advancements and significant evolutions of the trope of heroine crossdressing can be compared. By first searching for invented boundaries in this new theme, and then the deviations from the created standards for these characters, this thesis examines how the shifting concepts of masculine and feminine identity in this period take shape. This project works to establish the parameters of the early creation of staged heroine crossdressing and searches for definitions of masculinity as they appear on early modern stages.

### *Thesis Outline*

Due to the limitations of this thesis, some plays on Shapiro's list are not discussed at length. There are two reasons for this: firstly, some of the plays Shapiro includes do not fulfill the central criteria for this dissertation; secondly, the crossdressed female heroines in the other plays discussed are either extremely marginal or use conventions that are more deftly and engagingly displayed in the plays selected for deeper analysis.<sup>11</sup> Brief reference to these texts can be found in footnotes and in an appendix of titles.<sup>12</sup> Although plays discussed in depth are structurally organized into individual chapters focusing on specific authors, within each chapter the plays are largely discussed in chronological order. When Shapiro made his list in 1994, he included dating for first performances and publications; however, the dating of these plays is an active and contentious critical field and the critical consensus about their dating in many cases has shifted. I therefore reference those debates and use revised dates or dating ranges where appropriate. An outline of the overall chronology of these plays as I believe they are currently understood can be found in the Appendix. After exploring how each writer or group of writers puts their own stamp on the genre, my final chapter chronologically evaluates seven plays by authors who only contribute a single play to the cohort of heroine crossdressers. In this chapter, I have selected plays that exemplify both stock characters and

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<sup>11</sup> The first can be addressed very swiftly as neither the anonymous *George a Greene* (c. 1593-1599) nor *How a Man May Choose a Good Wife from a Bad* (1602) by Joshua Cooke or Thomas Heywood specifically feature a crossdressed heroine (Lin 272; Cressy 454; Hendershott 1). *George a Greene* includes a boy who dresses as a woman and hands 'his' clothes and identity to disguise a young girl, the heroine does not crossdress; she wears women's clothing. In *How a Man May Choose a Good Wife from a Bad*, two characters deploy disguises that match their gender identity. Ben Jonson's *Cynthia's Revels* (1601) offers a kind of transitional space between these two plays and the rest that follow insofar as the idea of a crossdressed heroine is alluded to but does not play a significant role within the play itself (Macdonald 140). In the induction, we are told that Gelaia will be dressed as a boy, "the daughter of folly, (a wench in boyes attire)" (60). However, there is no further mention of Gelaia until the final act in which it is stated she "did serve Anaides" (5.11.90).

<sup>12</sup> Some of these texts are not available in modern editions, while old spelling is retained, for ease of reading the long 's' has been silently modernized.

outlying plots or characters so that the arc by which early modern crossdressing heroines develop can be established. Then, in my conclusion, I re-evaluate the plays I have discussed across the thesis by setting them in conversation with each other according to the period in which they were written. Doing this shows how early modern playwrights copy, borrow, and build on popular characters and plots, and how they respond to the material that came before while also reflecting changing attitudes to crossdressing in Elizabethan and Jacobean England. This survey of the twists and turns of conventions and motifs over the course of the period 1570-1625 demonstrates why the patterns in heroine crossdressers emerge and argues that – collectively – these plays should be viewed as a distinct subgenre.

## II. Shakespeare

It is common to find that critical discussion of early modern crossdressing heroines focuses on some well-known characters from Shakespearean comedies: namely, Viola, Portia and Rosalind (Charles, Elam, Lindheim, Shattuck, Slights). Although perhaps less frequently discussed, to this list we must add Julia, Jessica, and Imogen whose names are familiar in this context. Collectively, these characters frequently feature in current critical debates in the broader field of early modern gender and sexuality (Dusinberre, Johnová, Shapiro, Traub). While Shakespeare's crossdressed heroines account for the majority of critical materials in these areas, it is salutary to note that only five of his (at least) thirty-seven plays include such characters (Greenblatt 73; Proudfoot 1). As such, Shakespearean drama constitutes only about ten percent of the plays that feature such personas between 1570-1625. Shakespeare acted and possibly joined the Queen's Men in the late 1580's and was involved as a writer with the Lord Strange's Men, Sussex's players, and potentially Pembroke's Men before writing exclusively for the Lord Chamberlain's Men/King's Men by 1594 (Holland 7, 11). At the very least, Gray's Inn, The Theatre, at court, The Globe Theatre, and The Blackfriars all featured Shakespeare's work with the latter two being the homes of the Lord Chamberlain's Men and subsequently housing most of his plays (The Blackfriars after 1609) (Holland 12, 15, 23). Rosalind Miles passionately attributes the greatest skill to Shakespeare, prioritizing him despite the numbers,

Predictably ... Shakespeare's handling of disguise was far more proficient than that of most of his contemporaries. Shakespeare's primary strength lay not so much in any startling experimentation or innovation as in his capacity to improve upon and dignify the techniques in common use by others of his day. (126)

This praise rings with some irony; admittedly, Shakespeare is not the inventor, nor the evolver of, disguise tropes. Nonetheless, given Shakespeare's canonical and critical dominance, I start with his interventions in the field, both to acknowledge these characters' importance and to contextualize Shakespeare as a contributor to a much larger and more significant body of work that begins nearly twenty years before him with *Clyomon and Clamydes* and continues long after (Berggren 383; Chambers 6).<sup>13</sup> In addition to assessing the influence of Shakespeare's well-known comedic heroines, I will also consider two characters from his history plays, Joan of Arc and Queen Margaret, whose experiences offer an alternative perspective on the way in which female characters engage with masculine clothing and action. Shakespeare's treatment of his crossdressed heroines across these divergent genres exemplifies the conflicting standards for such characters; his comedic heroines are rewarded with happy endings and his historic heroines are sharply punished.

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<sup>13</sup> *Clyomon and Clamydes* (c. 1570), or *The History of the Two Valiant Knights, Sir Clyomon Knight of the Golden Shield, Son to the King of Denmark, and Clamydes the White Knight, Son to the King of Swabia*, is one of the earliest plays on this list or perhaps, the earliest (Berggren 383; Chambers 6). The play has been attributed to a number of authors including George Peele and Thomas Preston, but no consensus exists (Chambers 6). As "the earliest known example of a girl dressed as a page," *Clyomon and Clamydes* is a foundational for the subgenre; it shares numerous links with other early heroine crossdressing narratives including *Gallathea* (Cartwright 221; Wynne 176). Hadorn notes that the play represents the traditions of morality plays while also searching for the newer, more complex themes and plots of the later Elizabethan period; in this, the play is representative of emerging changes in drama to come (86). However, the nature of the plot's two heroes and their unceasing similarities cause the heroine to become obscured. Arnold Wynne notes how easily confused the characters become and how cavalierly the heroine is treated (176).

### A. Comedies and Romance

There are five Shakespearean plays in which female characters crossdress and adopt masculine personas on stage: *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *Merchant of Venice*, *As You Like It*, *Twelfth Night*, and *Cymbeline*. A total of eight female figures don masculine clothing in these plays and Shakespeare produces these characters with their own set of common characteristics. The disguises of his main heroines are effective; each woman is successful in presenting as a man for a limited time. These characters are perceived by those they encounter as men: their physical appearance, mannerisms, and verbal communication project a masculine persona successfully. However, Shakespearean female crossdressers also experience full identity restorations. Each initially identifies as a woman, temporarily disguises herself as a man, and returns, or is presumed to return, to an entirely feminine presenting, female identity that coincides with an internal self-identification maintained throughout the arc of their individual plot. Though this is not a trope unique to Shakespeare, he is unusual in maintaining this narrative for all his crossdressed comedic heroines. As Paula S. Berggren explains, Shakespeare establishes “the pluperfect realizations of the convention. Measured against their predecessors, his transvestite heroines accept their boyish roles with equanimity... Indeed, Shakespeare’s boy heroines gain confidence in their assumed personae so rapidly that their costumes symbolize their control” (384). Consistent female self-identification is presented by these heroines and Shakespeare creates a strict binary definition of gender and identity for his women that is not necessarily held by other contemporary playwrights. For Shakespeare’s crossdressed heroines, the use of the word disguise is especially significant. The women ‘pretend’ to be men, they inhabit a masculine guise temporarily, but do not become, or intend to become, men permanently. As Bruce R. Smith

suggests, “Shakespeare’s comedies often invite the conclusion that masculinity is more like a suit of clothes that can be put on and taken off at will than a matter of biological destiny” (3).

A stock part of introducing many dramatic disguises is the explanation of motivation. Susan Baker emphasizes the distinctions between motivations for crossdressing and the effect such intention creates for the level of habitation occurring in the disguise. She identifies four basic categories:

In choosing a disguise, characters may do any of the following: hide their own identities without asserting any other; substitute another, already existing identity for their own; invent a specific role or persona for a specific and limited purpose; or, finally, adopt a role-personate an invented, particular identity – to be played in multiple circumstances and for multiple audiences.  
(305)

While each of these categories are represented across the course of this dissertation, a significant number of early modern female crossdressing dramatic characters fall into the latter two categories, suggesting a deeper involvement with their adopted identity. Some of the companion figures or supporting characters only briefly attempt to present as a man without committing to a new persona; some, but very few, appropriate a specific identity for their disguise (e.g., *Love’s Cure’s* Clara who is disguised as her own brother). The rest invent a masculine identity that they adopt for either a singular purpose and moment or that they carry with them for an extended period through various events. Most of these characters, and all of Shakespeare’s examples, ultimately end their relationship with their disguise, even if in some instances they appear in male clothing at the play’s denouement. There is a specific use for their disguise that eventually becomes unnecessary or untenable; nevertheless, Shakespeare’s main heroines test their disguises in diverse communities and situations.

Apart from *The Merchant of Venice*, the motivation for female characters to crossdress in Shakespeare's comedies is fear. In *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, Julia explicitly wishes to "prevent / The loose encounters of lascivious men" and seeks her maidservant's assistance in mitigating the risk by requesting "such weeds / As may beseem some well-reputed page" (2.7.40). *As You Like It*'s Rosalind acknowledges that an overwhelming fear for her personal safety stems from her natural appearance as a beautiful woman, when she laments to Celia, "Alas, what danger will it be to us, / Maids as we are, to travel forth so far! / Beauty provoketh thieves sooner than gold" (1.3.102). Viola in *Twelfth Night* metaphorically attempts to castrate herself by identifying as a eunuch to protect and preserve her body from harm. She asks the captain who rescues her to facilitate her plan, "Conceal me what I am... / Thou shall present me as an eunuch to him" (1.2.53). By identifying as a non-sexually engaged figure, she looks to remove herself from potential sexual harassment or interest while in a subordinate position. While these characters recognize such dangers and choose to crossdress, in *Cymbeline*, it is Pisanio's fear for Imogen's that prompts her disguise (3.4.143).

Gendered identity is structured around a series of signifiers, gendered actions, clothing, and props that relate to one early modern concept of gender. Dymphna Callaghan explains that the materiality of these signifiers, combined with the body, contributes to understanding identity, "Thus, a characteristic deconstructionist maneuver places the opacity of both the signifier and the body as the 'material' dimensions of the production of meaning" (430). Dramatic crossdressing challenges these signifiers and represents feminine and masculine attire on male actors and female and male characters. Shakespeare's female crossdressers continually remind their audiences of their internal identity through dialogue and a refusal to engage wholly with their masculine selves. They retain a rooted sense of a permanent female identity regardless of their appearance or temporal participation in the masculine sphere. As such, women living as men offer the opportunity to examine what

specifically is required to be an early modern man by searching for the moments in which they fail to become or further represent men.

i. *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* (c. 1589-1593)

Julia, Shakespeare's earliest crossdressed female character, appears in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* and provides an excellent insight into the commonalities Shakespeare shares with other contributors to heroine crossdressing (Warren 27). The plot follows several devices that become indicative of the trope. Julia's lover has abandoned her, and she decides to pursue him (Proteus) in disguise, which is a plot found in the later plays including *The Wise Woman of Hogsdon* and *Love's Pilgrimage*. She is conscious of her long-term reputation and preserving her feminine self within her disguise, thus asks to be "some well-reputed page" (2.7.43). Significantly, this is the preferred form of masculine disguise for heroine crossdressers. As Sue Starke reminds us, "The role of a page is to serve as an apprentice to a knight, with a view of becoming a knight oneself in the future" and necessarily bears a connotation of some ability for self-defense (19). Julia also hopes to gain anonymity through a class change as well as through masculinity. She recognizes safety in both appearing male and innocuously servile. A semblance of masculinity serves as protection; paired with unimportance, she can become socially invisible.

Julia's anxiety about the consequences of her disguise is revealed in the reservations she expresses about this transition with her servant, Lucetta:

LUCETTA. Why then, your ladyship must cut your hair.

JULIA. No, girl, I'll knit it up in silken strings (2.7.44)

Julia does not want her hair, a signifier of her feminine self which she intends to keep intact, altered to a state that will exist beyond her disguise. She expects to return to her feminine appearance and prioritizes that future state over her immediate need to be hidden. Marjorie Garber reflects on the instability that can be created by a crossdresser who uses attributes

(e.g., clothing, hair, or accessories such as weapons or sewing notions) that traditionally signal a gender identity. She argues, “The transvestite is both a signifier and that which signifies the undecidability of signification” (Garber, *Vested* 37). These signifiers both contribute to Julia’s sense of her own identity and reflect how she is viewed by society. Her anxiety stems from a fear that any changes may endure beyond her tenure as a crossdresser and indefinitely affect her identity.

Specifically, the exact form of her masculine shape causes Julia discomfort, and she hopes for the least explicit boy-ish form possible. Lucetta recommends the current fashion, which horrifies her mistress.

LUCETTA. You must needs have them with a codpiece, madam.

JULIA. Out, out, Lucetta, that will be ill-favoured. (2.7.53)

Julia chafes against the symbols of masculinity that will appear on her body. She feels that they are incongruous with her own internal identity and worries about the reaction of society after she leaves her disguise. By wearing a stand in for the male sexual organ she comes closer to possessing one in the eyes of those who may observe her, and her deception is escalated. Aware that her time in disguise is likely to become public knowledge eventually, she recognizes the potential for her appearance and actions at that time to reflect her feminine identity past her disguise and be viewed as ‘ill-favoured.’ Julia risks that she will be perceived as a liar and a deviant when, as she intends, her disguise eventually ends. Garber goes so far as to compare this anxiety and desire for a person’s identity to be instantly identifiable in early modern culture to the Nazis and their requirement that Jewish and gay people wear emblems signifying their identity as Jewish or gay: “The ideal scenario – from the point of view of the regulators – was one in which a person’s social station, social role, gender and other indicators of identity in the world could be read, without ambiguity or uncertainty” (*Vested* 26). However, Julia concedes that the risk is necessary and agrees to

assimilate those masculine signifiers which will give her the best chance at successfully appearing to be male, though she expresses her apprehension for the future to Lucetta (2.7.46). Julia's hesitation to take a codpiece is superseded by the necessity of her situation. She recognizes the risk of permanent damage to her reputation but determines that freedom to travel safely is more important, with the stipulation that she only use the minimum amount of masculine signifiers required to create a successful disguise. Masculinity is uncomfortable for Julia, she prioritizes femininity as her primary identity unequivocally, and she works to minimize the impact of masculinity on her sense of self, body, and community.

While Julia gains significant agency over her life and future through crossdressing, her experience with performing any masculine action is incredibly limited. Julia does not want to be a man and so does not act as one. In fact, her body reacts according to her feminine identity though she appears to be masculine. When Valentine agrees to give Silvia to Proteus, Julia exclaims, "O me unhappy!" before immediately fainting (5.4.84). This display of an involuntary action associated with femininity and a feminine lack of control over the body reveals Julia's true identity to her witnesses. Through her actions, she does not prove masculine; instead, she is identified as female, and this disclosure causes her deep embarrassment:

O Proteus, let this habit make thee blush!

Be thou ashamed that I have took upon me

Such an immodest raiment, if shame live

In a disguise of love:

It is the lesser blot, modesty finds,

Women to change their shapes than men their minds. (5.4.102)<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> There are echoes of this exchange in a much later play. In *The Heir* (1620) by Thomas May, Leucothe loves the son of her father's enemy, a plot device reminiscent of *Romeo and Juliet* (Thomson 33). In the third act, she meets her lover at a monastery. Though she wears boy's clothing to escape, she does not try to disguise herself

Julia hopes to alleviate the anxiety she has in Proteus witnessing her appearance change by emphasizing that her inconstancy was outward and temporary while Proteus proved to be irresolute in character and love, which, to her, is a greater offense. Proteus showed no intention of repenting until confronted while Julia always planned to return to her feminine self; she justifies her disguise and assumed masculinity through her intention that it be temporary. She is certain that morally her ephemeral projection of masculinity is not as detrimental to her character as his attempts to betray her with another woman. Furthermore, Julia is willing to accept some distain for her physical appearance as a man from Proteus, as long as he resolves to continue loving her despite her outward appearance.

Julia never commits to masculine identity, and actively resists visual signifiers of masculinity, masculine social spaces, and masculine action. She fears any change to the integrity of her femininity and is eager to return to her previous appearance and place in society. This hesitation and emphasis of femininity is a conservative approach to crossdressing and reflects a desire to minimize the social anxieties of crossdressing. Peter Hyland summarizes, “the revelation gives both aesthetic and emotional satisfaction” (53). As Shakespeare develops further characters, he creates heroines that increasingly engage with masculinity, its spaces, and signifiers. Later heroines must cope with sex, violence, and identity crises that are far more involved than Julia’s journey. However, Shakespeare does not waiver from his requirement that comedic crossdressing heroines must be noble, moral, and at all costs must be restored to their previous feminine identity.

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from him and he recognizes her instantly. She defends herself by claiming it is only her clothing that is altered, “Think not my mind transformed as my habit” (3.1). She does not return to masculine clothing. (Dodsley’s edition does not include line numbers. Page numbers are in reference to the 9<sup>th</sup> volume of *A Select Collection of Old English Plays*)

ii. *The Merchant of Venice* (c. 1596-1598)

*The Merchant of Venice* produces three women disguised as men, one primary heroine, a servant, and a minor merchant's daughter (Mahon 6). Jessica, the merchant's daughter, is an outlier among the trio; her brief disguise, which she uses to escape her father with her lover, Lorenzo, fails entirely. However, her new image is expected only to be effective from a distance and her lover is complicit in the ruse as the two escape together. Significantly she wears her disguise in the presence of her knowing partner. This causes a great deal of distress for Jessica who does not want to be permanently associated with a male form in Lorenzo's eyes. She begs him,

do not look on me,

For I am much ashamed of my exchange:

...Cupid himself would blush

To see me thus transformed to a boy. (2.6.34)

Jessica's deep discomfort with appearing masculine stems from the public exposure of her body with masculine signifiers. Without the secrecy of disguise, Jessica worries about the impression masculinity will make on her feminine identity and the potential effect it could have on her sexual relationship. If her image is conflicting for Lorenzo, she might have difficulties with the masculine association indefinitely. The sexual implications of Jessica's loss of Lorenzo's attraction, or even the confusion of Lorenzo being attracted to her male facade contribute to Jessica's unease in her masculinity. Jessica refuses to identify as male, though she appears as such; and when faced with exposing herself in her male form to those viewing her, she is reluctant and asks, "What, must I hold a candle to my shames?" (2.6.41). Jessica feels a moral incongruity with publicly becoming masculine. She is ashamed and resists showing her body in a masculine state. Her entire tenure with masculinity is filled with

resistance and refusal to interrogate her appearance with herself. Though some of Shakespeare's female heroines in crossdress are nearly discovered, Jessica is the only one who is recognized outright. She is not only identified as female, but as herself: though in disguise, a man sees her as she escapes and knows immediately who she is; he spreads the gossip, "That in a gondola were seen together / Lorenzo and his amorous Jessica" (2.8.8). Jessica engages with her disguise at a disadvantage; those in her immediate presence are aware she is in disguise. Her experience with public masculinity causes immense discord in her person and Jessica does not willingly adopt her disguise or masculinity. As a result of this refusal to integrate into the disguise, her facade is permeable and vulnerable to witnesses.

Portia and Nerissa, the principal heroine and her servant, however, enter their disguise with intention. They commit to creating convincing portrayals of men, going so far as to engage with their husbands extensively without being recognized. Despite their proximity, Portia is confident that she and her companion will remain undiscovered:

NERISSA. Shall they see us?

PORTIA. They shall, Nerissa; but in such a habit,

That they shall think we are accomplished

With that we lack. (3.4.59)

An explicit goal for Portia is to project an image that allows viewers to make assumptions concerning her body and capacity for certain action. Portia knows that by signifying masculinity, her body will be viewed as male, and she will be allowed to participate in patriarchal, masculine roles. Unlike Rosalind and Celia, Portia's companion, Nerissa, also crossdresses. To encourage her servant, Portia details the clothing that she has chosen and shows her knowledge of what will be perceived as masculine. She begins with weaponry, the vital outward show of violence, and then outlines actions she intends to have them perform. Portia expresses enthusiasm for her masculine persona and prepares to exhibit a masculine

presenting walk and language. Deciding that an adolescent will be easiest to portray, Portia indicates a pride in her potential for successful masculine disguise. She tells Nerissa,

I'll prove the prettier fellow of the two,  
 And wear my dagger with the braver grace,  
 And speak between the change of man and boy  
 With a reed voice, and turn two mincing steps  
 Into a manly stride, and speak of frays (3.4.61)

Portia is willing to commit to her role and understands the effectiveness of symbolic actions and accessories.<sup>15</sup>

The women assume intentional personas with the goal to gain agency over their situation. As men, the two gain access to situations forbidden to women and furthermore attain the ability to act in those masculine spaces. However, when Nerissa asks Portia why they must “turn to men,” Portia is quick to chide her for asking an inappropriate question, “Fie, what a questions that, / If thou wert near a lewd interpreter!” (3.4.79, 80). Portia protests against the idea that the women will change or transition. The insinuation bears sexual undertones that Portia deems inappropriate. If the two are perceived to cause a biological threat of either transitioning or of performing sexual acts while viewed as men, they are no longer only using the facade of masculinity, but will pose a greater threat to biological stability and binary gender definitions. The stakes are so high that the women do not attempt to become men; they only pretend to be men temporarily.

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<sup>15</sup> Similarly, the slightly later *The Scottish History of James the Fourth* (1598) features Dorothea who also highlights how vital a weapon is to her new masculine facade; it is an object that easily signifies gender, “I am wearie of these weedes, / Wearie to weeld this weapon that I bare” (4.4.1744) (Melnikoff 508). Dorothea professes anxiety about the effectiveness of her disguise and her servant acknowledges it is for show, “If not a man, yet like a manlie shrowe... / challenge him the field, / Suppose the worst, the weake may fight to yeeld” (4.4.1753). Dorothea represents many of the early patterns of female to male crossdressing shared with Shakespeare’s heroines: she is a noblewoman of notable moral standing; she uses a disguise to travel safely; she is uncomfortable with masculinity on her body; she fails masculine action; and she is fully restored to her former identity.

Though these physical and behavioral transformations aid Portia's disguise, she does not engage in or condone violence. In her disguise as a lawyer, her efforts are focused on circumventing violence, a feminine motivation. Portia acknowledges that the violent punishment of removing body parts is legally permissible but invokes the use of a technicality to avoid causing violence. She informs the choices she makes while masculine-presenting with her feminine values. At the trial Portia makes an argument to save Antonio:

Take then thy bond, take thou thy pound of flesh;  
 But, in the cutting it, if thou dost shed  
 One drop of Christian blood, thy lands and goods  
 Are, by the laws of Venice, confiscate (4.1.303)

While Portia's masculinity gives her agency in her situation and access to the court proceedings (a space in which her feminine identity would be forbidden). She nevertheless uses this power to further the desires of her female self to support her husband, save his friend, and halt violence.

After returning to their own clothing and personas, Portia and Nerissa reveal their disguises to their husbands. The disguises are successful until their completion, giving the pair control over their revelation. The women never allow their husbands to know their identities while still in crossdress; Portia and Nerissa maintain their disguises effectively and return to their previous identities without conflating the two personas. Instead, they reveal their disguises to shame their husbands before choosing to restore the previous power balance and returning to their passive marital roles by relinquishing the leverage they gained while assuming masculinity. They are entirely restored and with the removal of their facade, the two forfeit their brief power over the patriarchy.

iii. *As You Like It* (c. 1598-1600)

In *As You Like It*, a play which as Pamela Allen Brown explains is prolifically female oriented, Rosalind watches a violent display while still dressed as a woman (Brown 146; Dusinberre, *Pancakes* 405). Early in the play, a wrestling match occurs that is used to highlight discord between female spectators and violence. Touchstone remarks on the presence of female witnesses with, “it is the first time that ever I heard breaking of ribs was sport for ladies” (1.2.114). Celia immediately agrees and assures him, “Or I, I promise thee” (1.2.115). Rosalind and Celia are vocal in their discomfort at the public display, yet they remain to watch the occurrence. This display of violence is used to socially divide the onlookers based on their gender. The duke clarifies this point by assuring the women, “*You* will take little delight in it, I can tell you” (1.2.130).<sup>16</sup> The women are spectators to an event in which they cannot participate, one which is unappealing to them.

When Rosalind takes to her disguise, her familiarity with gendered social expectations allows her to take a pragmatic and direct approach to the signifiers of her masculinity. Rosalind recognizes the social limitations for publicly female bodies and the inherent danger in displaying her body without male protection. In her fear of assault and rape, she refers to her own body, and the self-worth she associates with her virginity, as a commodity which can be stolen from her. A masculine facade offers the opportunity to take advantage of security afforded to men, thus granting Rosalind agency over her own body. She gains the freedom to participate to a greater extent in society with less personal risk.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Emphasis added.

<sup>17</sup> *The Wars of Cyrus* (c. 1593) provides a very small heroine crossdressing narrative, but it also employs the common convention of crossdressing as an effective method for safe, independent travel for a female character. Alexandra is the daughter of a general who is captured in a siege. She trades clothing with her male servant so that she can escape, travel safely, and deliver a letter to her father. An anonymous play which is occasionally

In considering her appearance in disguise, Rosalind remarks on the benefits of her natural height with, “Were it not better, / Because that I am more than common tall, / That I did suit me all points like a man” (1.3.108). However, she acknowledges that weaponry, the physical symbols of a capacity for violence, will be particularly convincing. Robin H. Wells defines combative accomplishments as being entirely synonymous with masculinity, stating, “the word masculine was often used to signify martial or heroic qualities” (7). Rosalind chooses several weapons while affirming that her internal identity as a woman, with feminine thoughts and feelings, is not altered due to her appearance. She explains,

A gallant curtal-axe upon my thigh,  
 A boar-spear in my hand, and in my heart,  
 Lie there what hidden woman’s fear there will.  
 We’ll have a swashing and a martial outside,  
 As many other mannish cowards have,  
 That do outface it with their semblances. (1.3.111)

By this definition, the masculine signifiers of violence are not equated with manhood. She argues that even a man can fail to prove his masculinity without the performance of violent action, and that many do. To Rosalind, cowards are just as incapable of achieving honorable manhood as women if they will not be violent. As Derek Cohen summarizes, “[a]cts of violence belong to patriarchy as surely as fathers do” (1). Consequently, Rosalind has no intention of performing masculine action or in becoming a man; she will merely pose as one. By appearing masculine and brandishing objects associated with violence, Rosalind takes advantage of social assumption that she is capable of masculine action. These assumptions provide her independence to travel in public safely without making it obvious that she is

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attributed to a Thomas or Richard Farrant, it has been compared to Christopher Marlowe’s *Tamburlaine* (Berek 57; Ribner 63).

vulnerable. As Paula S. Berggren phrases, “Despite complaining, these early heroines persevere, for disguise guarantees them survival” (383). This pragmatic relationship between Rosalind and symbolic masculinity is an evolution from Shakespeare’s earlier Julia who is deeply uncomfortable with the objects of her disguise. Rosalind embraces the practicality of masculine signifiers without fear that her internal feminine identity will be compromised.

Though using indicators of a capacity for violence, Rosalind does feel some obligation to change her behavior for her appearance. Though she cannot produce masculine actions, she attempts to mitigate her feminine performances. She tells herself,

I could find in my heart to disgrace my man’s  
 apparel and to cry like a woman. But I must comfort  
 the weaker vessel, as doublet and hose ought to show  
 itself courageous to petticoat (2.4.3)

While Rosalind is content to appear masculine and does not suffer an identity crisis in taking on masculine clothing, her capacity to emotionally cross the divide between gender personas remains limited. This attempt to control her feminine actions in order to complement her attire does not last and she finds that her appearance and her internal sense of identity conflict. In a fit of emotional frustration, she concedes that her clothing does not make her a man. Nor does it change her feelings or capacity for action; she vents, “Dost thou think, though I / am caparisoned like a man, I have a doublet and hose in my disposition?” (3.2.177). Though she may look like a man, Rosalind lacks other resources. In fact, though Rosalind has her masculine disguise and Celia is also in disguise (albeit a feminine disguise), Celia continues to refer to Rosalind as ‘madam’ (3.2.216). Rosalind never becomes entirely engrossed in her disguise and continues to take opportunities to affirm her feminine identity.

As her alter ego, Ganymede, Rosalind has convinced Orlando to refer to her by her own name ‘Rosalind’ in jest despite the risk of her discovery. Though she teases Orlando

with the truth of her identity publicly, it is not Rosalind's hints which ultimately cause her hidden self to be revealed. Rosalind's disguise falters when she is presented with the results of violence, a bloody piece of cloth sent to her by Orlando from a hunt. The napkin is delivered with the message, "Dyed in his blood unto the shepherd youth / That he in sport doth call his Rosalind" (4.3.153). Rosalind's body physically and involuntarily reacts to the blood of the man she loves, and she faints. She cannot act masculine when presented with the evidence of violence; her body fails her disguise. The intolerance of Rosalind's female body creates an outward physical reaction that supersedes her masculine appearance. This involuntary feminine action does not go unnoticed by witnesses and the contradiction is evident. In her distress, Rosalind again does not deny that she lacks the qualities of a man; however, she still attempts to retain her disguise by claiming her feminine swoon was 'counterfeited' (4.3.163). It is a second feminine signifying action, equally involuntary, that Oliver considers to be convincing evidence that Rosalind is not manly; she blushes. Rosalind cannot control her body or the impulsive, passive actions that define it as female for the society observing her. Oliver's near discovery of Rosalind's disguise emphasizes the feeble nature of that disguise and her inability to command her feminine displays or her physical representation. As Lucie Johnová asserts, "masculine features must be and are balanced by the constant reminders of the heroine's femininity" (4). Repeatedly Rosalind's masculinity is compromised by feminine feelings, speech, and action yet her clothing remains sufficient to maintain her masculine disguise, albeit precariously.

Eventually Rosalind chooses to relinquish her disguise; though at several points she is unsuccessfully masculine, she remains hidden and is able to orchestrate her own revelation. Rosalind appropriates a masculine facade for a finite period. She returns to a heteronormative gender binary. While Rosalind expresses her brief desire to temper her feminine action by not crying, she does not engage in masculine action. She appears masculine but does not perform

it; rather her feminine actions show through her disguise. Her reversion to her fully feminine identifying and presenting persona is not complicated by public masculine action for which she must account.

The anxiety potentially felt by viewers of the play is expressed in the epilogue to the performance; a final note ensures the audience explicitly that the actor and character are separate. After admitting that it is unusual for a woman to give an epilogue, the actor playing Rosalind (here it *is* the actor; the fourth wall is broken) concludes with a statement that affirms his inherent manhood. He, Rosalind's actor, states,

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 curtsy, bid me farewell (Epilogue 14).

This effort to appease and affirm patriarchal norms despite producing complexly gendered material, demonstrates a dedication to those ideals rather than an earnest attempt to transcend binaries. Here Shakespeare displays a commitment to the social standards accepted in society and creates narratives that ultimately uphold those expectations rather than challenge them. Shakespeare's female characters are not masculine and remain firmly committed to their initially prescribed binary identities despite their disguises.

#### iv. *Twelfth Night* (c. 1601-1602)

For many female crossdressing characters, violence serves as the undoing of their disguise (Schiffer 7). While clothing offers a temporary illusion of masculine defense through an assumed capacity for violence, it is expected that women cannot ultimately perform the behavior required of a masculine person to achieve manhood. Without violence heroines

cannot prove that they are the men they appear to be and therefore, it becomes known that they are women by default. Viola, the heroine of *Twelfth Night*, is one of the more literal visual representations of this theory. While in her chosen disguise as a eunuch, a castrated figure typically associated with impotence, servitude, religion, and passivity, she is directly faced with a violent challenge and the expectation that her masculine form will rise to the occasion. Keir Elam's examination of Viola's choice to identify as a eunuch labels the descriptor as a "canceling of biological sexuality" (1). He suggests, "Viola intends to hide... not only her innate sexuality but also her assumed masculinity, thereby ensuring a double barrier of chastity against potential sexual dangers in the world of Orsino's court" (4). Again, Shakespeare is presenting a crossdressing heroine who hopes to distance herself from masculine performance. Viola attempts to escape the social presumptions associated with a male form by preemptively emasculating her masculine persona.

Though she has the potential to imitate her brother, Sebastian, Viola invents Cesario, the eunuch, and further insulates herself by creating limitations to her masculinity.<sup>18</sup> Her choice to not be a true substitute for Sebastian, a man for which she is a physical double, and not embody masculine action, becomes a catalyst for the failure of her disguise. However, she is largely unsuccessful, and her situation is complicated by the sexuality imposed on her masculine persona, Cesario, by the sexual attraction Olivia has for Viola's appearance. As Jonathan Crewe explains, this choice of chastity reverberates through the play, "For the purposes of the conjugal plot, desire appears to be either lacking or highly resistant to direction" (103). Though Viola attempts to remove herself from the sexual sphere in her male role, she is unwillingly redefined as a sexually attractive prospect, precisely what she feared.

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<sup>18</sup> This device is also apparent in *Philotus* (1603) which shares at least one source with *Twelfth Night* (Smith, G. 343). It is argued to be anonymous or by Samuel Daniel, is one of only two surviving Scottish plays from this period and is written in Scots (McDiarmid 223; Wilkes 233). Emilia's brother looks very similar to his sister and the two are easily confused; Emilia's father is also familiar with what Emilia would look like as a boy. However, these devices are joined, and the father identifies his son as his daughter in disguise. An early Jacobean play, *Philotus* utilizes popular conventions and adheres to Elizabethan moral sentiments.

Viola's multifaceted regret unfolds when she realizes that Olivia's total belief in her masculinity has not only put her at personal risk of discovery or accidental implication in a homosexual scenario, but potentially also compromises Olivia's reputation if the truth becomes known. In her distress, Viola agonizes,

Fortune forbid my outside have not charm'd her!..

She loves me, sure...

I am the man: if it be so, as 'tis,

Poor lady, she were better love a dream.

Disguise, I see, thou art a wickedness,

...

Alas, our frailty is the cause, not we!

For such as we are made of, such we be. (2.2.16)

As Viola recognizes that the disruption she created in the binary social order carries unintended consequences, she worries about the moral implication of her deception. The correlation between honesty and honor; honor and chastity; and chastity and moral character is well established for Viola and the society in which she functions. Garthine Walker states that while it is a problematic practice, "the term 'honour' is sometimes used interchangeably with certain others: 'name', 'fame', 'carriage', 'condition', 'reputation', 'credit', 'honesty', 'virtue' and 'chastity'" (236). By convincingly passing as a male and interacting with others in that state, Viola affirms the societal fear that the gender roles which support a patriarchal society are ultimately fragile and constantly at risk. Hoping to cause as little disruption and lasting impact as possible, she feels that her role in this destabilization could enduringly reflect on her reputation as a woman when she returns to that identity. Viola also feels personally responsible for Olivia's reputation. As an individual hiding for personal safety,

Viola justifies her temporary transition, but her impact on others is dangerous to the established social order and she is cognizant and sensitive of her role in that disorder.

While Viola has taken steps to protect her body sexually and retain her reputation for the future as a chaste, heterosexual, available woman, Olivia's reputation is potentially tainted by her infatuation with Viola. It is here that Viola's choice to identify as a eunuch would seem to be a productive counter, yet as Elam points out, "no further mention is made – or so it is said – of her putative eunuchhood" (2). This emphasis of conspicuously absent functioning male genitals is a reminder that the body of the actor is outwith the conversation in what Dymphna Callaghan terms "the absent-presence of female genitals" (431). However, Viola, in her role as Cesario, never clarifies a sexual unavailability to Olivia or anyone else. In fact, Viola never intended to speak of her sexual preferences in public at all; she had requested the captain introduce her alter ego to the duke as such (1.2.52). Yet Viola is aware that she is 'the man' from Olivia's perspective and feels culpable for the confusion (2.2.22). If it were clear that Cesario could be considered impotent, Olivia would easily view the boy, a persona already constructed as a lower-class page, as less than a man and unable to perform the actions necessary for a heterosexual relationship.

Viola's concern heightens as she is again faced with the consequences of her masculine appearance. When challenged to a duel, Viola compares herself to a second celibate figure, a priest, in another attempt to avoid the expectations of her facade. She expresses relief at the suggestion that she may not have to fight and willingly admits her lack of a violent nature to witnesses. She exclaims, "I am one that / had rather go with sir priest than sir knight: / I care not who knows so much of my mettle (3.4.289).<sup>19</sup> Again, Viola forgoes any attempt to uphold a masculine sense of honor. Unafraid of being perceived as

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<sup>19</sup> Laurie Shannon notes that this type of gendered "riddling" is in debt to the earlier play *Gallathea* which is discussed in chapter VI of this thesis (207).

weak, she chooses to align herself with the only male figures socially excused from defending their honor through violence, those men in the church. Katherine J. Lewis describes the medieval origins of the expectation that a priest or monk would expend any violent masculine energy toward spiritual battles and striving against sexual urges, “Monks were expected to be in combat against temptations sent by the devil... However, the tenor of hagiography suggests that nothing defined a monk’s manly strength better than the struggle for virginity or chastity” (114). Although Viola references this, she is not represented as a priest (with her eunuch claim remaining unclarified)<sup>20</sup> and therefore is expected to have some masculine proclivity for violence.

Like Julia before her, Viola lacks commitment to her role as a man and tries to avoid all signifiers of masculinity. For Julia those signifiers are primarily visual accessories, but Viola faces expectations that she will perform masculine violence. When she is finally faced with that violence, Viola does not possess the power to posture or feign ability. Not only does Viola lack the capacity to perform physical violence, but she is unable to subject her body to harm or pain without betraying her disguise. Though clothed as male, her body remains determinedly female and responds to environmental factors as such. As Nancy Lindheim explains,

Although both twins are androgynous, the androgyny of each is manifested differently, shaded towards a sexual or gender identity. Viola is male only in her attire and in the extroverted confidence of her address. She is always female for us, regardless of what she wears; constant asides and speeches remind us that her fears or desires are those conventionally ascribed to women and girls. (682)

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<sup>20</sup> W.E. Slights argues that Viola’s appearance as a page means that she has decided against claiming to be a eunuch, that the two identities are mutually exclusive (329).

While still seen as a man, Viola reacts from her feminine identity and becomes desperate that an encounter with violence will reveal her. She despairs, “Pray God defend me! A little thing would make me tell them how much I lack of a man” (3.4.331). This is indicative of a consistent struggle with her temporary persona; Viola is uncomfortable representing a man and chafes from the inconsistencies in both identities. However, Viola’s attachment to her internal femininity and incapacity to exhibit violence affirms her female sense of self. If she cannot be violent, she cannot be male. She reiterates to those threatening her, “I do assure you, ‘tis against my will” before showing a brief physical manifestation of masculine imitation by drawing a sword to face Sir Andrew (3.4.276). Her reprieve from violence is external and not as a result of her own agency: an accusation is posited that she has taken money in the form of a loan that is now needed. Unknown to Viola, the borrower is her brother, Sebastian, for whom she has been confused and a misunderstanding occurs when she is unable to return the money. Her inability to perform the masculine actions of Sebastian become the only distinguishing quality between the two.

It is at this point that Viola is accused of violating a social standard with consequences that are more severe for men; she is suspected of financial dishonesty. Though the crime is attributable to either men or women, the implications to social standing and character reputation weigh more heavily for men. Alexandra Shepard argues,

It is impossible to disregard the ways in which male status could stem from patriarchal notions of credit and economic worth, and the degree to which patriarchal discourses were confirmed, appropriated and repeated by litigants and witnesses in debt and injury cases. (82)

Therefore, Viola’s unintentional refusal to pay a debt is another score against her masculine veneer. These active signifiers of masculinity elude Viola and she intentionally avoids

participating in masculine defining behaviors, undermining her own disguise in the process.

Sir Toby attacks 'Cesario's' shortcomings in this and insults the figure before him with,

A very dishonest paltry boy, and more a coward than a hare: his dishonesty appears in leaving his friend here in necessity and denying him; and for his cowardship, ask Fabian. (3.4.349)

Fabian echoes with a statement that mocks Viola's preference for remaining passive, "A coward, a most devout coward, religious in it" (3.4.353). Viola's refusals to participate in the masculine sphere culminate in a poor social impression on her masculine identity that begins to bleed into the reputation of her brother. For a second time, Viola's decision to portray a masculine persona and her insistence that she not fully embody the behaviors expected of that role unintentionally reflect on the social standing of another person.

As Viola fails to cope with the repercussions of her disguise, Sebastian's inherent masculinity restores balance. After Sebastian bests Sir Andrew in lieu of Viola, he presents himself to the community. It is at this point that, faced with her brother, Viola reveals herself and announces her intention to return to her feminine appearance and identity.<sup>21</sup> Sebastian unwillingly fills the void of expected masculine performance that Viola created, leaving no space for her to continue to exist in the masculine sphere and his presence clarifies the failures in masculinity that Viola has portrayed. Furthermore, Sebastian provides an acceptable alternative sexual partner for Olivia, relieving the anxiety caused by another masculine role Viola could not perform. Where violence proves the shortcomings in Viola's commitment to masculinity and her limitations in imitating masculinity, it legitimizes Sebastian's masculinity and affirms his manhood, granting him an honored position among his peers and providing him with a suitable sexual partner. Viola rejects the signifying actions

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<sup>21</sup> Peter Hyland suggests that the lack of a "visual spectacle of revelation" is due to the potential practical complications of a costume change (55).

required to successfully perform sustained masculinity; she is a figure that demonstrates the potential social imbalance caused by a community reacting to a woman in a man's position.

v. *Cymbeline* (c. 1609-1610)

The plot of *Cymbeline* depends on a societal assumption that while gender identities may be concealed, certain hierarchical class indicators are inherent, immutable, and can be recognized in any situation (Shakespeare, *Modern* 2978). These aspects include signifiers in appearance, language, behavior, education, or moral disposition despite environmental influences. The tone of crossdressing in this play represents a shift in what has gone before in Shakespeare's plays. Paula S. Berggren argues that Shakespeare has changed perspective on crossdressing heroines, allowing increased tension to develop and limiting the agency of his heroine, "Shakespeare himself abandoned the convention relatively early in his career. When he took a last look at the female page in *Cymbeline*, he restricted the character's range considerably: Imogen has to be prompted to assume male disguise...man's apparel has become a last resort rather than a new resource" (385). Furthermore, *Cymbeline* marks a Jacobean movement towards approaching crossdressing heroine through more serious genres. While the debate of *Cymbeline* as a romance play is longstanding and the first folio denotes the play as a tragedy, there is a decided evolution in Shakespeare's treatment of his crossdressed heroine in this play from his comedic choices (Hoeniger 220). Nonetheless, Shakespeare remains more conservative than many of his contemporaries; rather than embrace the Jacobean tendency of evolving crossdressing tropes to allow more complex relationships with gender and gender roles, he tempers his final heroine and relies on the limitations of expression and resolution he sets for his earlier characters.

Posthumus Leonatus, Imogen's sanctioned husband, struggles with the social pressure he feels to unerringly perform masculinity to the expectations of society. In the first scene of the play, he asks that Imogen, daughter to the king and eventual crossdresser, adjust her feminine signifying behavior to protect his own ability to continue a masculine projection. Similar to Rosalind in *As You Like It*, Leonatus cannot cry for sake of masculinity. He tells Imogen, "O lady, weep no more, lest I give cause / To be suspected of more tenderness / Than doth become a man" (1.1.93). Posthumus Leonatus sees emotional display as contrary to his identity as a man and his performance of masculinity; but here he also admits the fragile hold he has on his capacity to consistently exhibit only masculine signifying behaviors. In the same speech, Leonatus angrily questions his inability to escape actions and emotions he considers to be feminine; for him, these are personal flaws to be overcome. The opening line of his second act soliloquy vents similar frustration with, "Is there no way for men to be but women" (2.5.1). It is on this backdrop of insecurity with gender presentation that Leonatus becomes the catalyst for his wife's crossdressing.

Leonatus has been led to believe his wife is unfaithful and proceeds to vehemently blame any signifier of femininity for the weakness he associates with infidelity. With reference to specific actions, Leonatus determines all failings to be feminine aspects and laments his inability to discard apparent feminine deficiencies: "Could I find out / The woman's part in me!" (2.5.19). In a rant that echoes religious doctrine attributing all sin to Eve, Leonatus details the negative qualities he sees as entirely feminine and holds women as culpable for those failures in society and himself. He pronounces,

For there's no motion  
That tends to vice in man, but I affirm  
It is the woman's part: be it lying, note it,  
The woman's; flattering, hers; deceiving, hers;

...

All faults that may be named, nay, that hell knows,

Why, hers (2.5.20)

Each of the attributes and social sins exist in both male and female bodies and identities, yet Leonatus sees each of these as performative actions that he defines as belonging to the feminine sphere. In this way, femininity is judged to be a moral deficiency that is difficult to avoid. He sees men who fail morally, including himself, as being influenced by femininity to a detrimental extent. Even when he discovers that his wife has not been unfaithful and reunites with her, he finds no resolution to the influences of femininity he sees in himself. The qualities he designates as feminine are so deeply embedded in his person that he cannot find or eradicate them. As Laurie Shannon argues,

Renaissance texts also frequently present gender as a concentrate that is diluted and changed by mixing, whether we consider the symbolic convergence of chastity with power in the female case or the now-established critical viewpoint that effeminacy marks men who become womanly by too strong an interest in women (185).

The villain, Iachimo, also attributes universal emotional states as responsible for eroding his male self. He worries, “The heaviness and guilt within my bosom / Takes off my manhood” (5.2.1). Traits which these men determine to be inherently feminine are an integral part of their overall existence; yet they believe that without the influence of femininity, men would have no flaws, physical or otherwise. This version of binary gender traits influences the expectations for Imogen as a woman when she takes a masculine disguise; she faces a moral judgement both in presenting and performing as a woman and in her role as a man.

Imogen’s transition to a masculine appearance does not involve the same anxiety as some other crossdressing characters. She is assisted by a disguise facilitating companion, a

character which appears as a device frequently in the crossdressing heroine trope. This figure is of a lower class, often a servant, and proffers the concept of using a disguise. By suggesting the disguise and offering the necessary accrements, this person alleviates the executive responsibility of the crossdresser's disguise. The woman participates in the disguise on a recommendation, not solely of their own volition. For Imogen, this is Pisanio who recommends that she entirely "forget to be a woman" and commit to her new role physically and in performance (3.4.154). Imogen responds quickly; she is uncomfortable with the specifics of her transition to disguise but is prepared to assimilate as necessary to be successful. Pisanio offers specific advice for which actions and attributes should be stifled and those which will project masculinity as a replacement. He counsels, "Change / Command into obedience: fear and niceness... / into a waggish courage" and "you must / Forget that rarest treasure of your cheek" (3.4.154). Pisanio recognizes that Imogen will need to overcome the patriarchal power dichotomy through a less passive role in society. The traits endorsed are harsh, unpleasant, and generally impolite, but represent masculinity. He counsels for adjustments to demeanor as well as language. However, the one trait Pisanio sees as impossible to hide or control, is the involuntary blush that might appear on Imogen's cheek. For Pisanio, this is the obvious and inherently female trait which proves femininity beyond appearance. Furthermore, cumbersome feminine clothing is discouraged and Pisanio provides full masculine attire which he details as, "doublet, hat, hose, all / That answer to them" (3.4.170). With this assistance, Imogen finds her disguise to be necessary and sees the requirements as compulsory for safety and to exist outside of her feminine and social identity without harm or fear of discovery. Yet the impetus for the disguise remains detached from her own culpability.

Imogen must be told to think of the potential assault she could face because of her feminine appearance. As she is married with her virginity already given to her husband,

Imogen expresses fewer fears regarding her long-term reputation. She values her life over the risks to her identity by assuming masculinity temporarily: “O, for such means! / Though peril to my modesty, not death on’t, / I would adventure.” (3.4.152). A successful, but hazardous, masculine disguise is her only option in pursuing an independent journey while maintaining a hope for physical safety and control over what is done to her body.

Imogen is impatient with Pisanio and his lists; she appears to be aware of the socially ubiquitous requirements for masculine identity and chides, “Nay, be brief / I see into thy end, and am almost / A man already” (3.4.166). Though Imogen is pragmatic and resigned to disguise in the desperation of her circumstances, her willingness to change is not equal to her contentment with the result. In her disguise as the boy, Fidele, Imogen’s resolve abates. While dedicated to performing the requirements for a successful masculine facade, the projection is not natural or comfortable. Quickly exhausted, she bemoans,

I see a man’s life is a tedious one:  
I have tired myself, and for two nights together  
Have made the ground my bed. I should be sick,  
But that my resolution helps me. (3.6.1)

The environmental shifts into living as a man outside of society are difficult for Imogen to reconcile, yet she feels forced into the position. Determined to survive outside of social and physical spheres that are comfortable, Imogen sees her difficulties as trials to overcome. When discovered by Guiderius and Arviagus, her brothers who were taken away, Imogen begins to feel safe and does not develop a strict masculine projection. The siblings do not recognize each other, and the brothers do not know their origins, but the men recognize a feminine demeanor in the boy they see. After growing attached to the boy they have found, Guiderius and Arviagus refer to Fidele in feminine terms. With the consent of the men in her new situation, Imogen occupies a feminine social role while appearing and publicly

identifying as male. The man who kidnapped the boys and serves as their father, Belarius terms Fidele as their “housewife” (4.2.43). Her brothers are willing to acknowledge Fidele’s masculine identity despite this feminine behavior. Although they witness these feminine signifying actions, they do not see beyond her disguise.

At the first encounter with Imogen in her disguise, Guiderius and Arviagus are open about the potential danger a woman would face unaccompanied in their presence. The two acknowledge that a young woman would be seen as a sexual commodity in their eyes. They tell her, “Were you a woman, youth, / I should woo hard but be your groom” (3.6.68). This exchange compounds the necessity of Imogen’s masculinity to acquire security as a woman outside of her normal social confines. Though she is married, the men who see her in a vulnerable and isolated state would only see her as a sexual body. Her form, despite her action, protects her from nonconsensual relationships and gives her some autonomy over her own body. Furthermore, by appearing as a man, Imogen unconsciously prevents any incestuous relationship she would have with the men.

When Imogen is faced with violence, her body fails to cope in a method that becomes familiar to crossdressing heroines; her body shuts down and faints; however, Imogen voluntarily facilitates the incapacitation of her own body. She finds a body wearing her husband’s clothing, believes he is dead, and takes a potion that causes her to lose consciousness, preventing her from performing any action at all. Imogen is unable to cope with the evidence of violence and is then discovered by Caius Lucius who believes her to be dead. As Imogen wakes, she is able to recreate her disguise and is not discovered. Recovered, Imogen interacts with the body and touches it in order to bury it, a practice specifically linked to women. Roberta Gilcrest notes woven fabrics and evidence of women’s folk medicine as particular links to women and their intimate involvement with medieval and early modern English burial traditions (164). Imogen refuses to leave the body before preparing it for burial

and protecting what she believes is her husband from the elements. She says to Lucius, “I’ll follow, sir. But first, an’t please the gods, / I’ll hide my master from the flies as deep / As these poor pickaxes can dig” (4.3.389). Though in disguise, Imogen performs a wifely duty and reacts from her feminine identity and motivations. The interaction shifts from a rejection of violent evidence to a loving burial ritual.

Facing a battle, an explicitly violent circumstance and masculine interaction, Imogen is recognized as incapable of participating in the event. Though still appearing as Fidele, Imogen is sent away from the violence by Lucius. He orders, “Away, boy, from the troops, and save thyself; / For friends kill friends” (5.4.1). This warning is not accompanied by a judgement of cowardice; the hallmark of men who flee battle. Whether it is from a perception of age or the obvious femininity Imogen projects, Caius Lucius offers the boy he sees a reprieve.

Ultimately Imogen faces violence more directly than any other Shakespearean crossdressed woman. Imogen’s own death is reported and in mourning the presumed death of his wife, Posthumus Leonatus attacks her, only recognizing her as a boy. Leonatus finally recognizes his own responsibility for the separation from his wife and passion drives his subsequent actions; however, in his anger he lashes out violently and victimizes his wife a second time. “Shall’s have a play of this? Thou scornful page, / There lie thy part. [*He strikes her down*]” (5.6.223). Imogen recovers from the injury and the impact of violence on her body serves as the catalyst for her revelation. Pisanio identifies his mistress as she falls, revealing her disguise to all present. After she revives, Leonatus claims to finally recognize the voice of his wife, but only after her body has failed to contend with violence and her feminine identity has been revealed for him. Violence forcibly removes the effective state of her disguise and publicly exposes her female identity through her body without her assent.

Shakespeare develops female characters in crossdress with increasingly more intimate relationships with masculinity and the impact of masculine performance in relation to their female bodies and feminine identities. He discusses the binary signifiers he expects to define masculine and feminine performance and inherent manhood and womanhood. For his female crossdressers, he creates limitations for their assimilation to masculinity and does not allow them to perform violence, the fundamental indicator of manhood and preeminent masculine action. These figures remain tied to their feminine identities and revert entirely to those personas at the completion of temporary disguises. The consistencies in Shakespearean comedic heroines affirm a standard of expectations for feminine behavior and restoration to a binary feminine identity through the incapacity to persistently perform masculine action. In contrast, in his history plays, Shakespeare involves female characters with masculinity and violence outwith disguise. Beyond the boundaries of comedy, his characters engage publicly with masculinity in relationship to their female selves, without the security and anonymity of disguise. This involvement requires social and personal reconciliation with opposing binary-defined signifiers existing on a publicly female body; this includes both masculine signifying clothing and actions. For these female characters there is no resolution; instead, they face reparations for their masculinity and remain impacted by their overt association with it.

## B. Histories: *Henry VI* Trilogy

The two exceptions to this discussion of Shakespearean plays are exceptions because they are not comedies, nor are the women in disguise. As such, these plays do not appear on Michael Shapiro's list of disguised heroines. Two history plays in the *Henry VI* trilogy present women in attire typically associated only with men and masculinity and inseparable from violence, armor. Shakespeare's characterizations of Joan of Arc and Queen Margaret in the *Henry VI* trilogy are strikingly masculine and participate in masculine social contexts, though neither ever identifies as a man either publicly or personally. The notoriety of seeing a woman in armor is made evident by an announcement of Joan and her appearance before her entrance to the stage. Talbot declares, "A woman clad in armour chaseth them" (*Part One* 1.6.3). Margaret's masculine appearance is less definitive, but she offers a declaration that supports the likelihood of her figure donning armor. She exclaims, "my mourning weeds are laid aside / And I am ready to put armour on" (*Part Three* 3.3.229). Both women express intense motivation to defend a cause and find that the accoutrements of masculinity allow them to function and find respect in male dominated spaces. Margaret and Joan adopt armor, a signifier for masculine violence, and appear in battlefields, the ultimate social interaction dedicated to violence, for political motives. The sphere of war and engagement in politics are both endeavors limited to the masculine domain in which Joan and Margaret participate as unconcealed women. Neither is in a disguise; this masculinity is layered on openly female bodies. The women do not identify as or attempt to live as men at any time. These circumstances specific to a comedic setting create separate atmospheres and garner a different public response than is created in dramatic narratives.

When a woman has the potential to perform masculine attributes, attention is drawn to exactly what it is to be a man for an early modern audience. Kate Bornstein gives a modern

definition of male privilege and masculinity that is rooted in the same violent identity. For Bornstein, “‘Male privilege’ is assuming one had the right to occupy any space or person by whatever means, with or without permission... Male privilege extends into sexual harassment, rape, and war... Male privilege is, in a word, violence” (108). Though Bornstein calls for a modern eradication of gender and Judith Halberstam is frustrated with masculinity remaining synonymous with maleness, it is this belief in a strict dichotomy and definition of gender and what exactly a woman is capable of (i.e., not violence) that fails Shakespeare’s female identifying, masculine characters in his comedies. These women assimilate masculinity for the benefits of male privileges, yet do not intend to engage in the masculine actions of which they are most afraid. They exist in a masculine space, but do not belong to it. The armor-clad women of his histories demonstrate a more complex interaction with masculinity and the masculine action of violence.

The relationship between masculinity and violence is accentuated in these figures who attempt to embody masculine qualities. A sustained tenure in a masculine social sphere would need to stem from a cultivated relationship with violence. As Jennifer Feather and Catherine E. Thomas explain, “achieving masculinity frequently, if not always, relies on acts of violence in one form or another” (Feather 1). By appearing masculine, these figures project the capacity to defend their right to exist in masculine spaces or to reap the benefits of male privilege. It is when their actions cannot rise to the occasion of their facade that the disguise cannot continue. These limitations underscore the ephemeral hold that masculinity has on a female body and reinforces the cultural expectation that a woman is not equal to the actions of men and therefore cannot and should not achieve manhood through masculinity.

Here the question of violence itself must be defined. As violence can be verbal, sexual, or domestic in addition to physical or martial violence, it is important to determine which type of violence these women are engaging with and whether they are synonymous

with manhood and therefore projected by masculine female characters. In the early modern period, verbal violence was most commonly recognized as a feminine trait with terms such as ‘scold’ and ‘shrew’ referencing forceful language and being applied solely to women. As Martin Ingram describes, “‘scold’ was a strongly negative term, in destructive impact second only to ‘whore’” (47). Though associated with a certain emotional force and power, a feminine show of verbal strength does not equate with honor in the way that male physical violence does in this period. There is no skill necessary by which a superior person could champion over the other; anybody who can speak can participate in scolding; and both men and women are capable of the task despite the association with women. Ingram describes how scolding came to be recognized as a significantly female crime.

brawling and verbal abuse were particularly though not exclusively associated with females because the latter tended to eschew physical violence and did not ordinarily have easy access to effective substitutes such as manipulation of the legal system (51)

Because physical violence is unexpected of women with society deeming violent performances impossible for female bodies, verbal abuse is left as the form of violence with which women can engage. As their only form of violent expression, it is then associated primarily with that gender. Women’s subjection to ‘ducking’ or the infamous ‘scold’s bridal’ is further evidence of a societal acknowledgment for a woman’s capacity for verbal force (Boose 185, 196). Domestic abuse by women towards their husbands was considered a fault of the husband and only significant in emasculating him and subverting his patriarchal authority. As David Underdown relates, legally a woman could not even be prosecuted for physical abuse. He states, “Scolds and witches could be prosecuted in the courts; unruly women who beat their husbands usually could not, so they had to be dealt with by unofficial community action, by shaming rituals like charivari” (127). In a public humiliation called a

skimmington ride, part of the charivari or 'rough music' tradition, men were punished for allowing themselves to be verbally or physically abused or shamed by infidelity. It is described by Underdown as "the acting-out of the proscribed behaviour by the 'husband' riding backwards on horse or donkey and holding a distaff, the symbol of female subjection, while the 'wife' (usually a man in woman's clothes) beats him with a ladle" (129). Produced on busy streets, this performative punishment of a man and a degrading proxy for his wife serves to publicly attribute culpability for destructive behaviors of a woman to their husband. Violence by women, therefore, impacts the masculine reputation of men more than their own. Such social structures created to punish violent behaviors by women through implicating their husbands in the punishments encourage larger patriarchal efforts to curb violence in women.

These communal efforts influence the impulse to eliminate violence from crossdressed females who appear on stage. There is no equal societal structure for physical violence performed by a woman, especially if such an action were to be performed on a man who is not her husband. The assumption is so firm that women cannot be physically violent, these violences, characterized as largely masculine, have no formal system by which they can be addressed for women. Often such actions are defined by a weapon, again an object disassociated from women. Susan Asmussen remarks on the general assumption the women were unable to perform significant violences due to their lack of a weapon. She argues, "Since women in early modern society rarely carried weapons that caused death, their brawls, though frequent, were rarely recorded" (*Being* 75). This distinction, a woman encountering a weapon, is where an early modern society stops short of believing in feminine violence. When a woman takes up arms, represents militia, or is challenged by weaponry, she is at odds with the early modern definition of femininity. Her ability to use masculine objects is a confrontation of her own masculinity or lack thereof. Judith Butler offers the visual of the

body being a type of empty receptacle for gender to be placed upon; “This ‘body’ often appears to be a passive medium that is signified by an inscription from a cultural source figured as ‘external’ to that body” (129). In Shakespeare’s *Joan of Arc and Margaret*, we can witness violence being ‘inscribed’ on the tabula rasa of female characters rather than by the male figures violence is supposed to define. When violence is added to the concept of a female body, these characters have the power to be heroic in their violence, but ultimately pose a great threat to the patriarchal balance of power. As such, they are disarmed by the end of their plays and face social punishments contrived for the unexpected sins of a woman who openly performs masculine violence.

i. *Henry VI Part One* (c. 1592)

In *Henry VI Part One*, Joan is embraced for her ability to fight and defend her faith and country (Shakespeare, *Modern* 926). King Charles offers his highest praises, compliments, and awards, “Tis Joan, not we, by whom the day is won... / No longer on Saint Denis will we cry, / But Joan la Pucelle shall be France’s saint” (1.6.17). Although she and, most significantly, her violent behaviors are applauded, this acceptance is dependent on maintaining sexual neutrality through her status as a chaste and victorious figure supported by God. She announces, “I must not yield to any rites of love, / For my profession’s sacred from above” (1.2.113). Her strength is gained through religion, and it relies on a sexual sacrifice and strict abstinence; consequently, she is not expected to adhere to culturally normative gender standards. This open acceptance of her martial behavior is rare in early modern drama; but as long as she is seen as a holy figure sent from God to aid a noble cause, she is embraced by men, regardless of her actions. There is religious and historical precedent for intersexuality and the crossing of gender roles for women under divine authority. The

medieval saint, Jerome, contends that a woman is not capable of full dedication to God without adopting masculine qualities, which are to him superior at worship and dedication. He does not limit the extent of this dedication, even to the point of a woman reaching the extreme potentiality being considered a man. “[A]s long as woman is for birth and children, she is as different from men as body is from soul. But if she wishes to serve Christ more than the world, then she will cease to be a woman and will be called man” (Lewis 123).<sup>22</sup> Records of the historical Joan are explicit that this is her goal. Susan Crane details Joan’s own words,

She supplements the argument from instrumentality with the assertion that her cross-dressing pleases God, and later that she took it by God’s command: “il plaist a Dieu que je le porte”; “je le fais par le commandement de nostre Sire et en son service” (it pleases God that I wear it; I do it on the command of our Lord and in his service). She links her civilian attire to her military purpose in the assertion that “l’abit et les armes qu’elle a portés, c’est par le congié de Dieu; et tant de l’abit d’omme que des armes” (the clothing and the arms she has worn have been by the permission of God, and just as much the men’s clothing as the arms) (302).

For Shakespeare’s Joan to remain a symbol of leadership and to be a warrior, she must embody a level of masculinity, the sole state in which these religious masculine signifiers of violence and devotion exist in the early modern gender binary. Like in the comedies, it is expected that her position of masculinity, power, and social influence is only temporary; however, Joan’s public female body conflated with her masculinity complicates her restoration. When first learning of Joan’s leadership in battle, Burgundy’s concern is great and his consent in following Joan is dependent on the temporality of her position. He tells those around him to, “Pray God she prove not masculine ere long” (1.5.23). Any implication

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<sup>22</sup> St. Jerome in *Commentarius In Epistolam Ad Ephesios*, III, V as cited in English by Katherine Lewis.

that Joan's success is possible without divine ordination cannot be supported by the patriarchy; for a woman to lead with masculine violence, she must be ordained by God. Joan recognizes the precarity of her position and clarifies that she is calling on notably feminine spiritual assistance through the Virgin Mary. She exclaims, "Christ's mother helps me, else I were too weak" (1.2.106). With a female patron and the subsequent spiritual blessing, Joan further deflects the anxiety around her role as warrior and leader. While celibate, Joan can be unconquerable and the epitome of a spiritual hero who has risen above mortal standards.

Though Christianity is culturally responsible for strict adherence to gender binaries, it is within religion that exceptions exist for those who are particularly spiritually ordained. Some believed that intersexuality was the most holy state of humanity and sat at the heart of creation. Fifteenth century philosopher Leone Ebreo subscribed to the platonic theory that Adam, being in the image of God, embodied both genders. From the 1938 translation, "It means that Adam, that is, the 'first man,' whom God created on the sixth day of the Creation, being a human individual, contained in himself male and female without division... And at one time it speaks of Adam in the singular as a man (Adam, one man), at another in the plural" (348). Though unsurprisingly controversial, this theory held by several philosophers and scientists was used to explain contradictions to normative gender binaries and expectations. Kathleen Long explains how the stance, which at first glance is stunningly progressive, also argues that while gendered physical or social anomalies may appear to be or be feared as 'monstrous,' they are in fact divinely appointed and created. While Long's work focuses on real people born as hermaphrodites in the period, her sentiments regarding gender ambiguity and interpretation of Ebero's work remain relevant to projections of stage characters performing mixed gender representations. Long summarizes, "Leone conflates the spiritual androgyne with the monstrous hermaphrodite; this association of the monstrous with the divine is characteristic also of the alchemical texts and takes on particular strength by the

end of the sixteenth century” (*Hermaphrodites* 9). Long also acknowledges that new discoveries in anatomical science were influencing opinion and highlights several of these developing theories. Jacques Duval, combined his new scientific discoveries with his strong religious belief that all living creatures had been divinely created, not excluding natural anomalies to binary gender or biologic sex standards. As Long states, “Duval adopts the view that the diversity of nature is a sign of divine power, rather than that which see any deviation from an established norm to be monstrous” (*Hermaphrodites* 82). By embodying both genders at a spiritual level, Joan’s physical expression of masculinity becomes a holy mission.

Like Spenser’s Knight of Chastity, Britomart, Joan finds that her abstinence permits the trappings of violence and authority (Stump 97). Joan’s army follows her willingly and depends on her leadership explicitly but reiterates constantly her status as a virgin. She is not only introduced as a “holy maid,” but when Alencon promises to enshrine Joan immortally as a statue, he grants her the moniker “sweet virgin” (1.2.51, 3.3.16). She also must continually remind the men that she is fulfilling her duty as a celibate when exhibiting violent behavior. When treated with her inevitable death, Joan uses her reputation for celibacy as a defense. She insists that she is, “A virgin from her tender infancy / Chaste and immaculate in very thought” (5.5.50). At this, Warwick is willing to grant her a quicker death for being a maid (5.5.55). It is her eventual forfeit of this defense and release of her claim to virginity that completes her fall from glory, power, and acceptance, resulting in immediate death.

This tactic is reminiscent of contemporary imagery lauding Queen Elizabeth I as a divinely appointed leader and warrior. Queen Elizabeth I blatantly recreated the Catholic virgin trope in her own image through her choice to remain unwed. With the removal of the Virgin Mary as an icon and as the head of the new Protestant church, Elizabeth I could fill the saintly role as a holy virginal figure. A transcript of a speech the queen made to parliament

emphasizes her belief in the holy nature of remaining unwed. She claims to have, “made choyce of this kinde of life, which is most free, and agreeable for such humane affaires as may tend to his service onely” (Bellegent). By invoking this holy position, she could lead her empire as a warrior figure. In her historic speech to the troops at Tilbury, Elizabeth I stands as King, violent and masculine.

under God I have placed my chiefest strength, and safeguard  
in the loyal hearts and good will of my subjects. And therefore  
I am come amongst you as you see... I know I have the bodie,  
but of a weak and feeble woman, but I have the heart and  
Stomach of a King, and of a King of England too... I my self  
will take up arms (Elizabeth I).

Elizabeth uses her position as a virgin to justify her authority over both spiritual and martial realms. She separates her body and her capacity for action, claiming a female body, but a masculine disposition for power and action. As a virgin, she is obligated only to God and can participate in, and indeed rule over, social structures prescribed for men.

The disparity of gender expectations in *Henry VI Part One* becomes more apparent when examining the Bishop of Winchester’s religious obligations. The bishop’s chastity is not questioned, but the actions for which he is admonished are in contrast to Joan. Through his status as a chaste priest he is not expected to prove his masculinity, nor is he demeaned for being a non-violent male; in fact, he is expected to suppress these desires. Winchester’s violent behavior is chastised by Henry VI for being inappropriate due to his holy and pure position. The king remarks, “Or who should study to prefer a peace. / If holy churchmen take delight in broils?” (3.1.112). The bishop’s chastity is expected to be an attribute of peace. A holy man was expected to expend his violent energy in spiritual tasks, the majority of which would be needed to combat sexual temptation. In contrast, as an unmarried woman, it is

socially expected that virginity is Joan's natural state and will not require a personal effort to fight sexual urges. Lewis summarizes the belief that a man's greatest battle would be in avoiding sex.

Monks were expected to be in combat against temptations sent by the devil, which could take various forms... However, the tenor of hagiography suggests that nothing defined a monk's manly strength better than the struggle for virginity or chastity (114).

By focusing his propensity for violence towards the suppression of his male sexual urges, the bishop conforms to a passive position most reminiscent of femininity. Winchester's lack of violent action, which he personally struggles with, is also condemnable in men who have not taken holy orders. Rather, medieval tradition held that women crossdressing in the pursuit of holiness were seeking a 'more perfect' masculine state.

Transvestism practiced by female saints was not regarded as immoral or scandalous by the Church Fathers or their medieval followers. Following Philo of Alexandria, the early Church Fathers represented the male as the more rational, and therefore superior, element of the soul, the female as the less rational and therefore inferior. Wearing men's clothes thus signified an attempt to become more rational and nearer to Christian perfection by imitating the superior sex. In an age which held celibacy to be the highest Christian virtue, female transvestism symbolised not only the rejection of one's own sex, but also the renunciation of the world in order to better serve God (Lucas 75)

Therefore, in the intentional absence of sexual activity, i.e., religious celibacy, men are expected to exist in a feminine state and women are capable of exhibiting masculine performances.

Joan eventually must defend her virginity. Joan uses two names, the well-recognized Joan of Arc and the French Jeanne la’Pucelle, or Joan the Maid, a name which reflects her commitment to maintaining a virginal image. Joan uses her celibacy to remain completely committed to her female body and identity while exhibiting masculine clothing and violent action publicly. When her status as a celibate is questioned, Joan defends herself vehemently. She insists, “Joan of Arc hath been / A virgin from her tender infancy, / Chaste and immaculate in very thought” (5.4.49). As evidenced by Joan’s military success in the play, her warrior state is possible so long as she is a symbol or holy conduit, without a sexual identity. If she is a figure without an explicit sexuality, she can exhibit actions indicative of either gender without societal backlash; the acceptance of her violent action is dependent on this sexual inaction. For one part of her body to gain agency, she must forfeit the activity of the other.

Unfortunately for her fate, Joan’s resolve disintegrates when she is threatened with execution. The abandonment of her claim to chastity and high birth is ultimately her downfall. When a shepherd claims her as his daughter, and therefore marks her as a commoner, Joan denies the connection to him vehemently until her death, “First, let me tell you whom you have condemn’d: / Not me begotten of a shepherd swain, / But issued from the progeny of kings” (5.4.36). This is the first instance in the play where class is also an explicit condition to her status as a holy figure. Maintaining a high birth and purity in every sense: spiritual, physical, and social, is a necessity for Joan to lead men in violence. Without those qualifications, the men she has led revolt against her and view her authority over them as false. Those men are willing to take extreme actions to restore their own power and punish Joan for what they view as blasphemous deception.

After defending her virginity and failing to illicit mercy, Joan hopes that a pregnancy will garner sympathy and be more likely to spare her. She offers a lengthy appeal culminating

in the plea, “I am with child, ye bloody homicides / Murder not then the fruit within my womb, / Although ye hale me to a violent death” (5.4.54). With this announcement, Joan’s death becomes inevitable. Her actions draw criticism when she is perceived as flawless; but with an explicit symbol of her sexual activity, activity performed outside of marriage, she is condemned outright. Warwick sees Joan’s inconstancy as proof of her guilt; he exclaims, “It’s sign she hath been liberal and free” (5.4.82). Whether Joan is pregnant or if she lies to save herself, the claim of a pregnancy represents deceit to the men who observe her; she has either lied about her status as a virgin or lied to stay alive. This becomes the catalyst for men to regain their patriarchal power over Joan and enact revenge on the woman who ruled them under false pretenses. Subsequently, Joan is condemned as a harlot, as a liar, and for blaspheming her faith through spiritual and religious representation without the required commitment to chastity. York condemns Joan for it, mocking her, “And yet, forsooth, she is a virgin pure. / Strumpet, thy words condemn thy brat and thee” (5.4.84). As the result of infidelity, she has breached the standards set forth for women who are virgins and are granted allowances to perform masculine action for spiritual missions. Joan is then executed and her struggle with her gender role and her power over a patriarchal society are forfeit.<sup>23</sup>

Historically, Joan’s defense through pregnancy was proven to be fictional; Shakespeare chooses to frame Joan in this context. Her documented conviction at Rouen and subsequent execution at the stake ultimately resulted from a trial for dressing in male attire. A delay in her death was ordered to investigate a published piece that declared Joan to be pregnant; it was conclusively determined to be false, and she was burned (Taylor, C. 48).

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<sup>23</sup> In Thomas Kyd’s tragedy, *The Tragedy of Soliman and Perseda* (1588), Perseda’s masculinity and previous murder are also not rewarded, she is not restored, and she dies for her actions. This heroine expects and is correct that her attempt at a duel will prove unsuccessful and fatal. While her physical strength is enough to kill a woman who does not defend herself, Perseda uses a more feminine method, poison, to kill a man and she does not best him in physical combat. Dressed as a man she performs no masculine task; she fails at masculine combat and dies for her chance to be masculine but does inspire justice as a heroic figure on a righteous mission of vengeance.

This inaccurate report is likely the source for Shakespeare's version of Joan's defense and the humiliations he devises for Joan also reference historical records (Spiess 96). Shakespeare's decision to include this detail is a significant emphasis on the standards for masculine women and is a deliberate choice to emphasize a cultural standard for women who exert influence over the patriarchy through exhibiting masculine behaviors. Without an immaculate moral standing, including a holy virgin reputation, this masculine woman is subject to be judged and face capital punishment by those she previously dominated. Shakespeare utilizes historical apocrypha to denigrate this martial figure and to justify her removal from glory and the narrative.

However, in reality she was accused of witchcraft, heresy, and even of predicting a future where she bore three sons with a man named Robert (not one of several fathers proposed in Shakespeare's play); Joan denied every condemning charge except the charge of crossdressing. She could not deny this charge as she wore men's clothing to the court, but claimed, as with every other charge, that the actions she did commit were sanctioned by God (Crane 299). Joan remains "by far the best-documented transvestite of the later Middle Ages" (Crane 297). Transcripts from the historic trial relate the charge and her response, "Jeanne hath been many times advised with gentleness, by noble persons of both sexes, to give up her man's dress and resume suitable attire. She hath absolutely refused, and to this day also refuses with persistence" (Murray 347). Her response is as follows: "I was invited to take a woman's dress then I refused, and I refuse still" (Murray 348). There are several theories as to Joan's purpose in her return to male dress after the end of her leadership role; one theory is sourced from an eyewitness to Joan who testified at the trial to exonerate her more than two decades after her death. According to this source, the confinement and torture she endured included fear of rape. Craig Taylor recounts the statements from the so-called Nullification Trial, "At the same time, an array of clerical witnesses testified that the real sexual threat

during the Rouen trial came from the guards, and even an unidentified English lord who had threatened to rape Joan” (47). Like many fictional crossdressers, the historical Joan potentially viewed a masculine appearance as a deterrent to sexual assault. Masculine clothing might serve as a defense to project her vulnerable body; if she looked like a man, men might be less likely to rape her (though Susan Crane does convincingly undermine this theory by noting Joan slept nude while in prison) (Crane 303). Nevertheless, the loss of virginity, even by force, is enough to retroactively condemn Joan and strip her of the religious authority by which she had shaped her identity. Along with physical protection, a return to male attire provides safety for Joan’s spiritual status of social and martial authority and chastity.

In *Henry VI part I*, men react to a woman who proves successful in masculine action. In society, Joan capably fulfills roles traditionally limited to men and for a time she excels in such leadership. As a conduit of God, male submission to her leadership is submission to a holy cause. As such, Joan’s masculinity is attributed to God and does not threaten the masculinity of men who serve her; for they do not serve her but God. However, as a sexually active woman who is publicly masculine and benefits from the social power of that masculinity, Joan threatens the patriarchal social order. When she is deemed unworthy of a holy cause through a symbol of her sexuality, that order is restored violently. Shakespeare chooses a narrative for Joan that outlines specific social expectations for women who perform masculinity publicly on a female body and he punishes a failure to adhere to those standards with death and removal from the narrative. Patriarchal authority is restored; Joan is not exonerated, and her masculinity is erased.

ii. *Henry VI Part Three* (c. 1592)

Immediately after Joan's death, in *Part One*, Margaret is introduced and marries King Henry VI, but her moment of violence does not manifest until the third part of the trilogy. In *Part Three*, Margaret commits one violent act which she shares with Clifford; she stabs York (Shakespeare, *Modern* 334). Significantly, she does so dressed as a woman, without armor, or other male accessory. She performs a feminine act of violence not only in social contradiction to her body, identity, and appearance, but also to the cultural definition of violence as an exclusively masculine act. This action is set in a context that diminishes any sense of power and agency in an otherwise subversive, masculine performance. The stabbing is essentially redundant because Clifford has already stabbed, and perhaps killed, York. Though undeniably violent, Margaret's action is more performative than effective. She is violent without significant purpose; a man has already performed the action and Margaret is not fulfilling a social void. There is no nobility or necessity in her violence.

Again, Margaret demonstrates symbolic masculinity; she leads an army in defense of her son's right to the throne. In doing this, Margaret usurps the leadership position of her husband and emasculates him. Henry is despondent at being dominated by his wife and laments his position. He decries his wife standing in his stead at the battlefield,

For Margaret my queen, and Clifford too,  
Have chid me from the battle; swearing both  
They prosper best of all when I am thence.  
Would I were dead! (2.5.16).

Removed from the battle, Henry feels incapable of expressing his masculinity and fulfilling his role as patriarchal leader. The public violent social situation of battle is designed for masculine achievement and Margaret takes her husband's place at the charge of the army.

Henry struggles to understand his place in society without masculine display; Margaret is appropriating not only masculinity, but the specific masculine role that belongs to her husband. Where Henry fails to achieve masculine glory, Margaret almost succeeds. Margaret threatens to join the battle in armor. She declares, “Tell him, my mourning weeds are laid aside, / And I am ready to put armour on” (3.3.229). Discussing the armor-clad heroines of *Orlando Furioso*, John C. McLucas marks the relationship between women wearing masculine denoting armor and crossdressing, “For these women, dressing for battle means, in effect, disguising themselves as men. The initiative of strapping on armor – armor not tailored to their female anatomy – gives them access to certain freedoms of movement and assertion” (37). While there is no further reference to her appearance, Margaret appears at the head of her army. Likely in this armor, Margaret spends the latter half of the play projecting masculine power before falling from her glory. Margaret holds the place as figurehead over the battle in her husband’s stead. Though she does not fight in the battle and does not personally engage in violence action, she facilitates that violence and controls it.

Shakespeare again employs a symbol of female sexuality to spur Margaret’s removal from power. It is not a pregnancy, but Margaret’s son that is her undoing; she collapses at his death. After witnessing the violence of the death of her son, Margaret loses the ability to project masculine power or participate in masculine social roles; she becomes passive, and, when Edward dies, she cries, “O, kill me too!” (5.5.41). Her progeny, a physical representation of her sexuality, mixed with an overwhelming violent display, destroys Margaret’s masculine facade. Margaret is immediately associated with her maternity and when faced with the traumatic loss of her son, Margaret is unable to continue projecting masculinity. She is rendered passive and is expelled from her position of power without protest. Margaret finishes the play by being banished from society and losing all sense of her masculine identity or social influence. In contrast to the endings of comedies, the women in

the *Henry VI* trilogy do not revert to their previous identities and social positions. These characters are not restored to feminine participating social roles. Joan is killed and Margaret is banished for filling masculine roles in publicly female bodies. Brutally, the women are stripped of their masculine agency and experience severe recompense for their time as masculine women in power over men. Shakespeare frames his only female characters who appear masculine without disguise in this format. There is no reward or return to a feminine social role; they are not allowed to rehabilitate.

Shakespeare creates boundaries for masculine performance. His comedic characters exist within limitations that preserve their feminine identity; his historic characters participate in patriarchal society outside these confines and through their downfall become warnings of the risks to women who perform masculinity. The parameters for these characters illustrate cultural expectations for female and male performances of masculinity and femininity. Masculinity is more easily identified on the bodies of female characters. As male characters are expected to be masculine, it is difficult to determine inherent masculine or male traits. On women, the qualities and gender signifiers which feel contrary to the comedic characters, and which are condemned in the characters of the history plays, are emphasized as 'other.' These actions and semblances are not feminine or considered natural to the female body; they are definitively masculine for the early modern society. Bornstein experiences a real-life revelation though recognizing masculinity more easily on a woman (herself). In her words "[i]t took my becoming a woman to discover my 'male behavior'" (110). Through these women a clear sense of masculine standards can be seen when they are taken out of the male context. Shakespeare not only reflects the societal values for masculine projection on the female body; he creates narratives that affirm expectations for masculinity and establishes limitations in the relationship a woman can have with masculinity while retaining a feminine identity that can be accepted in the community. The plays demonstrate the new trope of

female to male crossdressing as it develops topical themes and devices that prioritize and define this limited and binary relationship with masculinity and the feminine body.

Shakespeare accomplishes this work and represents a touchstone for the expectations of such characters. As other playwrights contemporary to Shakespeare produce similar content, patterns emerge that establish standards for the trope. These consistencies present a homogenous view of capacity for masculinity on the female form. Early iterations create a method for these characters that can be seen particularly through the work of authors who forefront crossdressing female figures frequently. Through the examination of the invention of the archetypes of female crossdressers and the eventual evolutions of the trope, societal definitions of gender and sexuality, including the ways in which those definitions expand and adapt, the values and expectations for gendered behavior in English early modern culture emerge.

### III. Heywood

Thomas Heywood is considered “the most prolific dramatist of the day (fifty-six plays have been identified, though he claimed to have “had a main finger in” 220)” (Briggs 268). His work spanned nearly fifty years and he make use of most generic forms of the period (Kathman, *Heywood* 1). Heavily influenced by Shakespeare, Heywood began his playwrighting adapting from poems and other dramatic works. Andrew Gurr describes the growth of the period in which Heywood is writing, “The establishment of a popular repertory by the end of the 1580s gave the poets a chance to build an intimate framework of allusion to familiar traditions and conventions which by the very process of building became subject to constant change” (Gurr, *Playgoing* 5). Kathleen McLuskie notes that this is the key to Heywood’s career and that his success “depended on his ability to recognize new trends” and Jean Howard calls him “a notable dramatic innovator, turning received genres to new purposes and inventing new theatrical devices to heighten the emotional impact” (Howard, *Thomas* 120; McLuskie 22). His plays are London-centric, for the masses, and an “alternative to the élite style of satiric iconoclasm... a theatre which was a spectacle and an entertainment” (McLuskie 15). The plays that appear in this chapter span from early in his career through his most productive years (1602-1603) at the Rose Theatre and just after (Kathman, *Heywood* 2). Heywood spent the last decade of his life working to publish his works (Kathman, *Heywood* 7).

Along with Shakespeare, Heywood is the first playwright to produce multiple texts with female crossdressing heroines. Michael Shapiro attributes four plays to Heywood in his list: *The Four Prentices of London*, *The Wise Woman of Hogsdon*, *Fair of the West Part One*, and *How a Man May Choose a Good Wife from a Bad*. However, the latter of these plays does not contain a female crossdressing character, only a woman who wears a disguise as

another woman.<sup>24</sup> In the three plays that do feature crossdressing women, Heywood contributes to the popularization of aspects that become core to the trope. His plays include several page boy disguises characterized by young noble women who dress as pre-pubescent boys of a lower class, a common type for female crossdressers throughout the early modern period. The series establishes crossdressing as an effective mode for women to travel safely independently. Patterns that define narrative standards throughout the developing genre are founded in these works. As early as Heywood's work appears in the collection of female crossdressers, it is possible to analyze the progression of his characters as he develops the trope. Heywood exemplifies development in crossdressing heroine narratives.

There are many issues in dating these plays. Current ranges allow for the three plays to appear in any order, with some evidence existing for *The Fair Maid of the West Part One* to appear first while some argue that *The Four Prentices of London* could have appeared earlier than 1596 (Bayer, *The Red* 12; Connolly 214; Gasior vii; Griffin 85; Jowitt, *Elizabeth* 125; Munro, *Popular* 145; Rowland 1). However, there is a clear ideological progression of crossdressing in the plays that informs the organization of this chapter as much as the dating. All three of Heywood's plays feature a crossdresser who uses their disguise to pursue a man; however, he does not initially take great care in developing his crossdressing women. *The Four Prentices of London* does not name the crossdresser; *The Wise Woman of Hogsdon* features a character who shares a name and lacks a distinct identity; and *The Fair Maid of the West* (which may or may not be his final but is ideologically his most complete attempt) features a dynamic protagonist who is the primary feature of her story. Earlier attempts prove chaotic, unorganized, and uncommitted to his crossdressed character; but as Heywood creates more material and in the midst of the growing popularity of crossdressing plots, his work

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<sup>24</sup> In *How a Man May Choose a Good Wife from a Bad*, two characters dress in disguises that match their gender identity.

culminates in a fully realized heroine situated in a paramount plot that emphasizes and promotes a complex and nuanced version of that trope.

A. *The Four Prentices of London* (c. 1596-1599)

*The Four Prentices of London*, performed at *The Red Bull*, is potentially Heywood's earliest play with a crossdressing female character and is likely his earliest work (Bayer, *The Red* 12; Connolly 214; Gasior vii; Munro, *Popular* 145; Rowland 1). The primary plot follows four brothers, Godfrey, Guy, Charles, and Eustance, who are shipwrecked and dispersed throughout the world to geographically fantastic and impossible destinations. Borrowing from Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*, the characters draw on historical figures and reflect "three classical figures (Hector, Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar), three biblical figures (David, Joshua and Judas Maccabeus) and three Christian figures (Arthur, Charlemagne and Godfrey of Bouillon)" (Howard, *Thomas* 121). The brothers have joined the navy after their destitute father determines to pursue a holy pilgrimage. Left behind is their sister, Bella Franca, who feels abandoned by the men and follows them. Guy washes up in France and is rescued by the king and his daughter. That daughter, only known as The French Lady, or The Lady, falls deeply in love with Guy, who rejects her for his own ambitions. He claims that, in his position as a knight, he cannot love a woman and announces that the king is sending him on a holy crusade to Jerusalem at the command of ten thousand men (3.100).<sup>25</sup> Undeterred, The Lady is willing to sacrifice her relationship with the king, her father, to pursue the knight who has rejected her.

The Lady reappears disguised as a page boy and explains her purpose, emphasizing the social transition she has also chosen, "Thus have I masked my bashful modesty / Under the habit of a trusty page, / And now my servant's servant am I made" (6.264). Thus, The Lady uses a device repeated frequently in heroine crossdressing narratives, the page boy disguise, which allows her both to remain inconspicuous while also being close to Guy.

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<sup>25</sup> This play does not include Acts. References include the scene and line number.

Physically, the page boy role is reasonably accessible for a young woman. As Michael Mitterauer observes, the majority of early modern servants were single and aged between 15-24, which is also the general age range for female characters who crossdress (18). A page is also likely to be unknown, from a different region, and it would not be unusual for a young page to travel to find work; indeed, “It was customary for a large proportion of the servants to be migrants” (20). There is also an assumed economic stature for migrant servants that labels these young people as likely to be above the lowest socio-economic groups. The artisan classes would have the capacity to send their children away to pursue employment while the poorest sons would remain to work with their families and inherit (21). Furthermore, it provides a façade of safety; a page offers the perfect combination of characteristics required for a young woman needing a masculine disguise. It is a common position that represents anonymity among the large collective of other young people searching for work in service, affords a semblance of socio-economic respectability, and fits in a social structure that includes a guardian. Thus, the page disguise is physically plausible and permits socially accepted independent travel.

Furthermore, the social relations of such a role explain the potential interpersonal benefits for a disguised character. As a personal servant, The Lady gains daily and intimate interaction with the man she hopes to woo. Accompanied with a masculine facade, this intimacy in close quarters is guarded by the social relationship expected between a man and servant in which Stefania Biscetti suggests “masters were as fathers to their servants” (291). While in her disguise, The Lady can hope to be treated as a male child, not as a potential sexual partner, and is able to guard her virginity and reputation despite the new intimacy. Any familiarity between the pair can be sanctioned by observing members of society as an appropriate platonic relationship. Masculinity and servitude grant The Lady opportunities for closer interaction with the man she intends to have an eventual romantic connection that her

feminine identity is not afforded, and these attributes of her disguise provide physical and social security.

The Lady also aligns her intentions with classical gods who famously use disguises to facilitate sexual relationships by referencing Ovid's *Metamorphoses* in which Apollo, Zeus, and Tereus all assume disguises to assault women without their consent (Anderson 7, 9, 19). She explains, "Love, that transformed the gods to sundry shapes, / Has wrought in me this metamorphosis." (6.267). Disguise represents an opportunity to force unrequited intimacy on a person who has expressed no desire for such a relationship. The Lady is successful in gaining unfettered access to Guy through her role as a page and she relishes the dynamic she has created with her new master. Masculinity affords her the ability to spend time with the man unsupervised and he, in turn, expresses a fondness for his servant that he did not for the daughter of the king,

My love and lord, that honoured me a woman,  
Loves me a youth, employs me everywhere.  
I serve him, wait upon him...  
And now I have learnt to be a perfect page,  
He will have none to truss his points but me (6.269)

Disguise provides circumstances that allow The Lady to cultivate a more intense relationship with Guy than was otherwise appropriate for a couple of such divergent social positions. She eliminates the authority her father represents over Guy and puts herself in a position of submission to Guy, effectively replacing her father with the knight in her own patriarchal power microcosm. Unaware and without consent, Guy usurps this authority despite his previous refusal.

Though The Lady maintains a semblance of a servant relationship with Guy, she explicitly acknowledges the sexual nature of her pursuit. Beyond an emotional intimacy, she

gains access to physical interactions which she views through heteroerotic desire. In a typically feminine fashion, she blushes at the thought of her desires (“many a thing, which makes me blush to speak!”), which she explicitly connects with their physical proximity (6.277). While pleased that Guy “will have none to lie with him but me,” The Lady also recognizes the limitations imposed by her disguise as her “poor heart / Is barred and kept from love’s satiety” (6.280, 282). The Lady expresses her attachment to her feminine identity and the sexuality she associates with that identity while shielded by her disguise. Her actions are motivated by the desires of her feminine self, and she gains a social position forbidden to that self. Her masculinity offers this independence while her assumed role as a servant affords her such intimacy. Indeed, Mitterauer suggests that “institution of service appears to have been of particular importance for the sex life of young people in European society in the past. In no other past culture was there such a long gap between sexual maturity and marriage” (32). The Lady’s role as a page is fueled by the sexual desires of her feminine identity but provides an in-between, nonsexual space in which to live as a masculine projecting character. She exists in limbo; she is sexually mature, pursuing a sexual partner, but not yet acting on that sexuality.

However, limitations for furthering intimacy and public acknowledgement arise from the same disguise that permits her to gain proximity to Guy. Bella Franca arrives in Jerusalem and goes unrecognized by her brother. As such, the men see a beautiful woman and vie for her attention. Still dressed as a page, The Lady befriends Bella Franca and tries to influence her towards any of the men other than Guy. But her disguise puts her at a disadvantage; she cannot openly express her love or tell Bella Franca her feelings. When Guy is banished for dueling over Bella Franca, she determines to follow him and The Lady vows to accompany her to keep the other two apart. Again, The Lady intends to use her disguise to gain intimacy, but this time with Bella Franca. Plotting to influence the woman against the knight, The Lady

uses her masculine persona to further the desires associated with her feminine identity. As the two travel, The Lady insults Guy and attempts to dissuade her companion. As Guy's private and trusted servant, she is able to speak as an authority when she argues.

I could not love a man of his complexion.

I would not have him if I were a lady

...

And I heard him say, should he be married,

He'd make his wife a cock-queen! (8.225)

With a nod to dramatic irony, The Lady realizes that her aspersions on Guy's suitability as a husband will be more effective if presented from a 'feminine' perspective. However, her efforts are unsuccessful.

When the travelers are attacked by The Clowne, The Lady has an opportunity to express her masculinity through violent action, but she is unable to respond when confronted. In her distress she cries, "I wear a weapon that I dare not draw. / Fie on this womanish fear! What shall I do?" (11.93). The Lady associates her fear and hesitation at violence with her female identity. Though she appears masculine and presents a masculine facade, she never internally identifies as a man. The Lady's sense of self never wavers from her female persona, and she does not attempt to be violent. Her weapon, a symbol of capacity for violent action and a signifier of manhood and masculinity, is merely a pretense. In this void, Bella Franca takes the sword to defend herself, but even this display of self-defense is interrupted and commandeered by a man. As the fight begins, Eustace arrives and inserts himself into the duel with great success, after which The Lady suggests that she change into feminine clothing. While Bella Franca and Eustace see this as a boy choosing a feminine disguise to fool his master (Guy), for The Lady, it is the catalyst for the restoration of her feminine identity.

The Lady faces an opportunity to assimilate to her masculine appearance by performing the masculine action, violence; she fails to produce such action. This serves as the climax to her disguise and leads to her public return to the feminine identity she has constantly affirmed through her motivations and actions. When she cannot prove her masculinity, she relinquishes it. The play continues as the brothers recognize each other and join forces in battle against pagans. After victory, they are reunited with their sister, Bella Franca, and The Lady who reappears in her feminine clothing. Guy recognizes the princess immediately and claims her as his own. He kisses her to the shock of onlookers who believe she is the boy dressed as a woman. Guy, rather than The Lady, explains the transition and accepts that he has lived with this woman for more than a year. He is no longer averse to marrying and The Lady's journey is concluded.

As one of the earliest instances of a plot with a crossdressing female character, *The Four Prentices* is notably messy. Dated 1594, with evidence that earlier drafts were performed, this play bears many marks of a work created early in a career (Gasior xiv). Heywood does not name his crossdressed character, relationships and locations are frequently difficult to follow, and The Lady's acceptance by Guy is only motivated by a restored proximity. However, this play contributes to the establishment of what becomes one of the most prevalent and recognizable tropes of female to male crossdressing narrative: a woman pursuing a man she loves who has abandoned her. While the relationship between the couples evolves and the female characters are named and explored in increasing detail, Heywood uses this device with all of his female crossdressers. Desertion serves to compel his characters to crossdress which provides them the security to travel independently and the anonymity to assess the circumstances of their abandonment when they encounter their lover. As the trope's popularity expands, with more than a dozen female crossdressing characters

appearing before Heywood's next attempt, crossdressing narratives begin to be foregrounded and the characters gain nuance and individuality (Shapiro 221).

### B. *The Fair Maid of the West Part One* (c. 1596-1603)

Heywood's *The Fair Maid of the West Part One* features one of the more ambitious crossdressing characters to appear in this period, Bess Bridges (Jowitt, *Elizabeth* 125). Bess is introduced as a young woman, "[n]ot fully yet seventeen," of a lower class living in a tavern (5.1.74). This woman uses not one, but two different masculine disguises with distinct purposes and motivations: first, she briefly dons a masculine disguise to protect herself and her household when the honorable men in her life are absent; second, this time for a more extended period and like other heroines we have encountered so far, she crossdresses to protect her honor when she decides to pursue Spencer, a young man who has expressed erotic interest in her. Heywood centers his plot on the question of Bess' reputation. Though both the hero and heroine are presented as generally virtuous, Spencer questions Bess' honor and abandons her. Despite his unsavory actions in trying to trick her, Bess rises to every occasion and eventually employs crossdressing to seek and redeem the man who leaves her.

Though Spencer is attracted to Bess, her social standing causes him to doubt her moral standing. His serving companion, Goodlack, questions whether a young woman could live in such accommodation without degradation; he asks "Honest, and live there?" (1.1.24). Spencer defends Bess claiming that he has "proved her / Unto the utmost test, examin'd her. / Even to a modest force, but all in vain" and she has met his standards of behavior (1.2.57). He further states that she will interact with, converse with, and even kiss men, but that she possesses virtuous qualities despite her position. However, Spencer determines to test her again. This time he challenges her honesty and trustworthiness by leaving a large amount of

money in Bess' care until he returns from a sea voyage or dies. He charges her, "Keepe still that hundred pound till my return / ...If never, wench, / Take it; it is thine own" (1.2.84).

Though Spencer chooses to test Bess with money, she is financially independent, and does not love him out of necessity or for lack of choice in men. While Bess continues to unwittingly prove her character to Spencer, he consistently makes choices that undermine his own claim to untainted integrity.

Unknown to Bess, Spencer is hurt in a fight he undertook to defend her honor and has killed a man. He believes he is "hurt to death" and that his injuries are recompense for the person he killed (2.1.50). Spencer sends Goodlack to Bess to retrieve his will which leaves her five hundred pounds a year, with the caveat that she must again prove to be honorable. Spencer continues to doubt Bess' worthiness and offers Goodlack all his possessions if she fails; he then flees (2.2.97). This gives Goodlack an incentive to find fault in Bess as he confronts her; and after a dramatic exchange between the two, Bess decides that a disguise as a page will help her to fend off aggressive men. This is her first masculine disguise.

At first, the disguise serves to protect her from unwanted attention and contributes to her worthiness through fidelity that Spencer seeks. She takes a sword with her to project a masculine ability to protect oneself and relishes the freedoms and respect that come with her attire: "Methinks I have a manly spirit in me / In this man's habit" (2.3.5). As a character, Bess is cognizant of the growth in popularity of female crossdresser and embraces a popular history of other women who have lived masculine lives. Heywood includes references to legendary crossdressers and Bess invokes the names of two specific figures when she exclaims,

Methinks I could be valiant on the sudden

And meet a man i'th' field.

I could do all that I have heard discours'd

Of Mary Ambree or Westminster's Long Meg. (2.3.10)

Bess speaks both to her own newfound sense of ability and wonders if she could also perform masculine violent action. Her faithful companion, Clem who encourages her crossdress, does not recognize the reference to Mary Ambree, but he teases that Bess is too short to be compared to Long Meg. Mary Ambree was an English ship captain. Many legends portray her, but there is historic evidence of her battling in Spain in 1584. Mary Ambree's success had been recently dramatized in ballads, a popular one being published in 1600, just two years before the performance of *The Fair Maid of West Part One* (Dugaw 32). Long Meg of Westminster is a similar figure, appearing in popular ballads that date to a similar time (Waage 105). Though there is no definitive proof of the real person, tradition holds that she was remarkably tall, fought in the army for Henry VIII, and that she, like Bess, worked in a tavern (Gartenberg 1). Frederick Waage specifically emphasizes Meg's reputation for height as being linked to a sense of androgyny; however, he establishes that her femininity ultimately overcomes any masculine physicality (108). Both legendary women have reputations as fierce and violently capable women. Though in disguise and shielded from societal judgement by a masculine facade, Bess is proud to associate herself with these strong figures and is inspired by their notoriety. Clem warns Bess of the practical dangers of violence and doubts her ability and chance of success in performing masculine action. Yet Bess commits to her persona with vigor, willing to join her semblance with corresponding action.

Bess insists that she is justified in her masculinity and avenging behavior by the poor character and abuse of her target, Roughman. When facing her adversary who has threatened the peace of her household, she defends her use of masculinity. She declares, "Let none condemn me of immodesty / Because I try the courage of a man / Who on my soul's a coward" (2.3.27). She is not afraid of the social judgement against her feminine identity that

could occur from public awareness of her masculine persona. Instead, Bess is willing to engage internally with the masculinity she hopes to project and feels vindicated in this choice due to maltreatment and lack of masculine action against Roughman's misconduct; like Shakespeare's Julia, who must act as a man when other men will not, hers is the lesser evil necessitated by other men's inaction.

Bess confronts her enemy with a valiant bravado. She feels the responsibility of her household and assumes the role as head and protector of those in her care. Facing what he thinks is a boy, Roughman calls Bess to prove herself physically with violent masculine action. Bess gathers her own courage and challenges "Draw forth thy coward sword, and suddenly, / Or as I am a man I'll run thee through / And leave thee dead i'th' field" (2.3.54). However, despite offering the challenge, Roughman refuses to engage and instead claims he has sworn an oath against fighting. His refusal to face the person he thinks is a small boy reveals Roughman's lack of courage and he readily admits to his own reliance on posturing: "How many times brave words bear out a man! / For if he can but make a noise, he's fear'd. / To talk of frays, although he ne'er had heart" (2.3.43). Further acknowledging his own refusal to appear on the battlefield, Roughman is presented as a man less masculine than a woman, Bess in disguise, through his inability to participate in violence. His fear and inaction, alongside his abuse towards women, servants, and bad behavior in taverns indicate his cowardice and immorality.

As Roughman fails to rise to the occasion, Bess chooses to show mercy rather than display violence. Though frustrated with Roughman's weakness, she relents. Thus, this crossdressed heroine does not yet have to come to terms with the performance of violence. By returning Roughman's weapon and letting him go, Bess asserts power without violence and emasculates her opponent. Bess tells Roughman that she is her own brother and hopes that this experience will be enough to curb any further poor behavior. Roughman's social and

moral status is deeply rooted in his unwillingness to perform the violent actions of masculinity. Unable to provide evidence of a capacity for violence and personal defense, Roughman cannot prove his masculinity or ability to protect, defend, or serve, causing his reputation to suffer; being less violent makes Roughman less of a man.

Bess believes that her purpose for masculinity has been fulfilled; and though she enjoyed the social power she gained, she is content to return to her feminine identity outright. However, Roughman continues to berate Bess and her servants. Despite having returned to her feminine attire, Bess bravely confronts her abuser and defends herself verbally. The bold young woman cheekily refers to her disguise as she chastises Roughman saying, “You wrong me, sir, / And tyrannize too much over my servants. / I will have no man touch them but myself” (3.1.50). This suggests a lingering attachment to her masculine persona, and it seems Bess relies on the courage she found through masculinity when she is again threatened. As Roughman continues to aggrandize himself and perpetuate lies, Bess unashamedly reveals her disguise and finds power through reference to her previous semblance, “That gallant fellow, / So wounded and so mangled, was myself” (3.1.114). Faced with humiliation, Roughman is exposed, and Bess proves unrelenting and harsh in her judgement of his falsehood and cowardice.

When the purpose of her disguise proves unfulfilled, Bess returns to masculine action as a solution, but this time without the need to crossdress:

Hare-hearted fellow, milksop, dost not blush?  
 Give me that rapier. I will make thee swear  
 Thou shalt redeem this scorn thou hast incurr'd,  
 Or in this woman shape I'll cudgel thee (3.1.121)

Bess taunts her adversary by insinuating that he is weak enough to blush, a passive reaction associated with femininity and the absence of capacity for dynamic action. St. Jerome

described blushing as the definitive female trait by which masculine presenting women would express their femininity. In a letter he decries the practice with “Other women change their garb and put on men’s dress; they cut their hair short and lift up their chins in shameless fashion; they blush to be what they were born to be — women” (Hieronymus 117). Blushing can define a body dressed and postured in a masculine fashion as female. It is an involuntary reaction which signifies a feminine identity over all other signifiers, physical or verbal.

Bess explicitly threatens that she will stand against Roughman with a weapon, entirely identified and identifying as a woman. The man who would not face a boy and now cannot face a woman is shamed into repentance. Importantly, Bess’ willingness to be violent disgraces the man she faces rather than affecting her own reputation. Instead of challenging the social sphere herself physically, Bess uses the trappings of masculinity to emphasize the deficiencies of the men around her. In the absence of honorable, masculine men, Bess’ use of masculinity is accepted and appreciated. Roughman is driven to acknowledge his fault and claims to find the dormant masculine qualities of courage and valiance. He vows not to rest until “by some valiant deed I have made good / All my disgraces past” and decides to achieve this by “cross[ing] the street / And strik[ing] the next brave fellow that I meet” (3.1.138). Roughman believes that fighting an innocent stranger unprovoked will redeem his honor. The type and motivation of violence seems irrelevant; it is the willingness to perform the masculine action of violence against an equal that reintroduces him into gentlemanly society. Roughman’s violence creates a social balance which allows Bess to end her first use of masculine disguise and masculine posturing.

Following Bess’ independent adventures, another man, also named Spencer, has died. The gentleman Spencer decides to let the news return so that he can further test the woman he claims to love. When Bess hears the false news, Goodlack observes her mourning for hints of inconstancy, still motivated by the potential to claim any inheritance as his own. He attacks

Bess with a tirade of leading questions that insinuate she has been unfaithful and immoral. The servant wonders aloud if she is a prostitute and insults her low social origins as “A trade-fallen Tanner’s daughter” (3.2.64). Goodlack calls her a “harlot” and “punk,” but Bess’ attachment to Spencer’s memory is convincing; she eventually earns Goodlack’s respect, who in return gives her Spencer’s ring (3.4.6, 3.4.9). When she learns of the inheritance, the loyal young woman writes a will leaving most of her money to charity and gives Goodlack a large sum to purchase a ship on the condition that he takes her on a journey. Initially Bess keeps the purpose of the voyage to herself and Goodlack is taken by her generosity. Roughman reappears to volunteer as Lieutenant to the voyage and Clem joins the crew.

For her voyage, Bess chooses to do something rare among crossdressing female characters; she decides that she will live either as a woman or man as is convenient. She explains, “For mine own wearing I have rich apparel, / For man or woman as occasion serves” (4.2.88). This fluidity of representation is the culmination of Bess’ willingness to use the attributes of either gender identity as social tools. She understands the usefulness of gender roles and can project the gender that serves her best in a given moment. She retains an attachment and internalized identification with her female self but is not afraid of participating in either of the binary gendered roles. Significantly she also is willing to expose her dual identities to her crew, who thus become her confidants and support her transgressive attire. In this, they represent an extended version of the single trusted companion trope. She receives no judgement for being a woman, being a woman in masculine clothing, or for asking that the secret be kept.

The 1631 quarto stage direction announces her entrance thus: “*Besse like a Sea-captaine*” (G4). Though Bess refers to Goodlack as ‘Captain’ and he fulfills the practical duties, she holds the authority of the position (4.4.1). The crossdressed captain relishes a victory they have won in a sea battle against a Spanish ship. Bess inquires as to their location

and reveals that she has brought them to the place of Spencer's burial to retrieve his body and re-inter him in a "lasting monument" so that they may be buried together as a couple when she dies (4.4.13). Impressed by her devotion to the man who abandoned her, Roughman zealously expresses his newfound loyalty and respect for female leadership: "May that man die derided and accurst / That will not follow where a woman leads" (4.4.17). When the captured Spanish tell the crew that the body has been taken from a proper burial spot near a church and dumped in a grave in a field, Bess is livid and proclaims, "Yet ere I die, I hope to be reveng'd / Upon some Spaniards for my Spencer's wrong" (4.4.54). When first told of his death, Bess wanted to be buried with her love. Now she will avenge those who desecrated his body and expects support in her violent proclivities. She internalizes what she and others view as a righteous rage in her role as a masculinely clad woman. Again, her disguise facilitates her ability to right an egregious wrong where no one else will.

Bess is openly masculine and authoritative over a traditionally male space; this ship is both commissioned and ruled by her hand. Bess demands respect and nearly participates in violence on multiple occasions, but consistently manages to avert conflict in exchange for peace. As captain, she directs her anger toward the church that removed Spencer's body and swears 'revenge' (4.4.61). Before she can follow through on this act against a symbol of God, Bess is again interrupted and redirects her energy to rescuing captured British sailors. The crew are reminded, "You have sworn / That howsoe'er we conquer or miscarry / Not to reveal my sex" (4.4.80). Bess is set up to perform all masculine social roles, especially violence. However, each time she commits to the action, circumstances direct her to passive solutions. She is never ultimately tested in a capacity to perform violence and a sense of her lingering feminine identity remains omnipresent.

As a new sea battle ensues, Bess makes a conscious choice not to participate in the violence; she chooses to not engage in the actual physical altercation. Instead, as leader, she

issues orders to the crew that, “The manage of the fight / We leave to you” (4.4.86). While her leadership receives a positive response from her companions, this choice is reminiscent of Shakespeare’s Queen Margaret who initially leads battles with noble speeches from a distance that does not complicate the incongruities of a feminine identity conflated with violence. Yet, Bess is praised as a figurehead; while Margaret sacrifices her noble status through murder, Bess retains a physical separation from violence which offers social deniability of her masculinity if and when she chooses to return to her feminine self. Nevertheless, there is a marked fervor in Bess’ determination to show courage and express her authority. When directed to keep to her cabin by Goodlack, Bess meets the instruction with disdain. She asserts, “Captain, you wrong me. I will face the fight, / And where the bullets sing loud’st ‘bout mine ears, / There shall you find me cheering up my men” (4.4.91). Bess may be unwilling or unable to challenge her body to masculine violence, but she is determined to lead and inspire her troops within those restrictions.

This is a thinly veiled allegory for Queen Elizabeth I who shares a name with Heywood’s heroine. Written near the end of Elizabethan reign, this play applauds a woman who utilizes the trappings and privileges of masculinity to achieve heroic accomplishments through those who serve her (Jowitt, *Elizabeth* 125). Bess stands as the figurehead of her people and bravely faces danger to inspire her men to action. Outside of the confines of the city and traditional society, the heroine goes to war for the memory of her love and battles against England’s enemies. As Claire Jowitt explains, “she is clearly acting as a pirate,” a romanticized status which allows her to act beyond the confines of gender and law while she is driven by noble love and the casualties of her passion are considered righteous (134). In this way, Bess is glorified as a symbol of bravery and virtue but creates a separation of her masculine leadership and the preservation of her feminine body by using her men as a proxy to perform her masculine ambitions.

Following the battle, Goodlack is injured, and Bess takes direct charge of confronting the captured Spanish Captain and freed prisoners. Among those released is her Spencer. She is somewhat unsure of his identity, but her body betrays her in a distinctly female reaction: she nearly collapses into a faint (4.4.135). The unintentional, passive action of fainting is indicative of a loss of bodily autonomy, most frequently associated with the female body. In the case of *As You Like It* and Shakespeare's *Rosalind*, Jean Howard calls a faint in crossdress a symbol of "true 'womanliness'" (434). Referencing female characters in Shakespeare and Middleton, Gail Kern Paster terms the early modern swoon as "symptomatic of hysterical sexual frustration" (70). The exceptions to this are male bodies which are subjected to extreme physical pain or grief. Kenneth Heaton catalogues Shakespearean fainting and concludes that six men and four women die from intense emotional collapse, eighteen people faint from emotional responses including six men and one boy. Heaton explains that "twice [the fainting] is dismissed as 'womanish;'" three are attributed to previous illness, two of which are argued to be epilepsy; and that of these men, the majority were considered morally or masculinely flawed, e.g., *King Lear*, *King Henry VI*, or *Julius Caesar* (1336). Though it is a small distinction, it is no less significant that the fainting or near fainting of women is not accompanied by pre-existing conditions; it is an understood symptom of their emotional proclivities. In a crossdressing woman, it is again an inadvertent reaction that is associated with their femininity independent of their clothing or current projected gender identity. Surprised by Bess' evident physical vulnerability, Roughman sends her below deck, although he uses masculine pronouns for the sake of observers. Spencer nearly recognizes his lover; however, he remains unsure and continues to use masculine pronouns to describe the person he has seen: "Methink he looks like Bess" (4.4.157). This suggests Bess' disguise is not entirely impenetrable; however, as she recovers, he remains unsure.

The play breaks suddenly; a chorus explains that the ship has continued to pirate Spanish and Turkish ships until “wearied with the habit of a man,” Bess is noticed by Moors in her feminine clothing at the port in Barbary (4.5.12). The sole explanation offered for Bess’ restoration to her feminine clothing is her fatigue with upholding a masculine position; however, it seems significant that it is the reappearance of Spencer that prompts her swoon which marks the final moment of her crossdress. Newly re-attired, Bess’ feminine identity becomes central and highly sexualized. Her presence is requested by the “King of Fez,” Mullisheg, who has never met an English woman (4.5.14). Bess’ gender subjects her to the desires of a patriarchal symbol, and she is once again obligated to participate in a social hierarchy that does not permit her authority.

The complex and racially problematic appearance of Moors in this play culminates in the relationship between Bess and the King, against whom Spencer is temporarily secondary. While the history of English trade and racism greatly inform the final act of *Part One* and are highly prevalent in the sequel, this thesis is unable to cover these themes sufficiently and defers to scholars including Jesús López-Peláez Casellas and Warner G. Rice. López-Peláez Casellas specifically addresses the impact of character flaws embedded in the depiction of Mullisheg (64). The remainder of Bess’ narrative in this play hinges on the approval of an exoticized and powerful foreign leader and the relationship she cultivates with him as a female representative of her nation and race. Until this point, Bess has existed in traditionally scandalous positions; yet her ambitions have raised her through the social sphere, and she has inspired loyalty and established an impeccably honorable reputation. Though a low-born, crossdressed pirate, she is elevated as a revered leader who represents English femininity. In a tavern, she is chaste; poor or with money, she is trustworthy; in men’s clothing, she remains irreproachable. She gains approval from every traditional representative of patriarchal authority through every non-traditional circumstance, semblance, or action. Her character not

only permits society to condone these qualities, but to make them admirable. When she is positioned against Mullisheg, he becomes an unexpected authority who provides Bess the chance to prove herself to an ultimate judge. Mullisheg represents Bess' final test: if she impresses even this king and retains her intrinsic English femininity in the face of exotic temptation, she will have publicly proven herself an indisputable paragon of both her sex and nation.

Bess first impresses the king's companion with her beauty and outward feminine display who, "ne'er beheld a beauty more complete" (5.1.3). Once again, Bess hopes to skirt physical confrontation, only agreeing to meet with the king if, "She may be free from violence" (5.1.25). Mullisheg agrees but, to his disappointment, Bess appears veiled. Bess continues to use the concealment of her body to retain what power she can. She denies Mullisheg the visual femininity he seeks, in essence controlling the male gaze. Refusing gold and setting her own terms, Bess commands the king to "Keep off; for till thou swear'st to my demands, / I will have no commerce with Mullisheg, / But leave thee as I came" (5.1.46). By subduing her feminine appearance, Bess manipulates the king in her favor and barter her femininity for that which she seeks. Mullisheg eagerly offers to submit to anything she wants and Goodluck reads her five demands which include freedom of movement to her ship and from the land, safety from violence, fresh food, and "Fifthly, to offer no further violence to her person than / what he seeks by kingly usage and free entreaty" (5.1.51). The language of this last request is peculiar and points to an acknowledgement by Bess that the king has some inherent claim to her body. She does not ask for no violence, but for no violence that Mullisheg is not entitled to and to which she does not consent. This caveat is immediately utilized by the king. After granting her these demands, he learns that kissing is a common English greeting and asks for one; she obliges. Bess' men recognize the opportunity and plot to take advantage of this infatuation and Mullisheg outright compares the pirate leader to

Queen Elizabeth I. As Jowitt notes, a controversial historical exchange between Queen Elizabeth I and the King of Morocco is mirrored in this relationship, which, “provoked considerable anxieties amongst English commentators concerning the wisdom and implications of establishing a close relationship with a culturally and technologically sophisticated non-Christian nation” (137). The adept use of femininity in diplomacy with Mullisheg begins to cause a ripple effect. Through the intentional use of her feminine persona, Bess establishes her own authority over a symbol of ultimate patriarchy, a king, and her ability to frustrate his sexual desire and restrict his access to her body.

As Bess’ interactions with Mullisheg explore the benefits of femininity in international relations, the plot shifts to Spencer who has since been released and returns on a merchant’s ship for Mullisheg’s coronation banquet. Once again, the lovers see each other. This time there is certainty and no contrary clothing to disguise either person. An exchange marks both their joy and Bess’ reservations about the prospect of a reunion. Choosing control over the environment, rather than an immediate reunion, she sends Goodlack to privately confirm their suspicions. Her conservative actions emphasize a measured approach to ensuring the man she was convinced was dead is truly alive. As has become her pattern, Bess calculates the impact of her actions and presentation on her social situation. Here Bess refuses to relinquish the diplomacy she has cultivated and the influence she has earned before being certain of Spencer. When Mullisheg confirms that he will allow her ship to return home and Goodlack signals that Spencer is indeed alive and present, Bess celebrates secretly, but still does not give up her advantage over the king. Instead, she manages to secure the release of more prisoners with the trade of a second kiss. This second kiss frustrates Clem who expresses racist anger at the exchange, for the king is now an open rival to an Englishman with prior claim to Bess in a power struggle that embodies “the anxiety concerning the potential of the Muslim world to ‘unman’ Europe through subordination, the consequences of

female power upon male potency” (Jowitt, *Elizabeth* 138). It is only then that Spencer appears to beg for Bess’ hand from a position of vulnerability; he must receive permission to court the woman he considers his own. His request is granted; Mullisheg immediately agrees and shifts his infatuation for Bess to admiration remarking, “Till this hour / We grac’d thee for thy beauty, Englishwoman, / But now we wonder at thy constancy” (5.2.119). Though her beauty and conspicuous feminine physical display initially gained Bess her influence over the monarch, she maintains his admiration through her constancy of character and loyalty to Spencer. Mullisheg ushers in their wedding and a Christian officiant is brought to perform the ceremony.

Bess’ marriage returns her to a completely feminine social role and removes her capacity for effective social diplomacy. The anxieties encompassing both her masculinity and her interaction with and influence over an exoticized foreign state are brought to conclusion. This erasure is so complete as to expunge the memory of her masculinity in *Part Two* of Bess’ saga. Written potentially thirty years following the first installation, Heywood revives a Bess who suffers from definitive amnesia when it comes to her masculinity (Crupi 75). The sequel offers a Bess devoid of significant agency and created with disparate social context to her original form; as Charles Crupi denotes, “The heroine of 1630 is simply not the heroine of 1600” (76). Reinvented for the Caroline era, her restoration to femininity firmly imprisons the former maverick to the confines of feminine social expectations, ignorant of her previous Elizabethan potential. Left passive and defenseless against patriarchal pressure, Bess is recreated as her own antithesis. Crupi summarizes the devolution: “In Part I her independence functioned freely in the spaces allowed by social instability, but Part II restores centralized authority: patriarchal cruelty and patriarchal largesse alternatively furnish all occasions for the advancement of plot;” Bess is no longer the hero(ine) of the story (81). In *Part One*, Bess achieves her freedoms, power, and earns unwavering loyalty through her unflappable

morality, faithfulness, and principled behavior. Her undeniable virtue prohibits social condemnation and permits her the ability to manipulate gender signifying clothing and position to create greater and greater opportunity for herself. However, her lack of engagement in physical masculine violence preserves her body and allows a seamless return to her the feminine social sphere without lingering anxieties of her masculinity; in *Part Two* she does not crossdress at all. Though she stands in the face of violence and uses the privileges of a masculine appearance, abstinence from the performance of masculine behavior sustains her feminine identity. The unhindered reclamation of this identity thoroughly strips all memory and signifiers of masculinity and restricts Bess Bridges to an absolute feminine identity and social role. While Crupi admits that this distinct change could be the result of a new author or collaboration, he makes the argument that the change in Bess' character reflects a political shift marked by the new monarchy:

Part I, staged around the turn of the century in a theater incompletely controlled or appropriated, presents competing cultural forces in a world of fluid social conventions and uncertain structures of authority. Its elements of inversion and resistance elude containment and, despite Heywood's traditional reputation, celebrate possibility and contingency. Part II, staged at the Caroline court, recasts the characters to confirm a stable social arrangement resting on mythicized monarchy and the self-idealizations of Charles and Henrietta Maria. (76)

As such, Bess' crossdressing reflects a nostalgia for the bold leadership of Elizabeth I while the later play attempts a patriarchal equilibrium. Although Heywood re-feminizes the Caroline version of his heroine, crossdressing remained popular until the 1642 closing of the theatres (Shapiro 221).

C. *The Wise Woman of Hogsdon* (c. 1604)

First published as *The Wise Woman of Hogsdon*, the play also known as *The Wise Woman of Hoxton* features a leading female lover who is the driving force of the romantic plot but is not the woman identified in the title nor the play's crossdresser (Griffin 85; Massai 124). Instead, the primary heroine is Luce, a girl who is described as a "fair, sweet, modest rogue" (1.1.138). A nefarious suitor, Robin Chartley, faults her only for being "honest" and her resolution that she "will do nothing without marriage" (1.1.143, 147). Chartley's blatant desire for extra-marital sex becomes the motivation for Luce's decision to crossdress. In addition, this play includes a secondary heroine and crossdressed virgin who is disguised as a page and initially unnamed. Formerly betrothed to Chartley, his desertion has left this character's reputation in tatters, so she follows him in the hope of becoming "an ear-witness of his second contracting" (1.2.203).<sup>26</sup> Her disguise offers her the freedom to do so and, when she finally sees her betrothed, he is indeed in the process of promising himself to a second woman. Although this moment presents her with an opportunity to reveal herself and confront the couple, she instead chooses to retain her disguise out of embarrassment: "Modesty / would not suffer me to discover myself; otherwise, / I should have gone near to have marred the match" (1.2.209). Though she wants to interfere, she, much like Jessica in *The Merchant of Venice*, feels immodest in her clothing; more specifically, she does not want to draw her lover's attention to herself while she remains in masculine apparel. For this woman, who has already lost his interest, a masculine appearance is not the reintroduction she intends to create. She does not want to associate masculinity with her feminine identity

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<sup>26</sup> *May Day* (1611), one of two George Chapman plays with a heroine crossdresser, is dominated by a male crossdresser; however, a minor female character does briefly dress as a boy (Chapman 761). She only speaks three short phrases in this state and experiences no confrontation or crisis nor does she have a final restoration. While a minimal character, she is reminiscent of an archetype: young, wronged women who find agency and safety through masculinity and who recover delinquent lovers successfully, as in *The Wise Woman of Hogsdon*.

and complicate any attraction Chartley might develop for her. She does not want him to be unattracted to her feminine form because it appears masculine; this hinders her ability to reveal herself. Thus, while she can freely observe and discover information in her disguise, it also inhibits her power to take direct action.

Unlike in *The Four Prentices of London*, Heywood does eventually give this crossdressing character a name. However, it takes three acts for the name to be revealed and, when it is, it transpires that she, too, is called Luce. In her masculine form, this character is known as Jack, although references to her are generally collated in textual editions as ‘2<sup>nd</sup> Luce,’ ‘2. Luce,’ or ‘Luce2’ (Leonard, Symonds). Michael H. Leonard also notes, “Curiously, Second Luce is omitted from the *Dramatis Personae*” despite the inclusion of “two Citizens Wives,” even though only one speaks and is “clearly evident” (92, 96). This is an interesting textual minimization of a character who significantly impacts the plot, provides the audience with vital information, and ultimately facilitates the resolution of the play. However, the printed plays (including the 1638 quarto and modern editions) ruin any potential surprise, as the use of ‘2<sup>nd</sup> Luce,’ ‘2. Luce,’ or ‘Luce2’ identifies the speaker for the reader long before the revelation of her name occurs onstage.

The ‘second’ Luce leaves her life in the country behind in pursuit of restoring her reputation. She eavesdrops and gathers information without being suspected of harboring ulterior motivation. However, the limitations she finds in her disguise come from her commitment to maintaining her reputation. She chooses to retain her disguise rather than confront Chartley and conflate her boyishness and female body in his presence. Graham Hammill addresses the dichotomy in the second Luce’s gender identity through the lens of the social gaze. He explains, “she doesn’t exactly attain some authentic femininity outside of performance and theatricality... Luce2 attains a problematized femininity precisely for generic homosocial consciousness” (94). Hammill questions this Luce’s motivations for

maintaining her feminine sentiments and the fear for reputation that keeps her in disguise. He argues it is simply a dramatic mode, yet this fear of a damaged social reputation is core to much of the plot. Both Luces are concerned for the opinions they might incite from the observing public and the impact it will have on their character. While the second Luce can seem somewhat underdeveloped, she prioritizes her internal feminine identity over her outward presentation in a masculine role. The second Luce works to preserve the integrity of the feminine image she intends to project to Chartley by retaining her masculine facade and keeping the two performances separated.

Nevertheless, after choosing to remain in her disguise, the second Luce commits to it and attempts to project the persona effectively by living publicly as a boy. When she agrees to become the titular wise woman's servant, she determines to ensure that she can continue to "live both unknown and my sex unsuspected" (2.1.102). Thus, the second Luce resolves to engage more fully with her identity as a male servant by attempting to change her feelings and desire to those which she associates with masculinity. Now aiming to sustain her disguise, the second Luce commits to a more involved masculine identity as Jack. In that guise, she ingratiates herself with the wise woman and is able to gain information on those around her, including Chartley.

Boyster, a young man, comes to the wise woman and asks to be married to the first Luce. The wise woman, as her mother, agrees and crafts a plan to secretly marry Boyster to the first Luce. A switch is devised to allow the first Luce to marry Boyster while thinking she is marrying Chartley. The wise woman plots to have Chartley marry Jack (second Luce) in a dress, a marriage which she believes will be invalid and humiliating. Unknowingly, the wise woman fulfills the second Luce's greatest desire and the intention of her disguise. When the wise woman asks the second Luce how capable she may be at performing feminine signifying actions, she responds, "Doubt not of me I'll act them naturally" (2.1.191). The second Luce is

eager to accept and is next seen in a dress, prepared for her marriage. However, even in feminine attire, she continues to respond to masculine terms, addressed as, “boy” and “lad” although wearing the dress (3.1.1, 3). Despite physically returning to her feminine representation, her masculine identity is still affirmed while she claims it. Her choice of identity is validated while she chooses to maintain it.

In this example, gender identity preference is accepted regardless of external appearance. For the second Luce, the identity she claims is the identity accepted by society; her appearance does not supersede her gender in the eyes of the community. The wise woman even doubts the plausibility of the boy she sees effectively portraying a woman; however, a confident second Luce asserts, “Fear not me, I have as good a face in a mask as any / lady in the land could wish to have” (3.1.83). Here the second Luce is already dressed femininely, but the wise woman is not convinced that she will pass as a woman, even if veiled. The second Luce’s claim to masculinity is so firm as to afford priority to the verbal identification she offers over the physical image that is seen; she may be a woman and look like a woman, but she is considered a man when she calls herself one. This speaks to both the second Luce’s success in performing masculinity convincingly and to the societal value of self-identification. When the wise woman urgently reminds the second Luce that she now must be called Luce, “No more Jack now, but Mistress Luce,” the character finally reveals to the audience that Luce is, in fact, her true name (3.1.87). Moreover, the second Luce is aware that this coincidence will conveniently make her impending marriage more legally binding, as the names used will be accurate.

This faith in the second Luce and her identity usurping her appearance is complicated for Boyster when he discovers her half dressed in the first Luce’s clothing. Half formed in female attire and half in the body Boyster recognizes as belonging to the boy, Jack, the second Luce is interrupted sneaking outside to find her new husband, Chartley. Boyster

recognizes the clothing from the woman he married, those the first Luce had been wearing at their wedding but struggles to come to terms with the body he sees beneath. Though the body is represented as female to the audience through the knowledge that the second Luce is a woman in disguise, Boyster sees the body as he has been told to see it, as Jack's body. Seeing a mixed semblance, he becomes angry and demands "What art thou, girl or boy?" (3.2.33).

The second Luce is brutally honest, her response acknowledges a mixed identity, "Both and neither; I was a lad last night, but in the / morning I was conjured into a lass, and being a / girl now, I shall be translated to a boy anon" (3.2.35). The second Luce starts the summation of her identity with the masculine 'lad' and transitions to acknowledgement of a feminine identity before claiming that her state of identity will return to masculine again. Here Luce admits to her disguise before committing to a complete abandonment of it. Boyster becomes infuriated at his inability to decipher the body of Luce/Jack and is sent into a rage, cursing the wise woman as a 'witch,' 'she-cat,' and 'damned sorceress' for facilitating his presumed marriage to a non-binary body, which is deeply distressing to him (3.2.40, 3.2.41). After his outburst, Boyster decides the body is a boy, permitting the second Luce to retain her disguise, and he vows to keep the information from the first Luce.

However, the first Luce sees the second Luce flee and, knowing part of the wise woman's scheme, identifies the body she knows as Jack as female. She tells Chartley "the lady sayed, who, / masked and half unready, ran fast after her poor / affrighted husband" (3.3.11). The first Luce believes she has married Chartley and that Luce/Jack is now married to Boyster, though the opposite is true. While Boyster chooses to see a male body so as not to confront the possibility that he could be legally married to the strange form (a boy could not be his bride) the first Luce sees a partially dressed female body. To this point, Chartley and the first Luce have not consummated what they believe to be their marriage, though some time has passed. The second Luce returns to her boy form and remains in the service of the

wise woman so that she can continue to spy on Chartley, who is now, unknowingly, her husband.

When Sencer, a young man, arrives, he is upset that the young woman he loves, Gratiana (or sometimes Grace), has agreed to marry Chartley, the second Luce overhears their exchange and is immediately distraught. As her marriage has also not been consummated, she finds herself in the same position as the other Luce: both are precariously at risk of losing their husband. She cries, “My husband marry another wife / tomorrow?... Nor / death it grieves me so much that I am a wife, but / that I am a maid too” (4.3.46). As long as Chartley attempts to marry another and continues to betray women, the second Luce is not confident in returning to her feminine form and declaring her rights as his wife. However, it is not the second Luce’s anxiety, but the first Luce’s distress which prompts the first Luce to call her mother, the wise woman, to do something. The wise woman has still not told her daughter the truth of the marriage trick but cryptically guarantees that everyone will get what they want, and second Luce decides to stay and witness the conclusion, hoping not to be a virgin much longer.

The play is concluded with Chartley’s repentance whose attempts at infidelity are “defeated by the cleverness of a group of women” (Gibbons 393). Ervin Beck describes the requirements for the mode to reach resolution and explains,

the “romantic” comedies of the prodigal son celebrate the prodigal’s romantic affection for a virtuous girl. The hero may perversely court other girls in his riot, but his return to a former love and his subsequent marriage to her betoken his spiritual regeneration and offer a traditional excuse for the celebration that ends the play. (119)

For the second Luce to return to her feminine identity and resume her previous life, Chartley must complete his prodigal journey and repent his actions to receive the woman he has

slighted. Chartley's repentance only comes with confrontation. The wise woman sets him up by hiding individuals in closets and each one reveals themselves when he lies. Confronted by the first Luce, he must acknowledge the marriage he believes has occurred; however, he is overheard by all those hiding. This prompts a mix of rage, violence, and respect for the first Luce from the second Luce who threatens Chartley and the other Luce from her concealment. However, this impulse towards violence is not acted upon and is tempered by her recognition that it is Chartley who has done wrong. Chartley is cornered and the wise woman explains the marriage plot she has invented, to the joy of the first Luce and Boyster. When she tells Chartley that he has married her boy servant, Jack, the humiliation leads to his utter contrition and rapid, miraculous reformation. Only after this repentance and moral restoration does the second Luce reveal herself to him. Her return to Chartley emphasizes the power she has gained: as the only person with the knowledge of her feminine identity and the potential validity of their marriage, she can abandon him. The second Luce boldly asserts control over the situation and the penitent man before her.

The second Luce alludes to the tenuous nature of Chartley's position, intimating that she would not have revealed herself had he not repented. No longer carrying fear of equating her body with a masculine appearance, the second Luce uses her hair to signify her identity. "Look on me well; nay better, better yet. / I'll assure you I left off a petticoat / When I put on these breeches. What say you now? [*Scattering her hair*]" (5.2.248). Though dressed as a man, it only takes the release of her hair to convince Chartley that 'Jack' is, in fact, another Luce. When dressed as a woman, the second Luce was able to maintain a masculine disguise (even partially dressed); however, with her verbal claim to femininity and the feminine physical signifier of her hair, she redefines her identity and is accepted. Retaining her power over Chartley, she instructs him to recognize her womanhood despite any contradictory gender signifiers and proves her femininity with hair alone.

Though this play is largely under-researched, work that has been done includes Beck's discussion of the play's place as a citizen, city comedy and the use of typical generic tropes that inform the plot at large. Beck classifies Heywood's piece as a prodigal son play that focuses on a problematic male and his relationship with morality and women. He writes, "The hero rebels against or disappoints a father or father-figure... This element distinguishes prodigal-son comedy from the 'faithful wife' play, in which a young man deserts a faithful sweetheart or wife, as in *The Fair Maid of Bristow*" (116).<sup>27</sup> As Beck explains, even in plot the second Luce crosses gender expectations by fulfilling a role typically associated with a wayward boy. This heroine uses her disguise to pursue the man she loves, creates the circumstance for the prodigal man, Chartley, to reform, and achieves a restoration physically and socially through an eventual return to her feminine identity. The second Luce successfully employs her disguise to gain control over a patriarchal system before returning to that system under her own terms with Chartley's new humility and rededication to fidelity confirmed.

Heywood grants purpose to the second Luce that is denied his previous crossdresser, The Lady though she remains far less developed than Bess. However, the second Luce lacks individuality and is muddled by her interchangeability with the first Luce and her singular goal of reuniting with Chartley. The abandoned woman trope is developed to the extent that the second Luce employs her disguise to her benefit by gathering information and ingratiating herself into society. Heywood also changes her manner of dress several times while creating a character who maintains her disguise through complex literal and figurative identity layers. In an advancement from *The Lady*, the second Luce chooses to keep her disguise in multiple

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<sup>27</sup> The title character of John Day's *The Fair Maid of Bristow* (1605), Anabell, is pursued by two equal and nearly interchangeable suitors, Vallenger and Challenger, a device seen in *Clyomon and Clamydes* (King 20). Her disguise is eventually undone by her father, an example of the paternal exception to a successful disguise; see also *More Dissemblers Besides Women*. Anabell's disguise is driven by a necessity to rescue that is similar to Shakespeare's Portia of *Merchant of Venice*.

social situations and demonstrates behavior that allows her to live as a successfully masculine presenting person for an extended period. This is also the first, and only, play in this period in which two crossdressing heroines have identical names.<sup>28</sup> As Heywood continues to write female crossdressing characters, he invents women with increasing success in and dedication to their disguise. His writing matures through incremental nuance and escalation in the refinement, agency, and features of such characters.

In the decade between Heywood's first foray into a female crossdressing character and his culminating work, the playwright epitomizes the growth and escalating popularity of the female crossdressing trope. His first work, *The Four Prentices of London*, is a chaotic and disordered romp with undeveloped characters and plot appendages. The disguised woman remains unnamed but establishes Heywood's penchant for female characters who utilize masculine clothing as a tool to pursue itinerant men. He constructs foundational concepts that include a facade of masculinity as protection for independent and secure travel for women. After, Heywood invents a mature and foregrounded heroine of legendary proportions. Bess Bridges combines multiple crossdressing story lines, motivations, levels of masculine assimilation, and use of disguise. She is political, independent, and conscious of the power of her sexuality. *The Fair Maid of the West Part One* immortalizes a character who wears her agency on her sleeve and achieves influence over patriarchal symbols through her deployment of both femininity and masculinity. It is a work that reflects the maturation of both the author and trope as it comes into common use at the end of the Elizabethan period. Potentially Heywood's last attempt at heroine crossdressing, but ideologically between his two other plays, *The Wise Woman of Hogsdon* introduces a character who, though not fully realized, engages with masculinity for a prolonged period and with intention. The second

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<sup>28</sup> In the later play, *The Roaring Girl*, Moll Cutpurse and Mary Fitzallard share the given name Mary, but Moll uses that moniker throughout.

Luce, an obvious secondary figure, uses masculinity to facilitate an advantage over her adverse circumstances. Cognizant of the benefits of masculinity, this heroine navigates a complex use of layered masculinity to infiltrate new social spheres and actively participate in the events that lead to the repentance of her man and the restoration of her femininity.

Heywood treats his heroines in three distinctly separate ways with varied degrees of attention and development. Placed in the context of other playwrights who participated in the development of a subgenre of female crossdressing characters, Heywood's work can be seen to formulate traditions that construct the devices that will denote the whole trope.

#### IV. Middleton and Dekker

Thomas Middleton began his writing career while at Oxford, though he did not finish his degree (Taylor 2). However, Middleton's career blossomed at the change in monarchy and the Jacobean era saw the bulk of his work. He wrote for companies and spaces as varied as the King's Men, Prince Henry's Men, Lady Elizabeth's Men, and Prince Charles' Men, the Fortune, the Curtain, St. Paul's, at court, and private hall playhouses (O'Callaghan 12). The second decade of the 17<sup>th</sup> century brought a new focus on female characters and heroine crossdressers feature frequently. Though Middleton did not write crossdressing heroines in the last six years of his life (after controversy over a 1624 play likely inspired his shift towards pageants and prose) these heroines appear regularly throughout the rest of his career (Taylor 9).

Middleton made his career collaborating with other playwrights, but his most enduring partner is Thomas Dekker. Middleton and Dekker collaborated from the beginning of Middleton's career and on two plays with heroine crossdressing (Taylor 3). Dekker was involved in about forty Elizabethan plays, but few survive, and none appear here (Twynning 1, 2). Middleton and Dekker collaborated on two Jacobean successes, *The Patient Man and the Honest Whore* and *The Roaring Girl*; but "About 1606 the Paul's Boys collapsed, and soon after Dekker fell out with Prince Henry's Men" leading Dekker to shift to pamphlet work for a period (Twynning 4). After Dekker was released from seven years' imprisonment for debt, his dramatic collaborations were revived.

In both his single authored plays and in his collaborative endeavors with Dekker and Webster, Middleton made a significant contribution to the development of the conventions associated with crossdressed heroines on the Jacobean stage. Middleton wrote eight plays that belong to this subgenre; Dekker contributed to two and a third Dekker collaboration without

Middleton is included. An exception, *Your Five Gallants* (c. 1606-1607), is omitted because the motif is barely discussed. The courtesans' crossdressing simply enables them to follow the titular 'Gallants' to a masque and observe their actions but has no impact whatsoever on the female characters' sense of identity. By contrast, Middleton's seven other plays, both his own and his collaborations with Dekker and his one with John Webster push the established boundaries of the trope.

Collectively, these playwrights frequently introduce hidden crossdressers who appear as boys for the majority of the play until they are exposed in a surprise reveal, typically in the last act. These characters do not discuss their disguise and are entirely free to perform masculine identities until their revelation; they are not perceived as feminine until their female identities are known. Other plays contribute to concepts of masculine disguise as a form of protection for the female body against violence or rape, especially when attempting independent travel. However, clear advancements are made within these tropes and new uses of female crossdressing are invented by Middleton and his partners, or, as Paula S. Berggren observes "Middleton's use of the convention confirms the direction away from the traditional female page who woos the audience as surely as she does her lover. Generally, Middleton puts women into men's clothes to signal toughness or sexual indiscretion" (389). Notably, Middleton and Dekker do not require an immaculate moral reputation for their crossdressers. Sexuality is displayed more conspicuously on these figures than is seen in Shakespeare or Heywood's women. Here crossdressers can be prostitutes or live in brothels and still complete their character arcs with communal acceptance, like the infamous Moll Cutpurse, as the trope becomes more familiar to audiences. Furthermore, masculinity is displayed in increasingly bold fashions with fewer social restrictions or expectations placed on the characters. These plays represent a marked evolution in the possibilities for female

crossdressing figures and make evident the substantial popularity, influence, and usage of the trope.

A. *The Patient Man and the Honest Whore* (1604)

In *The Patient Man and the Honest Whore*, also titled *The Honest Whore Part 1* a woman who is known to be in disguise is confronted with public questioning of her bodily presentation (Daalder 243; Mulholland, *The Patient* 280).<sup>29</sup> This play is a Thomas Dekker and Thomas Middleton collaboration which follows Bellafront, a sex worker who leaves the profession and works to reform herself. Bellafront uses a page disguise to visit Hippolito, a former customer whom she loves. However, Hippolito has sealed himself off from women in an attempt to give up prostitutes and remain faithful to his new love, Infelice. An evolved form of the pursuit of a lover by a scorned woman in disguise, the plot follows a flawed but reformed woman rather than an idealized virgin. Unlike many similar heroines, Bellafront seeks a relationship with a man who has left her but had made no promises or vows towards her; Hippolito has slighted her but not abandoned a formal engagement.

After she has donned her masculine appearance, a conversation occurs surrounding the question of Bellafront's opaque identity. When she goes to see Hippolito, his servant is initially convinced of Bellafront's masculine gender by clothing alone. He explains, "If it be a woman... / keep me for meddling with her, for the thing has got / the breeches; 'tis a male varlet sure, my lord" (10.99). Bellafront's disguise is immediately sexualized, and her identity is linked to the attraction a man feels towards her. Excusing his own unsurety of the guests' gender identity, the servant allows Bellafront in and comments on her lack of manly features: "He says he's Signor Matteo's man, but I know he lies... / 'Cause h'as ne'er a beard. 'Tis his boy, I think, sir" (10.104). Despite the word play and indications of a lack of masculine signifiers, Bellafront passes initial visual inspection.

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<sup>29</sup> A second part follows in 1630.

However, Bellafront's disguise does not endure long, although Hippolito is only able to see past the disguise when he is instructed to look closer.<sup>30</sup> When prompted, he recognizes her and is furious, calling back his servant who still does not realize the error until admonished with, "Thou hast let in a woman in man's shape, / And thou art damned for't" (10.132). Bellafront's disguise ultimately does her a disservice. Hippolito becomes more resolute in his decision not to pursue her. Hippolito is repulsed by the incongruity between Bellafront's appearance, her identification as a woman, and the fact that she continues to look entirely masculine while attempting to win his love; he calls her a "she-devil" (10.144). He is angry that he was fooled by the disguise and demonstrates frustration at his inability to recognize a potential mate. Feeling betrayed that his sexual attractions are complicated by the appearance of her female body in a masculine semblance, Hippolito implies that Bellafront's pursuit of love is as misplaced as her clothing is on her form: "Woman, I beseech thee, / Get thee some other suit; this fits thee not" (10.160). A combination of Bellafront's deceit and Hippolito's grappling with Bellafront as a page create anxiety and tension between the couple that Hippolito does not attempt to overcome.

The servant, for his part, becomes anxious that he will not be able to identify a visitor's gender correctly and so refuses to let anyone enter again "though he had hairs at his mouth, for fear / he should be a woman, for some women have beards; / marry, they are half witches" (10.192). The assertion that women with mustaches must be witches (in equal parts mystical, monstrous, powerful, and wrong) recalls similar connections previously discussed in relation to Shakespeare. The nuances of the association between gender and witchcraft

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<sup>30</sup> Laetitia of William Haughton's *Englishmen for My Money, or A Woman Will Have Her Will* (c. 1599) is another short-lived crossdresser who appears before this play. However, she enjoys the prospect of her crossdressing and the agency it affords her (Greg 100). Due to be married against her will, Laetitia uses a brief disguise to undermine the marriage. A momentary eavesdrop is the entirety of her disguise; yet her determination and willingness to participate in the ruse is evident; she gains autonomy over her father and thwarts his match. Though her appearance lasts for a short time and is not accompanied by masculine action, Laetitia takes some pride in her masculinity and deception as it is a means to personal social power. She does not passively assume the disguise, demonstrate extreme discomfort, or fail in her goal to appear masculine.

dominate modern criticism concerning the subject. Anne Llewellyn Barstow contends that the study of witchcraft has been foundational in recognizing women as a legitimate and separate historical category (13). Yet, ironically, this recognition arose from defining women through perceived masculinity on female bodies. Malcolm Gaskill illuminates the cultural shifts in the Jacobean period that lead to women assuming tasks and positions previously reserved to masculinity:

Although legally and culturally male privilege dominated society, in practice patriarchal ideals were tempered by pragmatism, and thus many women emerge from a close examination of evidence as important actors in their own right. Yet it is undeniable that women adopted, or were forced to adopt, male roles and identities to a greater extent than men adopted theirs – an imbalance which is especially striking with regard to witchcraft prosecutions (144).

As women became increasingly active in public society, especially economically, fear over the ensuing societal implications rose exponentially: women's capacity to perform masculine social roles shifted power dynamics severely enough for a patriarchal system to label these supposedly masculine abilities as supernatural and criminal. As Barstow summarizes, though men were prosecuted for witchcraft "over 80 percent of the victims were women" (7).

Though there is a body of work that attempts to decenter women as the only historically relevant witches, the clear majority in female witch convictions is the result of the fears surrounding female biological shifts (Apps, Gaskill).

The servant in *The Patient Man and the Honest Whore* associates masculine physical qualities on women with dangerous, unnatural, and potentially criminal powers. He sees the blending of gender signifiers, which he deems contradictory, as likely witchcraft. His reference to 'beards' indicates a fear that invokes the dynamics of ageism woven through witch narratives. Prejudices surrounding the physical aging of women are a foundational

excuse for the vilification of and desire to ‘other’ women who now diverge from the feminine qualities expected in youthful women (Monter 449, Rowlands 453). Abject fear of the women’s physical changeability throughout their lives reinforced the fear that women might manipulate and change natural forces. Or, as Laura Kounine observes:

[Ahrendt-Schulte] suggests it was the perceived ability of the female body to transform, for example in menstruation and pregnancy, that rendered her so dangerous. Moreover, women were potentially threatening in their role as housewives, with their ability to transform the food and drink which they made and prepared. These ‘good’ acts could thus be put to use in ‘bad’ ways. The identity of the witch has thus become inextricably linked to their (female) gender. (297)

The powerful natural ability to create life and the distinctive physical transformations of female puberty and menopause are a type of anxiety-inducing alchemy in which natural forces combine to create something new and misunderstood. This assumed power over their own bodies is extended to the fear of a potential influence to change male bodies. Kounine discusses several German cases where witches were accused of making men impotent through stealing their manhood and masculinity and Lyndal Roper attributes these anxieties to the demonology literature widely disseminated in German (Kounine 302, 312; Roper, *Witchcraft* 123). The specific fear that men could be stripped of that which they believe makes them men –i.e their penis– through a sorcery associated with women prompted widespread backlash through the male-lead institution of the law and early modern German courts. Hippolito reinforces the servant’s fear that an encounter with an unrecognized anomaly could have dire consequences for his masculinity. By admitting no one into the room he guards, the servant can be assured that he will not be tricked again by the visual cues he expects to be concrete signs of identity.

After such angst surrounding sex and gender representation, the play ends on surprisingly conservative terms. Barbara Kreps aptly acknowledges,

Certainly he made an unorthodox choice when he made a whore the sympathetic titular heroine... Dekker's impulse to break away from stereotypes in *The Honest Whore* is only partly successful... His maneuver away from the paradigm of the hardened and indifferent prostitute leads him only to the stereotype of the patient and long-suffering wife, and both part 1 and part 2 conclude without resolving either the contradictions in his position on women's legal rights or the other contradictions that emerge in these plays in his thinking about women's and men's. (94)

Although a brief foray into crossdressing, the significance of this example is not in Bellafront's actions, but rather in the reactionary fears and anxieties demonstrated in the discovery of her identity. The visceral discomfort of witnessing a figure who appears to be male but reveals itself to be female undermines the viewer's capacity to distinguish between sexes. The incongruity between appearance and internalized identity or sex is interpreted as dangerous, malicious, and possibly supernatural, which leads to a social apparatus for labeling and punishing this threat and mitigate the perceived power to confuse the male gaze.

#### B. *The Roaring Girl* (c. 1608-1611)

Middleton and Dekker's *The Roaring Girl* does appear on Michael Shapiro's list of "Female Heroines in Male Disguise" (Rose, M. 367). An infamous, violent, and masculinely clad character based on a real, historical woman, Moll Cutpurse seems the perfect addition to

the list.<sup>31</sup> Marjorie Garber remarks on the prolific nature of the play stating, “In the manner of such things, it has now become the one crossdressing play (other than Shakespeare’s) most students of the period study” (Garber, *The Logic* 230). However, as has been frequently emphasized by scholars, Moll is not in disguise (Krantz 6; Rose, M. 386). As Garber explains,

Moll Cutpurse is indeed, as is often noted, a cross-dresser who differs from Rosalind and others in that she is not in disguise; she is what sexologists today would call a (relatively) continuous or constant cross-dresser, rather than an episodic one, though she does not cross-dress to pass (everyone onstage knows she is a woman—although everyone offstage, presumably, also knew she was played by a boy). (*The Logic* 230)

Moll wears her masculine clothing openly on her female body; she identifies and is identified as a woman with masculine appearance and masculine performance. While Moll’s brazen relationship with her masculinity contrasts with most crossdressing heroine figures, Shapiro’s inclusion of *The Roaring Girl* is not necessarily complicated by Moll’s exposed relationship with masculine clothing and action, for the play includes another Mary, Mary Fitzallard, who does disguise herself as a boy page. Mary uses both feminine and masculine disguises to manipulate the patriarchal social structure which tries to deny her agency over love, fortune, and her future. Her masculinity is used more subtly than Moll’s but remains undeniably effective. Presented as a parallel foil to Moll, Mary benefits socially from adopting a disguise

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<sup>31</sup> Like *The Roaring Girl*, Robert Daborne’s play, *A Christian Turn’d Turk* (c. 1609-1612), is a fictionalized drama that draws on popular historic characters (Al-Olaqi, *The Fear* 1; Vanwagoner 305). John Ward was an English Christian sailor who deserted from the navy, was captured, and subsequently converted to Islam; Siemen Danziker was a Dutch seaman. Both turned to piracy and captured the imagination of the public and Daborne as infamous traitors depicted through various pamphlets and songs (Hapka iv). Alizia is a young woman traveling who wears the clothing of a boy sailor to preserve her virginity if the ship is captured by pirates. Like in *The Fair Maid of the West*, the ship’s crew are aware of her disguise and support her. Overall, Alizia is relatively undeveloped, and little is revealed of her character. Nevertheless, her eventual tragic suicide is indicative of a Jacobean shift towards applying crossdressed heroine narratives to tragicomedy and tragic plots, such as in *Cupid’s Revenge* or *The Maid’s Tragedy*.

before returning to a feminine presentation which affirms her internalized sense of identity. By contrast, Moll decidedly creates and insists on an identity that publicly and boldly conflates her female identity with her masculine physical qualities and performances.

Twentieth-century research attempting to quantify Moll's relationship with her sexuality focuses on Moll's divergent qualities, her place outside of normal society, and attempts to label or categorize Moll. Mary Beth Rose asserts that Moll's choice to present as a woman in men's clothing is intentional and requires society to overcome or at least face their anxieties surrounding her opposing gender signifiers. Rose notes the significance of Moll's overt guise in contrast to heroines who borrow masculinity temporarily:

It should be stressed that Moll is not in disguise: she is neither a disguised player, a man pretending to be a woman; nor is she a disguised character, whose role requires a woman pretending to be a man. Unlike the disguised heroines of romantic comedy, Moll seeks not to conceal her sexual identity, but rather to display it. (Rose, M. 367)

Moll lives her mixed identity in open society, embodying the masculine on the female as her own identity with no reference to a former state to which she can be restored. There is no transition from feminine to masculine or back. Moll's masculine femaleness is a constant. Thus, Rose suggests that her character has the potential to alleviate some of the anxiety a crossdresser poses to the community by not revealing where they fit in the patriarchal hierarchy. Indeed, Moll's candor morally separates her from those who deceive society:

When used simply to denote a costume, worn in a play or festival for example, 'disguise' could be used as a morally neutral term in Jacobean England. But discussions of apparel in the moral and religious literature more often use 'disguise' as an inclusive censorious term meaning, roughly, 'deformity of nature' and comprehending (Rose, M. 387).

This concealment extends to social rank and sexual availability, disrupting the expectation that all encounters are immediately discernible. However, Moll does not fit this pattern of women who use masculine apparel for disguise without internalizing masculine qualities. She is not deviating from a form of herself which she identifies as more authentic; her show of masculinity is a truthful and an honest representation of her sense of self. Though not aligned with expectations of the natural state of a woman, Moll is not disguising her womanhood with her masculinity but simultaneously demonstrates masculine signifying attributes while announcing her identity as female.

She possesses a masculinity which is not borrowed but is of her own self and genuine to her person. She does not appropriate her clothing or violent behavior, but they belong to her. As Garber phrases,

Critics of *The Roaring Girl* emphasize that Moll is not in disguise. Whether in pants or her frieze jerkin and black safeguard she is always read as a woman, unlike Rosalind/Ganymede, or Viola/Cesario, or any of the dozens of female pages who turn up in the cross-dressing plays of the period. What this means is that she does not, will not, cannot disappear into the actively “real” identity of the “woman” she is supposed to be, her transvestite “other” going underground, or becoming incorporated into the dominant fiction of womanhood (femininity, object of desire). (*The Logic* 231)

However, Jane Baston makes the argument that Moll is forced back into the structures of society through what she terms “rehabilitating” (317). While examining Mary Frith’s encounters with legal punishment for crossdressing, loudness, and theft, specifically four recorded instances of Moll facing prosecution for these crimes (including time in Bridewell for her appearance onstage), Baston attempts to separate herself from the tendency to see the character of Moll as universally transgressive (Gurr, *The Shakespearean* 266). As Baston puts

it, the depiction found in *The Roaring Girl* is “more reactionary than radical” (320). When considered alongside not only Middleton’s other crossdressing women, but the many other contemporary characters, Moll clearly does not stand alone as a counterculture female character. In fact, this depiction of her is in many ways tempered. As Garber notes, “She has been extensively cleaned up from the original, ‘historical’ Moll, as is also noted; her virginity—in fact, a fairly common choice on the part of female-to-male cross-dressers in the early modern period” (*The Logic* 230). Moll as a character is created with specific authorial goals that utilize both the reputation of historical Mary Frith and common devices for crossdressing narratives.

The play expects an audience that has preconceived notions about Moll and her role that are superseded by the authors. This viewer is encouraged to ignore the things they may know or have heard regarding Moll and to accept that the new story to be witnessed on stage is, if not better, at least new. The audience is cautioned,

What he would of a roaring girl have writ;  
 If that he finds not here, he mews at it.  
 Only we entreat you think our scene  
 Cannot speak high, the subject being but mean:  
 A roaring girl whose notes till now never were  
 Shall fill with laughter our vast theatre;  
 That’s all which I dare promise. (Prologue.4)

The intentional re-direction of the masculine popular culture icon is cemented as Moll joins the following scene in her first appearance. She immediately refuses her characteristic tobacco on a mission to secure a shag ruff (3.118). Yet, she is not stripped of her trademark, loudness. Laxton comments on her forceful presence, “sh’as the spirit / of four great parishes, and a voice that will drown all / the city!” (3.194). Such loudness is characteristic of the

urban roaring boy, although Gates determines that Moll “is more aggressive than many of the roaring boys of early modern drama” (45). He highlights the social leniency towards young men who behave loudly and aggressively noting, “the roaring boy is characteristically fond of tobacco, given to swearing and gambling, and eager to quarrel,” all of which are hallmarks of the roaring girl, Moll (45). Gates continues by determining “that such rude behavior could be viewed as an elite characteristic” in boys, which does not translate to feminine counterparts (47). He makes the argument that though the men come from all backgrounds, they typically try to inhabit a social role that is not their own. Ultimately the article claims that the behavior is contrived and put on by boys, a performance. Yet Moll performs the behaviors more ideally than the men she encounters. Her remarkable brashness is openly displayed. Moll uses a voice and actions that signify masculinity to those who view her on her publicly female body and ultimately female identity. She is recognized as a woman in open society; though occasionally confused for a man, community awareness of her female identity is general. Even in the brief moments she is confused for a man, she is quickly re-identified as a woman without changing her appearance. Her character also displays awareness of a capacity to mix with males in masculine social spaces and expresses the limitations her attire creates in feminine society. When refused clothing by Mistress Openwork, Moll expresses a desire that the woman be “for a minute but a man” in order to face her in combat on equal terms (3.249). Here Moll considers herself as equal to a man and in the social role assigned to men but is identified as and continues to identify as a woman. She is overtly and observationally both with no sense of opacity, misrepresentation, or dishonesty and there is a level of acceptance for her presence and behavior, as they are, in society.

Moll follows her desire to fight with an actual fight. She joins masculine society when encountering a man whom she claims “abused” her in a tavern (3.258). She “*Strikes him*” and subsequently proves herself capable of performing the ultimate masculine action, violence.

Fellow is greatly insulted by her attack but does not return the blow. He laments, “Why tread upon a worm, they say, ‘twill / turn tail; but indeed a gentleman should have more / manners” (3.268). He tries to convince others, and presumably himself, that he is leaving because Moll cannot beat him and is not a gentleman; she is therefore unworthy of his efforts. Moll inserts herself into the male sphere and is initially rejected from it, yet only for fear of her success. Her dominance is undeniable when Fellow flees at her violent display. Laxton praises “Gallantly performed, i’faith, Moll, and manfully! I / love thee for ever for’t” (3.271). Actions which distinctly prove masculinity are performed successfully by Moll and are openly acknowledged. Her masculinity is publicly substantiated and witnessed with full recognition of her female body. Moll responds with anger after Laxton offers his support and retorts that she is more capable without him. She asserts her competence in a physically male space with masculine action, specifically when the male character is unable to perform their own masculinity.

Moll’s seeming support of freedom from patriarchy for women is tempered, however, when she follows the small battle with a speech demeaning women. Her masculine actions lead to a moment of patriarchal expression. It is a patriarchy she traverses, yet in her moments of power, supports.

‘tis impossible to  
 know what woman is thoroughly 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? (3.331)

Moll had been accused of promiscuity and chooses to use her moment of masculine power to assert herself over other women. Her reputation as honest is held above other women. In shaming sex workers, whom she claims put themselves in such a position, Moll Cutpurse

calls for other women to be honest in their identities and exercise power over their bodies as she does over her own. Moll is blatant with her identity as a woman who is also masculine in clothing and action, defining herself by that truthful presentation. When Trapdoor describes Moll in blended terms by applauding her, “heroic spirit and masculine womanhood,” she retaliates by tripping him and humiliating him (3.368). Moll dominates any attempt to mock her success, prioritizing masculine physical reaction over feminine passivity.

While Moll Cutpurse proves entirely capable of performing as a man, the implications of being assigned both genders simultaneously remain unappealing to her character. When she fights Laxton, Moll enters “*Like a Man*” (5.37). Not dressed like a man nor in disguise, but with an indication of physicality as well as appearance. Yet when attacking Laxton for his treatment of her, she does so to “defy all men” (5.92). Moll uses her masculinity to protect women, including herself. Once again accusing Laxton of abuse, she attacks him in defense of all vulnerable women. She declares, “I scorn to prostitute myself to a man, / I that can prostitute a man to me” (5.111). Moll uses violence to revenge herself on Laxton for when he had the chance to abuse her in a tavern. In moments, Moll transitions between expressions of the feminine and the masculine without forfeiting her identity as a masculine woman. Once she has achieved her task of dominating the man, this moment of mercy is quickly identified as belonging to her feminine side. Directly after being spared, Laxton calls Moll a ‘noble girl’ (5.124). This equally diminutive and emasculating response to passivity is only partially countered by Moll, who instead identifies her spirit as “mistress,” a feminine term, but one with more implied power and agency than the infantilizing ‘girl’ she received (5.140). Moll’s violent streak ends at this self-identification, though her desire to present as masculine continues.

Patrick Cheney attributes any conflicting characteristics of Moll to a gender binary, assigning Moll’s moments of passivity and violence to a concept of femininity and

masculinity rooted in the personifications of Venus and Mars (and later Eros). Cheney's penchant for emphasizing duality in Moll's varied levels of behavior extends to an argument that Dekker and Middleton use the contradictory characteristics to negate Moll's sexuality. Feeding off this concept that simultaneous feminine and masculine action could cancel out sexual capacity, Cheney believes that Moll's romantic rejection of men makes her asexual. Cheney tries to argue that Moll can be a binary biologic (or at least conceptually biologic) hermaphrodite, in other terms a sort of 'equally balanced' intersex individual, in a form that extends to dual behavioral attributes. This somehow creates a social neutrality or cancelling out of social sexual expectation. He argues that her opposing traits make her non-threatening, yet fascinating, to a society that values women primarily for their reproductive capacity in a play driven by marriage. Cheney sees this in all her discordant characteristics, arguing that "Moll's hermaphroditic nature helps explain her paradoxical personality – the fact that she is both benign and irascible" (126). Moll's behaviors, for Cheney, are not a balance of character but dueling roles that society can ignore or reasonably accept as long as Moll removes herself from sexual availability to men, eliminating her as a threat to the patriarchy. If she does not participate in the sexual relationship for which gender roles are created, Moll can exist in a liminal fringe devoid of pressures to participate in sexual dynamics. Yet Cheney fails to consider Moll in non-binary terms. He does not allow Moll's sexuality to exist marginally or fluidly. However, if we allow for a measure of nuance beyond a purely binary gender structure, or an all or nothing heterosexual identity, Middleton and Dekker's 'Moll' can provide perspective into possible alternatively gender social roles that have a space within the social structure rather than nonparticipative or ostracized presence.

Jonathan Dollimore questions the nature of transgression and extends his debate to Moll and her role as a perceived societal transgressor. Using renaissance concepts of selfhood, he argues that a person's desire to be true to their chosen identity should be lauded

by their own cultural standards. That, “one which might actually endorse deviance in principle, at least if it were seen as a quest for authentic selfhood” (55). This is the space for Moll to exist as a masculine woman with full acceptance and integration into society, as long as her actions and identity are legitimate to her sense of self and that authenticity is projected to society transparently. However, Dollimore challenges Moll’s reputation for subversion. On the contrary, he argues that an attempt by a woman to emulate masculinity is ‘regressive;’ it is a woman trying to become only the defined opposite of the persona that has been rejected. Dollimore notes Moll’s ability to be exceptional in her male role and greater than the men she encounters. He argues, like Cheney, that hermaphroditism is a neutralizing of gender, but elaborates that while transvestism is an assertion of power over gender, it is not necessarily transgressive.

Dollimore attributes particular agency to the crossdresser without disguise as a person whose divergent nature is open and intentional, which is Moll’s hallmark. Moll is afforded this higher status and her criminality and social power in the play are given precedent over determining her sexuality or genital structure. Dollimore searches for behavior that is transgressive beyond the boundaries of binary gender concepts, but ultimately finds that Moll is still defined by these qualities. He argues,

But if the hermaphrodite threatens the binarism through ambiguous unity, the female transvestite of the early seventeenth century positively disrupts that same scheme by usurping the master side of the opposition... the transvestite represents a subversive reinscription within, rather than a transcendence of, an existing order, while the hermaphrodite is often appropriated as a symbol of just such a transcendence. (68)

For Dollimore, Moll must be a hermaphrodite, a combination of two sexes bound to the concept that there are two sexes and limited within that social definition. He does not find

Moll to be outside of gendered social expectations, but rather to exist as part of the binary using those signifiers of either masculine or feminine expectations, albeit in socially unprescribed combinations. For Dollimore then, what is expected as masculine or feminine remains culturally recognizable as such on Moll. She is female, dressing as a male; no more or less. Moll is a female character who is capable of displaying masculine signifiers including dress, speech, and action; but by this analysis, that is rooted only in preexisting early modern definitions of binary gender and gender roles. Her femaleness is what a female is anticipated to be and her masculinity is easily recognized and labeled as such. She wears men's clothes on a female body. She is a 'she.' Moll is definable and not an enigmatic sexual 'unknown' that threatens the boundaries of patriarchal structure. Yet, if the characterization of Moll is definitively female and her actions and clothing cross normative gender boundaries, the lines are not as clearly drawn as Dollimore claims.

These two pieces are contradictory; though Moll does exhibit traditional perceptions of masculinity (though on her female body), she is also at times feminine. The movement between her feminine and masculine traits is not entirely binary. As Cheney suggests, Moll participates in a liminal gender space, one that allows her to interact comfortably and with acceptance in male and female spheres. At the end of the play, she returns to feminine clothing. Though the true non-binary transgression that Dollimore searches for and does not find may indeed not exist, the transitions and movement between gender presentations, signifiers, and spaces requires a spectrum of gendered performance that is simultaneously not entirely feminine or masculine. Moll inhabits spaces with gender performances not preordained by social convention: her combination of female and masculine, most specifically of her unequivocally female body (and not biologically hermaphroditic), in harmony with violent action, challenges the boundaries of early modern gender prescription. The spaces and moments in which she employs both sets of signifiers and moves between

social roles and spaces, though these are binary, is nothing short of fluid. However, such attempts either to define Moll as asexual or render her sexually inconsequential due to her mixture of masculine and feminine signifiers fail to account for two glaring issues. Firstly, Moll in no way possesses an equality of opposing gender attributes that could somehow mathematically cancel each other. Her masculinity does not negate her female-ness and her femininity and masculinity do not exist in equal parts. Secondly, Moll speaks to her own sexuality and explains in no uncertain terms that the balance required for her to engage in a heterosexual relationship, one in which she is open to participating, is not lacking in her own self or body, but is the result of a shortcoming in society.

Moll ends the play in a tempered version of her appearance but continues to cling to her identity as a masculine person. Dressed femininely, she teases Sir Alexander, “Methinks you should be proud of such a daughter— / As good a man as your son!” (11.152). He remains horrified at the idea and agrees to allow Sebastian to marry anyone else. As Sebastian and Mary are reunited, Moll explains her own refusal to marry. Calling for perfection and balance in the world before she can be bound in marriage, she chastises a broken and sinful society that would dictate her actions before addressing its egregious flaws.

When you shall hear  
 Gallants void from sergeants’ fear,  
 Honesty and truth unslandered,  
 Woman manned but never pandered,  
 Cheaters booted but not coached,  
 Vessels older ere they’re broached;  
 If my mind be then not varied,  
 Next day following, I’ll be married. (11.216)

This resolution from a femininely attired Moll calls for absolute reconciliation of the world before she can find enough balance in her own person to couple with another person in marriage. To return to the question of Moll's sexuality, Moll is not capable of placing herself in a binary heterosexual relationship until she can adhere to a sole gender role. She is not, in modern terms, asexual; perhaps she is aromantic, but these labels seem ultimately inappropriate for a character who functions in two sides of a patriarchal society that she conclusively supports and is accepted in without radical change to herself or identity.

However, it is possible to consider how established identities that mix masculinity and the female body offer a different perspective on sexuality. In discussing tomboys and the emphasis and focus on the body that boy-ish actions on a girl-ish body creates, Jennifer Higginbotham finds sexuality rather than a lack thereof. She argues, "early modern tomboys transgress gender boundaries both by being masculine and by pursuing activities that call attention to female bodies as sexual subjects" (71). Moll's unabashed masculinity prioritizes her body and sexuality. Her masculine action draws specific attention to her female body that plainly remains identifiable as such. Playing out these concepts against Halberstam's contributions to gender theory, Higginbotham cites Moll's feminine appearance and 'manly' descriptions as being too adult and too female-centralized to qualify as a tomboy, as tomboys exist in an adolescent phase that has been outgrown and transcended in the figure of Moll. However, in distinguishing Moll as outside the category of tomboy, Higginbotham asserts that study of crossdressing should continue without mixing conceptions of gender and genitalia. Moll's choice to be masculine and female identifying do not necessarily impact her sexuality. Her performance of masculine or feminine gender signifiers do not negate her capacity for sexual desire or action, nor do they influence her choice of partner. Moll speaks to her own heterosexuality and chooses not to engage in marriage based on a political stance rather than an absence of attraction. Though she recognizes that she would be expected to

change her gender performance at the point of entering a traditionally heterosexual union, her sexual attraction remains the same in her current state of masculinity.

Moll's refusal to marry and participate in the obligatory comedic wedding again emphasizes her unique characterization when compared to other crossdressing comedic female characters. Moll identifies and is identified as a woman in masculine or feminine clothing. She is not in disguise; she does not want to be a man entirely. Though Moll ends the play dressed in feminine attire, she does not renounce her masculine clothing or actions. There is no return to a formerly established identity. She reinforces her dedication to her contrary lifestyle by remaining unmarried. The critical disagreement on how to categorize Moll's role and sexuality in this play is rooted in a critical attempt to either categorize her based on the binary spaces she flouts or define her in modern fluid terms. However, Moll is ultimately an early modern figure bound by patriarchal, binary boundaries. She crosses and pushes these boundaries, existing in the feminine and masculine, male and female spaces simultaneously and separately. Moll straddles the divided segments of society by layering binary signifiers which allow her to interact in both spheres and exist in between sides. She possesses a masculine female body that is not outside of or beyond binaries. When masculine, she remains open in her identity as a woman. Moll Cutpurse honestly presents her internalized female identity and her externalized masculine identity to society explicitly without disguise or concealment. Ultimately it is this difficult to define transparency that absolves her in the eyes of a society that attempted to condemn her actions and body.

If Moll Cutpurse is not in disguise, then the burden of Michael Shapiro's categorization of plays with 'Heroines in Disguise' must be held by Mary Fitzallard.<sup>32</sup> Mary

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<sup>32</sup> Nathan Field's *Amends for Ladies* (c. 1611-1618) is also a Moll Cutpurse play; here, she appears very briefly in one scene and is likely present to capitalize on the popularity of the person, the character, and *The Roaring Girl* which preceded (Dawson 385). However, like in *The Roaring Girl*, there is a secondary masculine heroine who crossdresses in disguise. Lady Honour, or The Maid, dresses as an Irish page to return a gift and a letter from her lover (Bartley 440). Her disguise offers the opportunity to observe and interact with her lover

is frequently considered to be as Adrienne Eastwood claims, “the ideally feminine character” (20). She resonates with traditional masculinely disguised women such as Shakespeare’s Viola or Rosalind; Mary is in disguise and ultimately reverts to a fully feminine and female identity. Like many others in Shapiro’s list, Mary Fitzallard uses her disguise as a mechanism to manipulate her social sphere. Mary Beth Rose comments on the pattern between young heroines who use a gendered disguise, also usually of a lower class, saying, “Not only do women in men’s clothing come from various classes in society; they also have the unfortunate habit of dressing alike, obscuring not only the clarity of their gender, but the badge of their social status as well, and thereby endangering critically the predictable orderliness of social relations” (374). However, Mary’s relationship with masculinity, sexuality, and disguise proves more complicated than many similarly disguised heroines. Moll’s lack of ‘disguise’ defines her approach to living outside of early modern societal limitation, but her forthright approach to her identity tempers her subversion. She defies gendered expectations, but in full view of society. Mary, on the other hand, exploits her ability to appropriate masculinity and multiple class positions to influence and undermine those making decisions without her consent.

Though juxtaposed with one of the most recognizable crossdressers in early modern drama and history, Mary makes her own impact. Disguised not once, but twice, Mary contorts into disguises of both genders and varied social roles. She appears in her disguise at the start of the play, but it is a disguise that does not hide the character she portrays. Despite a semblance of working-class apparel, she is recognized as a gentle and delicate woman. Neatfoot describes her as “sweet damsel,” an “emblem of fragility” and “the fairest tree of generation” (1.10). Mary is an unanticipated disguised figure, where Moll is expected as the

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anonymously as a servant seen also in *The Wise Woman of Hogsdon*. Her father accidentally stabs her which is the end of her disguise. A violent encounter is the undoing of her masculine façade but she recovers and marries happily. This play is largely a conglomeration of popular tropes, plots, and characters, used without any attempt to conceal their similarity to preceding dramas.

title character, and serves as a direct foil to Moll. She is not aggressive or violent, yet her appearance remains deceptive throughout the play until she appears for the first time as herself in the final scene.

Sebastian Wengrave, the young man betrothed to Mary, is the target of her deceit. Sebastian has disappeared and abandoned Mary despite an agreement between their fathers. He does not recognize his neglected beloved until she chooses to reveal herself. She cries out, “Have you forgot me?” before removing her disguise to a greatly surprised Sebastian (1.61). He admits that the revelation terrifies him and exclaims,

Ha! Life of my life: Sir Guy Fitzallard’s daughter!

What has transform’d my love to this strange shape?

...this so strange disguise

Holds me with fear and wonder. (1.62)

Sebastian’s extreme reaction illustrates the latent anxiety he possesses towards his own inability to recognize a potential mate. His embarrassment is compounded by the endearing terms he uses to acquaint himself with his unknown betrothed. He addresses her fondly with, “You’re mistaken, sweetheart,” before being confronted with his negligence (1.55). Coupled with an accusation that he has abandoned his betrothed, neglected and forgotten her (an accusation which he can only partially refute), Sebastian attempts to cope with his confusion. Faced with this and in the light of his attempt to be familiar with a strange woman, a shaken Sebastian admits that he has been avoiding Mary but has a plan to reunite them. Largely ignoring his infractions, a hurried explanation reveals that he is pretending to love the second Mary, Moll Cutpurse. Sebastian’s excuse for this liaison is Moll’s utter social unacceptability:

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. (1.101)

To Sebastian, Moll is unlikable, possibly unhinged, and recognizable enough for his purpose. By courting Moll, his father will be entirely horrified, prompting approval of the previous Mary who had lost favor due to financial circumstance; however, in this discussion, Moll is clearly positioned as a woman. She may be a controversial partner, but she is undeniably identified as a viable heterosexual match, if not a preferable choice.

Mary does not return until scene eight of the play. Missing Moll's dramatic encounters with violence and sexual innuendo, Mary Fitzallard reappears in an evolved state of disguise. Crossdressed as a man, her intentions have changed. Moll assists the couple by supporting their 'honest' relationship, a curious term for a couple which has not appeared in the open together without a disguise at this point (8.39). Sebastian remains aware of Mary's identity in this new disguise and complicates binary discourses of desire by maintaining his sexual attraction to Mary despite her appearance. Mary relishes a kiss with Sebastian by offering a response that equally affirms her dedication and borders on the masculine erotic. She says to him, "Never with more desire and harder venture" (8.44). This moment between them in her state of masculinity garners attention and commentary on the confusing image which has been compounded by Mary. Ironically the unusual moment is commented on by Moll who is at the time fully dressed in her male attire: "How strange this shows, one man to kiss another" (8.45). Mary here transgresses against society in a form that the infamous crossdresser does not; she expresses explicit sexuality in her male clothing. Mary goes beyond affirming her sexual attraction in male clothing. While kissing Sebastian, she is disguised as a page, ostensibly indistinguishable from a man. If Moll were to kiss a man, she would do so as a recognizable woman, though dressed as a man. Her feminine identity cannot be obscured by her clothing. This position and her abstinence from romantic expression

redeems an amount of her subversion. Moll does not threaten the social expectation that a person should be immediately identifiable. As Trapdoor makes clear previously in the scene, she is expected “In man’s apparel” (8.5). Though her clothing flouts social law, she skirts the edge of iniquity through sexual and romantic abstinence and through the maintenance of her ‘honest’ identity as a conspicuous female regardless of clothing or action. In this, Mary Fitzallard is the greater social offender. Unknown as a woman to any strange onlooker, she engages sexually with a man and exacerbates the moment with innuendo.

Though all onstage viewers are aware of her identity, Sebastian is still prompted to defend their relationship, though he only manages to complicate the display with homoerotic overtones. He defends himself through his enjoyment of the kiss.

SEBASTIAN. I’d kiss such men to choose, Moll;

Methinks a woman’s lip tastes well in a doublet.

...

SEBASTIAN. The older they wax, Moll. Troth, I speak seriously:

As some have a conceit their drink tastes better

In an outlandish cup than in our own,

So methinks every kiss she gives me now

In this strange form is worth a pair of two. (8.46)

Sebastian’s attempt to confirm his heterosexuality through his attraction to Mary quickly goes awry as he emphasizes the pleasure he finds in the duality of the situation. Moll thrusts his desire further into the wanton by aligning his proclivities with commodity and debaucheries at brothels. She insinuates that his desire is beyond even the current imaginations of sex workers and that eventually such women might deign to lower themselves to his level of desire. Doubling down on his position, Sebastian marks the erotic nature of having both what belongs to him and being outside of a traditional relationship, fidelity and infidelity. In short, Sebastian is attracted to role play and does not see it as contrary to societal expectations, but

as fulfilling alternative desire within cultural constructs. James Bromley aptly highlights the queer nature of his response,

Alternately, clothing is also shown to kindle nonnormative desires within the context of coupling when Sebastian ruminates on the pleasures of kissing the cross-dressed Mary Fitzallard... While the play reminds the audience that Mary has a woman's lip (though on the early modern stage, she would have a boy actor's lips), Sebastian offers the audience a queer fantasy when he thinks "every kiss... is worth a pair of two" (8.55-56). Here, he also allows the "form" of clothing to give her another identity and thereby imagines a kind of nonmonogamous pleasure wherein one kiss comes from Mary herself and the other from the page she pretends to be. (154)

Mary does not offer her own opinion on the interaction but is reduced to silence. Though participating in the queer and erotic moment, it is defined by her partner and the woman who witnesses them. However, Moll avoids the complications of Sebastian's response by focusing on their task of deceiving his father, Sir Alexander.

Her explanation of her motivation in assisting their ruse also sheds light on the significance of Mary's name. Moll admits, "I pitied her for name's sake, that a Moll / Should be so crossed in love... / My tailor fitted her: how like you his work?" (8.66). The sharing of their name prompts empathy from Moll, who goes so far as to recreate Mary in her own image. Though the masculine image is what hinders her from pursuing love, Moll uses the same device to facilitate Mary's love. Lloyd Edward Kermode interprets the women's positions in this moment as being "strangely interchangeable" due to their appearance (437). He attempts to argue that Moll's confusion at the kiss removes a portion of her agency and lends it to Mary, though he admits the complication of Mary's subjugation to Sebastian. While I agree that Moll's transformation of Mary gives Mary an amount of masculine agency

and complicates both women's sexuality by revealing their prospective reactions to the kiss, I am more aligned with Alicia Tomasian's opinion that "'Moll' and 'Mary' are not interchangeable in this scene and are perhaps not so off stage either" (210). The women have distinct motivations for their attire; and though one is made in the image of the other, their relationship with clothing and sexuality remain starkly distinct. Mary defines her sexuality and participates in open displays that affirm her orientation; her clothing is a masculine facade created to enable her relationship. It is separate to her female identity, does not integrate with her sense of self, and does not impede expression or pursuit of her heterosexuality.

Mary briefly encounters violence when Moll draws her weapon and offers to solve their dilemma with force. However, Mary plays no part in this display and Sebastian, perhaps for her sake, pacifies Moll and trades her sword for an instrument. Mary voices her approval of the avoidance of physical confrontation by praising Moll's musical reputation. Her flattering statement, "I've heard her much commended, sir, for one that / was ne'er taught," prompts a volleyed exchange laced with innuendo between Moll and Sebastian (8.82). Focused on the use of her 'instrument' against Sir Alexander, the two drive the conversation and course of action away from Mary. Moll sings a bawdy song, Sebastian manipulates his father, and Mary is rendered a silent observer. Though in her most masculine form, Mary does little to assert any physical masculinity. Rather, as a page, she shies from violence and encourages passive action which leads to her ostracization from masculine and innuendo laden conversation. Instead, she affirms her sexual attraction to Sebastian which, regardless of his reaction, does nothing but uphold her heterosexual, female identity within her disguise.

Again, Moll is the heroine of her own play. She changes from her distinguishing male clothing into a female disguise. It is poignant that it takes the need to appear unlike herself to put women's clothing on Moll; however, greater significance can be found in her further need

for a mask. Feminine clothing is not recognizable on Moll, but she can be recognized in it. Women's clothing is not foreign enough on her body to obscure her identity. Moll's identity remains, as always, definitively female. From within her dress and mask, Moll conspires with Sebastian to finally trick his father. In his frustration with Moll, Sir Alexander has offered his endorsement to anyone who is not Moll; yet in her disguise, he gives unconditional approval to her appearance. At her revelation Sir Alexander laments his "reviving shame" and his attempts to rescind his endorsement are met with Moll's harsh scolding (11.142). When Mary enters, it is for the first time in her own clothing. She appears not restored but reinvented. The descriptions of a reputable, young noble woman are for the first time visible on her body. Her introduction by Sir Noland as a worthy bride is not contrasted or obscured by her form.

Nor I more delight in doing grace to virtue  
 Than in this worthy gentlewoman, your son's bride,  
 Noble Fitzallard's daughter, to whose honour  
 And modest fame I am a servant vowed (11.182).

Mary's singular speech in the final scene is in response to acceptance. Sir Alexander commits to giving his land to the couple and apologizes. Emphasizing his proclivity towards judging by sight, Sir Alexander's apology further compounds his anxieties in being unable to immediately assess status and character. Mary responds with a surprising forgiveness, "Duty and love may I deserve in those, / And all my wishes have a perfect close" (5.2.191). Though she has remained physically passive throughout her disguises, Mary is remarkably adept at using gender and social disguise to manipulate those around her. Mary Fitzallard reaches outside of feminine social restrictions to gain power and influence until she obtains the object of her goals: Sebastian, marriage, and elevated social and financial standing.

Both Mary and Moll use their masculine clothing to supersede societal limitations. Moll defends herself, moves between social classes, and maintains her independence through

remaining unmarried. Her masculinity is a permanent state which she does not relinquish even when certain signifiers are more feminine in a single moment. She possesses a perpetually female body which expresses both the feminine or masculine. These traits are her own and allow her to fully embody and perform action assigned to either gender. These qualities are hers and are not appropriated but derive from her own identity and motivations. This is what separates her from Mary and other women who use a masculine persona as a disguise. Like them, Mary belongs to the type of female characters who temporarily express a masculine facade to pursue a wayward lover only to eventually revert to an external representation of their feminine, female identity.

### C. *No Wit, No Help Like a Woman* (1611)

*No Wit, No Help Like a Woman*, composed exclusively by Middleton, is a play with a particularly complex plot (Jowett 191). As Juan Tomás Matarranz Araque remarks, the play is embroiled in a social context of the rise of Puritanism, public denunciations of crossdressing, and an increasing tolerance for salacious language and characterizations onstage. In short, there is a new opportunity for “onstage feminine characters with a stronger presence and personality” (50). In a continuation of the Jacobean movement to explore female characters in increasingly complex moral and social positions, *No Wit, No Help Like a Woman* foregrounds protagonists of lower classes and of mixed respectability. The wife and daughter of Sir Oliver Twilight are kidnapped, and antics ensue surrounding the family. Parallel to the Twilight family plot, yet without much intersection, Master and Mistress Low-water have been left destitute for which they blame their relatives, the Goldenfleeces. As a wealthy widow, Lady Goldenfleece is pursued by a group of suitors that includes Sir Gilbert Lambston. Much to the horror of Mistress Kate Low-water, Lambston proposes that she

become his mistress after he marries Lady Goldenfleece. Nevertheless, Kate Low-water tells him that she will think on his offer and then, with the help of her husband, devises a plan to join the widow's suitors in disguise as a gentleman.

For a crossdressed female heroine, Kate Low-water possesses several unusual traits. She is married, not remarkably youthful, and her morality is frequently questioned, although she is determined to protect her virtue. Yet despite these mixed qualities, her disguise is effective and is complimented with, "He seems a gentleman" (4.159). A rival suitor notes this suitor's grace and admits his attraction to her feminine qualities: "A proper woman turned gallant! If / the widow refuse me I care not if I be a suitor to him" (4.190). Regardless of the comedic nod to the ruse, Mistress Low-water's disguise proves to be completely successful. Her masculinity is more effective than that of her competing suitors and she quickly attracts Lady Goldenfleece who also is drawn to the newcomer's aesthetics: "The more I look on him, the more I thirst for't. / Methinks his beauty does so far transcend" (4.217). This response is the goal of Kate's disguise and affirms both her ability to portray masculinity and lends legitimacy to the vindication she seeks.

With a motivation rooted in revenge for money cheated from her husband by the Goldenfleeces and a drive to reclaim her fortune with any means necessary, Kate deviates from heroines who crossdress out of noble necessity to preserve life or virginity. While in the pursuit of righting a wrong, this scheme is business and is devised for an economic purpose. As she learns that her feminine self will be ineffective, Mistress Low-water pursues masculinity in search of power over her own social and financial status, this being done with more than a small amount of spite for her nemesis. As Adrianna Nycz explains:

Kate does not explicitly express her wishes to exact revenge on the widow, she alludes to the fact that she is poor because the Widow has all her money.

Therefore, by recovering the Low-water fortune, Kate's and the Widow's

positions would be reversed, leaving the Widow in the same destitute situation in which Kate finds herself in the beginning of the play (73).

Hoping to profit from her disguise, Kate asserts authority and agency directly over her own husband. After their agreement on the plan, a stage direction indicates a shift in their relationship: “*Enter Mistress Low-water, as a gallant gentleman, her husband like a servingman after her*” (Scene 4). This power shift emphasizes the immensity of Mistress Low-water’s transformation; her social position transitions as vastly as her gender presentation. In her masculine clothing, she is a gentleman with authority over her husband. As master over her spouse, Kate assumes power over her household and takes control over the household finances. She becomes the man in her relationship and her husband becomes her man. Yet Mistress Low-water justifies her use of masculinity as a means to protect her femininity and marriage, as Nycz explains: “Kate’s motivation to cross-dress in her scheme is because she believes that cross-dressing will keep her virtue intact since it will have been encased within her male identity. Therefore, Kate’s virtue will be protected by a man (that man being herself in disguise)” (74). If Kate were to display such authority over her husband in a feminine state, she would shame and emasculate her husband in conjunction with compromising her own reputation as a gentlewoman and worthy wife. Her masculine attire enables her to supplement her husband’s shortcomings without compromising either of them.

Amazingly, Kate wins her courtship and illegally marries the widow. However, as this marriage is illegitimate, both as her second marriage and as a union between women.

Mistress Low-water immediately changes her demeanor of confidence and awkwardly attempts to avoid her new wife’s attentions on their wedding night:

WIDOW. [kissing her] Thus I kiss it.

MISTRESS LOW-WATER. I can’t abide these kissings...

WIDOW. What cannot you, sir?

MISTRESS LOW-WATER. ...A married man must think of other matters.

(9.211)

Though confident in masculine spaces until this point, Kate resists any erotic entanglement. However, her refusal to kiss her wife again changes to an insistence that she will do no more than kiss her wife so that she does not have to engage in sexual intercourse. This comes as a shock to the bride, who questions the validity of an unconsummated marriage. In response, Mistress Low-water makes excuses that facilitate her and her husband's plan to match Lady Goldenfleece with Beveril, Mistress Low-water's brother (9.223).

After several close calls and a rescue by her husband, this determination to avoid sex reaches its zenith. Kate announces to all who attended the wedding that she will never consummate the marriage and rejects Lady Goldenfleece outright, vowing, "For ever I refuse her; / I'll never set a foot into her bed, / Never perform the duty of man to her" (9.390). Entirely successful in mimicking masculinity to a large social group and in an intimate relationship, Kate is adamant that she will not perform the masculine sexual acts expected. Yet this revelation does not compromise her; the disguise continues. The explicit purpose of this disguise and the subsequent marriage is made clear as Kate threatens to keep the whole fortune due to her as a husband. However, she relents and agrees to only keep half on condition that, after their separation, the widow promises to remarry immediately. When her terms are accepted, she chooses to invalidate the marriage through the fact of her other marriage rather than disclose her female identity. She announces, "I am married to another" (9.521). Kate momentarily maintains her disguise until, in defense of the widow Goldenfleece's honor, Beveril threatens her with violence and death, declaring, "The law would hang you if married to another" (9.558). At this, Mistress Low-water finally removes her disguise.

There has been much editorial debate about the way in which Kate reveals her female body, the details of which are discussed in John Jowett's notes in the 2007 Oxford edition (9.559.1). In Dyce's 1840 edition, Kate's comment that "I've my neck-verse" is glossed as a hug; however, by 1976, Lowell E. Johnson's edition includes a footnote suggesting a show of bare breasts (5.1.349). On the basis that "a boy actor could not, of course, expose a cleavage," Jowett argues that it refers to the removal of clothing or a beard; however, Peter Hyland imagines a false set of breasts (9.559.1; Hyland 56). Peter Stallybrass finds no firm evidence and "no records of" false breasts being in use but does not discount the possibility (53). Nevertheless, there is an imagined female body. Regardless of the manner of revelation, it is rooted in a feminine type of physical action; a refusal to perform masculinely leads to the show of a female form. Furthermore, it is a threat of masculine violence and the prospect of being expected to perform the masculine action of violence that prompts the revelation of Kate's feminine identity.

Kate Low-water's characterization is the result of a firm and mature Jacobean evolution of feminine crossdressing. In a discussion of *No Wit* in conjunction with *The Roaring Girl* John Jowett emphasizes, "they mark a more permanent shift in Middleton's dramatic interests toward representing women as central characters and skeptically analyzing the social roles available to them. Moll and Mistress Low-water are both shown in a highly positive light" (198). With both the support of and power over her husband, Kate fills a masculine void. Where her husband lost their fortune and is unable to regain it, his wife turns to masculinity and takes control over the family finances by restoring their lost wealth. In the process, she competes in a courtship and emerges the victor, overshadowing the deficient men who make the same attempt. Mistress Low-water proves to be a much more successful man than any of the male characters in the play, both in love and finance.

D. *Wit at Several Weapons* (c. 1613)

First performed circa 1613 and originally published in two Beaumont and Fletcher folios, *Wit at Several Weapons* is now generally attributed to Thomas Middleton and appears in new collections accordingly (Lavagnino 63). The play features a woman of dubious moral quality who uses a masculine disguise to con gullible people. Aptly named Lady Ruinous, this woman and her husband are recruited by an outcast noble (Witty-pate) to take advantage of the corrupt ruling class. Described as somewhat of a shapeshifter, Lady Ruinous holds a great deal of power among this group of thieves. Her disguises give her authority over the men under her husband. At his restoration to society at large, she appears only in feminine clothing, is briefly thanked, and ostensibly also reassimilates into standard society. Though the analysis of specific authorial arc regarding crossdressing heroines is interesting, here it is the general evolution of the trope which is most important. The shift into the second half of the Jacobean period brings with it bolder, more empowered versions of female heroine crossdressers.

Lady Ruinous and her husband lead a band of gentlemen thieves and highwaymen. The appropriately named, Witty-pate, a young nobleman who has been turned out by his father so that he can learn to live by his wits, encounters the thieves and joins them. For the first time in the convention's history, Sir Ruinous proudly announces his wife's crossdressing proclivities before she appears on stage: Sir Ruinous positively embraces his wife's capacity to shift into a man and back again at will. Witty-pate formulates a plan to rob his own father and questions these skills. He asks, "she can change her shape, and be masculine," Sir Ruinous reassures him, "'Tis one of the free'st conditions, she feares not the crack of / a Pistoll, she dares say stand to a Grazier" (1.2.249, 250). Sir Ruinous values these traits. He is pleased by her skill and particularly notes her bravery in the face of violence. He does not

feel emasculated, confused, or unattracted to this characteristic in his wife. In fact, he capitalizes on her skill as a commodity. Witty-pate sees the device as beneficial to his cause and formulates a plan to rob his own father. The young lord instructs her to, “meete us to morrow (at a / certaine place and time appointed) in the masculine Gender” (1.2.254). Here, Witty-pate intimates that he sees clothing as a transformation that impacts more than Lady Ruinous’ appearance; in that garb she becomes “the masculine Gender.” For him this is not a deterrent, and he offers no moral condemnation or even commentary. The function of this disguise is public and profitable; significantly, it is unequivocally accepted and understood. There is no sign of disapproval or disbelief in the potential for Lady Ruinous’ abilities. This serves to establish her acceptance as a crossdressing woman before her first appearance.

In her first onstage appearance, Lady Ruinous is dressed as a woman, her default self. However, she does not prefer the moniker ‘lady’ and infers that it is a diminutive definition of her existence. She claims her masculine abilities as part of a comprehensive identity and does not separate her masculine action from her feminine self. In a brag to Witty-pate, she attributes mirror those he hopes to achieve for himself, “And I put to my shifts and wits to live, / Nay sometimes danger too, on Foot, on Horse-back, / And earne my supper manfully ere I get it” (2.1.24). Lady Ruinous’ masculine persona allows her to achieve financial stability and to provide for her husband and his men, using her wits, the prized virtue of this play. This is a new power among women who crossdress onstage. Open transition between two gendered identities at regular intervals and retaining attachment to both feminine and masculine signifying qualities in either state of appearance, is an indisputable advance in the trope.

Lady Ruinous uses her disguise freely and trusts male observers to not only recognize the validity of the assumed identity, but to support and interact with her without judgement in either state. These men are unashamed of this knowledge and do not see the disguise as

worthy of ultimate secrecy, and unlike the pirate Bess, who passively used a male disguise among a company of men aboard her ship, Lady Ruinous actively uses her disguise for financial gain. Her disguise is not one of desperation or necessity: it is not adopted to protect her female form, but rather chosen voluntarily to facilitate monetary prosperity. She uses it for social power without any consequences for her romantic and sexual relationship with her husband. The ease in which she converts into her male self is marked by the speed with which she changes. When asked to become “a brave young Gallant,” the rogue woman responds, “Ile soone be ready Sir, / Before you ha shifted Saddles” (2.1.46, 55). The subsequent raid proves to be successful with the facilitation of Lady Ruinous’ gentleman disguise. She proves to be forceful, assertive, and convincing, though not physically violent. By playing this masculine character, these traits secure the wealth they seek.

At the conclusion of this episode, where intelligence and disguise results in an efficient yet morally sanctioned highway robbery reminiscent of Robinhood’s merry men, Lady Ruinous is asked to engage her other identity to complete the vendetta against Sir Perfidious, Witty-pate’s father. Lady Ruinous is asked to collect women for a party and wholeheartedly engages in the feminine sphere to achieve her goals. The shift to wearing feminine clothing and engaging with women socially is absolute, completely binary, and goes unquestioned. She procures the cooperation of a young woman, only identified as the niece and ward of Witty-pate’s father, by swearing on the integrity of her womanhood. Lady Ruinous unironically voices confidence in the total validity and substantive nature of her female self in that moment. To the young woman she declares that she is not lying, “Else let me be that shame unto my Sex” (5.2.8). The crossdresser believes that she fulfills the societal standards and expectations of her gender when performing that gender. Later she uses her female identity for manipulation in the same way she exists in her male persona. Her femininity enables her to occupy female spaces and to realize calculated social objectives. It

is her appearance that convinces the niece to trust the stranger without reservation. Lady Ruinous exploits this by referencing the fraternity implied by a shared feminine perspective, coaxing the woman with, “Let’s have a female motion, ‘tis in private” (5.2.38). The purpose Lady Ruinous finds is in this power and manipulation that she gains when appropriating the semblance of either gender. Gender exists as a commodity through which performance provides tangible return and profit.

Furthermore, this play does not conclude with the resolution that has been typical until this point. Although her role in the concluding scene is brief and lacks the independence she demands earlier, she is offered a pardon and reintegration into the greater society alongside her husband. They offer their appreciation and acceptance with a simple line “Thanks worthy Gentlemen” spoken simultaneously (5.2.210). There is no indication of Lady Ruinous’ intent, and it remains unknown as to whether she will continue to live in both the masculine and feminine spheres. As with many of these figures, the fringes of society allow freedoms which a restoration to society forbids. As a criminal outcast, Lady Ruinous finds an ability to function masculinely in dress and leadership; yet she forfeits these social benefits when re-entering female society. This indicates a divide between her position outside of the nobility as an outlaw and her place within that limits her ability to fluidly exchange her gender identities when she is restored to femininity and a higher economic class position. The finite space of organized society requires her to exist in a finite gender identity.

#### E. *More Dissemblers Besides Women* (c. 1614-1615)

*More Dissemblers Besides Women*, a play frequently compared to Shakespeare’s *Measure for Measure*, has two crossdressing female characters who are both interested in the same man, Lactantio (Buccola 88). In this single-authored play, Middleton manipulates

previous expectations and patterns of crossdressers to position two young crossdressing women against each other in pursuit of an undeserving man. One unnamed woman is disguised as a page and is also pregnant with Lactantio's child; however, Aurelia, Lactantio's lover, also arrives in disguise (as a gentleman). While navigating his two partners who have arrived at the same household, Lactantio prioritizes his hope to become heir to his uncle, a cardinal who disdains women, over rectifying circumstances with either woman.

Foregrounding relationships, feelings, and different social positions, Middleton offers a mixture of familiar archetypal characters and a fresh look at plot and character development.

The play opens with Lactantio pursuing the femininely clad Aurelia; however, in the second scene, Lactantio is with his uncle and a page enters under the pretense of delivering a letter but instead announces, "I'm with child" (1.2.143). The unnamed woman, a character marginalized to such an extent that Lila Geller terms her "a barely sketched-in character," reveals her identity to her former lover without hesitation, therefore maintaining one of the shortest onstage disguises in early modern drama (300). Regina Buccola recognizes the parody of this scene and summarizes the connection with the page to previous character traditions calling her, "a bathetic pregnant Page who makes a mockery of the early modern theatrical convention of the lovelorn woman crossdressed as the servant of her beloved" (90). A distressed and blindsided Lactantio dismisses his pregnant page. However, as she leaves, the Lord Cardinal, comments on the departing page's physical appearance,

The prettiest servant  
 ...I have oft took him  
 Weeping alone, poor boy, at the remembrance  
 Of his lost friends, which, as he says, the sea  
 Swallowed (1.2.149)

This adulation betrays the Cardinal's attraction to what he views as a young boy and indicates that the page has lived in the household for an extended period of time in an emotional state. In her article on domestic violence, Susan Dywer Amussen reminds us that "No systematic evidence exists about the abuse of children" in this period; however, though not generally linked to pedophilia, anti-Catholic sentiments provoke this narrative (76). Huston Diehl notes, "playwrights were among the first Englishmen to live their entire lives in a predominantly Protestant culture" (2). By creating a foolish catholic figure who loathes women but is erotically attracted to what he believes is a boy, Middleton can lampoon catholic clergy without breaking the censorship laws restricting religious material onstage (2).

As soon as his uncle is gone, Lactantio erupts in an amorous speech directed at a newly arrived visiting gentleman. The visitor is Aurelia who has used the disguise to come into the Cardinal's house, which is forbidden to her. Aurelia does not need to reveal herself to Lactantio as he is aware of her disguise, and he immediately embraces her. Significantly, he also unarms her, and tells her to "Deliver up your weapon. / It is not for your wearing" (1.2.172). Lactantio finds the symbol of masculinity inappropriate on the body of the woman he loves, even in her disguise. He emasculates her before claiming ownership over her and engaging in physical intimacy with her.

In a device also used by Middleton in *The Widow*, Aurelia fears that she will not be able to conceal her identity from her father who interrupts the couple unexpectedly. Though the disguise endures the inspection of other men, the intimacy of a father's knowledge sees through her masculinity.<sup>33</sup> The couple are met with a harsh rebuke, "Shame to thy sex, and sorrow to thy father. / Is this a shape for reputation / And modesty to mask in?" (1.2.203).

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<sup>33</sup> This device is also seen in *Antonio and Mellida* (c. 1599-1601), John Marston's play which was performed by The Children of the Queen's Revels and is sequelled by *Antonio's Revenge* (Munro, *Children* 2; Neill 358). Mellida disguises herself as a page to get past her father. He nearly recognizes her in a similar fashion to other fathers in plays such as *The Fair Maid of Bristow* and *The Maid's Metamorphosis* who see through their daughter's disguise but, in this version, Mellida escapes.

The father removes his daughter to lock her away and preserve the virtue he believes she has put at risk by both disguising herself as male and in forming a relationship with Lactantio.

Buccola notes the novel approach to a reveal that Middleton has created with his works, “unlike any other playwright of his age, Middleton directly challenges the ‘authenticity’ of onstage disguise... presenting Aurelia’s crossdressed disguise as a visiting Roman gentleman as instantly penetrable by her father” (92). Still under the authority of her father, Aurelia does not protest and follows him, which concludes her short dalliance with disguise.

Though the page’s disguise has been revealed to Lactantio and the audience, she retains it in the enduring hope that she can convince Lactantio to honor their pre-existing relationship. Before the first act concludes, she reappears to wash Lactantio’s laundry and sings a bawdy song. In the third act, she enters arguing with Lactantio and attempts to guilt him, pleading, “Think of your shame, and mine” (3.1.1). However, Lactantio has no empathy for the page, regrets the sexual relationship, and goes as far as to label the page as merely an unsatisfactory servant. He rants, “Thou art th’unfortunat’st piece of taking business / That ever man repented... Well fare those / That never shamed their master!” (3.1.2). After the impregnated woman has been referred to as only a subordinate, she rebukes Lactantio for his cruelty in removing her from her home and friends only to forget his promise of marriage and abandon her; he acknowledges that he made many empty promises but makes it clear that he has no intention of honoring his word. In a speech that reveals his lack of integrity, Lactantio tells his page, “Marriage is nothing with you, a toy till death. / If I should marry all those I have promised, / ‘Twould make one vicar hoarse ere he could dispatch us” (3.1.20). She cries as the man she trusted schemes to find a new plan to conceal her.

Lactantio demonstrates his authority over her disguise, masculinity, and general appearance when he notes: “I must devise some shift. When she grows big / Those masculine hose will shortly prove too little” (3.1.23). A plan he considers includes sending the woman

to his former nurse and he acknowledges explicitly that the child is indeed his and should be raised by a person he trusts; however, immediately his attention shifts to inquiry a newly arrived servant about Aurelia, leaving the page again in tears. The nameless page is granted no agency over her future and is systematically delegitimized through her position as a servant, an unmarried pregnant woman whose body is slowly betraying her state, and as a woman dressed as a man. Lactantio ridicules and rejects his former lover; soon after the Cardinal enters and he wonders, “What ails this pretty boy to weep so often?” (3.1.132). Though he expresses some affection for the effeminate and perpetually distressed boy, the Cardinal declares that the servant will be transferred to the widow Duchess’ household, which causes her further anguish. Attention returns to the page at the end of the fourth act and her new role as servant to the duchess. Calling herself Antonio in the new situation, the page finds kindness in her new home. The Duchess expresses compassion for the ever-tearful boy and numerous comments are made on the delicate voice and body of the sympathetic addition to the household; however, as the page is sent away for dancing lessons, disaster strikes, and she goes into labor. The page’s female body betrays her and as she is ushered off stage exclaiming “I rather need a midwife and a nurse” (4.3.90).

The final act opens to a grand farce created around the explicit bodily realities of childbirth as the page attempts to conceal her condition amidst an enthusiastic dance lesson. As the instructor drills the page in music lessons, she comments at her escalating labor pains, shouting, “O, my stomach!” (5.1.30). References to the explicit noise, pain, and general bodily function of childbirth are an advancement in female to male crossdressing. Not only does Middleton create a pregnant masculine character, conflating the appearance of a male with an increasingly less disguised female body, he does not shy away from unambiguous symptoms and reminders of that body in the throes of pregnancy and labor. Far beyond the subtlety of Shakespeare, who skirts female bodily function and punishes Joan of Arc for even

a pretense of pregnancy, Middleton provides a character who is deeply sympathetic despite her moral lapse of sex before marriage and who has no desire to be or remain masculine. Forced into disguise by an unscrupulous lover, her body and the evidence of her sexuality supersede her unwanted disguise and force a public revelation. The suffering page attempts to keep her legs closed while dancing and takes a fall trying to leap for the dance; from the ground she exclaims, “A midwife, run for a midwife!” and her condition becomes immediately known (5.1.222). Though the birth is not in doubt, the onlookers struggle to reconcile the sight of a boy in the midst of childbirth with the startled observation that “the boy’s with child” (5.1.223). Nevertheless, although her capacity for childbirth is vividly displayed, the page’s actual identity remains obscured.

In the meantime, Aurelia dons a second disguise: now, she adopts the role of a traveler woman and this time she successfully deceives her father. An immensely racist exchange opens the final scene as Aurelia is discovered in her costume by the Duchess who is angry at the general deception and a liaison between the young woman and Andrugio, whom the Duchess fancies. After conceding that she is not as young or beautiful as Aurelia, the Duchess transitions from a disappointed potential lover to a dominating ruler. Showing no tolerance for the Cardinal or his opinions, the Duchess brings the newly re-feminized page and her child forward, explains the situation, exposes Lactantio, and demands that he fulfill his obligations. Though critical of his actions, the Duchess offers generous language towards Lactantio and offers the Cardinal every opportunity to be equally generous. She advocates for the man,

He durst not own her for his wife till now,  
 Only contracted with her in man’s apparel,  
 For the more modesty, because he was bashful,  
 And never could endure the sight of woman

For fear that you should see her. (5.2.218)

Though these flattering attributes do not exist in Lactantio's own explanations, these are the words that rescue him from his uncle's wrath. After personally providing a large dowry for the marriage, the Duchess convinces Lactantio to follow through with the marriage and acknowledge his young son. In a sharp reversal, Lactantio reminds onlookers of his new fiancé's prior crossdressing, "Pray, what / have you done with the breeches? We shall have need of 'em shortly.... / My son and heir need not scorn to wear what his mother has left off (5.2.249). Such an embrace of the page's history after her transition back to a feminine appearance is a step further than Shakespeare is willing.

While this play, particularly the conclusion, is frequently compared to Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*, there is a distinct contrast between the playwrights' attitudes towards their female characters. Despite several lacking the courtesy of even a name, Middleton prioritizes his female characters, their power, agency, and resolution. As Buccola explains, "The plot of *More Dissemblers* parallels that of *Measure* in a variety of particulars, but Middleton places a woman in the role of central authority where Shakespeare presents a male Duke" (87). Morally compromised through her premarital pregnancy and her conflation of a viscerally female body with her masculinity, the page is still offered a full redemption and restoration. An earlier play by George Whetstone, *Promos and Cassandra* which has also been compared to *Measure for Measure*, kills the crossdressing heroine for her premarital relations, allowing no room for a return to her previous life.<sup>34</sup> Middleton's page, however, is not condemned and receives the traditional reward for reverting to her feminine self: the

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<sup>34</sup> In *Promos and Cassandra* (1578), a two-part play by George Whetstone, Cassandra is forced into her disguise because Andrugio, her brother, has been condemned to death for sex with an unmarried woman (Hillman, *Measure* 391). In a series of hypocritical and ironic scenes, Promos, the ruler of the town offers to trade Andrugio's life for sex with Cassandra. While Cassandra initially views her virginity, which she synonymizes with honor, as more valuable than her brother's life, Andrugio convinces her otherwise, "if thou thy selfe submyt, / To saue my life, to Promos fleashly wyll, / Iustice wyll say, thou dost no cryme commit" (3.4, p. 27). (The ProQuest digital version of the play does not include line numbers. Page numbers reference the downloadable PDF.)

marriage she pursued. Treated in the fashion of many virginal heroines, Middleton does not punish his crossdresser beyond, perhaps, granting her the lackluster husband, Lactantio. The play ends by emphasizing that men are frequently more problematic than their female counterparts, with a nod to the play's title, the final lines are, "O, they that search out man's intents shall find / There's more dissemblers than of womenkind" (5.2.266). This advancement in focus on female crossdressing heroines, though less conspicuous than that of characters such as Moll, is indicative of Middleton's career of contributing both to the developing forms of the new subgenre and to prioritizing the narratives of his female crossdressing heroines.

#### F. *The Widow* (c. 1616)

*The Widow* written solely by Middleton, contains a hidden crossdresser whose masculinity is doubted through the observations and comments of other character, as also seen in *The Patient Man and the Honest Whore* (Chakravorty xii). A device well utilized by Middleton and Dekker alike, a hidden crossdresser plot includes a character that appears as one gender throughout the play with a concealed identity that remains unknown to both the other characters and the audience until a climactic reveal through which they identify as the opposing gender. In this play, a young man, Ansaldo, appears in the latter three acts. Ansaldo engages in numerous comedic scenes as a boy before his identity is revealed to be a facade. After changing into what is presumed to be the disguise of a young woman, Ansaldo is recognized by her father as Martia, a young runaway. This is a variation on the trend of father's recognizing their daughters in crossdress as in *More Dissemblers Besides Women*; Martia is discovered while disguised in women's clothes. The dynamics of Martia's disguise are complex and best understood through how the character is named.

Historically, editors conspicuously favor one identity over the other. In 1840, Alexander Dyce designates the character as Martia throughout the play; however, the first print edition (1652) held at the Huntington Library and the Oxford edition (2010) textualize the character as Ansaldo and the name Martia appears only in dialogue, reserving the surprise for the reader.<sup>35</sup> Where Dyce's edition insists on establishing the character's ultimate gender identity, the first printed edition and the Oxford edition present Ansaldo as a man. Subsequently that character is male throughout the reading until otherwise indicated, which allows for two different interpretations: either Ansaldo is the character's primary identity and is male and Ansaldo until he is not (though the prefix does not change); or the text is complicit in disguising Martia until she reveals herself. As Gary Taylor summarizes, "Dyce (followed by Bullen) then changed the speech prefixes to 'Martia.' These nineteenth-century editorial changes ensured that readers – unlike audiences – responded to the character as a woman, not a man, throughout the play" (1087). Either way, the figure of Ansaldo represents a distinct form of the crossdressed heroine: this character successfully performs masculinity until the plot requires a gender change. As the audience is unaware of the crossdressing, the playwrights do not need to impose the same restrictions upon this character as those whose underlying femaleness has been established. Instead, Ansaldo is accepted as male, until proven otherwise. While it is tempting to retrace the play with the knowledge that Ansaldo will turn female, as in the 19<sup>th</sup> century editions; if the play is read chronologically, it is at times appropriate to consider the character as wholly male. Ansaldo only identifies as a male and does not betray, publicly or in a personal aside, the existence of Martia. Therefore, at times the character preforms more masculinely than characters whose crossdressing is an open secret.

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<sup>35</sup> The play was likely sold to Humphrey Moseley, the publisher, by the actor Alexander Gough; evidence suggests it was printed from a stage manuscript used for a 1630 revival (Taylor 1084).

Yet, while Ansaldo freely behaves as male and is recognized as such, there are moments that hint at a feminine quality to the character. Early in his first appearance, Ansaldo encounters the thief Latrocinio, who comments on the boy's body in effeminate terms. Discussing music, he tells Ansaldo, "You kept time, methought, / Pretty and handsomely with your little hand there" (3.1.12). Ansaldo accepts the compliment, but it does not change the perception of his identity in the community. Moments later, Latrocinio refers to Ansaldo as "sir" and "young gentleman," affirming the presentation Ansaldo offers (3.1.44). Though noticeably young and attractive, Ansaldo is still considered a man. Thus acknowledged, Ansaldo prepares to surrender his possessions to the thief, but instead chooses to show a signifier of his masculinity, a weapon. He remarks, "I've searched; here's all that I can find, [*He shows a pistol*] / And you're so covetous, you will have all" (3.1.59). Ansaldo admits that the gun did not always belong to him, nor is it his first instinct to use it; however, he is able to use a show of masculine violence to protect his body and property. Brandishing a weapon represents a capacity for violence that successfully deters Latrocinio without requiring physical action. Nevertheless, Ansaldo remains vulnerable and, when Latrocinio's compatriot, Stratio, approaches him and earns his trust, Stratio completes the robbery.

Left only in a shirt, Ansaldo gathers courage to enter a house. As a stranger, the boy is announced in the household and described by Violetta to her mistress, Philippa who sister to the widow, the title character. She says, "The slaves had stripped him to th' very shirt, mistress. / I think it was a shirt; I know not well, / For gallants wear both nowadays" (3.3.19). Referencing what the Oxford edition calls "a brief flourishing of unisex fashions," Violetta is not sure if the boy is wearing a shirt or chemise, but she is sure that the person is a boy (3.3). The clothing that signifies gender is ambiguous on Ansaldo, but the identity he claims takes precedent: Violetta is uncertain of the clothing, but confident in the man. Violetta prioritizes Ansaldo's self-identification and adjusts her own perception of the clothing and body to

match. The women persist in commenting on the remarkable nature of the gentleman that is 'lovely,' but they uphold that Ansaldo is a man.

Dressed by the women in an old suit, Ansaldo is accused of stealing it by Brandino, Philippa's husband. Ansaldo does not know Brandino and worries that the truth will put the women who helped him in jeopardy; therefore, he refuses to tell how he obtained the suit. Brandino instructs his clerk, Martino, to detain Ansaldo, who responds by defending himself physically and performing masculine violence by striking Martino in the face (4.2.12). Ansaldo hits his opponent hard enough to loosen a tooth. Other than a brief cry of distress, Ansaldo does not hesitate; he performs an unequivocally successful violent act. He proves capable of masculine action and does not fail to achieve masculinity within the community when tested.

However, after this altercation, Ansaldo returns to Philippa and Brandino's home and readily accepts the offer to be disguised as a woman. Philippa commands Violetta, "dress him up in one of my gowns and headtires. / His youth will well endure it" (5.1.76). Philippa equates youth with gender ambiguity. An unmarried boy like Ansaldo could not be expected to have achieved a mature masculine identity and therefore could more feasibly exist in an androgynous space or in separate binaries. As Ira Clark explains, "Almost any list of specific means whereby to attain manhood in early modern England would include marriage" (Clark, I. 13). Not yet considered an adult and not yet attached, Ansaldo's adolescence, in the modern term, tolerates all signifiers of gender without obvious contradiction in the eyes of society. Philippa condones the crossdressing because Ansaldo is young and could appear believable as a member of either side of the binary gender divide if required.

Despite Philippa's teasing introduction in which she says, "Is't not a goodly manly gentlewoman?" Ansaldo's gender performance when dressed as a woman is equally convincing (5.1.149). Here we have another example of a member of society prioritizing a

character's self-identification over physical appearance; though Ansaldo appears perfectly feminine, Philippa affirms his masculinity. Ansaldo is received affectionately as a woman; he is kissed by Brandino and kissed on the hand by Martino. The flirtation continues until Francisco, a gentleman, asks for a moment alone with Ansaldo who returns from the liaison with a marriage proposal (5.1.233). Philippa vouches for Francisco's character, "One that would make an excellent honest husband / For her that's a just maid at one-and-twenty, / For on my conscience he has his maidenhead yet" (5.1.239). Francisco is approved based on the belief that he is still a virgin, a status spoken of in feminine terms; he is a maid. Philippa urges Ansaldo to accept the proposal of marriage as a joke. Dressed as a woman, Ansaldo is successful in presumed heterosexual flirtations with men. Yet, although Ansaldo verbally assimilates to a female social role, no passive feminine-indicating actions are performed and Ansaldo is still only known as a man to the audience.

Philippa's jest is taken further than she expects; Ansaldo marries Francisco. As the couple re-enter with Ansaldo in feminine attire, the servant, Violetta, can barely explain what she believes has happened through her boisterous laughter. She declares, "Here they come, one man married to another!... / Ay, man to man, i' faith. / There'll be good sport at night to bring 'em both to bed" (5.2.408). Though the couple look convincingly heterosexual, Violetta sees them as two men. It takes an unnamed man to recognize Ansaldo as a woman and reveal her feminine name. Called The First Suitor, this man exclaims, "My daughter Martia!" (5.2.411). The First Suitor is a gentleman who has been courting Philippa's sister, the widow; this gentleman is also Martia's father. A father's recognition is a repeated device of the female crossdressing trope. This patriarchal familiarity is allowed to transcend a disguise and permeate the self-identification of a crossdressed heroine. In a method used by Middleton here, and also in *More Dissemblers Besides Women*, the relationship between a father and daughter creates a dynamic where her pre-existing identity is evident to him. Though the

heroine chooses to change appearance, it is the father who discloses the feminine identity and name, not the character herself. After this revelation, Martia explains that she has run away from her father and is repentant. As she has already changed to a feminine appearance, she, assimilates into that societal role, complete with a heterosexual marriage.

When Martia is unveiled, Ansaldo is forgotten and is not mentioned again. The two identities do not exist in the same space and function as entirely separate characters with individual capacities for gendered action. Ansaldo behaves as a male with no indication of a concealed feminine self; Martia holds an entirely female social role with no remnant of Ansaldo. Paula S. Berggren sees this as a tool to retroactively forgive, or perhaps just forget, the masculine indiscretions performed as a boy

Thus in *The Widow*, Middleton makes his genderless page an image of the unbound self as a moral being, subject to no constraints of role but an impersonal service of the good. It is all the more remarkable that he does so, or by adding to the surprise revelation of her sex the potential humiliations of retro-disguise, he strains Martia's capacity to sustain this delicate note of the sublime. I suspect that only by depriving Martia of confidential address to the audience does Middleton contrive her survival with dignity unimpaired (393)

This iteration of the crossdressing heroine functions as a bait and switch; one masculine character behaves according to that identity and is viewed and treated as such until the character trades clothes and identities completely for a feminine persona. However, where Berggren terms this 'genderless,' I would instead argue Middleton creates binary individuals with separate, distinct functions that do not consider the societal implications of the actions of their other half; nor are the characters responsible for the actions of the alter ego, though both identities are ultimately placed upon the same body and character. Where each half does perform a binary social role, there is no incongruity of gendered action in either identity

because the parallel identity does not exist in the sphere of the other. This creation of hidden crossdressed characters that permits separate sets of actions and social interactions within a parallel divide that does not intersect is pervasive in Middleton's work and indicative of his treatment of crossdressing heroines.

#### G. *Anything for a Quiet Life* (c. 1621)

*Anything for a Quiet Life*, considered to be a collaboration with John Webster and with similarities to *The Tempest*, is another Middleton play with a surprise crossdresser (Dunkle 799; Montgomery 122).<sup>36</sup> A minor character is secretly woven into the latter three acts who significantly impacts the dynamics surrounding their crossdress. A fascination with clothing and identity permeates into the conflicts of the citizens and their struggles that results in disguise being used as a convenient trick to advance the plot and tie up loose ends. Leslie Thomson's introduction to the Oxford edition of the play details the topical interest in clothing and textiles that generally drive the various economic motives of the plot and, of course, facilitate the means for crossdressing in a time where the fabric industry in London was in crisis (1593). This clothing is used to manufacture power and influence for characters of both genders through disguises that traverse both gender and social status. A play created well into the development of female crossdressing tropes, *Anything for a Quiet Life* uses clothing to obscure and revive recognizable devices. The play is full of now familiar thematic patterns and characters; Charles Forker notes the half dozen Shakespearean plays from which Middleton and Webster draw (76). However, the amalgamation of popular matter creates space for new combinations of situational interactions for crossdressing female characters.

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<sup>36</sup> This is Webster's first collaborative work, though it came late in his career. The reason for this change in practice is unknown (Gunby 6).

Though a woman is hidden within the clothing of an otherwise male character, subtle hints might prompt recognition of this possibility for an attentive audience.

Introduced in the third act, Selenger, a servant to Lord Beaufort, is immediately complimented for possessing traditionally female traits; in the same breath that he is called “sir,” he is told his voice, “sounds sweetest” (3.1.4). Immediately the servant objects, comparing his voice to a bagpipe before the matter is forgotten. A tease for an attentive audience proves the popularity, frequent use, and narrative familiarity with the concept of a hidden crossdresser by the appearance of *Anything for a Quiet Life*.

Selenger is used to emphasize faults in other characters: Sib Knavesbe, a married woman attempts to flirt with him and is turned down unequivocally; she continues to escalate and pursue sex with the boy to the dismay of other men (3.1.50). The boy is adamant that he will not engage physically with a woman, threatening “I could bite you” when Sib tries to kiss him (3.1.50). This extends to a complete disinterest in a relationship with women that hints at the servant’s potential identity; he swears to never be under “a woman’s command” (3.1.92). Selenger is also falsely implicated in a plot to extort Lord Beaufort. The unraveling of this attempt leads to the revelation that Selenger is Mistress Cressingham, the young wife of young George Cressingham and that her motivation for crossdressing was to thwart the schemes of the Knavesbes. She does not speak as her feminine self.

Middleton and Webster are able to use a hidden crossdresser as an auxiliary figure to emphasize the faults in other characters. Little attention is given to the particular motivations or resolution of Mistress Cressingham in her own right. This form of crossdressing is not staged as salacious nor is Mistress Cressingham expected to reform or demonstrate a re-commitment to her feminine identity. Her disguise is completely vindicated by her husband who also dispels any question of her unfaithfulness or a potential homosexual encounter. Selenger is an example of the hidden crossdresser turning into a recognizable archetype. The

casual appearance and lack of attempt to address the personal characteristics or intentions of Mistress Cressingham are indicative of a device which has ceased to be surprising, controversial, or require in depth explanation. A female character completely hidden within a male presenting character has become so conventional by this point that there is now space for new explorations that push gendered characterizations further.

#### H. *The Witch of Edmonton* (1621)

In *The Witch of Edmonton*, collaboratively created by William Rowley, Thomas Dekker, John Ford, and perhaps even Thomas Heywood, we witness a shift in genre as the motifs associated with crossdressed heroines appear in a tragicomedy (Corbin 5; Howard, *Thomas* 120). As in *More Dissemblers Besides Women*, Winnifride is pregnant when she crossdresses as a page so that she and her husband, Frank, can escape the consequences of his father inadvertently forcing him into a bigamous marriage with Susan. As they prepare to leave, although dressed as a boy Winnifride is weeping for their sorry state, when they are unexpectedly intercepted by Susan. Susan takes Winnifride's appearance at face value and calls her "lad" even though she becomes tearful when Susan refers to Frank as "her husband," and charges the boy to "be servant, friend and wife to him," to which, of course, Winnifride readily agrees (3.2.73). Armed with Frank's sword, Winnifride exits, while Frank attempts to part with Susan.

Tom, the *Witch of Edmonton*'s talking dog, enters and indicates his intention to bewitch Frank through touching him; after which Frank, having admitted to Susan that she is not his lawful wife, kills her. To cover his tracks, Frank cuts himself and ties himself to a tree before shouting murder. While his self-inflicted wounds are tended at Susan's house by her younger sister, Katherine, Frank becomes ill with guilt and Winnifride uses her disguise to

visit him undetected. The family of Frank's new, bigamous wife does not recognize her and, tearful again, she admits that she does not feel herself in masculine clothing: "For your sake I put on / A shape that's false" (4.2.71). She chides him for marrying twice and his guilt causes him to confess his crime to her. Susan's father, Old Carter, simultaneously discovers the truth of his daughter's death and attempts to attack Frank. When Winnifride intercedes on his behalf, Frank begs Carter not to attack a woman and thereby causes her to reveal: "I am not as my disguise speaks me, sir, his page, / But first, only wife, his lawful wife" (4.2.177). Winnifride laments Susan's death, her husband's actions, and the punishment he will receive. In the final scene, Frank's execution, Winnifride appears feminine clothing. Though she is distraught and faints, the event resolves in her favor. Frank's father offers to support her and her child in addition to money granted by the court; Winnifride absolves Frank and they bid farewell before he dies; all is forgiven despite the consequences.

Although not the first pregnant heroine crossdresser, Winnifride's treatment suggests a sympathy for her that is new. She is pregnant, she crossdresses, and her husband is an adulterer and murderer, yet she receives a relatively peaceful resolution. This sympathy is also extended to the Witch, a character based on Elizabeth Sawyer, a historical woman accused of witchcraft (Roper, *Witchcraft* 133). Tolerance for crossdressing women with complex morality is well-established and such characters can be viewed with sympathy and acceptance by the late Jacobean era.

Indeed, in the decade in which Middleton and his collaborators produce material with crossdressing heroines, the authors show equal parts interest in using established generic conventions from the previous three decades of early modern female crossdressing characters on the English stage and in progressing plots and character developments beyond early limitations. Middleton creates characters with more agency and autonomy, who speak to their complex motivations and relationship with their bodies and gender identities. These

characters are given dimension, priority, and power not offered in earlier iterations. His work reflects an exponential growth in the trope and its popularity. As Middleton pushes these boundaries with a combination of knowledge of now popularized tropes and stock plots with a desire to explore crossdressing in new depth, he is joined by a large cohort of playwrights who capitalize on the popularity of Jacobean innovation.

## V. Fletcher and Beaumont

Following Middleton and Dekker, another famous pair of theatrical collaborators – John Fletcher and Francis Beaumont – make a significant contribution to the development of the conventions surrounding the crossdressed female heroine. It is striking to note that a third of the plays they co-wrote included such characters, and Fletcher continued to do so with other collaborators after Beaumont’s death (Clark, *S. The Plays* ix). As later users of the heroine in male disguise trope, Beaumont and Fletcher take further license with its potential for dramatic effect. The established rules for behavior and deeply ingrained plot patterns created in the Elizabethan era are distinctly manipulated and exploited to create new development potentials for the characters in their Jacobean texts. This creativity is perhaps reflected in the fact that, of all the authors discussed in this thesis, Fletcher and Beaumont produce the most plays that include masculinely disguised women.

Beaumont and Fletcher lived together during their time at the Globe Theatre. Though the two playwrights are indelibly linked, only “about nine plays of the vast canon [of both writers individually and with others] were products of the famous collaboration” (Finkelpearl, *Beaumont* 3). This number has slightly shifted as reattribution work continues and a greater clarity of authorship is gained through new research. Independently without collaboration, Fletcher wrote sixteen more plays and Beaumont two. Five of Beaumont and Fletcher’s plays were created for boy companies. Beaumont’s career and life ended before Fletcher’s; the playwright “ceased writing in 1613, probably after suffering a stroke; he died in March 1616” (McMullan, *Fletcher* 5). Fletcher replaced Shakespeare as the primary writer for the King’s Company and was in turn replaced by Philip Massinger, with whom he had collaborated. Fletcher died of plague in 1625 (McMullan, *Fletcher* 10).

Twelve plays attributed to them appear on Shapiro's list: *Love's Cure* (c. 1605) (revised by Philip Massinger), *Cupid's Revenge* (1612), *The Maid's Tragedy* (c. 1611), *The Nightwalker* (c. 1611), *Philaster* (c. 1610), *Love's Pilgrimage* (c. 1614), *Wit at Several Weapons* (c. 1613),<sup>37</sup> *The Honest Man's Fortune* (c.1613), *The Pilgrim* (c. 1621), *The Duke of Milan* (1623),<sup>38</sup> *The Maid in the Mill* (1623), and *The Faithful Friends* (c. 1620) (Clark, S. *The Plays* 2; Duncan 398; Hoy 113; McKeithan 396; Pincess xvi; Thorssen 313). Due to more recent authorial attribution efforts, nine of those plays appear in this chapter with a further play appearing as a brief footnote due to its limited use of heroine crossdressing. As Andrew Gurr reminds us, "All Fletcher's plays were strongly woman-centred" (Gurr, *The Shakespeare* 11). With this prolific use of the tropes, Beaumont and Fletcher take advantage of those traditions to modify their plots, offer new perspectives into crossdressing, complicate emotional responses to gender identity, and grant further agency and autonomy over social situations to their masculinely clad female characters than is displayed by their predecessors. Featured heroines experience identity crises when attempting to return to femininity, tragic plots are introduced signaling a generic shift for the trope, and general familiarity with the common conventions for heroine crossdressing permits a red-herring narrative to emerge that manipulates established expectations. Beaumont and Fletcher boldly advance conventions, making heroine crossdressing an integral part of their collaboration.

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<sup>37</sup> More recently attributed to Middleton and Dekker and so appearing in that chapter (Lavagnino 63).

<sup>38</sup> Now largely considered a Massinger play (Thorssen 313).

A. *Philaster* (c. 1610)

A play featuring “a high level of camp humour,” *Philaster* is closely related to Sidney’s *Arcadia* and Shakespeare’s *Cymbeline* and shares a partial plot with *Cupid’s Revenge*; though derivative in this way, it contains another woman hidden in a boy character, potentially the first instance of such a character (Gossett 5; Munro, *Children* 105, 124; Wayne 10). Crossdressing is long familiar by this point and Marie Loughlin argues “cross-dressing in this particular tragicomedy does appear to function in generic terms as a kind of ‘shop-worn theatrical’ mechanism which simply serves to bring about the familiar tragicomic turn from imminent tragedy to comic reconciliation and harmony (25). Beaumont and Fletcher begin their heroine crossdressing career as part of the new generation of playwrights who utilize the complex emotional levels available to them through tragicomedy; they begin with invention. The introduction of a new approach to the (non) recognition of a heroine crossdresser provides an opportunity for fresh interest and engagement for an audience no longer surprised by masculine female characters. *Philaster* is also potentially the first tragicomedy, with or without a crossdresser, to be a popular success (Loughlin 23).

Known by the name Bellario and described as “[t]he trustiest, lovingst, and the gentlest boy” this character embodies several of the convention’s more prevalent tropes (1.2.138). The character lives successfully as a boy without acknowledgement of a feminine persona and, with echoes of *Twelfth Night*, the only hint at a possible secret arises when a noble lady falls for the boy and Bellario remarks on a vow of chastity. Bellario’s underlying gender is only revealed in the final act as she uses her feminine name, Euphrasia, when she is accidentally wounded. Believing she will die, Euphrasia explains that she was in love with Philaster, a love which is unrequited, and concocted the plan of a disguise to be with him and serve him. The unusual element of this play is that she is not awarded his love or even

substantial attention and her class status is emphasized as a personal deficiency. She ultimately recovers from her wound and is sent away.

Bellario serves Philaster, the rightful heir to the throne of Sicily. A king who has conquered the land hopes to marry his daughter, Arethusa, to a Spanish prince in order to circumvent Philaster's claim. This is complicated by love between the princess and Philaster, which prompts him to send Bellario into her service. Bellario is deeply loyal to Philaster and pledges loyalty and fealty at their departure, "since I am to part with you my Lord... Heaven blesse your loves, your fights, all your designes... And heaven hate those you curse, though I be one" (2.1.50). When an affair that the Spanish prince has committed is exposed, he in turn sparks a rumor that Arethusa has been sleeping with Bellario. Philaster approaches Bellario and wavers between concern that Arethusa does not show Bellario the same affection she would show himself and the temptation to believe in the rumors. Though Bellario succeeds twice in convincing the master that nothing has occurred between the two, Philaster ultimately remains in a distressed state that is compounded by the open gossip of courtiers. Bellario is still only known as a boy to the characters and audience at this point.

This leads Philaster to attack his lover by stabbing her. Her reaction to his assault confuses Philaster further. Arethusa prays for his safety, not her own. In this manic state, He fumbles on a sleeping Bellario and decides on a similar course of action.

PHILASTER. Sword, print my wounds

Upon this sleeping boy: I ha none, I thinke

Are mortall, nor would I lay greater on thee.                      *Wounds him.*

BELLARIO. Oh, death I hope is come: blest be that hand,

It meant me well (4.5.20)

A less complex character than many of the crossdressing heroines, Bellario's lamentation offers insight into his character's emotional state. He claims to be grateful for death and is

docile towards the violence of Philaster. The commonality between this reaction and that of Arethusa is not lost on the offender who, when Bellario pleads to him to “save your selfe,” becomes saturated again in confusion asking, “How’s this? / Wouldst thou I should be safe?” (4.5.36, 37). Philaster again immediately regrets his impulsive violence and comes to the realization that he has wounded a completely passive and loyal individual. Though still in disguise and with little other indication towards Bellario’s concealed person, this utter submission to violence correlates Bellario with feminine attributes.

Furthermore, Bellario’s sole interaction with the ultimate symbol of manhood, a sword, is nonviolent. Having failed to counter or even defend against violence, the boy uses his own blood to mark his sword. He explains, “With my owne wounds, Ile bloody my owne sword. / I need not counterfeit to fall; Heaven knowes, / That I can stand no longer” (5.1.48). Bellario does not use the sword for its purpose but instead uses it, and the bloody display of bodily weakness, to submit to Philaster fully. Indeed, Bellario goes so far as to initially take the blame for Arethusa’s injury before Philaster returns to declare the truth. Bellario’s passivity and dedication to his master is total, “Alas my Lord, my life is not a thing / Worthy your noble thoughts: tis not a life... / May I live spotted for my perjury” (5.2.14). He believes that his body is only worthy of sacrifice and demonstrates a sort of self-loathing for his form, actions, and life. There is an evident shame and loathing in his submission. Philaster reappears to claim responsibility, but this does not serve to save Bellario. Faced with being stripped and possibly tortured, Bellario has no doubt that his body will fail him. When his request to kill him goes ignored, Bellario shifts tactics and offers to share strange secrets with a gentleman present.

Bellario’s inability to face the prospect of violence prompts acquiescence. This gentleman does not recognize the figure before him but – with a nod to the convention of fatherly recognition – is quickly convinced that it closely resembles his missing daughter. In

this play, however, the father's word is not enough to convince everybody. As Bellario shares intimate details about the girl, Euphrasia, he claims to be her emissary. The noble begins to ask questions, still in ignorance, until he bluntly asks for the name of the person before him. She answers with 'Euphrasia.'<sup>39</sup> Her father is then completely convinced without a change in the appearance of the body and goes as far as to share his new discovery with the members of his party and Philaster. Philaster is in disbelief, then shock. Though he accepts that Bellario is a woman, he refuses to use her name and insists that he cannot fully relinquishing his attachment to her old identity. This is an unusual case of misgendering that complicates Euphrasia's return to her femininity and foreshadows Philaster's sustained emotional distance to her.

His acknowledgement that her actions as Bellario are partially redeeming only goes so far, and Euphrasia's explanation of her motives are damning and offer no happy resolution. Euphrasia claims to have fallen in love with Philaster at first sight and because she is of a class that would not permit their union, she determined to live as a boy in his service indefinitely,

I...  
 drest my selfe  
 In habit of a Boy, and for I knew  
 My birth no match for you...  
 that I might ever  
 Abide with you (5.5.172)

Euphrasia blames her social position for the disinterest Philaster shows for her. But rather than going from an equal, higher-class position and pretending to lower herself to gain access

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<sup>39</sup> In the 1620 quarto, she reveals her hair as a visual display. This is not included in the later 1622 quarto. *Antonia and Mellida* and *The Wise Woman of Hogsdon* also have hair revelations (Hyland 55).

to Philaster, her social movement is lateral and cannot be redeemed. There can be no restoration to a position she never held. Marie Loughlin comments on the anxieties associated with legible gender signifiers that are exacerbated by a hidden crossdresser,

The obvious implication is two-fold and self-cancelling: first, to recognize that Bellario/Euphrasia's male clothing belies rather than testifies to the nature of the body beneath indicates this society's ability to read accurately the social signs of gender, sex and sexuality; second, the recognition of this discrepancy expresses the malleable and counterfeit nature of these very signs (37)

Although Euphrasia gains the proximity she seeks, it is through a desperate and unrequited obsession that does little to garner pity and nothing to attract affection; her crossdressing and affections are punished. She has deceived society, is unable to re-integrate, and receives no reward. Though she claims love and not lust, her lack of social standing and the fact that her love is not returned do not create sympathy for her cause. Unreciprocated love between people of noncongruent social standing does not lead to an amenable ending. Loughlin argues that her lack of heterosexual marriage also leaves the homoerotic questions her identity as Bellario created unanswered (41). Euphrasia's futile attempt at closeness, simply brands her as conspicuously unworthy. She is left pathetic and unwanted.

As Catherine Henze summarizes, "*Philaster* also perfectly fits Fletcher's description of a tragicomedy, most simplistically because no one dies, yet some come close. Its tragicomic elements of otherworldliness, swiftly changing characters, improbable hypothesis and vivid passion set the standard for the new genre" (160). Despite being offered permission to marry any man in her own class, Euphrasia clings to a vow of chastity. So instead, she is offered forgiveness by Arethusa and is banished from court. Regardless of noble action while disguised, Euphrasia's lack of honorable intention and attempt to remain disguised indefinitely with a futile goal of remaining close to her lover without eventually expressing

her desire is condemning. While *Gallathea* presents a character who intends to retain a masculine identity, the love in that relationship is consensual. For Euphrasia, her feminine self is irreconcilable with her disguise, and she is shunned and exiled from the community and therefore from returning to her former self, leaving her to lead a celibate and lonely life.

### B. *The Maid's Tragedy* (c. 1611)

A Beaumont and Fletcher creation, *The Maid's Tragedy* invokes the trope with a similarly tragic tone to that of *Cupid's Revenge* (Potter 141). There are two heroines, Evadne and Aspatia, and like Urania, Aspatia does not don her disguise until the final act. This play has no comedic elements which makes it one of only two titled tragedies in Shapiro's list; though several exist in the Caroline period including multiple examples from James Shirley and *The Tragedy of Soliman and Perseda* is an Elizabethan example, this is the first and only Jacobean example. In brief, the play opens with a wedding between Evadne and Amintor. Amintor had been promised to Aspatia, but the king changed the arrangement to honor Evadne's brother's successes. Therefore, Evadne is married to Amintor; however, in their bedchamber she reveals she has been forced to become the king's mistress. She is despondent and her new husband disavows her without consummating the marriage. The king expects his affair with Evadne to continue and for the marriage to never be consummated. Evadne is persuaded to murder the king; she agrees in hopes of seeking personal justice after being raped and denied a proper marriage. In the final Act, she goes to the king; however, in order to commit the murder, Evadne finds that she must disassociate from her femininity,

I am not she, nor bear I in this breast

So much cold spirit to be cald a woman,

I am a Tiger, I am any thing

That knowes not pittie, stirre not, if thou doest,

Ile take thee unprepar'd (5.1.64)

Abandoning her identity as a woman for something more animal, the spirit of a 'Tiger,' Evadne accomplishes her task and assassinates the sleeping king. By relinquishing her femininity, she finds the ability to commit this violent act.

Meanwhile, although she is thought to be dead, Aspatia wakes up in her coffin and is still in love with Amintor. To return and confront Amintor for betraying her by marrying Evadne, Aspatia disguises herself as her brother, a soldier who is not named and is only referenced. Enraged and grief ridden, she prepares to challenge Amintor to a duel and declares that she is willing to die in the endeavor, "This is my fatall houre, heaven may forgive... / And put a womans heart into my breast / It is more honour for you that I die" (5.3.74). Aspatia blames her woman's body for being unable to process the stress she is under. She did nothing to be slighted by Amintor and hopes to cause equal pain to him and his new bride. Claiming to be a servant looking for work, she begs to see Amintor, but is refused. Again, she blames the gender divide for her pain. "There is a vild dishonest tricke in man, / More then in women" (5.3.24). Angry at her experience with Amintor and her disappointments in love, Aspatia laments that she feels obligated to be coupled with the opposite sex and the generalized faults she attributes to all males (5.3.28). As she clings to her feminine mental state, her frustration with male behavior and the power she feels has been exercised over her future, by a man without her consent, fuels the passion behind her new masculine disguise. Unwilling to be passive any longer, this heroine confronts her former love with aggression.

Assuming the role of a brother defending his sister's honor, Aspatia utilizes both the moral high ground and the patriarchal position of a man with a legitimate grievance. Acknowledging guilt, Amintor proclaims grief and tries to ingratiate himself with the

stranger through a deference and remorse previously denied to Aspatia. Knowing that she is presumed dead, Aspatia explains that, as a brother, she was called to attend the wedding between Amintor and Aspatia which was subsequently cancelled so that he could marry Evadne. Audaciously, the newly made boy tells of a past at war, but little experience otherwise, and expounds a hope to maintain his honor in all dealings (5.3.59). In vengeance, Aspatia challenges Amintor to an illegal duel. The suggestion of this duel sheds light on a new complication of crossdressed heroines attempting violence and when and where it is legal. Aspatia explains that her persona as a boy is very obviously too young to engage in a duel according to the law (5.3.64). The type of duel here is important. In his book on the impact of dueling on early modern society, Markku Peltonen describes the factors of an early modern duel in contrast to the medieval battle trials. He offers three defining features, “These three aspects – a private or secret fight, caused by an insult and organised by a challenge in order to prove one’s sense of honour rather than to overcome one’s opponent – gave the duel of honour its quintessential characteristics” (2). Aspatia is not challenging Amintor to a duel with any legal footing, but rather to a social exercise to demonstrate honor. Her goal is not necessarily to achieve anything other than to prove her willingness to participate. As a civil and social event, dueling offers Aspatia the opportunity to situate herself on moral high ground through a predicated ritual. Simply calling for the duel forces her opponent to acknowledge that a circumstance exists for which he must defend his honor.

Previously heroines have shied from violence due to fear, physical incapacity, interruption, and a lack of faith in their ability or bravery, but this figure acknowledges that the violence might also be construed as unlawful. Typically, desperately working toward maintaining an unscathed reputation, early modern crossdressed heroines use a disguise for the express purpose of avoiding the public eye; however, to be publicly involved in a violent activity risks both. Violence inherently draws attention and social scrutiny, particularly

violence under the auspice of honor. If onlookers were to attempt to ascertain if a duel was indeed lawful and noble, they could perhaps witness a fault in the fragile masculinity and masculine performance of a heroine or, more specifically in this case, judge the youth to be an ineligible participant. Women are supposed to be unable to engage in the social act of violence; however, boys are simply too young and not allowed to commit strictly ordained social violence.<sup>40</sup> In this a crossdressed heroine is doubly unsuitable, both too young and too female. Beaumont and Fletcher offer a new context for disallowing certain people from displaying violence and, in the same moment, create a heroine who breaks all previous expectations and creates a new standard.

In the same speech where she declares her intention to duel, Aspatia magnanimously offers her opponent the opportunity to use her own weapon (5.4.66). She expresses no insecurity or internal debate on her choice. As the instigator of the duel, Aspatia takes authority over the terms of violence. Amintor does not rise to the occasion; cowardly, he balks (5.3.75). Aspatia calls him out for not meeting the challenge by publicly and openly humiliating him. With guilt and shame, he accedes and, with ample warning, Aspatia strikes first. Amintor does not dare to fight, so he must be prodded.

As the first disguised woman to engage in a duel, Aspatia crosses a new line. She performs masculine action, greatly emasculating the man before her. Amintor becomes angry at the humiliation and lashes out. Though declaring that he could ignore one blow and does not fight so that he will not kill, Amintor is met again with aggression. The blow is followed

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<sup>40</sup> Fletcher uses this theme again in a later play. The *Maid in the Mill* (1623) features a group of young people planning to put on a play (McKeithan 396). One young woman, Aminta, very briefly dresses as a page to deliver a letter anonymously. The gentlemen are threatened by a boy having contact with the women threatening "I should not see a masculine in peace / Out of that house" (2.2.340). Aminta assures them that she is too young to pose a threat and alludes to being under the age required to duel as a man. She qualifies this by noting she does not carry a weapon, "Alas: I' am a child, Sire, / Your hates cannot last till I wear a sword" (2.2.341). Adult manhood is defined through a signifying sword and the violent actions that accompany it. Aminta's entire foray into crossdress lasts a handful of lines; she spends it assuring others that she is not a man through merit of not having a sword and that she bears no threat. When she returns in the fourth act, it is in a feminine representation and her disguise is not discussed.

by a less bold kick that serves to embarrass the receiver further. Reduced to the victim of petty contact, Amintor holds off no longer. Losing his patience, he threatens to kill the boy in retribution. So, they fight but after such posturing, a convincing strike, and a humiliating kick, Amintor is stunned at the reality of the actual combat. Aspatia does not follow through and Amintor wounds her badly. Amintor expresses surprise at the sudden passivity from his opponent,

Thou canst not fight, the blowes thou makst at me  
 Are quite besides, and those I offer at thee  
 Thou spreadst thine armes, and takst upon thy brest  
 Alas defencelesse. (5.3.103)

Aspatia proves capable of delivering a single blow when she is physically challenged but does not participate fully in the patriarchal art of dueling when Amintor finally engages. Whether she is incapable of further exertion is indeterminable. The encounter began with her announcing her intent to martyr herself, admitting that she believed the duel would prove fatal (5.3.74). In failing the action, as expected, she restores the status of both Amintor and herself. Aspatia proves that she cannot fulfill a masculine role, but that Amintor can, despite his desire not to engage in the duel. His reputation as a capable man is restored and Aspatia relinquishes her masculinity.

In this play, the consequence for participation in violence is severe for women. Killing the king has tragic consequences for Evadne. When she faces her husband once more, Amintor forsakes his former spouse for having committed murder; she then kills herself. Though not crossdressed, she is a woman who rejects her gender to commit a violent act in opposition to her sense of her female self. So conflicted with the dichotomy between her action of murder and her feminine identity, Evadne cannot reconcile the discord and chooses to die rather than live with the internal anguish of masculine actions which cannot be justified

in accordance with her femininity. Her death leads to Amintor's own suicide threat. He gives his soul a feminine moniker lamenting, "My soule growes weary of her house" (5.3.179).

This exchange prompts Aspatia's identity reveal and her own reckoning with the violence with which she has engaged. She now speaks of her body and repositions it with feminine pronouns, highlighting the injuries it has sustained. While her actions could briefly be masculine, it is a feminine body that failed to withstand violence. Though she never changes her clothing back, the shift in how she identifies herself is enough for her body to be recognized. In her subsequent dialogue, the heroine expresses an optimistic renewed desire to live and be reconciled with her former lover.

Thou art there already, and these wounds are hers:

Those threats I brought with me, sought not revenge,

But came to fetch this blessing from thy hand.

I am Aspatia yet. (5.3.207)

Here the conversation turns. Acknowledging the woman he betrayed, Amintor offers to take Aspatia somewhere to recover and she admits the consequences of submitting to her body saying, "Amintor thou must stay, I must rest here, / My strength begins to disobey my will" (5.3.215). The reconciliation is short lived, and with her boldness, Aspatia loses her strength. In her final moments, she recants her resolve to die with, "I would faine live / Now if I could, wouldst thou have loved me then?" (5.3.217). Amintor replies that he is not worthy of her, and she dies holding his hand.

Thus, this crossdressed heroine is a victim to her own body which cannot withstand the violence inflicted upon it. Managing one strike, she creates a convincing facade that she cannot maintain. When her challenge is met, her submission is total with fatal results. With no intention of success or survival, Aspatia's reversal to her feminine identity and sudden desire to live is pathetic. This use of death and a tragic conclusion exhibit vague parallels

with Shakespeare's history plays where the consequences of participating in a forbidden masculine act result in death; Joan of Arc must die, Margaret loses her son, and Evadne kills herself. Beaumont and Fletcher subject a wronged woman who has crossdressed and engaged in a single violent blow to the same fate. There is a judgement of crossdressing created that is not alleviated by social harmony, but it is also an unexpected conclusion to a now familiar heroine crossdressing trope through the tragic generic form. As Beaumont and Fletcher continue to reinvent popular tropes and storylines, they rely on both recognizable patterns and efforts to confound, evolve, and reassess the roles, circumstances, motivations, and outcomes for their female crossdressers.

### C. *The Nightwalker, or the Little Thief* (c. 1611)

A hidden heroine is added to the repertoire in *The Nightwalker, or the Little Thief*, a play attributed to Beaumont and Fletcher or to Fletcher and James Shirley (Clark, S., *The Plays* 172; Maxwell 487). This heroine, known only as Snap until she is revealed to be Alathe, is the title character who appears as a young serving boy with a remarkable prowess for thievery. Her female identity is not made public until a dramatic reveal in the final scene changes the context of her existence. Alathe is an early product of this invention, being followed by *Anything for a Quiet Life* (c. 1621), *The Widow* (c. 1616), *Hymen's Triumph* (c. 1615), and preceded by *Philaster* (c. 1610). In these plays, the authors use subtle hints that encourage their viewers into believing that they are 'in the know' about a secret or potential plot twist.

A more morally ambiguous figure than many of the virgin crossdressers, Snap's freedoms seemingly derive from his unhindered identity as a boy. Visible and dynamic, Snap participates in the underbelly of society without explicit reference to any feminine identity.

Attaching himself to a fallen noble who has resorted to thievery, Snap creates an ‘honorable waif’ persona. As Snap, this character begs to serve the fallen nobleman, Lurcher. However, contextual hints at a potentially alternative identity seep into the narrative from the beginning. Lurcher hesitates to allow Snap to become his servant because he is confused by the presentation of the figure of a boy before him, remarking, “A pretty Boy, but of too milde a breeding, / Too tender and too bashful a behaviour;” the thief questions the motives of his prospective protegee (1.2.14). Snap’s beauty, passivity, and shyness confuses Lurcher who sees these qualities as feminine and not suited to the nefarious lifestyle Snap leads.

Committing to Snap’s presentation, Lurcher gives the boy an opportunity to prove his honesty, directly asking if he is telling the truth: “He blushes as he speakes, and that I like not / I love a bold and secure confidence, / An impudence that one may trust... — Thou canst not lye?” (1.2.18). Lurcher further notices that the youth blushes yet affirms Snap’s masculinity by using male pronouns. In her discussion of boy actors, Lisa Jardine remarks on the blush as a powerful tool for boy actors to indicate femininity, “The audience is invited to remark [upon] the ‘pretty folly,’ the blush, the downcast shameful glance of the boy player whose ‘woman’s part’ requires that he portray female qualities, but in male dress” (*Still* 29). For Jardine, blushing and the subsequent mannerisms are the ultimate signifier of femininity that surpasses symbolic attire. Much like violence belongs to the masculine persona, early modern society synonymizes blushing with femininity. Mary Bly argues that the realities of the stage prohibit the actual performance of blushing and rely on verbal manifestation to invent a blush; however, this interpretation disassociates blushing from the body of even the boy actor. In Bly’s words, “the blush is unlikely, given the likelihood of heavy stage make-up” (*Queer* 57).<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> This is not the first time that a blush challenges the integrity of a masculine disguise. Early in the heroine crossdressing tradition, *Gallathea* (1592) introduces blushing as a potential detriment to heroine disguise. See chapter VI for more detail.

Snap evades the question as to whether he is lying in a manner that initially satisfies the unsure Lurcher, yet his response hints at a likely deception. In the wake of Lurcher's challenge and the bodily betrayal of the blush, Snap declares, "I would not willingly," before skillfully dodging a second attempt to ascertain a judgement of integrity (1.2.23). Lurcher wonders if Snap lacks the intelligence necessary to lie and deceive effectively and continues to waver in his approval of allowing the boy to become his servant; in the meantime, Snap catches on to Lurcher's thieving motives. Changing tactics, Snap offers a truthful account of her propensity to lie. After cleverly ascertaining the reasons for Lurcher's hesitation in hiring her (that he does not want an entirely honest servant), the boy provides an honest account of a dishonest skillset. This flexibility in character demonstrates a remarkable control over the masculine presentation that can be adjusted as needed. When Snap directly asks if Lurcher would prefer a criminal servant and he says yes, Snap promises,

I can doe any thing for your advantage.

I guesse at what you meane; I can lie naturally,

As easily, as I can sleepe Sir, and securely:

As naturally I can steale too (1.2.41)

With this and an assurance that such expert thievery will not be applied to her mentor, Snap begins to redefine the moral standards for crossdressed heroines.

Though traditional conventions allow several heroines to remain unidentified throughout their play and exhibit less conflicted or challenged male personas, Snap twice pushes boundaries. Familiarity with heroine crossdressers allows for hints to be made at the potential for a disguised character without explicitly revealing whether or not the character is indeed a hidden crossdresser. This foreshadowing and teasing points to an audience familiar enough with the trope and established parameters of heroine crossdressing to recognize that a boy who blushes may not be what he seems. The pervasiveness of the trope by *The*

*Nightwalker* also permits new behaviors. Snap is a professed accomplished petty criminal keeping company with unsavory characters. Though a hidden identity may be suspected, Snap is still able to maintain a persona as a boy thief with dubious morality; there is not an expectation that the character should behave as a modest young woman. In refusing to definitively acknowledge the existence of Alathe within the character of Snap, these complex boundaries are tested. Snap represents a shift in the moral expectations for female characters in crossdress and exists in a grey area where a character may exhibit the behaviors of an amoral boy without consequence to a feminine persona revealed late in the play.

To justify the act of assuming masculinity, most heroines present a stringent dedication to patriarchal moral standards. They remain honorable and honest in all things except their appearance. This compensation contributes to the sense of uniformity or repetition in the personas of so many characters who belong to the cohort. Meek from either fear or a choice to be unassuming through servitude, these figures avoid both conspicuous and dubious behavior. A reasonable strategy for preserving disguise, this device also serves to rationalize that any masculine appearance is out of desperation and not a reflection on moral character. Snap, however, flaunts this proclivity towards disrepute. Though full of a gentleness evident to Lurcher, Snap models an inconstancy of integrity feared by so many male observers in previous plays. Fearless, deceptive, and willing to be utterly false, Snap boldly declares, "I scorne all hazard, / And on the edge of danger I doe best sir, / I have a thousand faces to deceive" (1.2.57). If the heroines offend in no other manner, their resolution can remain relatively unproblematic and their motives for crossdressing can be justified. There is an unwritten rule that the heroines live by the restraints of their feminine identity during their time in masculine disguise. Snap circumvents this pattern by performing a masculine identity with no explicit admission of an underlying female self. As such, he is able and willing to transgress moral social conduct. While Snap exists without the persona of

Alathe, these actions can be attributed to a wayward boy and he can participate in masculinity to any degree; however, when Alathe is eventually revealed, there are potential retroactive consequences for these behaviors.

The relationship between the two thieves, Lurcher and Snap, is intertwined with the drama of a young woman, Maria, who has been betrothed to an old, unattractive man, the Justice Algripe, much to the distress of her lover, Heartlove. Heartlove intercepts Maria on her way to her marriage bed, where her absence causes uproar. Although the exchange between the two is innocent, their discovery ruins Maria's reputation. Hoping to steal from the household, Lurcher and Snap arrive in the wake of this disaster. Setting their sights on a chest of valuables, the "dainty Boy" (Snap) devises a plan to wear a fake beard and ride on Lurcher's back to scare those they encounter away (2.1.32). Successful in this disguise layered on disguise, the two escape with one of two chests. After bearing the chest back to their own lodging, the box is discovered to be a coffin containing Maria. The discovery seems to overwhelm Snap who admits to an emotional reaction to the occurrence, "a strange mistake!... / It makes me almost weepe to thinke upon't" (2.4.67). Unusual in a boy, this admission serves as a further reminder that Snap is performing masculine gender unusually.

The pair decide to bury the stolen coffin, but accidentally encounter Algripe who they interrupt in a tirade against women. In a panic, the companions stand the coffin on end. Snap hides behind the box and speaks as Maria's ghost. In this voice, more is revealed as to a potential hidden identity. As the body, the young thief calls to the justice Algripe, "Among thy other sinnes which blacke thy soule, / Call to thy minde thy vow made to another, / Whom thou hast wrong'd, and make her satisfaction" (2.5.54). In assuming this feminine voice Alathe reveals information that the boy should not know. Lurcher is surprised enough at this strange exchange to ask, "how dost know he made vowes to another [woman]?" to

which Snap replies, “I over-heard the women talke” (2.5.67, 68). While this response satisfies her partner in crime, this is a strong indication towards an alternative identity.

Until this point, hidden crossdressers are generally assumed to be male characters until they are fully revealed to be female characters. Here, Snap’s identity has not been challenged, but is continually alluded to in vague terms. The character of Alathe has yet to be introduced or explained, but Snap slowly begins to unravel the disguise unprompted, but only in small doses. Though Lurcher is confused by Snap’s feminine signifying actions early in the play, he does not contest Snap’s identity openly. Even when speaking as Maria in her coffin, Snap does not fully divulge a second identity. The plot has evolved to allow the interaction of an educated audience, now familiar with the possibility that any onstage boy could eventually be exposed as having been female the entire time. Though Snap has not revealed himself, the recognizable feminine signifiers of gentleness, beauty, and blushing are recognizable to a knowing audience and paired with a plot of revenge against a wayward lover, other conventional patterns of crossdressing characters are evident.

Maria awakes after this incident and creates a disguise for herself, as a female servant in her own household. However, this is not particularly effective. Snap is immediately certain of the disguise and finds the situation curious, announcing to the audience “I met her in / another habit” (4.2.3). After several small escapades in thieving, Snap creates a second disguise in addition to his identity as the servant boy (which has yet to be challenged) and determines to discover Maria’s motives. Lurcher assists in the scheme by bringing Algripe and several others under false pretenses where Snap makes a dramatic appearance as an angel in a costume he has stolen and confronts Algripe. Filled with fear of the looming apparition, the justice promises to become noble and full of charity; his repentance prompts Snap, as the angel visage, to disclose a great deal of information with significant details hereto unknown in the process of the condemnation. Lurcher was a gentleman who lost his wealth to the

scheming Algripe and Snap knows the secrets of Algripe's past. This slow burn of first hinting at the potential of a hidden crossdresser, then offering pieces of secret information through that mysterious character is a progression in heroine crossdressing aided by the prolific popularization of such characters and plots. *The Nightwalker* cleverly engages the audience throughout each scene, expecting a shared level of knowledge made possible by preceding plays. Snap alludes to a past, without divulging an explicit identity, that is so characteristic of previous heroine crossdresses that she is identifiable as such before she reveals herself or concludes her disguise.

As Maria's disguise crumbles under the eye of her mother, Snap continues to share information and refers to serving a mistress, rather than Lurcher saying, "I serve a Mistress / Would rather dye than play with your misfortunes" (4.6.58). Following Snap's previous disclosure, it is easily inferred that this mistress is, in fact, the female identity of the boy. Snap displays an intimacy with this mistress and calls her "beloved" and "worthy of a better / Than he, that stole Marias heart" (4.6.73). A motivation for the creation of Snap and life as a boy begins to take shape; this mistress had been betrayed by Algripe when he had a romantic liaison with another woman, before his engagement with Maria, interrupting their own wedding plans. Snap describes the mistress to Heartlove in passionate terms with, "She threw her troubles off, remembring yours... / this gave her boldnesse / To employ me thus farre..." and "When you but see, and know my Mistresse well, / You will forgive my tediousnesse, shee's faire, / Fair as Maria was" (4.6.91, 96). Heartlove has little patience for his part in the conversation; not understanding the significance of the story, he ends the discussion. However, with a passing comment of "pretty boy" Heartlove leaves a reminder that his perception of Snap has not altered (4.6.123).

Snap has not officially outed any secret identity yet. Snap's insistence on hinting voraciously at her hidden identity leaves those around her looking foolish in their incapacity

to notice, though the audience has every opportunity to be in on the secret. This solidifies Snap as a clever and manipulating character able to effectively use the tools of masculinity and her position as an innocuous servant to her benefit. Snap uses this power to identify Maria, whose disguise is a conspicuous failure; Snap's aptitude for disguise seemingly enables her both to recognize and reveal the young woman, as Snap confronts her with, "I know you are / Maria, this thinne vaile cannot obscure you" (4.6.154). Through this revelation, Snap demonstrates an intimacy with disguise that allows insight into the disguise of others and some influence over those disguises. Though it is done indirectly, Snap's recognition becomes the catalyst for Maria's return to society and the resolution of the play.

Maria's emergence spawns her reconciliation with Heartlove, complete with newfound familial approval, and Algripe publicly proclaims his repentance. He pledges that he would right his wrongs against the woman he was betrothed to, if she were alive. Snap takes this moment to finally reveal herself as Alathe, the woman formerly betrothed to Algripe and sister to Lurcher, easing the tension she has created by her allusions to the disguise. Speaking to her brother, Lurcher, she explains her second motive, to rehabilitate his criminal ways.

I preserved you brother,  
 That would have lost me willingly, and serv'd yee  
 Thus like a Boy; I serv'd you faithfully,  
 And cast your plots but to preserve your credit;  
 Your foule ones I diverted to faire uses (5.2.139)

Though Snap proved adept at stealing clothing, tricking lesser minds, and in multiple disguises, Alathe uses the theft of a coffin rather than the treasure chest to prove that she manipulated Lurcher's actions to keep him from being as degenerate. However, this attempt from Alathe's feminine persona to exonerate Snap's actions omits several other moments of

thieving, including that of stealing the angel costume. Snap is given leeway to perform morally suspect actions while the character is defined only as a boy; however, when Alathe claims the identity for her feminine self, she follows the pattern of heroine crossdressers before her and works to salvage a respectable reputation for herself. Alathe further claims that her disguise was not primarily to win her love, but to be close to her degenerate brother and selflessly save his damaged reputation. Alathe adopts her disguise to manipulate her brother away from his instincts towards more egregious crimes and uses this to excuse the petty crimes she commits along the way.

After reconciling with her repentant brother, Alathe is welcomed by Algripe who goes so far as to kiss the woman who has not changed her boyish appearance. He declares, “let me kisse thee in these cloathes” (5.2.149). This vivid homoerotic display is legitimized by another disclosure from Alathe. As Snap, she stole the contract made between herself and Algripe, a contract which voids his more recent marriage and allows the pair to be recoupled. With a final comment to Maria that she stole the coffin with the girl in it to retain control over her man, Alathe demonstrates cunning and agency rarely seen among crossdressing heroines. She intentionally exploited her masculinity and new place in society as the servant of a thief to successfully maneuver her sphere in ways unattainable as a female-presenting person.

#### D. *Cupid's Revenge* (1612)

Like *Philaster* with which it shares some plot, *Cupid's Revenge* steps away from the predominantly comedic tradition of crossdressed heroines and is one of the early tragicomedy

texts to use this trope, if not the first (Al-Olaqi, *Chapman* 5; Loughlin 23).<sup>42</sup> Heavily influenced by Sidney's *Arcadia*, here Beaumont and Fletcher produce two hopeless heroines, Hidapses and Urania (Munro, *Children* 117, 120). As Lucy Munro quips, "familiar materials and conventions are used and tilted in peculiar ways" in this play; established conventions are toyed with, and the popularity of previous material is the catalyst for experimentation (*Children* 121). Cupid is angry with an elderly king who has discouraged deference and worship to the god. In revenge, he afflicts the king and his daughter with hazardous infatuations. Meanwhile, a young widow, Bacca, sleeps with the prince, Leucippus, outside of wedlock. This arrangement distresses her; but before the two can sort their issues, Cupid causes the king to fall in love with the widow. As a rival to his own father, the prince is to be banished. To Leucippus' horror, his father marries Bacca though she continues to flirt with Leucippus. His rejection, and pleas that she treat his father well, lead to Bacca's evil plan to dispose of both her lovers in favor of her own daughter, Urania, so that Urania may be queen. Leucippus is too moral to kill his stepmother and it is in his moment of ethical distress that Urania makes her first appearance, disowning her mother's cruelty and showing empathy for the prince. Nevertheless, Leucippus is only narrowly rescued by a mob of citizens from being hung at Bacca's order; Urania is therefore declared heir apparent, and Leucippus goes into hiding.

In the wake of these dramatic events, Urania appears as a boy with the intention of assisting the unfortunate Leucippus. At the top of Act V, the newly made princess in boy's clothes makes her alliances abundantly clear. She sees the renegade prince as family and is in direct opposition to her mother's plans to place her in power. Ismenus, the prince's

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<sup>42</sup> Gordon McMullan also notes the play as 1612 but suggests a potentially earlier dating of 1607-1608 (*Fletcher* 3).

companion and cousin, asks the boy figure for the princess, and Urania immediately reveals her identity:

URANIA. You know me weel inough, but that you mock,

I am she my sen.

ISMENUS. God blesse him that shall bee thy husband; if thou

wearst breeches thus soone, thoult bee as impudent as thy mother. (5.1.13)

Ismenus interprets her disguise as deception and as potential sexual depravity. Though his distrust in her loyalties is reasonable, her duplicitous appearance gives him further reason to fear Urania's motives. Ismenus does not believe that she has disguised herself to help Leucippus; she has only proven that she can fool him and disguise her true self. He conflates her mother's sexual degradation with Urania's clothing and discernable masculinity.

Nevertheless, true to the typical form, her earnest pleas prove to Ismenus that she is honest and of good intention. His cynicism transforms into the undying support of a noble servant, and he exclaims, "I think / thou art as good a creature as ever was borne" (5.1.59), and – in addition to information about the prince's location and funds for her trip – Ismenus issues Urania a letter explaining her loyalty and purpose.

With affirmation of the nobility of her motivations, Urania reclaims her disguise and chooses to retain her temporary masculinity. Projecting her own interpretations of her brother's likelihood to trust her, Urania determines that the letter will not prove effective enough to protect her from his potential anger. Like many predecessors, she maintains feigned masculinity to protect her body during travel; furthermore, Urania sees her disguise as capable of protecting her from any violent reaction her brother might have at seeing her: "When I have found my Brother, I will begge / To serve him; but he shall never kno who I am; / For he must hate me then for my badde mother (5.1.71). Urania thus hopes that as a stranger that she can be close to her brother and earn his unbiased trust and love. This

established pattern of using disguise to ingratiate oneself into a household is used in a maturing fashion. Unlike a heroine such as *Twelfth Night's* Viola, Urania is not living with strangers, but with her own stepbrother and she has the chance to grow a relationship with him or observe him while remaining unknown. Yet like Viola, Urania uses her masculine disguise to gain safety in travel, safety in a potentially dangerous situation, and intimacy with a man who is predisposed to be hostile towards her. However, Urania understands that she will likely be found out eventually and does not expect to survive the situation.

Though facing a high risk, her instincts serve her well. After the boy enters Leucippus' service, he grows fond of his new servant, whom he refers to only as 'boy' or 'child,' and questions why such a loyal servant would want to be attached to a banished outcast.

LEUCIPPUS. Alas for pittie, take another Master...

Wilt thou goe save thy selfe?

Why doest thou weepe? Alas I doe not chide thee.

URANIA. I cannot tell; if I goe from you Syr,

I shall nere dawne day more...

If I were a man, I would fight for you (5.4.4)

In a characteristically double meaning phrase, Urania confesses that she does not identify as a man and so does not fight; at the same time, she weeps. As Shakespeare's *Touchstone* advises in *As You Like It*, there is "much virtue in If" (5.4.98). That 'if' is protective of her feminine identity; she does not feign an identity she does not feel. It preserves her sense of self while publicly creating a boundary of what action she will not perform. Furthermore, her feminine signifiers of innocence, beauty, and proclivity toward crying are notably evident. Veiled in the facade of boyhood, these behaviors endure as her disquiet continues. Leucippus

is left begging her to eat and cannot fathom the deeply passionate and loving stares the boy focuses on him.

To this point, the parts follow patterns from comedic plays and Urania's identity struggles echo those of her predecessors. However, tragedy comes as she faces violence. The climax of her despondency occurs when the queen intercepts a letter with Urania's plans, sending a messenger, Timantus, in his own disguise. While Urania fears discovery, the messenger's mission is more drastic. He lunges at the prince and his attempt to stab him is only prevented by Urania's intervention as she sacrifices her body on his behalf. She cries out, "Gods keepe him but fro knowing me till I dye: / Aye me, sure I cannot live a day" (5.4.68). Urania briefly loses consciousness and, not believing Timantus's revelation of her true identity, Leucippus refers to Urania as 'boy' one last time. Urania stirs and makes a final plea for recognition ("Doe you not know me?") but Leucippus still refers to her as 'boy' (5.4.123).

Here, regardless of her insufficient actions, Urania is still misidentified and maintains a semblance of youthful masculinity, if not adult manliness. While some female heroines do crossdress within adulthood, such as *No Wit's* Mistress Low-Water, most do so in perceived adolescence which provides security as any inability or unwillingness to perform mature masculine action can pass for inexperience and immaturity. This concept can be stretched to a sort of gender neutrality in adolescence, where adult gender performance is not expected on a young body, therefore leaving that body somewhat less identifiable. Naomi J. Miller and Naomi Yavneh note that ideas of childhood had shifted in the period to the point that, though childhood was once considered a feminine stage of life, even "the term 'child' itself became increasingly gender-neutral" (Miller 1). This is not to say that children were not gendered, but that the space given to young people to develop gendered skills or attributes allowed for

failure and lacking. In this space, Urania can lack all masculine performance while maintaining a plausible facade of a boy.

Finally, Urania explicitly reveals herself to Leucippus; their reunion is tragic, and the familiar structure of the comedy plays has evaporated. As Urania lays dying, she tells her stepbrother who she is, explaining that she used the disguise to protect herself from the hatred he must feel towards her and her mother. Leucippus immediately acknowledges her identity and is astounded that he did not recognize her. He tells her that he does not hate her and promises, “I will love thee, or any thing” moments before she dies in his arms (5.4.143). Leucippus’ willful ignorance until this point is not a new addition to the plots of disguised heroines; in *The Four Prentices of London*, a man sleeps next to a disguised heroine page but manages not to discover her identity. Though he can engage in copious flattery and attachment to a page boy, if Leucippus questions the gender of the page or his attraction to the page, he challenges his own sexuality. But here Leucippus protects his own image through cautious wonder and admiration that he labels purely platonic. Yet when confronted with the truth, he does not doubt it for a moment, though the image in front of him has not changed. Urania has the power to validate an attraction already present. This play concludes with a revelation, but no restoration. Although Urania preserves her virtue and reconciles with her brother, they both still die.

In this tragicomedy, crossdressing is not excused or erased by a complete return to previous identities and a reaffirmation of the dominance of heterosexuality through a marriage; Beaumont and Fletcher apply the devices of comedic crossdressing to lend poignancy to their new form of a tragic ending for a noble crossdressing heroine. In later plays, Fletcher and his collaborators continue to raise the stakes of crossdressed female characters and introduce more severe conclusions for their heroines. As women have

increasingly emotional and physical involvement with their temporary genders, the results are less and less frequently reconciled amicably for the character.

E. *The Honest Man's Fortune* (c. 1613)

The trope of a disguised heroine becomes so prevalent by Fletcher's usage, and indeed in his own catalog that he is able to exploit the predictable elements in this possible collaboration with Nathan Field or perhaps Philip Massinger with new convincing evidence for the participation of Cyril Tourneur (Garrett 2; Jackson 203; McMullan, *Fletcher* 7).<sup>43</sup> The awareness of the function of a crossdressed heroine allows for manipulation and complication of the plot. Ironically, this is best witnessed in a play where there is no crossdressed female character. Though included in Shapiro's comprehensive list, only a serving boy is present in *The Honest Man's Fortune* (Clark, S., *The Plays* 63). However, it is my contention that it is exactly this erroneous inclusion that is indicative of the familiarity and assumption of the plot. The primary plot follows Montague, a nobleman who has encountered financial difficulties and been forced to release his staff including his page, Veramour. Laverdure, a courtier, convinces himself that the boy shows feminine characteristics and is indeed a beautiful woman in disguise.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> In the late Jacobean era, Massinger writes his own heroine crossdressing play and relinquishes the trappings of comedy for his heroine in *The Duke of Milan* (1623), which has been compared to *Othello* (Thorssen 313). In the ultimate scene, Fransico invents a plan to disguise himself to gain access to his enemy and enact revenge. Fransico includes his sister, Eugenia, in the ruse. The duke courted Eugenia years before and abandoned her. The two use their disguises to gain access to the body of his new love, Marcelia. They make her appear to be alive and add poison to her lips, ultimately killing the duke. Eugenia does not explicitly crossdress, but she is not recognized when she accompanies her brother. It is not unreasonable to suggest that she might be disguised as a male assistant, though it could be a feminine disguise. The question of disguise is left to stage direction. Neither the 1623 nor the 1638 quartos include a stage direction indicating crossdress. However, by the 19<sup>th</sup> century, editions of the play including stage directions for costuming Eugenia in 'male attire' are common. The Oxford Scholarly Edition based on the quarto held at the Bodleian Library does not indicate any crossdress.

<sup>44</sup> Sometimes Laverdine (See Malone Society edition and Shapiro 85).

In Act Three, Laverdure expresses his attraction directly to Veramour saying, “I had not seene a youth that hath pleased me better” and asks the boy to leave his current service (3.3.206). When he is met with hesitation, Laverdure escalates and explicitly tells his object of attraction, “thou shouldest lie with me” (3.3.217). Veramour is wholly against the proposition declaring that he would rather have sex with his “Ladies Monkey” than with the suitor and furthermore decries reports of Neopolitan men who sleep with their pages (3.3.218). This rejection convinces Laverdure that the boy is disguised as a woman, and he concludes that only a contrary woman would prefer a monkey to a man. Mario DiGangi notes the decidedly nonconsensual nature of this exchange “Laverdine fears being punished as a sodomite because he intends to marry Veramour: his desire not only violates the reproductive and social functions of marriage but, given the boy’s reluctance, might be considered a species of rape” (31). The two have no further exchanges until Laverdure attempts to out the boy as a woman and claim the supposed woman within for himself.

Laverdure is such a pathetic figure – for both his ambitious hope to marry the lady, Lamira, and his attraction to the servant beneath him – that when he vehemently repeats his belief that Veramour is a woman, Veramour eventually humors him:

LAVERDURE. This is the Gentlewoman.

MONTAIGNE. This, ‘tis my Page sir.

VERAMOUR. No sir, I am a poor disguis’d Lady

that like a Page hath followed you full long

For love god-wot. (5.4.228)

Using a popular plot reference evident in many of the texts previously examined here of a female character disguising herself to pursue a lover, Veramour seemingly contradicts his former master by admitting to being a woman. Unusual because the reveal is not facilitated by the woman or by a father figure, this new knowledge is shocking to the onlookers, most

especially the Montaigne who has shared a bed with the boy. He testifies, “But by my troth I never found her Lady” (5.4.236). The former master alludes to an intimacy he has shared with his servant and his astonishment is based on the familiarity he believes he has with the body of Veramour, more specifically Montaigne claims to “have laine together” (5.4.236). Though surprised and confused, Montaigne is quick to honor Veramour’s self-identification and immediately switches pronoun usage.

Subsequently, Laverdure feels exonerated in his persistent homoerotic attraction, though he thinks it is heteroerotic, and his instance that Veramour is a woman. Further interrogation ensues and the scene follows patterns familiar to the traditional heroine revelation.

LADY ORLEANS. Why wore you boyes cloathes?

VERAMOUR. I’le tell you Madam,

I took example by two or three playes, that methought

Concernd me (5.4.237)

Veramour’s answer suggests a widespread understanding that boy characters onstage are frequently found to be women in disguise, with at least five such plays belonging to Beaumont and Fletcher preceding this one. It particularly focuses on the characters who exist as boys throughout the entire play without hint until the final scenes expose their hidden identity, reflective especially of *Philaster*. By the performance of *The Honest Man’s Fortune*, it is a device so well utilized that Veramour openly references the familiarity with the plot and that it could possibly inspire similar behavior.

Treading close to breaking the fourth wall, Veramour’s revelation and use of a masculine disguise is accepted, but questions continue to arise regarding the servant’s motivation for secrecy.

MONTAIGNE. Why made you not me acquainted with it?

VERAMOUR. Indeed sir I knew it not my selfe,

Untill this Gentleman open'd my dull eyes,

And by perswasions made me see it (5.1.2889)

Unlike the majority of heroines who retain knowledge of and an integral connection to their previous feminine self and announce their previous name or social role when revealed, Veramour claims to have been unaware of a latent feminine identity and references the persistent assertions from Laverdure that the boy must be a girl. He remarks on having been convinced of possessing a second, hidden self; a self only revealed to him through the persuasion of Laverdure, presumably with consistent assertions during the offstage gap between their exchange in acts three and four.

This unusual stance prompts hesitation in the interrogators:

AMIENS. Could his power in words make such a change?

VERAMOUR. Yes, as truly woman as your selfe my Lord.

LAVERDURE. Why but hark you, are not you a woman then? (5.4.244)

Amiens' comment reflects a common staple in revelation patterns for a heroine; a figure disguised as a boy will announce that they are a woman in disguise, but not change attire. In such cases, the gender identity is shifted only through the power of self-identification with no physical change or attempt to provide any amount of proof. Amiens is suspicious of the validity of a change only verified by claim and Veramour offers to prove his masculinity by showing that he is wearing breeches under the dress in which he has appeared (5.4.248). Yet this does not satisfy onlookers who argue that women are capable of wearing breeches and the resident fool, La-poope, advocates "search[ing] further" (5.4.251). However, this is laughed off and no further tests or examinations are required to assure the community of Veramour's masculine identity. Laverdure is left humiliated, but generally forgiven and the play ends abruptly with Montaigne departing to marry the lady. Beaumont and Fletcher

lampoon their own history of creating men who fall in love with those dressed as boys. A man who falls in love with a boy but convinces himself it is a woman speaks to the same anxiety that a person's sexuality may be fooled by a crossdresser. However, rather than the fault be of a woman who deceives those around her for some justified end, a man makes a fool of himself and cannot blame trickery, only his errant imagination and attraction to a boy.

Not only are Beaumont and Fletcher familiar enough with the prevalence of the plot's device, but they are aware of the popular knowledge. With confidence in audience recognition, the pair employ the expectation to bait and switch their viewers, finding new humor. While this play does not contribute to the cohort of female characters, it features the willingness of Beaumont and Fletcher to manipulate the foundations of the trope and their desire to create new narratives with the well-established patterns. It is the hallmark of a generic device ubiquitous to the point of popular culture awareness. Now several years into writing successful crossdressed heroines themselves, they capitalize on it by marketing it to a regular audience. It is a play for theatre goers and for their own following.

#### F. *Love's Pilgrimage* (c. 1614)

*Love's Pilgrimage* includes two crossdressed heroines and is sourced from one of Cervantes' *Novelas exemplares* (Hicklin 74; McMullan, *Fletcher* 6). The first, Theodosia, or Theodoro in disguise, is discovered by her brother and they travel together to find a man who has abandoned her, Marc Antonio. On the road they meet a boy among a party of travelers who have been robbed, but Theodosia immediately recognizes that the boy is a second young woman in disguise. It is revealed that both women are on the same mission to find the same man who has made promises to both.

Theodosia begins her journey in a state of great distress. Though she is again a crossdressing heroine who does not immediately address her own dual identity, indications of her disguise are prevalent. Peter Hyland questions if an audience who could not read the stage direction indicating her disguise would be aware at all, arguing that there are no indicators of her femininity; however, she does behave like a heroine in disguise and follows established patterns (65). Arriving at a place of lodging, what appears to be a boy promptly faints. He is not dressed as a servant or page in typical crossdressing fashion but is in noticeably rich attire. This disguise is conspicuous and draws attention from the hosts of the inn. The woman of the house coddles the guest, worries that he is not eating as much as a typical young man, and remarks on the youth's appearance in floral terms, "sweet Lilly" and "pretty Tulip" (1.1.86, 87). A second young man, Philippo, arrives and violently demands access to the room; when he has gained his desired result, Philippo occupies the bed opposite to Theodosia. An emotionally vulnerable Theodosia decides to trust the strange gentleman sharing her room. By the second scene she has revealed, "You are deceiv'd with whom you have talkt so long. / I am a most unfortunate lost woman" (1.2.47). Theodosia's initial trust turns to anxiety as she recognizes that she is as physically vulnerable as she is emotionally. When laughed at, she feels threatened and demonstrates more masculinity than she did when disguised. Theodosia warns the young man to keep away from her and brandishes a sword in her defense: "Do not stir Sir: I have here a Sword" (1.2.49). This is an unusual display for a revealed crossdresser who has made her identity public. Though known to her companion, she clings to the representation of her masculinity, foreshadowing that she has not relinquished this identity. While Theodosia has shared her underlying feminine self, she retains the ability to call on the trappings of masculinity that offer physical safety and independence. Ostensibly the original purpose of her disguise, masculinity served to allow her to travel unharmed while unaccompanied and also to gain lodging. It is, in fact, the revelation of her female identity that now puts her at the risk she attempted to avoid, vindicating her original choice to conceal herself. Theodosia's attachment to

her weapon and the safety afforded by her borrowed masculinity outside of her disguise crosses a new boundary of the trope.

Philippo makes no attempt to attack her, rendering her display effective. With physical safety assured, Theodosia offers her personal history and tells of a desperate quest to find a man who is contracted to marry her but has disappeared. She explains that she has a brother who is friends with the man, and she hopes to gain help from this brother. It is from him that her disguise has been borrowed (1.2.99). Desperation seeps through her revelations and she has little faith in her own ability to achieve her goals without assistance, yet she is filled with undying determination and resourcefulness. Philippo reacts strongly to what he has heard and demands to see her, calling for a candle. In the light, the two recognize each other. He is the sibling she seeks. She becomes overwhelmed and utterly submissive to her brother. Ashamed of the state in which she has been found, Theodosia pleads,

My Brother Don Philippo: nay Sir, kil mee.

I ask no mercy Sir...

Behold in infinite these foul dishonors,

...ye have a sword sir,

And such a cause to kil me in (1.2.133)

Theodosia believes her disguise and masculine identity is shameful. Her ensemble and deception are described in catastrophic terms, and she believes that her transgression may be worthy of capital punishment. Philippo chooses not to use his weapon against his sister, on one condition: "Rise Sister: / I wear no sword for women: nor no anger / While your fair chastity is yet untouch'd" (1.2.144). His offer of potential forgiveness is contingent on Theodosia's virginity: so long as she has not had sex, consensually or otherwise, he will not kill her. While previous female crossdressers have used masculine facades to seek safety

from sexual assault, this is the first instance in which virginity is an explicit requirement for social redemption for crossdressing.

When she assures her brother emphatically that she meets his sexual expectations, the two devise a plan to embark on a journey to pursue the wayward fiancé. It is Filippo that opens the opportunity for Theodosia to preserve her disguise, and invites her to create a specific identity:

PHILIPPO. Then it shal be: what must I cal ye?

Come, do not blush: pray speak, I may spoil all else.

THEODOSIA. Pray cal me Theodoro. (1.2.173)

Staying in crossdress, Theodosia redefines her disguise. No longer appropriating her brother's possessions, she aligns her new masculine identity with her feminine self and chooses a derivative name. She takes more ownership of this second incarnation and yet Filippo now criticizes her for betraying her femininity. Once again, a blush marks her inability to restrain her unconscious feminine action; nevertheless, Filippo conflates her identity and physical presentation and calls her both 'brother' and 'sister' (1.2.156, 177).

With new determination, the siblings begin their expedition after Marc Antonio, the renegade lover. On the dangerous road the pair meet Leocadia, the second disguised young woman, whose presentation convinces Filippo that she is a boy. Nevertheless, he quickly becomes deeply fond and protective of the strange traveler and, learning that Leocadia had been robbed, he expresses distress and specifically notes the boy's attractiveness: "A sweet fac'd Boy, indeed: what rogues were these? / What barbarous brutish slaves, to strip this beauty?" (2.2.113). The siblings take responsibility for the boy; but in their attempt to learn about their new companion, Theodosia becomes suspicious. Leocadia answers the questions that the siblings ask, but her story shifts as the interrogation escalates. She claims to be the son of a Don; however, the Filippo knows that the man only has a daughter. Theodosia

notices, “He is ashamed, and blushes” (2.2.175). The blush is dramatic on the face of what looks to be a boy which concerns Theodosia who has also noticed verbal signifiers that suggest femininity: “Mark his language, / And ye shall find it of too sweet a relish / For one of such a breed: ile pawn my hand, / This is no boy” (2.2.185). Philippo does not share his sister’s discernment and is not immediately convinced that what he sees is not the truth. Philippo demonstrates a particular distress at not being able to appraise the bodies he sees correctly and immediately. However, it takes his sister, a woman in crossdress, to identify these established feminine signifiers on a contrary body. This is an evolved version of the encounter between the women in *Gallathea*. The earlier text features two disguised women with suspicions of each other’s concealment, but neither confronts the other. Here we are offered a bolder recognition and agency in expressing that awareness. Theodosia shares her doubts directly with Leocadia in a private conversation between the two, remarking on the discernable blushing exhibited. “I have beheld ye narrowly (more blushes!)... / You would ill cover an offence might sink ye / That cannot hide your self” (3.2.19). Leocadia cannot continue to counter these accusations. Her body involuntarily behaves in a feminine manner. The obvious feminine actions exhibited are clear enough to Theodosia that Leocadia confesses. She finally admits under pressure, “I am a woman... / Here you must give me leave to shew my sex” (3.2.51). How Leocadia ‘shows’ her sex is left unclear; however, this encounter highlights Theodosia’s ability to perceive Leocadia’s femininity. It takes a feminine gaze to accurately acknowledge the traits which a patriarchal society has defined as appropriate to that gender.

Leocadia’s revelation leads to an outpouring of her personal history which includes a romance with a man who turns out to be Marc Antonio. Shocked, Theodosia (who still maintains her own disguise) responds manically, pelting Leocadia with questions about her potential sexual encounter, though from an unexpected perspective: “And when the night

came, came he, kept he touch with ye? / Be not so shamefast; had ye both your wishes? / ...did he lie with ye?" (3.2.95). Theodosia is surprisingly non-judgmental and sex positive towards the desire to want to consummate their relationship. She does not hold Leocadia solely responsible for this desire and acknowledges that there must be a mutual choice to pursue such a consensual sexual relationship. Theodosia has a selfish, emotional interest, not a moral one. If they slept together, their contract is binding, offering Theodosia no hope for her own claim. Leocadia is confused at the clear investment Theodosia demonstrates ("Why do you ask so neerly?") but proclaims that she was completely left alone, after which Marc Antonio abandoned Leocadia for another woman (3.2.103).

Realizing that this is the beginning of her own story, Theodosia advocates for empathy and criticizes Leocadia for her anger with, "Ye are too violent" (3.2.149). Here, Theodosia uses her appearance to assert an appropriated patriarchal authority and gatekeep Leocadia's behavior as a woman, hypocritically chiding her masculine behavior. When they return to Philipppo, he pretends he already knew: "I ghest it was a woman, and a fair one. / I see it through her shape, transparent plain (3.2.226). Leocadia is made more vulnerable through sharing her identity and Philipppo's attraction to her is pointed, proving its initial usefulness as warding off such attention. Though the siblings pledge their help, Leocadia is now at the mercy of Philipppo's attraction and Theodosia's jealousy, both hazards she avoided under the protection of disguise.

The traveling party eventually confront Marc Antonio who, in intermittent scenes, has shown a blatant disrespect and disdain for both women. He instigates a fight and when he is struck down, Theodosia faints, a familiar reaction for a disguised heroine who witnesses violence. She regains consciousness believing that Marc Antonio is dead. Philipppo is furious at his sister for her perceived feminine weakness and the obligation he feels towards her when he would rather pursue Leocadia, who has gone missing:

You women bear to swoonings; you do pick  
 Your times to faint, when some body is by  
 Bound or by nature, or by love, or service  
 To raise you from that well dissembled death (4.1.155)

Theodosia is blamed for an unconscious bodily reaction deemed indicative of her femininity and her brother nearly reveals her as a result.

Marc Antonio is wounded and attempting to woo a married woman, Eugenia, in the presence of the two disguised women. This woman, Eugenia, fiercely rejects him while the crossdressers express automatic forgiveness even as he assaults the woman and kisses her breasts. Ultimately, Marc Antonio believes in his impending death and has a sudden moment of epiphany and repentance after being made aware of Leocadia's true identity, "I was betroth'd to Theodosia / Before I ever saw thee; heaven forgive me, / She is my wife this half hour whilst I live" (4.3.171). Marc Antonio in his fear and self-pity settles the unspoken dispute. He did not sleep with Leocadia and his first contract, in fact, belongs to Theodosia. Though she had been abandoned and so recently witnessed his proclivity for abuse, Theodosia reveals herself to Marc Antonio and is elated to be reunited, "That's I, that's I! I'me Theodosia... / What I so long have sought for" (4.3.182). It is a complete restoration and reunion for both figures, Theodosia's disguise has been successful and accomplished her aims. She traveled in safety and redeemed her wayward lover. Theodosia is restored to her feminine identity and place in society, yet the conclusion of the play is delayed by Leocadia's second disappearance.

In the wake of a heartbreaking abandonment, Leocadia is pursued and found by Philippo. He has discovered feelings for the woman, still attired as a man. His expression of these emotions is based heavily on his summation of his own perception. Leocadia is not convinced at the prospect of a replacement romantic interest, but Philippo believes his

opinion of Leocadia and his faith in his ability to discern her feelings and emotions will be persuasive.

I have observ'd the method of your blood,  
 ...  
 I knew which blush was angers, which was loves,  
 Which was the eye of sorrow, which of truth;  
 And could distinguish honor from disdain  
 In every change; And you are worth my study (5.4.26)

Again, Filippo prioritizes his interpretation of Leocadia and her body. Though he did not initially recognize her, he claims a flawless capacity to read her involuntary blushes. He believes in his own analysis and flatters Leocadia based on his own desires. He defines her by his own standards and labels her to be worthy of his attention. This is unsurprisingly successful; thus far his imposed expectations have been met. Leocadia agrees to be with him and Filippo discloses her identity to her newly arrived father. Her father is angry at the deception he believes is dishonoring to him. This escalates to a threat of duel between Marc Antonio and Filippo which is only dissipated by the reappearance of the women. Femininely dressed for the first time, the women express their love and use their new identities to quell the potential for violence.

*Love's Pilgrimage* pits two crossdressing heroines against each other in a fresh look at what a relationship between two female crossdressers can be. One heroine sees through the feigned masculinity of the other and they serve as rivals rather than companions or wannabe lovers. Both pursue the same lover in an advancement of a familiar pattern and the lover must repent for the heroines to find restoration and love. This play takes the modes of heroine crossdressing and expands them to new potentials based on the framework of conventional themes.

G. *Love's Cure, or the Martial Maid* (c. 1615)

Attributed to either Beaumont and Fletcher, Fletcher and Massinger, or a collaboration of the three, *Love's Cure, or The Martial Maid* is possibly Fletcher's most recognizable piece; this play features twin siblings, a girl and boy, Clara and Lucio, who have been raised separately (Duncan 398; Perez 3). The children's father, Alvarez, has been exiled for killing a man in a duel and has fled with his daughter, without the boy and his wife. The girl was subsequently raised by her father as a boy and the boy by his mother as a girl; the boy to be protected from the enemies still in the city who might enact vengeance on a boy and the girl to protect her on the battlefields where she is raised. Both have grown up being addressed by their respective sibling's name. After sixteen years, Alvarez, a duke, is pardoned and returns from banishment; he is accompanied by his child. Lamoral, a friend to Vitelli (Alvarez's enemy), shares the history of the family and that he has been an escort to the newly arrived pair, "I bring him, with his little son, grown man / (Though 'twas said here he took a daughter with him)" (1.1.37). This makes it clear to the audience that this character is likely a heroine crossdresser but the other characters outside the family are unaware. Begrudgingly and over the course of 28 lines, Lamoral admits the successes of the formerly banished son who has demonstrated bravery and heroism at war. He explains how the "brave youth" was "careless of danger" and subsequently struck a man down in heroic fashion with a sword in the heat of battle (1.1.56). This lengthy accolade, which fully details a noble charge into battle and a remarkable physical display, is followed by praises given to the young man for his heroism; Lamoral explains that the successes went as far as to endear the soldier to an infanta who facilitated the pardon recently granted to the duke. Both the achievements in masculine violence and flirtation with the infanta earn the hero and the father the opportunity to return home; it is only from the triumphs of the person known as Lucio that this occurs.

While the young man is not immediately identified as a woman in this first scene, Lamoral has planted the seeds of potential for the revelation for all audiences familiar with the popularized device. Although these actions are only reported, and therefore offer tentative, second or third hand proof through war stories, the audience is called to imagine and believe in a male war hero, whose physical feats of valor would be impressive for anybody, who may have been born a woman. This person who is associated, even if vaguely, with a feminine identity (or at least that a daughter was taken away and a son brought back) is reported to have defeated an enemy “with one strong blow” (1.1.60). This martial maid is an exception to the expectation that a female heroine cannot be violent. In this alone all precedents for the ensuing plot have already been broken. By the production of *Love’s Cure* nearly thirty plays with crossdressing heroines had been performed and published. Though many of these characters encountered, feared, or bravely stood in the face of violence, none have yet performed violence with such success or praise. This character, Clara using the identity of her brother Lucio, is not inhibited by her preexisting female identity. Her young girlish childhood, however short it may have been before her banishment, has been written over by a masculine adolescence and a new adulthood defined by the same masculinity of which she is conspicuously capable. Presented in circumstances that argue for nurture superseding nature, at least in part, Clara is prepared to be a man, a noble one of notable repute; she has never lived as an adult woman and has long left her identity as a girl.

Her brother, Lucio, is subsequently introduced as an equally proficient woman, Clara. Multitasking by running a household, taking charge of servants, and producing needlework, Clara, is the epitome of an ideal noble lady. While Clara’s secret identity is largely hinted at initially, Lucio’s crossdressing is immediately addressed. Bobadilla, a male companion familiar with Lucio’s disguise as his sister, expresses immense distress at the confusing success of a man who represents every stereotype of a woman. This negative reaction to male

crossdressing is common, though not universal in such narratives; in Mary Wroth's *Urania* (a non-dramatic work), crossdressing men are deemed "extraordinarily beautiful" and praised (Chess, *Male 2*; Roberts 52). While Lucio scolds and threatens to tattle to his mother, Bobadilla calls him a "hermaphrodite" and wonders that there is supposed to be a penis, which he terms "the best of a man," under the dress that Lucio wears; Bobadilla questions the presumed male characteristics of Lucio's physical body based on the convincing feminine signifying actions he performs (1.2.7). Simone Chess details the characteristics of the male to female crossdressing trope, a popular though somewhat less prevalent device with thirty plays extant by the early seventeenth century compared to the fifty that make use of female to male crossdressing; many of these themes overlap with female to male crossdressing including transitions of class, encounters of violence, and the active manipulation of societal gender expectations (*Male 1*).

However, *Love's Cure* is novel in both female-to-male and male-to-female crossdressing genres, presenting parallel crossdressers of each gender and their personal journeys as they de-transition. Furthermore, there is an overt obsession with the physical characteristics of sex expressed in this play; Anne Duncan remarks that *Love's Cure* "seems to be grounded in biology" (402). There is an explicit quality to discussion of the body, genitalia, and potential contradictions between the body and gender performance that is created by comparing siblings who are incredibly successful at performing gender, but who each possess anatomical sex organs that are openly contradictory to the identity that they project. The open knowledge of their parents and companions, in conjunction with suspicion from the larger community, prompts unease and discussion over the bodies and social roles that the siblings inhabit. Biological reference underlines the apprehension and obsession associated with maintaining a gender norm surrounded by uncertainty. In an example of yet another play that employs the Galenic theories of biologic sexual transition caused by

outward influences including socialization, Bobadillo is consumed with anxiety that Lucio will never prove his sexuality or that his body may permanently be impacted by his embrace of a feminine lifestyle. As these two characters reach adulthood and the danger to their persons ends, their parents deem it is no longer necessary nor appropriate for these long-term disguises and alternative identities to continue. Significantly, however, undoing their transitions is shown to be painful and made with an effort which is an entirely unique approach to a de-transition experience in crossdressing narratives up to this point.

Where Lucio shows proficiency with words, Clara is used to being a person of action. Resenting upheaval, she shows frustration at merely being brought into a society of nobles, not soldiers. She asserts, “I had rather meet ten enemies in the field, / ...than be brought on / To change an houres discourse with one of these / Smooth City fools” (1.3.12). Her irritation is met with compassion by her father, Alvarez, who acknowledges the difficult position in which he has placed his daughter, socially and personally. He reveals that she has been living not only as a boy, but specifically in the life intended for her brother and establishes the criteria for Clara’s new position.

My lovd Clara,  
 (For Lucio is a name thou must forget  
 With Lucios bold behaviour) though thy breeding  
 I’the camp, may plead something in the excuse  
 Of thy rough manners, custom having chang’d,  
 Though not thy sex, the softness of thy nature,  
 And fortune, (then a cruel stepdame to thee)  
 Impos’d upon thy tender sweetness, burthens  
 Of hunger, cold, wounds, want  
 ...

Thou shalt no more have need to use thy sword;  
 Thy beauty (which even Belgia hath not alter'd)  
 Shall be a stronger guard, to keep my Clara (1.3.17)

Alvarez makes it evident that Clara has risen to any masculine occasion or hardship at the cost of feminine signifiers. No longer soft, her father sees potential redemption in her enduring beauty. Stripping her of her sword, he offers that her looks should be her consolation and protection. This is contrary to the purpose of many heroines who choose to don masculine disguises to protect themselves from others abusing their beauty. Struggling with the age-old battle of nature versus nurture, Clara acquiesces to her father with the caveat that she would prefer to simply be a man. Her hesitation is unusual and desire to remain masculine is only mirrored in *Gallathea* where a woman is allowed to continue her life as a man. But this is not offered to Clara and though her transition is not entirely willing, she bends to the pressures of her father. Unwavering, Alvarez insists that she should “endeavour rather / To be what you are” and (in this new space) return “as you were borne” and be “a woman.” (1.3.39).

Though most heroines in crossdress de-transition unprompted when their identity is made public, whether from their own revelation or if outed, Clara does so only after being directed. She consents to a physical reversion of her appearance and subjugates herself to Alvarez’s will as her patriarchal authority, but she continues to struggle with releasing her masculine actions. Jennifer Vaught uses examples of the cultural shift from military vocation and clothing to civilian life during the early modern period to emphasize an emotional disturbance often found in males who lacked an outlet for violent behavior. She categorizes them as “demilitarized men who are hard to tell from women,” men who have lost an outlet for their aggression and more importantly lost the primary venue through which their masculinity could be tested, measured, and proven (119). Clara has been raised in a male,

military culture and found her own remarkably successful identity through these standards. When Clara's sword is taken from her, her identity wavers. She struggles to understand her rehabilitated gender role and is only restored temporarily when called to arms by her father. Her father is attacked and calls for aid; and though Lucio is also present, Alvarez requests his daughter and not his son. Clara is grateful to resume her masculine persona and participate in violent conflict, "Fortune I give thee thanks / For this occasion once more to use it" (1.3.82). She shames those men present who do not match her vigor and enthusiasm for violent aggression. Among them is Lucio, who would not fight and fled the skirmish.

In attempting to quantify Shakespeare's concept of masculinity, Robin H. Wells defines military accomplishments as being entirely synonymous with masculinity, as "the word masculine was often used to signify martial or heroic qualities" (7). After an impassioned speech from Clara who is still recognized physically and publicly as a man by strangers who do not know her intent to transition, Alvarez expresses a confused pride in witnessing his daughter's capability and leadership even as he is attempting to change it. He muses, "I am pleas'd / With what I dare not give allowance to. / Unnaturall wretch, what wilt thou doe?" (1.3.138). As a concerned father, Alvarez pities the position in which he has placed his daughter. He is not ashamed of what he has taught her but acknowledges the difficulties she will face as he forces her to abandon the self she has performed and identified with until this point. He worries that her acts of war place her irrecoverably in a masculine position. Clara spares the life of her opponent, who still views the person in front of him as a man. Alvarez must justify Clara's actions to her mother, who witnesses the scuffle but had not previously seen her daughter become violent. Having made the same agreement and produced an equally proficient feminine son, Eugenia quantifies the results by giving a value to the resulting impact on the gender performance of the sibling.

You, in a Man,

Have given to me a Daughter, in a Woman,  
 I give to you a Son;  
 ...as she appears,  
 Alter'd by Custom, more than Woman, he  
 Transform'd by his soft Life, is less than Man. (1.3.202)

For the first time in early modern drama, *Love's Cure* addresses explicitly the anxiety of re-transitioning gender identity.

While *The Roaring Girl's* Moll faces the liminal social states of being masculine and female and a multitude of characters emerge from varying commitments of gendered disguise, Clara and Lucio have been conditioned through their formative years, not of their own volition, to identify as a gender opposite to the one they were respectively assigned at birth. Resocialization poses significant stress on each sibling's sense of identity. The playwrights provide an examination of the emotional turmoil experienced by their siblings, an insight which is new to the trope and filled with a fresh anxiety. While characters in the past have struggled to live in their disguise and *Gallathea's* lovers hope to continue their relationship by keeping one partner male, it is radical to witness two characters so uncomfortable returning to the identities of their birth even though their identities are known to their family, household, and close companions from the start; by the second act, their clothing must change, and the community becomes aware of their identities incrementally. This play is interested in the distress surrounding the potential for the performance of gender to create gender, risking the integrity of an internal 'primary' identity or even anatomical biology. The intimate insight into both the concern of the family who incited the disguises and the anxiety of the siblings as they are socially reconditioned is a significantly more personal view of a trans experience than offered in previous dramas.

Lucio's failure does not garner the same compassion for his struggle. Bobadilla threatens the boy with claims that his father will correct him through grievous acts of violence. With frustration, the threat that Alvarez will, "cut off thy Masculine gender," is lobbed at the distressed Lucio (2.2.61). Later, Alvarez himself expresses similar violent anger toward his son who struggles with assuming new masculinity. The societal tie between violence and manhood is extreme enough to risk Lucio's status with his father who is angry enough to threaten violence. As Derek Cohen notes "[a]cts of violence belong to patriarchy as surely as fathers do" and this emphasis on patriarchy grows in the Jacobean era (1). When Bobadilla threatens her brother for his masculine ineptitude and though she has been forced into feminine clothing, Clara still defends Lucio with her bare hands by "choke" (2.2.120).<sup>45</sup> It is Lucio who convinces her not to harm Bobadilla. Though appearing in feminine clothing and attempting to identify as a woman, Clara still consistently demonstrates proficient masculine behavior. Her violence is undeniably associated with maleness and cannot be justified as a female trait. She attracts judgement from her brother who demands, "When will you be a woman" as her masculine actions overwhelm her attire (2.2.157). Initially, neither sibling can tolerate their new clothing and cling to their old lives. Clara's assimilation is painful and slow. When she is re-assimilated into feminine culture, it goes beyond her attire: she must be demilitarized. Bobadilla has already informed her that violence is not appropriate for her new identity, "remember Mistresse: nature hath given you a sheath onely, to signifie women are to put up mens weapons, not to draw them," but she struggles not to return to her habits (2.2.96). Explicit physical biology is used to shame Clara and she is unable to contest

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<sup>45</sup> Another play features a heroine who attempts to defend herself. *The Partial Law*, a play with an unknown author who is compared to Massinger and unclear date between 1620-1630, shares a plot with Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso Canto V* (Dobell xi; Shapiro 222). The Shakespeare Folger Library lists the manuscript as 1620; Thomas Marc Parrott and Walter Wilson Greg believe the play is Caroline (Greg, *The Modern* 118; Parrott 542). The author's unique addition is Florabella's use of disguise "to act as her own champion" (Dobell xi). Florabella dresses as a gentleman in order to defend herself and she intends to die in the duel to prove her innocence and virginity when it is questioned. Lucina, her companion, also disguises herself as a male servant. The crossdressed women are intercepted and Bellamour, her lover, wins the fight instead.

the patriarchal insistence that she return to an outward feminine presentation in order to preserve her female self.

When Clara arrives at the final scene, a confrontation between her father and his enemy Vitelli has arisen. Clara has since fallen in love with Vitelli, the same man whose uncle was killed by Alvarez, prompting the banishment of her family. Flanked by her mother and brother's new love interest (who is incidentally also Vitelli's sister), Genevora, Clara and the others insist on using their voices to convince the men to end a potentially deadly duel. Clara comes to the men passively. Instead of physically interfering as she did before, she kneels before them and acknowledges "[h]ow little power" is left to her (5.3.121). In her return to femininity, she forfeits her physical agency. Clara's final plea to her own lover, the presence of whom provides the final catalyst for her transition, is for his weapon so that she may end the tension. She is denied that weapon and speaks of the heterosexual love which forced her into her new passive position.

In me, that I forgot my sex, and knew not  
 Whether my body female were or male,  
 You did unweave, and had the power to charm  
 A new creation in me, made me fear  
 To think on those deeds I did perpetrate. (5.3.115)

Clara willingly concedes that she experienced confusion and did not remember the sex with which she was born. She attributes her change to engaging in a sexual attraction and relationship with a man; through her desire to participate in a traditional heteroerotic relationship, she learned shame for her former actions. In order to fill the role of a woman in a hetero-normative relationship, Clara must completely sacrifice her former behaviors and identity and her desire to engage in her new relationship makes her willing to part with her masculinity. Vitelli emasculates her and she forfeits her agency to him. When she proves

capable of exchanging her habitual masculinity for deference, she is accepted in her new relationship and with her pleas to stop the violence, peace is restored to the community. Lucio also responds to Clara's call for an end to the animosity, a call which is echoed by his own betrothed, Genevora; he finally proves his willingness to perform masculine violence and achieves his own heterosexual union. Clara's clothing, violence, socialization, and circumstantial influence allow her to possess masculine agency boldly, but her sexual awakening and intent to participate in a relationship with a man desolate her power to retain these traits.

*Love's Cure* marks a substantial transition in the approach to virginal crossdressing heroines, offering characters who face internalized identity crises and navigate gradual and complex gender transitions rather than immediate and subdued reversion to a fully developed sense of female selfhood. In breaking this boundary, Beaumont and Fletcher continue to pursue the evolution of the female crossdressing trope by shifting both their use of character and generic convention.

#### H. *The Faithful Friends* (c. 1620)

*The Faithful Friends*, or sometimes *The Faithful Friend*, is likely a Beaumont and Fletcher play but the authorship remains debated (Pincess xvi; Wiggins, *Vol. VII* 289). In it, a young woman, Lelia, has been missing for some time. The community, including her brother, Marcus Tullius, believed that she had followed her lover, Marius, when he was exiled from Rome. Marius, who has returned to marry Lelia, believed that she had stayed behind. Both men become distressed when they learn neither knows her location, as she has spent this time crossdressed as a boy servant called Janus who serves the lady Philadelphia. Lelia plans to reveal herself but war is coming. As Janus, she asks to serve as arms bearer for Marius, a

repeat of the disguised heroine who serves her lover to become closer to him trope as seen in *The Four Prentices of London*, *The Faithful Friends*, *Ram Alley*, *Clyomon and Clamydes*, and *The Fleire*, *The Wise Woman of Hogsdon*, *More Dissemblers Besides Women*, and *Philaster*. An act of violence reveals her; Marius is stabbed, and Lelia cannot defend him. Her distress immediately confirms her feminine identity to the attackers; she does not deny it. A wounded Marius recognizes his love, and they are reunited. Marius survives and Lelia remains disguised as a boy, going unrecognized by her brother before Marius shares the news that she has been found. Lelia spends the remainder of the play clothed as a woman and receives a blessing to be married in the end.

#### I. *The Pilgrim* (c. 1621)

*The Pilgrim*, a Fletcher play performed by the King's Players at court at Whitehall, has a plot entirely focused on heroine crossdressing with a farcical nature compared to *As You Like It* and based on Lope de Vega's *El peregrino en su patria* (Dyce B2; Hoy 113; McMullan, *Fletcher* 8; Wilson 140, 141). In this under-researched play, such antics revolve around trying to discover a runaway young woman in disguise. As the Fletcher play with the most disguises, *The Pilgrim* capitalizes on the frequency of Jacobean heroine crossdressing through giving knowledge of the tactic to its characters (Wilson 140). For the first time in the advent of heroine crossdressing, a community stumbles around knowing that a crossdresser is in their midst, but they still struggle to identify her, and the tradition of effective disguise is upheld as multiple female characters utilize numerous feminine and masculine disguises.

Alinda has eyes for Pedro, the son of her father's enemy, who has suddenly disappeared from the community. Alinda is deeply unhappy because her father is cruel, but she is generous and spends her time serving the poor. Pedro arrives disguised as a destitute

pilgrim; he claims that Alinda's reputation is "the holiest we ere heard of" and that he has come to witness her piety (1.2.39). The two converse but Alinda does not recognize Pedro. As they part, he tells her "I seek my self; and am but my self-shadow" (1.2.164). Alinda recognizes these words; they are inscribed on a ring gifted to her by Pedro. Too late she realizes the identity of her stranger and Alinda disappears to search for him.

An outlaw, Roderigo, discovers a young boy and takes him in. In a now familiar pattern notably seen in *Cymbeline*, the boy servant is called "pretty" and treated gently (2.2.33). Pedro, still in his disguise, is also captured by the outlaws; however, Roderigo recognizes him. They argue and Roderigo threatens to hang Pedro while Pedro attempts to use his conversion as a holy man to avoid violence. Roderigo's men balk at his order to execute a religious man; but Pedro resigns himself to his fate. At this, Alinda enters crossdressed for the first time, and Roderigo demands that his new boy perform the hanging. Understandably distressed, Alinda tries to avoid this task by claiming, "I am a boy, and weake, sir" (2.2.266). Desperate to avoid violence, Alinda convinces Roderigo that he will not have satisfactory revenge if Pedro dies willingly with his soul prepared for heaven, so Roderigo agrees to delay Pedro's execution.

When Roderigo discovers that this boy is carrying jewelry that he himself gave to Alinda, he realizes who she is; however, Alinda has already escaped. Shortly after, Juletta, Alinda's companion and servant, arrives at the outlaw camp also disguised as a boy. Unseen by the other characters, Juletta does not find her mistress, but secretly she attempts to sabotage Roderigo and Alinda's father, Alphonso, in their attempts to find Alinda.

Alinda searches for Pedro while her father's men search for her. She is initially found but is not recognized as a woman. Juletta then encounters her mistress and neither recognizes the other immediately, but suspicion arises. However, both encounter several groups, including one explicitly looking for a girl in disguise, and continue to go undiscovered. As he

searches for his daughter, Alinda's father comments, "She has been here in boyes apparel, Gentlemen, / A gallant thing, and famous for a Gentlewoman" (3.4.53). The use of a page disguise by a noblewoman in plays is so prevalent a trope by this time that it garners comment.

Alinda is again found wandering and is taken in by the keeper of a madhouse where, coincidentally, Pedro has volunteered to help the inhabitants. This time, he recognizes Alinda, and they begin to embrace and kiss, which the madhouse workers read as a sign of their insanity. Though Alinda's disguise has dissolved for Pedro, it remains effective for others. The two are forcibly separated and the melancholy Pedro bids his love, "Farewell for ever" (3.7.171).

In the meantime, Juletta has followed Alphonso with the intention to harass him. Alinda changes from her disguise as a boy into a female fool, approaches her own father, continuing to go unrecognized. The two women, now reunited but still not knowing each other, band together to impede Alphonso in the search for his daughter. As Juletta leaves, she recognizes a ring that Alinda has gifted her and realizes the identity of the boy she met. This is the second time jewelry possession has revealed Alinda. But it is again too late; they have parted.

Roderigo has dressed in a pilgrim's disguise to hunt Alinda who, still dressed as a fool, initially mistakes him for Pedro but soon discovers the trick. Roderigo and Pedro meet, nearly fight, but become friends. Alphonso arrives at the madhouse to have his daughter released but he instead finds a female patient wearing Alinda's boy disguise: so now we have a third crossdressing female character. While the madhouse keepers are fooled by the clothing, this time Alphonso – in a variation on a father seeing through a heroine's disguise – is able to see past the costume.

When Alinda and Juletta reappear, they are dressed as old women and are working together. They send Roderigo away to a temple to repent. The play concludes at the temple where Alinda and Juletta arrive in final disguises as shepherdesses. Alinda is recognized quickly but when asked, Juletta claims to be a boy in shepherdess' clothing, although she finally relents when she has sufficiently tormented Alphonso. He tries to marry her off, but she refuses and claims "My mistress is my husband" (5.6.120). Pedro and Alinda come together and Roderigo pledges to serve the governor.

This is a play built on Fletcher's own customs in creating heroine crossdressers with scenarios that benefit from and echo his own canon. The characters know that a young woman might disguise herself as a boy if she runs away, particularly if she is pursuing a lover; yet the community still fails to recognize a crossdresser under their nose. A father knows that he should be able to recognize his daughter even if she is dressed masculinely but he struggles to do so and is mocked for his inability. A female servant crossdresses to support her crossdressing mistress but they humorously also succumb to the false appearance of each other. Disguises are used in rapid succession and the heroines exhibit more agency over their situation and desires than the men they deceive. This is a text about knowing crossdressing and the common elements of the trope as it has evolved into the Jacobean period.

By the conclusion of the Jacobean period, Beaumont and Fletcher are able to participate in the development of a new genre, the establishment of generic conventions for that genre, and the evolution of that genre beyond early practices. Together they represent the largest collection of plays with a female to male crossdressing characters by that time. Their prolific contribution to the trope is indicative of a larger popularity of the trope; a popularity they deftly exploit. Beaumont and Fletcher produce this extensive body of work within the context of a general boom in the genre. By their final example of crossdressing heroines at the end of the first fifty-five years of the trope, nearly fifty such plays had been published. In

the following fifty years, more than twice that many would be created. These works signal sweeping cultural and thematic shifts in early modern drama where female crossdressing is a staple device both with established conventions and emerging evolutions, cemented as a fashionable and enduring plot for the stage.

## VI. Single Plays

While the authors examined above created multiple examples of dramatic works with female crossdressing characters and provide insight into authorial intent and growth, they do not exist in a vacuum. The sheer popularity of the trope prompted an array of authors to dabble in the creation of female crossdressing characters: between 1570-1625 there are nearly twenty extant examples of this phenomena. For some of these authors, like John Lyly, this heroine crossdressing play represents one play in a significant body of work; for others, like Lording Barry, the play that appears here is the only surviving work (Hunter 4; Kathman, *Barry* 1). Although they provide only one play, these authors contribute significantly to the early development of the trope and the establishment of generic form through the first decades of usage in terms of volume and invention.<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, while these authors do participate in the furthering of developing generic conventions, many also produce devices unique to their own play and progress evolutions of the trope. Collectively, these plays provide an excellent overview of the progression of crossdressing heroines as a subgenre over its first fifty-five years beyond the canon of a single playwright.

This final chapter is an examination of the contributions of a sampling of those plays, each chosen as a representation of elements that exemplify the genre as a whole or a notable divergence. The brief summaries of plays not discussed at length here can be found in footnotes throughout this thesis that mark their connection to heroine crossdressing.

*Gallathea*, featuring Gallathea and Phyllida, is one of the earliest extant heroine crossdressing plays; it introduces patterns and themes that can be found in plays throughout the decades

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<sup>46</sup> There are small exceptions: George Chapman writes both *May Day* which appears in a footnote in Chapter III and *The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois*. Massinger authors *The Duke of Milan* which appears in a footnote in Chapter V and likely collaborated on *The Honest Man's Fortune*. Samuel Daniel is the creator of *Hymen's Triumph* and potentially *Philotus* which appears in a footnote in Chapter II. Several plays are anonymous and ongoing attribution efforts do not discount the possibility of these playwrights having a hand in other works.

following it but also provides one heroine an opportunity never seen again: the chance to remain living as a man. The two crossdressers in *The Fleire*, Susan and Nan, go into service of men they are romantically pursuing; two heroines and their morally dubious rivals engage with explicit sexuality and class division. *The Dumb Night*'s Mariana finds eleventh hour agency and courage through crossdressing that echoes Shakespeare's Portia. Personal tragedy drives the heroine of *The Hogge Hath Lost His Pearl*, Maria, to seek penance and self-punishment through crossdressing and an attempt to abandon her former self. *Ram Alley* derives inspiration from the plays before it to structure its plot but allows its heroine, Constantia, to embrace her masculinity in ways that the characters she resembles do not. Charlotte, the forceful heroine of *The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois*, craves violent justice and is willing to use masculine disguise and action to an extent rarely seen in trope to achieve her goals. Finally, *Hymen's Triumph* crosses generic boundaries, presenting its heroine, Silvia, who does not survive her foray into masculine disguise.

### A. *Gallathea* (1592)

No examination of female crossdressed characters in early modern drama would be complete without an exploration of John Lyly's *Gallathea*, one of the earliest and most significant examples of this trope; for as Christopher Wixson notes, it is one of "only five plays between 1570 and 1590 that contain heroines in a male disguise" (Brown 220; Wixson 248).<sup>47</sup> Michael Shapiro emphasizes its singularity insofar as it is Lyly's only use of the plot device (221). However, *Gallathea* is not only impressive for being such an early example of this kind of character but also because of the complex use of crossdressing. Lyly's play written to be performed by choir boys contains two female characters who dress as pages throughout the play and, even more remarkably, he also creates the opportunity for one to live permanently in her new form (Briggs 265). While several plays include multiple heroine crossdressers (e.g., *The Merchant of Venice*, *Cupid's Revenge*, *The Maid's Tragedy*, *Love's Pilgrimage*, and *The Pilgrim*), Lyly creates two equal characters with precisely paralleled experiences that are not found in other plays. Furthermore, while *The Maid's Metamorphosis* finds a heroine forced to endure the body of a man, Lyly is the only playwright in this period to produce a heroine who is willing to transition to a male body and remain in that state beyond the conclusion of the play.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> In her introduction, Anne Lancashire suggests the date is 1584 (xiv).

<sup>48</sup> *The Maid's Metamorphosis* (1600), an anonymous play, follows a familiar fairytale plot of a girl thrown from a noble position who runs to the woods for safety (Buccola). This girl, Eurymine, is found by her hunters who agree to take an animal heart to the duke as proof of her death, reminiscent of the Snow-White narrative. The god Apollo discovers her and hopes to rape her. To avoid this fate, she prays to be turned into a man. While the risk of rape and a hope to protect their body is a common motivation for masculine disguise, Eurymine is the only example of a physical, biological transformation being granted in order to escape rape (in *Gallathea* a similar transition is offered to facilitate a consensual relationship). Ascanio persists that Eurymine's mind and body must ultimately coincide, and he does not consider a trans identity to be valid (5.1, p. 103). Her love endures but they are not united until her body is restored to its former state. (*The Tudor Reprinted and Parallel Texts* edition does not include page numbers or line numbers. Page numbers reference *Internet Archive's* downloadable PDF.)

*Gallathea* follows two young women who both, without knowledge of the other, use masculine disguise to escape imminent danger. The two meet and fall in love not knowing, but to some degree suspecting, the identity of the other. When the truth of their identities is revealed, the heroines hope for a way to continue their romantic relationship without the condemnation of their community. The play is set in a small, Lincolnshire village in which every five years the “fairest and chastest virgin in all the countrey,” must be sacrificed as a tribute to Neptune; she must be bound to a tree to be collected by Neptune’s Monster, Augur, never to be seen again (1.1.8). Nevertheless, Lyly chooses to complicate his own premise when, as Kent Cartwright notes, he “denies the condition necessary to fulfill destiny: one and only one most-beautiful virgin” and instead presents *two* candidates for this position (211). Two fathers, Tityrus and Melebus, believe that their daughter (*Gallathea* and *Phyllida* respectively) is the most beautiful and each independently forms the same plan in order to save them from their fate; that is, they disguise their daughters as boys, specifically boy pages. In this, *Gallathea* is foundational in establishing the form of a page as an effective disguise for female characters.

The drama opens with Tityrus attempting to justify his plan to his daughter, *Gallathea*. Calling her disguise a “tragedy,” he laments that to “avoid” this “destiny” he thinks “it better to use an unlawful means” to preserve her “honor” than for them to both experience “intolerable grief” (1.1.59). He regrets the circumstances but is determined to save her life at the cost of propriety or legality. Tityrus sees his proposed disguise as the only option to save his beloved daughter. Although she becomes distressed at the thought of dying young, *Gallathea* believes that it would be more honorable to sacrifice herself, “Destiny may be deferred, not prevented, and therefore it were better to offer myself in triumph than to be drawn to it with dishonor” (1.1.70). In a further attempt to convince *Gallathea* of the necessity of such a disguise, Tityrus argues that the gods themselves prefer disguise in certain

contexts: “To gain love, the gods have taken shapes of beasts, and to save life art thou coy to take the attire of men?” (1.1.89). He also insists she is too young to understand his justifications and urges that she follow his instruction. For Gallathea, then, crossdressing and disguise is not her own choice but rather it represents an acquiescence to her father’s demands.

There follows a similar interaction between Melebeus and his daughter Phyllida, who is equally reluctant to follow her father’s advice. Melebeus categorically believes that Phyllida is the most beautiful and pure: “Everyone thinketh his own child fair, but I know that which I most desire and would least have, that thou art fairest. Thou shalt therefore disguise thyself in attire” (1.3.4). When Melebeus explains she will be, “[i]n man’s apparel” Phyllida proves hesitant, and protests “It will neither become my body nor my mind” (1.3.15, 16). Here, at the start of the play, Phyllida feels incapable of embodying visual male signifiers or of considering herself as a boy. Worried about the implications of her appearance and actions on her internal female identity, Phyllida is uncomfortable with what she sees as a discordance between her appearance and her identity, which makes her fear for her modesty and become anxious about how her actions as a boy page will reflect on her feminine self,

For then I must keep company with boys, and commit  
follies unseemly for my sex, or keep company with girls and  
be thought more wanton then becometh me. Besides, I shall  
be ashamed of my long hose and short coat, and so unwarily  
blab out something by blushing at everything. (1.3.17)

In what becomes a pattern in plays that follow *Gallathea*, Phyllida fears that her female body will betray her masculine appearance through an involuntary blush that could be read and interpreted by onlookers as an indication of her concealed feminine identity. For as Derek

Dunne explains in his examination of the legal ramifications of early modern blushing, it was believed that a blush could reveal truth in a body and person: “Physiognomy manuals that were popular in the early modern period claimed to identify a correspondence between outer appearance and inner character” (233). Ultimately, despite her hesitation and discomfort, Phyllida establishes what becomes a popular rationalization for these disguises: that is, her bodily safety. So, like many later heroines, she acquiesces to her father’s request out of necessity: “Whatsoever you command I will not refuse, because you command nothing but my safety and your happiness” (1.3.11). Thus, like Gallathea, Phyllida also does not choose her disguise of her own accord but submits to her father’s instruction: both also take their father’s name while in disguise.

Before the two female characters meet, Gallathea likewise expresses her struggle with her appearance and worries that her female body will betray her. Gallathea’s issue with her disguise is social: she is concerned that she will taint her female reputation with her disguise and struggles with the dishonesty of both hiding her body and not sacrificing herself for the sake of the community. She soliloquies,

Blush, Gallathea that must frame thy affection fit for thy habit, and therefore  
be thought immodest because thou art unfortunate. Thy tender years cannot  
dissemble this deceit, nor thy sex bear it. O, would the gods had made me as I  
seem to be, or that I might safely be what I seem not! (2.1.1)

Like Phyllida, Gallathea considers blushing to be part of her femininity; furthermore, she associates the involuntary action with guilt and thereby demonstrates Dunne’s observation that “a blush could be understood variously as a sign of guilt or indicative of chastity, albeit with an implicit awareness of sexuality” (234). As a blush can share a secret or be the outward signifier of discomfort or dishonesty, Gallathea fears both: that is, her blush will express her guilt in appearing masculine and also reflect some immodesty. In a compelling

moment, Gallathea wishes she had been born a man so she could avoid this ordeal. She initially blames her father's selfish love before owning that it is her own body in the disguise, and she is responsible for any actions she performs that are required to maintain her new state. Her clothing may have been her father's idea, but Gallathea is the one who must live in it. Where Phyllida is deeply uncomfortable with the implications of masculinity on her body, Gallathea is more uncomfortable with the social ramifications of deception. Or to rephrase, at this point in the play, Phyllida does not want to be a boy and Gallathea does not want to be in disguise.

Phyllida enters for the first time in male clothing and is noticeably insecure with both her appearance and the physical adjustments she feels forced to make which "indicates that Phyllida's movements betray awkwardness and embarrassment" (Cartwright 217). She is afraid of witnesses and becomes terrified when she sees Gallathea. To herself she stresses, "I neither like my gait nor my garments, the one untoward, the other unfit, both unseemly. O Phyllida! –but yonder stayeth one, and therefore say nothing." (2.1.13). By contrast, Gallathea finds comfort in Phyllida's obvious discomposure: "I perceive that boys are in as great disliking of themselves as maids; therefore, though I wear the apparel, I am glad I am not the person" (2.1.16). Gallathea attributes Phyllida's physical discomfort to a general male insecurity that she equates with the insecurities she knows women feel. This first encounter between the women is tentative and immediately tests what is a staple for later crossdressing women, the effectiveness of their respective disguises.

While the majority of female characters in masculine disguises are successful in hiding their identities until they choose to reveal themselves, Phyllida and Gallathea very quickly begin to challenge each other's identity. Without acknowledging their hidden selves, and therefore maintaining a fragile semblance of disguise, the women openly discuss the femininity they sense in each other in asides. Phyllida thinks Gallathea looks as if they could

be a woman, but affirms the visual identity presented, “It is a pretty boy and a fair. He might well have been a woman; but because he is not, I am glad I am, for now under the color of my coat, I shall decipher the follies of their kind” (2.1.19). Hoping to emulate the ‘real boy,’ Phyllida plans to observe Gallathea; however, this hope is undermined by Gallathea’s lack of confidence in performing masculine action.

Unsure that she can act in a masculine manner, Gallathea denies Phyllida the chance to watch and copy any masculine movement. She cannot bow, “I would salute him, but I fear I should make a curtsy instead of a leg” (2.1.23). Phyllida equally distrusts her body and the effectiveness of her clothing but has no doubt that her feminine mind can match any male mind: “If I durst trust my face as well as I do my habit, I would spend some time to make pastime, for say what they will of a man’s wit, it is no second thing to be a woman” (2.1.25). Phyllida is deeply confident in her feminine self and her equality with any male she encounters; yet she cannot reconcile her expression or movement and sense of identity with her clothing and appearance. Gallathea expects masculine speech patterns from Phyllida and is again terrified of that involuntary feminine response, the blush. Gallathea worries that if she is teased with a common boyish comment that accidentally hits truth, “All the blood in my body would be in my face, if he should ask me, as the question among men is common, ‘Are you a maid?’” (2.1.28). Phyllida ultimately determines to be assertive in a masculine fashion announcing, “Why stand I still, Boys should be bold,” but is interrupted by the arrival of Diana and her nymphs (2.1.31). While they may suspect some aspects of femininity in each other, they accept each other’s outward presentations and continue to perform their own new identities; thus, “they simultaneously invest in maintaining belief in the disguises” before encountering society at large (Chess, *Or* 157).

Diana accepts the disguise, or at the very least chooses to affirm their signified, outward identity. Addressing Gallathea as “fair boy,” Diana is met with the contradictory

response, “You are deceived, lady” (2.1.33, 34). Seeking clarification Diana asks, “Why, are you no boy?” and receives the response: “No fair boy” (2.1.35, 36). The goddess sidesteps the question of gender identity and focuses on the adjective, reaffirming the visage of boy-ness with, “But, I see, an unhappy boy” (2.1.37). This exchange is disturbed by the nymph, Telusa, who asks after a deer the party is hunting. After being told it is the goddess’ deer, Gallathea makes a punning retort that exposes her affection for Phyllida. She tells the nymph “I saw none but mine own dear” (2.1.42). This hints at romantic feelings that Gallathea holds for Phyllida, feelings which from here begin to seep through her encounters with the other heroine, clouded and condoned by the disguises. As Gallathea pines after Phyllida privately, Diana challenges her about their purpose for being in her forest. Phyllida is confused and claims to not understand the goddess; but when asked, “What, art thou neither lad or shepherd?,” Phyllida replies, “neither lad nor shepherd is here” (2.1.51; 2.1.54). Though denying identification as man or woman for the first time, Phyllida skirts the issue by claiming she will be a lad when she is older (2.1.52). When Diana decides to take the two with her, Phyllida clarifies she will agree not because she is a virgin woman and has the right to follow Diana, “but for that fair boy’s favor, who I think be a god” (2.1.62). Phyllida attempts to reinforce her disguise by insisting that she is not a woman but, at the same time, her admiration of Gallathea is made explicit. Gallathea is ordered by Diana to join, but she makes it clear that she would not leave Phyllida regardless (2.1.65). Although by this point the truth of the heroines’ identities has been guessed at frequently, all involved resolve to support the identities which are presented rather than indulge their suspicions.

Simone Chess is particularly fascinated with the concept of social labor in relation to establishing gender, or this group effort to affirm identity, arguing it is the primary theme of the play. For Chess, “the play is less about any one fixed sexual identity or attraction, and more about the partnered project of creating and maintaining gender” (*Or* 146). Referring

heavily to Jane Ward's work on the specific social interactions of femme people (typically cisgender females) with transmen, Chess carefully applies the niche sociological development of masculine gender through femme support to the dynamics of *Gallathea* in a fashion that uniquely suits the interwoven gender depictions and relations of the play. Ward's definition is useful in understanding the concept, "Gender labor is the work of bolstering someone's gender authenticity, but it is also the work of co-producing someone's gender irony, transgression, or exceptionality" (150). Chess expertly summarizes the nuances of this supportive role as "the more complex work of actually participating in the production of the partner's gender (through sexual acts and roles, through shared gender dynamics, through the private work of thinking and feeling one's sexual orientation in connection with a partner's gender identity)" (*Or* 150). In her application of this theory to the play, Chess addresses the dominating questions of *Gallathea* and *Phyllida*'s persistent doubt and affirmation of their respective genders and modern inquiry into whether the relationship is queer or searching for a heterosexual conclusion. This culminates in the question of the efficacy of their disguises, "are the lovers ever 'passing' for male (and/or are the boy actors ever 'passing' for female of FTM)" (*Or* 152). For Chess, these behaviors do not have to be contradictory, but rather complementary to the goal of each person as a femme supporter to a transmasculine person.

The heroines are remarkably inefficient at perfecting their masculinity and subsequently their disguise. *Gallathea* interacts conversationally from a female perspective, regularly hinting at her femininity, while *Phyllida* ignores these discrepancies and creates *Gallathea*'s masculine gender from only the visible indications and explicit affirmations of masculinity *Gallathea* offers. *Gallathea*, in turn, redefines the definition of masculine physicality in order to accommodate *Phyllida*'s traditionally feminine movement and appearance. Even while directly noticing the contrary signifiers, *Gallathea* defines *Phyllida* as masculine, therefore those actions become associated with the new masculine image being

created and begin to ultimately define masculinity. Chess explains this through Ward's specific study of femme cisgender people in relation to masculine, FTM, transgender men,

The labour of forgetting is an internal and external process, one that might bolster the trans person's identity, but also a private process of belief and understanding for the cisgender partner; this type of gender labour involves choosing not to know or linger on the trans persons full gender history.

Importantly, the gender labour of forgetting is not about denial or misinformation, but rather about manipulating memory to make space for queer and inclusive narratives. (*Or* 151)

Gallathea and Phyllida create this condition with the added circumstance that they are both cisgender women who have been forced to identify publicly and socially as masculine. In other words, they simultaneously fulfill both roles in this type of relationship. Each presents a masculine identity, but internally functions as a femme supporter of their masculine counterpart. Rather than exerting effort into the maintenance of their own disguises, they build and uphold the masculinity of the other. Furthermore, both avoid early modern gender coded actions. Fear of an accidental curtsy and incompetence in bowing is presented; both are avoided. Unintentional blushing is dreaded, but neither the feminine blushing nor masculine violent action transpire. They simultaneously exhibit masculine signifying clothing and feminine signifying language and beauty. The two remain remarkably neutral in physical display, allowing the community to consider reading either action on either body, as no contradictory action has yet been demonstrated.

Later in the second act, Neptune appears with Cupid, who has disguised himself as a female nymph to infiltrate the hunting party. After watching and listening to the group, Neptune becomes angry; despite the purpose of the disguises, the god has not been deceived at all. Fully aware of the attempt to fool him, Neptune schemes to seek revenge.

Do silly shepherds go about to deceive great Neptune, in putting on man's attire upon women... Neptune, that hast taken sundry shapes to obtain love, stick not to practice some deceit to show thy deity, and having often thrust thyself into the shape of beasts to deceive men, be not coy to use the shape of a shepherd to show thyself a god... I will into these woods and mark all, and in the end will mar all. (2.2.17)

Neptune recognizes Tityrus' logic in justifying the attempt to mislead the god, that there is some equity between gods using animal disguises to seduce human women and the fathers' attempt to hide their daughters in the clothing of men. Though angry at the deception, he recognizes the value of disguise, but remarks on Diana's apparent inability to see through the disguises while he is not fooled. Insulted but proud that Diana is deceived where he is not, the god determines to use the same tactic and disguises himself among the humans trying to avoid his wrath.

The women close the second act with soliloquies of distress. Their mutual infatuation has escalated from their nervous introductions to their admissions of admiration when with Diana, creating misery in their situation. Gallathea again craves a change in herself to rectify the conflict in her two personas. She wishes she could have the mind of a man to match her image. If she thought and felt like a man, she believes she would not love a boy. Gallathea would rather have died for the sake of others than live as a boy in love with a boy, which is presented as an impossible paradox. "How now, Gallathea, miserable Gallathea, that having put on the apparel of a boy, thou canst also put on the mind!... Had it not been better for thee to have been a sacrifice to Neptune than a slave to Cupid?" (2.4.1). Markedly, Gallathea does not hope to return to outward femininity but rather to have her internalized sense of self change from female to male in order to match her masculine appearance. Not knowing that she is in love with a woman, Gallathea contends that with the feelings and self-identity of a

man she would not have been affected by Cupid and would not be able to have feelings for a boy. She argues that homoerotic attraction would not be possible, though it is what she is unwittingly experiencing.

Phyllida is also unhappy with her circumstances and specifically her femininity. She laments her beauty and age, the qualities which have forced her into disguise, and is frustrated with how discordant her masculine clothing is with her previous identity. Phyllida is resentful that it took her becoming a boy to find and fall in love with a boy and regrets her mixed feelings. She acknowledges that without the incongruous disguise, her love would not be problematic.

Poor Phyllida, curse the time of thy birth and rareness of thy beauty, the unaptness of thy apparel and the untamedness of thy affections. Art thou no sooner in the habit of a boy, but thou must be enamored of a boy?... Ah, Phyllida, do something, nay, anything, rather than live thus. (2.5.1)

Phyllida vows to cease living in disguise and denounces the love she feels. Her hatred for her disguise and clothing grows as her feelings for the boy she sees develop. She sees her masculinity as prohibiting a romantic relationship; if she can return to her feminine identity, she can be with a boy. With pleas to Venus, Gallathea submits to her own urges and determines to follow Phyllida.

The virgin nymphs also are impacted by the conflicting interests of the heroines and the obvious tension brought to the hunting party. Unknowingly influenced by the masquerading Cupid, Telusa wonders at the love and sexual overtones infiltrating Diana's group of virgins and attempts to quench her own newfound affection for Phyllida who has taken her father's name, Melebeus. Eurota, the second nymph, admits that she has fallen for Tityrus, or Gallathea using the name of her own father. A third nymph, Ramia offers competition to Eurota and expresses the same infatuation. Eurota wishes she "were no

woman” so as not to be attracted to a boy (3.1.113). Ramia wishes Gallathea “were no boy” so that she felt nothing for him (3.1.115). Telusa wishes she “were no body” so as not to exist and feel anything at all (3.1.116). This desperate pining by the sworn virgin followers and a multitude of lovers hoping to change identities to avoid love is preceded by the erotic inuendo of Phyllida and Gallathea’s first conversation with each other and their own hopes to change identity to facilitate love.

The women speak one after the other in sentences that mirror each other. Phyllida immediately emphasizes feminine qualities in Gallathea that are not concealed by her clothing: “It is pity that Nature framed you not a woman having a face so fair, so lovely a countenance, so modest a behaviour” (3.2.1). Gallathea’s actions and quality of features are recognizable as feminine and suit a female identity, but do not serve to undo her disguise. In turn, Gallathea alludes to this duality of her person and confirms Phyllida’s remark metaphorically, “There is a tree in Tylos whose nuts have shells like fire, and, being cracked, the kernel is but water” (3.2.4). Phyllida replies with confusion and claims to not understand the meaning of this story: that something can be different internally than what it appears to be on the outside. After hinting at her own truth, Gallathea takes her brash words a step further by challenging Phyllida’s presumed masculinity. In the first direct hint that Gallathea may not believe in the disguise, she says, “I would not wish to be a woman, unless it were because thou art a man” (3.2.7). Muddled by the supposed boyishness, rather than manhood, Phyllida portrays, Gallathea claims that she would want to be a woman if Phyllida were a man. Gallathea would change herself if a sexual relationship were possible between the two. This proposal is erotic with or without the confusion of disguise; if Phyllida could grow from her representation of a boy to an available man, the man Gallathea is portraying would want to become a woman to be with that man. With Gallathea’s potential doubt in the disguise she sees, Gallathea hopes that Phyllida will be a man that her female identity could be with. If

Phyllida cannot be a man, Gallathea does not want to be a woman. Her hope for her identity is tethered to whether that identity is compatible with the identity of the person she loves.

Phyllida volleys with, “Nay I do not wish to be woman, for then I should not love thee, for I have sworn never to love a woman” (3.2.9).

The tête-à-tête continues as the heroines mutually disclose they have sworn not to love a woman. Gallathea accuses Phyllida of having a feminine mind, prompting Phyllida to bluntly explain her truth in a hypothetical, “Suppose I were a virgin (I blush in supposing myself one), and that under the habit of a boy were the person of a maid... would not then that fair face, pity this true heart?” (3.2.17). The truthfulness of her statement is accompanied by that involuntary physical affirmation of her internalized feminine identity, the blush. After Phyllida conflates her identities, Gallathea counters by applying the same speculations to herself, “Admit that I were, as you would have me suppose that you are, and that I should... desire your favor, would you not yield?” (3.2.23). Neither answers the other and they mock each other for speaking in hypotheticals before ceasing to address the other; then, in asides, they explicitly relate their respective fears that their facades have failed.

PHYLLIDA. I fear me he is as I am, a maiden.

GALLATHEA. What dread riseth in my mind! I fear the boy to be as I am, a maiden. (3.2.31)

Still referencing the other in masculine terms, this fear does not affect the heroines for long. They refuse to confront each other and promptly convince themselves they must be wrong based on minor attributes.

PHYLLIDA. Tush it cannot be; his voice shows the contrary.

GALLATHEA. Yet I do not think it, for he would then have blushed. (3.2.33)

As Cartwright describes, “both prefer that confusion over clarification” (218). Again, blushing is foregrounded as an infallible indicator of femininity, the feminine action which

supersedes all other gender signifiers. They push the issue with simple riddles that explain the truth, leaving little margin for the women to ignore the evidence of their hidden identities. Gallathea becomes utterly convinced, proclaiming, “Aye me, he is as I am, for his speeches be as mine are” (3.2.40). Phyllida seeks clearer proof and advocates for the two to enter the forest and examine each other. This infamous moment has been at the center of great critical speculation as to the physical or sexual encounter between the two crossdressed female characters. Whether their discovery is literal is left vague. Phyllida only offers, “Come, let us into the grove and make much one of another, that cannot tell what to think one of another” (3.2.55). It is tempting to hope for a physical sexual encounter from the pair offstage, but the two do not acknowledge any subsequent revelation. This moment is difficult not to eroticize completely; however, the two do not yet discard their performance.

Augur announces the day of the sacrifice, and the fathers gather along with the community. They confront each other about their daughters, and each hypocritically accuses the other of having a beautiful daughter who is not present. Melebeus claims his daughter died as an infant and Tityrus calls him out, exposing his attempt to hide the girl from the gods. Tityrus claims to have seen Melebeus kissing his daughter, Gallathea, which angers Melebeus who argues he has a young, beautiful wife. The nymphs insist that Cupid undo the love entanglements and he declares, “If they be true love knots, ‘tis impossible to unknit them; if false, I never tied them” (4.2.23). Neptune appears, furious, and seeks his vindication, vowing, “I will be here at the hour, and show as great cruelty as they have done craft, and well shall they know that Neptune should have been entreated, not cozened” (4.3.6). As Gallathea and Phyllida approach the gathering of citizens, they are still preserving a fragile sense of acknowledging masculinity in each other and themselves. Though having met privately offstage, little has changed. As Chess phrases the aftermath to the liaison, “the lovers do not allow it to disrupt their mutual gender performance” (*Or* 147). Lyly only offers

a frustrating denial of explicit satisfaction, offstage or onstage. Though the women left to view each other's bodies, they show no sign of any discovery.

However, the allusions to feminine fairness and beauty are still present and this new conversation is devoid of asides. Increasingly, they no less than flirt with each other and offer physical compliments based on the feminine characteristics evident to them through their respective disguises. In discussing the pending virginal sacrifice, the heroines speculate as to who will die if it will not be either of them.

PHYLLIDA. I marvel what virgin the people will present. It is happy you are none, for then it would have fall'n to your lot because you are so fair.

GALLATHEA. If you had been a maiden too, I need not have feared, because you are fairer.

PHYLLIDA. I pray thee, sweet boy, flatter not me. Speak truth of thyself, For in mine eye of all the world thou art fairest. (4.4.1)

This affectionate address is notable. Jeffrey Masten remarks on the nature of the use of the term 'sweet' in early modern male relationships, "In this sense, it represents yet more evidence for the mobile quality of desire, erotics, and affection, as distinct from identities, in this culture. Second, it is historically 'queer' — used between men in a way that now seems to offend against normative codes of gender (sweetness now seems effeminizing)" (370).

Between men, the language is markedly fond; yet here the underlying identities of the heroines exacerbate the queerness of their relationship. The romantic sentiments between the two become progressively verbal and public, as the two hint at their feelings. Phyllida specifically is conscious of the potential queer qualities in the relationship between her and the boy she suspects maybe a woman. Warily Phyllida works to firmly place Gallathea back

in a male sphere but does not want Gallathea to see her in the same terms. Simone Chess emphasizes the intentionality Phyllida displays,

by overlooking Gallathea's suspicious prettiness and accepting her as male, because that work allows her [Phyllida] to "be 'the girl.'" Her admiration for Gallathea, and her work to see her as male despite possible evidence to the contrary, allow her to be glad to be (secretly) female. At the same time, her attraction to Gallathea does not inspire her to reveal herself; instead, she wants to go even deeper into disguise (*Or* 156).

Phyllida attempts to heteroize or de-sexualize their attraction. However, as she tries to manipulate their dynamic to both maintain her disguise and create a facade of heteronormativity, Gallathea will not comply.

Gallathea, less concerned with the emerging queerness of her attraction, is again blunt and comments that she could not and would not see their relationship in terms of asexual mutual masculine affection.

PHYLLIDA. I love thee as a brother, but love not me so.

GALLATHEA. No, I will not, but love thee better, because I cannot love as a brother. (4.4.12)

When prompted thus, Phyllida escalates the romantic and erotic elements of their exchange by introducing explicit multi-gender dynamics. While still claiming to be a pair of boys who love each other, Phyllida asks to call Gallathea, mistress. Phyllida wants an intimate relationship but is willing to risk her disguise in order to create a semblance of heterosexuality for herself. Although less interested in prioritizing heteronormativity, Gallathea readily accepts and goes so far to admit it is a familiar title.

PHYLLIDA. Seeing we are both boys, and both lovers, that our affection may have some show, and seem as it were love, let me call thee mistress.

GALLATHEA. I accept that name, for divers before have call'd me mistress.

(4.4.15)

Though she explains she has been called such before, Gallathea coyly retorts that Phyllida is the more appropriate mistress in their coupling (4.4.18).

Promptly the impending danger of the sacrifice causes the two to escape to the woods a second time. Intending “to be both absent” when the virgin is chosen, the couple seeks shelter (4.4.32). This second conference between the heroines ends unevenly. Gallathea remains assertive in challenging the identity of their relationship and in her hopes for open love between them. Throughout the drama, the two heroines generally speak in in short exchanges that mirror each other; one says something and the response of the other is of similar length. Both end their conversations with a small speech but in the fourth act, only Phyllida has a closing speech. She continues to be despondent at the situation as she grapples with the potentiality that Gallathea is also in disguise: “For if she be a maiden, there is no hope of my love; if a boy, a hazard. I will after him or her, and lead a melancholy life, that look for a miserable death” (4.4.42). It is the first time two different gender pronouns are used in reference to one of the figures. Filled with uncertainty, previous confrontation between the two has left Phyllida unconvinced while Gallathea holds no such reservations. But it is Phyllida who first fully acknowledges that she has seen through Gallathea’s disguise, and that she still harbors feelings though she knows Gallathea is a woman. Despite this and the despondency Phyllida feels, she remains in love and is willing to commit to the love even if there is no hope for a happy life together. Phyllida manipulates her reality through choosing what to affirm and what to overlook in Gallathea’s identity. Regardless of the risk of her disguise being discovered and the potential danger to her life or in losing her love, Phyllida pursues Gallathea.

When the time for the sacrifice arrives, a third maiden, Hebe, is introduced as a substitute offering. She is deemed not beautiful enough which causes mixed feelings – she is happy to live, but ashamed to have not qualified as worthy. The heroines witness the rejection of Hebe and Gallathea becomes nervous. In her anxiety, Gallathea follows her same pattern and chafes at being misgendered, regardless of her appearance. Phyllida refers to Gallathea as a boy and Gallathea contradicts her.

PHYLLIDA. Why should you fear? The god requireth no boy.

GALLATHEA. I would he did; then should I have no fear.

PHYLLIDA. I am glad he doth not, though, because if he did, I should have also cause to fear. (5.3.5)

Phyllida exerts effort into the maintenance of Gallathea's masculinity, again to be refuted. Though she continues to be vague, Gallathea does not guard her disguise closely. More concerned about the morality of deception than being male, Gallathea insists on the truth to the contradiction of her appearance. Phyllida is more terrified of losing the opportunity to love her partner in a socially acceptable, heteronormative fashion. She is committed to the facade that Gallathea is a boy, and she is girl, preserving her hope that the two may eventually be together. Furthermore, Phyllida is terrified of the potential that Gallathea would be in danger as a woman; as such, she creates a safer reality through affirming Gallathea's appearance and continuing to imagine her as a male immune to the sacrifice despite Gallathea's increasingly obvious comments.

Neptune roars against the gathering of people who he feels have tried to supersede his power with the substitute maiden. He blames the fathers for loving their daughter more than they respect the gods and threatens vengeance on all virgins, claiming, "I will make havoc of Diana's nymphs, my temple shall be dyed with maiden's blood" (5.3.15). This prompts Diana to chastise him profusely; Venus arrives to attempt to placate Neptune but is angry that Diana

has captured Cupid. They insult each other liberally before Neptune intervenes and offers to appease them both, “Diana, restore Cupid to Venus, and I will forever release the sacrifice of virgins” (5.3.71). This agreed, Cupid is returned and Tityrus and Melebeus reveal their trickery. This is devastating to their daughters who can no longer avoid the truth they both suspected.

GALLATHEA. Unfortunate Gallathea, if this be Phyllida!

PHYLLIDA. Accursed Phyllida, if that be Gallathea! (5.3.113)

They question their own capacities to love a woman as a woman and the social implications, but do not doubt that they do love each other. Neptune asks the heroines, “Do you both, being maidens, love one another?” (5.3.119). Each uses the physical representation of the other as justification for their passion. Without acknowledging the doubts both had expressed in the other’s disguise, they offer excuses, ignoring the suspicions both had previously revealed.

GALLATHEA. I had thought the habit agreeable with the sex, and so  
burned in the fire of mine own fancies.

PHYLLIDA. I had thought that in the attire of a boy, there could not  
have lodged the body of a virgin, and so was inflamed with  
a sweet desire which now I find a sour deceit. (5.3.120)

Phyllida’s defense borders on the absurd. This claim that she could not imagine that a girl would be disguised as a boy, while inhabiting the same disguise is loaded with irony and facetious overtones. The heroines stand their ground and affirm their impossible love, refusing to abandon their feelings or label those sentiments as false. Though they are willing to try to blame those feelings on the boy personas, they do not separate the feelings from the discovered female identities. Diana insists that the affections will have to be rejected; however, Phyllida and Gallathea pledge their eternal love. The love still stands and is not erased or dissolved, though they both identify as women.

GALLATHEA. I will never love any but Phyllida. Her love is engraven in my heart with her eyes.

PHYLLIDA. Nor I any but Gallathea, whose faith is imprinted in my thoughts by her words. (5.3.127)

Neptune declares the situation to be ridiculous, exclaiming, “there can be no cause of affection,” but Venus shocks onlookers with her approval of the situation (5.3.132).

As the goddess of love, she resolves that love is the dominant force, declaring that love supersedes all other factors, that she condones the love, and will accommodate it. She announces, “I like well and allow it. They shall both be possessed of their wishes, for never shall it be said that Nature or Fortune shall overthrow love and faith” (5.3.134). The goddess again asks for vows of love, which are readily given (5.3.139). Furthermore, Venus offers a solution which astounds the gods and mortals alike. She tells all present she can change the sex of one of the lovers.

VENUS. Then shall it be seen that I can turn one of them to be a man, and that I will.

DIANA. Is it possible?

VENUS. What is to love or the mistress of love impossible? Was it not Venus that did the like to Iphis and Ianthes? How say ye, are ye agreed, one to be a boy presently? (5.3.143)

The goddess focuses on the transcending elements of the love the heroines exhibit. For Venus, love is not related to their gender, but is authentic regardless of their outward presentation or internal sense of identity. She affirms the love Gallathea and Phyllida still expound, though they have been revealed as two women. As Chess notes, “Venus emphasizes the core values that motivate the lovers’ relationship but that do not depend on stable gender roles or on anatomical sex” (*Or* 162). Yet even Diana doubts the power of the goddess.

Venus reminds Diana that she is known to have performed this task before, for Iphis and Ianthes.

In Ovid's *Metamorphosis*, Iphis was born to parents who were too poor to afford a wedding dowry. This caused her father to decide to kill any girl child. After intervention from Egyptian gods, her mother decided to hide the sex of the girl and raise her as a boy. Ianthes falls in love with what she thinks is a boy. Iphis starts to reciprocate those feelings and become desperate. She prays to become the gender she was raised to be in order to love Iphis (Robins 48). Described as "the sole mythological account of female same-sex desire, not only in Ovid but in all of classical literature," this reference gives historical legitimacy to the desire of Gallathea and Phyllida for love, the potential for a physical sex change, and provides precedent for the general suitability of the new narrative (Kamen 21). The major deviation in *Gallathea* is the ambiguity of the woman who will change; it is unclear which heroine will transition. Both happily agree to allow one to be altered and consent,

PHYLLIDA. I am content, so I may embrace Gallathea.

GALLATHEA. I wish it, so I may enjoy Phyllida. (5.3.148).

However, their fathers each object to the prospect of their own child undergoing the modification. Melebeus insists that his daughter ask his permission and Tityrus intends to keep his daughter as she is. Melebeus is happy to allow Phyllida, not his own daughter, to become a boy. Tityrus is more concerned for the son he has who is intended to be his heir. He infers that Gallathea is an elder sibling and a recognized malehood would disinherit her younger brother. He does not question the validity of a potential transition, nor is there doubt that the community and local authority would recognize the new gender identity. He, and the society, would be so committed to a transition that it would be legally binding and impact his legacy unquestioningly. The men continue to bicker about the issue but ultimately decide to let the goddess make the choice for the sake of their children.

Venus gains sanction from all gods present and announces her plan, “Then let us depart. Neither of them shall know whose lot it shall be till they come to the church door. One shall be; doth it suffice?” (5.3.173). Both consent and they exit to have one of them changed and to be married. Laurie Shannon attributes the lack of a visual marriage to the consistently overt homoerotic language shared between the heroines and creates a marginal space for their homosexual relationship to endure, stating, “the play’s thorough homonormative structure leaves heterosexual marriage profoundly unrepresentable” (199). Gallathea returns to give the epilogue alone, which is the balance to the previous act having been concluded by Phyllida and offers the advice, “Yield, ladies, yield to love” (*Epilogue 4*). There are several theories as to which lover transitions, and it is assumed that their physical presentations will not initially divulge the transition to the public, but this final speech contributes to understanding the conclusion of the play: Gallathea has the final word and speaks to “You ladies,” rhetorically distancing herself from that group (*Epilogue 1*).

Ellen M. Caldwell searches for “their true natures” and sees a “hermaphrodite image” in the concluding revelation (33, 32). Caldwell finds the two “as nearly alike as possible” and interprets the couple through a rigid binary of disguised self and ‘true’ self (33). This argument only allows for a difficult resolution riddled with sacrifice and compromise. It is indicative of this view that Caldwell completes her argument with a reference to “woman as union of opposites” who are Elizabethan, psychologically masculine with permission but ultimately feminine: “A marriage of minds, not bodies” (40). Caldwell desexualizes the love and the union of Gallathea and Phyllida in order to create an uncomplicated ending that sidesteps questions of biology. It is a convenient reading that seems to intentionally ignore physical and sexual references in the text. Kent Cartwright summarizes a similar traditional approach, that the changed one is unimportant: “The metamorphosis ought not to be

completed onstage nor the choice revealed because the maidens resemble each other enough to make the selection irrelevant, so the argument goes” (222).

Cartwright also provides a political reason for this approach: equating virginal love with heterosexual love could be complimentary to the Virgin Queen. However, in a convincing argument, he shows how the play encourages an active speculation in which heroine is possibly changed. Gallathea never appears in female clothing and becomes the final representation of the couple. Cartwright emphasizes Gallathea’s reference to the women of the audience as “You ladies” as a conscious dissociation Gallathea makes between herself and women (*Epilogue 1*). Furthermore, her attachment to honesty and integrity suggest that it is altogether unlikely Gallathea would appear again in male clothing when no longer obligated if the attire was not indicative of her identity. I believe it is also inappropriate to ignore that Gallathea is the title character of play. Both hold an equal dramatic position and Gallathea’s importance could only usurp Phyllida with a consequential difference, that she is the one to transition. Cartwright acknowledges the hints at Gallathea’s potential for transition while noting the “hilariously disruptive” possibilities of that outcome but is primarily focused on the importance of the speculation taking place (223). The act of theorizing is useful in itself. Simone Chess attributes this vague quality to the ability to read such a breadth of outcomes into the obscure moments of the play, explaining that it, “refuses to stage the most intimate scenes – in terms of their potential to depict both romance *and* sexual acts,” specifically the offstage forest encounters and the lack of a staged marriage (*Or* 148). However, the context of Greek mythos of Galatea, an ancient heroine predating Ovid’s *Ianthe*, contributes to the uncertainty of Lyly’s character. That Galatea bears a child born as a girl but chooses to raise the child as a boy and names her Leucippus. Leucippus of Crete grows to be remarkably beautiful and before her marriage is taken to the goddess Leto, mother to Artemis and Apollo, who changes the girl to a boy in order to facilitate the

marriage (Markantes 1). Yet Lyly makes specific choices within his characters that diverge from a strict adherence to his source material, leaving these echoes of narrative to contribute to the questioning of his conclusion rather than to the clarification.

Another popular theory is rooted in Venus' nearly outrageous assumption that neither Gallathea nor Phyllida will know who has changed until they reach the church to be married (in this unstaged, future wedding). It insinuates neither will recognize either a biological change or lack thereof in their own body, prompting an equally valid, if more radical argument: that neither body will change. At the 2018 meeting of the Shakespeare Institute's BritGrad conference, Emma Frankland and Andy Kesson presented a version of this theory in their plenary lecture on an ongoing workshop of the play. Their concept revolves on a basic desire to appease society and its preexisting expectation. Venus does not need to physically change the bodies if the community believes that a body has changed and is willing to recognize the relationship as legitimate on the word of the goddess and the couple. Potentially the two could remain in male attire and not disclose the identity of the 'changed' partner, or either could choose to remain masculine while the other reverted, if the society at large sanctioned a shift based on faith and presumption. This theory is, of course, complicated by Phyllida's discomfort with the masculine clothing, Gallathea's dislike of deception, and Venus' precedent for enacting a sex change, but the blessing of the gods and social affirmation could mediate those fears in the women significantly and leave Venus' offer unnecessary.

Gallathea and Phyllida are remarkably poor at being disguised; they forget the moments of femininity they see in the other's masculinity and interpret each other as they choose in order to create nonbinary identities and a nonbinary relationship within binary social constraints, perpetuating a façade of heteronormativity. They determine through the restrictions of an early modern binary environment to shift the burdens of establishing and

continuously recognizing gender to the society who insist on a binary heterosexual perspective of the love between the two. It is important when considering this play to acknowledge that though the two heroines form similar archetypes, the two develop separate approaches to maintaining disguise and gender, queer and heterosexual love, and their personal comfort with the private and public aspects of these conditions.

What the lovers share categorically is a dedication to their love and relationship and a willingness to be fluid or binary in their sexuality and gender identity in order to retain a relationship within patriarchal constraints. I propose, that although it is possible to view the lovers as women who believe in the capacity of the other to be male, gender fluid with an attachment to binary definitions of gender identity, temporarily masculine lesbian women searching for societal approval, or as a cisgender woman and transgender man, it is more valuable to address the potential for any of these conclusions and embrace the questioning and ambiguous nature of that narrative. It is these questions of gender identity, physical sex, disguise, transition, and the involvement of social labor that defines *Gallathea* as a play with distinctly modern themes and enduringly provocative questions though it is one of the earliest examples of the trope in early modern drama. By not answering the question of the bodily transition or even the gender transition in *Gallathea*, the queerness of the heroines' love is both perpetuated and accepted.

#### B. *The Fleire* (1606)

In *The Fleire* (or *The Fleer*), an Edward Sharpham play, Signor Antifront is a gentleman who has sent his daughters, Florida and Felecia, away (Cathcart 20; Leech 70; Munro, *Children* 58).<sup>49</sup> After losing his throne to an unnamed rival, he employs a disguise to

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<sup>49</sup> The *ProQuest* version does not include line numbers. Page numbers reference the downloadable PDF.

conveniently leave and go in search of them. The two sisters have turned to sex work and self-title themselves as ‘whores’ (1.1, p. 3). As such, they acknowledge the clash of their new life with their birthright but expound on the greater ironies of having no other way to survive, despite the harm to their reputation. It is within this context of disguise and the social limitations of class and gender that a different set of sisters, Susan and Nan, crossdress. These sisters, who have not lost their status as respectable women, immediately express opinions on their role as women with Susan establishing a physical difference between the genders. She comments, “Come sister, come, wee were not borne to stand, t’is / against the nature of our sexes kinde” (1.1, p. 9). Susan insinuates that the bodies of the sisters are weaker and incapable of basic endurance, even in simple standing. In comparing two suitors, Nan describes men and women as having separate purposes and as akin to different species. She insists, “man was made to labour, vse my creation, women to / bear, ile vse yours: Birds to flye, Fish to swimme” (1.1, p. 10).

Susan and Nan argue about the most valuable qualities in a suitor and hold varied opinions concerning appearance, wealth, and conversation, but both are relieved to learn they do not love the same gentlemen; one prefers Spark and one Ruffle. However, these men have their sights set on Florida, Felecia, and tobacco. Nan and Susan hurriedly decide that becoming boy servants will allow them to become closer to and manipulate the suitors away from Florida and Felicia. Thus, they intend to use these disguises conventionally to gain agency and power over their own lives outside of avenues typically available to young women and to pursue suitors who have abandoned them for other women. However, when Nan and Susan attempt to get work under Spark and Ruffle, the men claim that they have no need for help, so the heroines become servants to the wrong gentlemen, Piso and a knight, Sir John. (2.1, p. 46). This disappointment causes a crisis for the women who have disguised themselves. Nan cries, “O God, I am vndonedoe?” (2.1, p. 48). Despite the error, Nan finds

confidence in her new role and declares that she can accomplish, “Any thing that a Boy should doe” (2.1, p. 48).<sup>50</sup> By contrast, Susan more passively agrees that she will live with the knight with, “Tis partly as youle vse me” (2.1, p. 48).

Nan develops a camaraderie with her new master and displays a capacity for bawdy humor and language, embracing vulgar masculine verbal signifiers. As a boy, she engages in what is best described as masculine banter and assimilates well. As Piso struggles with women, Nan participates in his misogyny going as far as to call a woman’s “taile” “the worthiest part of her body” (3.2, p. 60). Nan adapts to her new identity, becoming socially competent in the male sphere. She volleys with Piso trying to turn him against his infatuation with one of the sex-working sisters; he markedly does not mention which sister he desires. Nan continues to prove to have a quick wit and matches Piso. Her love advice, however, is clearly biased. Influenced by her enduring hopes to both attract a suitor and to foil the prospects for Felecia and Florida, Nan recommends being contrary towards women, ignoring their feelings, and responding in contrast to the atmosphere, “the onely way to win them is to care little for am: when they are sad doe yee sing: when they sing and are merrie, then take your time & put am too’t” (3.2, p. 62). Though she does not indicate an explicit interest in this man, Nan demonstrates a resentment towards Florida and Felecia that is extended to any man who hopes to woo her rivals. Nan uses the agency of her new masculinity to influence her circumstances according to the desires of her feminine self, actively manipulating her physical presentation and verbal interaction to obtain proximity to the men she hopes to attract. She also finds the inconspicuous nature of her serving role equally useful to her purposes. Joining the ranks of Viola of *Twelfth Night* and fulfilling the trope which *An Honest Man’s Fortune* parodies, she is an example of a crossdressing heroine who finds

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<sup>50</sup> This absence of Susan is significant enough for her character to be removed entirely in a later edit (Leech 69).

power through both the visibility of masculine signifying actions and the invisibility of a shift in social status to servitude.

Though she is seen sparingly in crossdress, Susan is conspicuously absent for a large portion of the remaining scenes. In the tradition of crossdressing female companions or equal heroines, *Merchant of Venice* or *Gallathea*, a mirrored exchange can be expected; but here it is not found. There is some explanation for this exclusion. The extant version of *The Fleire* is an edited copy; Paul Werstine details editing of the play to shorten the original, which has been lost, “In addition the play is also severely abridged. Exactly how severely, though, is hard to say, because the nearly two hundred lines of 4.1 are likely but not certainly cut... For 4.1 to keep a place in the adaptation, it would need attention because substantial portions of it involve the cut roles of Piso and Susan” (338). Furthermore, a second edition exists where Susan is removed entirely (Leech 69). While greater examination of only Nan is possible, the few exchanges that do still exist between both sisters permits some insight into their individual responses to crossdressing and shared motivations in the purpose of their masculine disguises.

As the pages, Nan and Susan together hear a plot by Florida, Felecia, Piso, and Sir John to murder Spark and Ruffle because they have rejected Florida and Felecia. Nan again demonstrates her biting commentary while using her position to disengage from the plan. Piso recommends a location for obtaining poison and receives open criticism. Nan chides, “If a were of my minde, a would thinke no poyson too good for you” (4.1, p. 71). She condemns their actions publicly and particularly blames the women privately to her sister. Calling them “dan’d peeces,” Nan reiterates her loyalty and affection for the potential victims, the “worthie Gentlemen” (4.1, p. 71). While they debate, the sisters in disguise are interrupted by the second set of sisters and, remarkably, Florida seems to have surmised the truth of Susan and Nan’s identities and confronts the two. She tells them, “T’is true my little musitians, you

carry but the cases / my little curtals, yfaith I smell a smock heere too, and are / you two wenches yfaith?" (4.1, p. 72). Unusually, the sisters are unsuccessful in concealing their identities. They are recognized as women in disguise, though only by other women, a device also seen in *Love's Pilgrimage*. Their discovery differs from others in that they are not recognized as specifically themselves by a father, as in *The Widow*, nor are their mannerisms familiar to another crossdresser as happens in *Love's Pilgrimage*, and to a lesser extent, *Gallathea*. Yet, Susan and Nan are recognized by their rivals. Florida's innuendo garners a coy response and Nan deflects the enquiry with "If we were, I hope thou wouldest not wrong vs" (4.1, p. 72). But it is Susan who reveals both identities to the rival sisters. She tells their truth to their competition, "Then tis true, wee confesse to thee wee are both wenches, and the loue of these two Gentlemen, Sparke and Ruffel hath made vs leaue our selues to waite on them" (4.1, p. 73). This failure to prove masculine without a confrontation of masculine action, violence, close relative, lover, or other crossdresser is a break from the narrative convention.

Nevertheless, Nan continues to push boundaries and claims an affinity for her masculine self. She affirms the possibility of the great cultural fear, that a woman can assimilate masculinity and permanently shift, even partially, away from a strict binary identity when she admits, "I haue plaid the boy so long as I am chang'd into the nature of a boy... I can tell baudie tales, drinke drunke, brag, swears, and lye with any Lackie in the towne" (4.1, p. 73). The details of actions Nan associates solely with the masculine is telling. She marks vulgarity, excessive drinking, bragging, cursing, and lying as belonging solely to masculinity and boyishness and Susan adds her own list of new masculine skills, "I can man a punck to a play, or slaunders any Gentlewoman as well as anie Innes a Court puny, I can as well as he, swears such a Lady is in loue with me, and such a Citizens Daughter would haue come to bed to mee" (4.1, p. 73). These are bold actions. Susan associates with sex workers,

insults women, courts women, flirts with and sexually attracts women. Even Nan finds the sexual nature of Susan's identity to be surprising and comments on Susan's willingness to live in a brothel. Susan retorts with "Thy Ladies are as common as any Tauerne doore" (4.1, p. 73).

Both embrace debauchorous aspects of lower-class masculinity while the lack of success in pursuing their gentlemen leads to the women both assimilating to their alternative gender identities and new social positions quickly. As Peter Hyland notes,

Almost all disguises represented some sort of transgression of social boundaries, and could show and interrogate differences of class, gender, religion and nation. Such mobility of identity might have been seen as subversively destructive, or it might have been seen as a blessed liberation from authoritarian constraint. (4)

Furthermore, there is evidence the women do not immediately remove their disguises at the point of identification. They decide not to go to the magistrates and appear in the final act as pages, allowing their physical masculinity to endure beyond their identification as women. It is then reported that Spark and Ruffle were poisoned and did not survive. Susan and Nan are called to affirm the news, which they do. There is no other appearance or information provided concerning the sisters. They do not retransition publicly and Felecia continues to identify the two as pages, though she is aware of their female identities. However, there is a clear lack of reward for these crossdressers and their efforts bear no fruit.

Lucy Munro sees this ending as a Jacobean experimentation of genre that shifts the expectations of comedy noting, "A comparison with *Your Five Gallants*, however, suggests that both plays share a self-conscious awareness that comic endings can be satirised as arbitrary impositions" (87). There is no comedic satisfaction; the women are not reintroduced to society; the object of their disguise is denied, and they do not receive love or marriage.

They experience no restoration of any kind. These consequences, when viewed with the immersion into masculinity these women exhibit, point toward a lack of sympathy for characters who use masculine disguises to manipulate society to pursue selfish, unrequited love. Lacking any need for safety or hope for justice, Susan and Nan receive no reward and their crossdressing is deemed unjustified and ultimately unsuitable.

Deemed, “tawdry and imitative” by Mary Bly, *The Fleire* is a prime example of a play created in the midst of crossdressing popularity that relies on established conventions to create a drama that is ultimately an amalgamation of stock plot points and characters (149). Made to appeal to audiences familiar with the already developed common themes of heroine crossdresser plays, *The Fleire* does not invent new devices, but derives a plot consistent with and reflective of the genre from which it emerges. However, this familiarity with the common use of plots and character archetypes in previous heroine crossdressing narratives allows for a few moments of pronounced individuality, namely that the play undermines the success of its crossdressers categorically and fails to offer them the conventional restoration.

### C. *Ram Alley or Merry Tricks* (c. 1606-1607)

*Ram Alley or Merry Tricks* by Lording Barry is a Children of the King’s Revels play which exemplifies a continuation of popular tropes, derived from popular authors, while offering small inventions to the genre (Fraser 74; Munro, *Children* 59). Specifically, the plot relies heavily on Middleton’s *A Trick to Catch the Old One*, a play without a crossdressed heroine; however, this borrowing of popularized devices does extend to crossdressing, including a heroine who pursues a lover (Leggatt 59). As Robert Fraser explains, it is, “a competent example of the type of comedy produced for the private theatres and reflects, therefore, on the work of other, better-known dramatists” (2). This is not to say that the play

is held in disregard; at the turn of the twentieth century, Felix Schelling lauds Barry for his work calling it, “among the very best imitations of Middleton’s comedy, and a better play than several of Middleton’s own” (*Vol. 2* 519). Set in the real location of a London alley, this is a play that, like *The Roaring Girl*, draws on reality and history (Watson 205).

Immediately, the crossdresser appears to discuss her disguise and explain her motivation: Constantia is a gentlewoman, destined as the heir to her mother’s fortune and the function of her disguise is to pursue a man whom she loves:

I have forsook  
 My shape, my mother, and those rich demesnes  
 Of which I am sole heir, and now resolve  
 In this disguise of page to follow him  
 Whose love first caused me to assume this shape.  
 Lord, how my feminine blood stirs at the sight  
 Of these same breeches. Methinks this codpiece  
 Should betray me (1.1.1)

Constantia makes it clear that she sees her body in feminine terms and finds the masculine signifying clothing she wears as discordant to her physical body and sense of identity, especially the codpiece that references genitalia. Like several heroine characters in preceding plays (e.g., *Clyomon and Clamydes*, *The Fleire*), Constantia finds Boutcher, the object of her affection, and offers to enter his service. Unlike her predecessors, she cites her own name as a reference and presents her own letter to her new master who offers a warm welcome, “She gives thee here good words, and for her sake / Thou shalt not want a master. Be mine for ever” (1.1.23). After this success, Constantia reveals that the reason for her disguise is her suspicion that Boutcher has been unfaithful. As in of *The Wise Woman of Hogsdon*, Constantia believes that her disguise will allow her to travel independently and in secret so

that she can find the truth for herself. It is not long before Constantia witnesses another woman, Frances, explain to Boutcher that she was “Spotless and free, till you corrupted me,” which affirms her fear that the two have had sex (1.1.77). Each woman’s reputation has been impacted by the treatment they have received from Boutcher, Frances because she has had sex and Constantia because she has been abandoned. His actions towards Frances and their subsequent extramarital sexual relationship condemn her in the eyes of society and in the eyes of Constantia, who hopes to marry Boutcher.

However, though Constantia quickly discovers Boutcher’s infidelity, she does not immediately confront him, nor does she reveal herself or discard her disguise. Instead, this heroine ingratiates herself into masculine society, assimilates herself into the fringe society of servant boys, and attempts to manipulate and influence her lover from her concealed position. Proving adept at adopting new masculine skills and unafraid of associating herself with men, she deems herself one of them. Coarse language enters her lexicon, and she becomes an insider among her new community. Recounting an expedition to obtain information for Boutcher, Constantia relates, “I tell you, master, / I have done that for many of these gallants / That no man in this town would do but I” (1.2). Constantia acclimatizes to her new station and proves proficient in gaining Boutcher’s trust. She counts herself as both belonging to the cohort of men with which she converses but also as superior to them, bragging that while she associates with the men, she behaves differently than any other man would. Though thoroughly immersed in the masculine social sphere, this tie to her previous identity as a woman leaves Constantia performing in a fashion adjacent to what is expected of a man.

Constantia continues to use her masculine appearance and the social benefits to achieve her goals. When Taffeta, a third woman, seeks Boucher’s attention, Constantia tests him by pushing him to betray her before her own eyes. Taffeta drops a handkerchief from a window and convinces Boutcher to collect the item, but although he refuses to enter the

house to return the token, this interaction convinces Constantia that Boutcher is in love with her and reconfirms her belief that he is inclined to be unfaithful. As Boutcher gives in to Taffeta's advances, Constantia makes the choice not to attempt to stop him, but to let it play out while she indulges her masculinity further. In a vulgar and aggressive advance, Constantia approaches Taffeta's maid, Adriana.

CONSTANTIA. Now will I fall aboard the waiting maid.

ADRIANA. Fall aboard of me! Do'st take me for a ship?

CONSTANTIA. Ay, and will shoot you betwixt wind and water (1.2.107)

In her disguise, Constantia insinuates a desire for sex with Adriana, even alluding graphically to anatomical innuendo. This sexual engagement is unexpected in a virginal crossdresser and a significant advancement in the behaviors of crossing dressing heroines. Despite her early discomfort, Constantia is willing to integrate into her masculine role, even so far as to attempt a sexual encounter with a woman.

However, Constantia is prevented from follow through when Adriana counters with a poignant insult that alludes to Constantia's secret: "Blurt, Master Gunner, your linstock's too short!" (1.2.110). Adriana's language points to an insufficient penis, leaving Constantia astonished that Adriana might be aware of her physiology and that her physical stature might betray her identity. Though Adriana's language may be construed as comments on the undeveloped body of a boy, Constantia associates the words with her female body. Constantia reacts by affirming her desire to perform the actions of her masculine identity completely, with an intense desire to achieve masculine sexual action:

ADRIANA. Faith, I should breech thee!

CONSTANTIA. How? Breech me!

ADRIANA. Ay, breech thee (1.2.116).

In response to the insult that she is a loose woman, Adriana argues that she, instead, would ‘breach’ the person she sees. The insinuation of a female penetration belittles the already precarious masculinity Constantia attempts to project. Adriana gives assurances to Constantia and the two conceal themselves in the house together, presumably to learn how a woman can penetrate and perhaps how a female boy can be penetrated. This is unusual and is reminiscent of *Gallathea*’s heroines absconding into the woods, though this instance is decidedly more explicit; however, the results of such a liaison are again left undivulged.

Beyond her eagerness for sexual interaction with a woman, Constantia continues to proficiently adapt to her life as a page. She learns the inner workings of sex work and comfortably voices her opinions publicly on legal questions. Her voice becomes critical, authoritative, bold, and lewd by the end of the first act. By the second act, Boutcher’s new servant challenges him, and he receives biased advice. Knowing her master’s desire for the widow Taffeta, Constantia uses the impact of her masculine voice to influence her master.

These waiting maids are to their mistresses  
 Like porches unto doors: you pass the one  
 Before you can have entrance at the other;  
 ...  
 Be ruled by me: untruss yourself to her,  
 Out with all your love-sick thoughts to her (2.2.60)

This lengthy advice serves two purposes. Simultaneously establishing her character as an authority on masculine courting and asserting influence over Boutcher, Constantia gives advice on masculine behavior. Though this advice is clearly tainted by underlying feminine motives to undermine the success of the match, the advice projects the opposite. Constantia positions herself as a man well versed in effective masculine behavior and she is convincing enough to gain control over Boutcher’s actions. The crossdressed heroine continues to liaison

with Adriana and gains further information on the relationship of the noble couple. When Adriana invites the boy in and goes as far to offer the potential of “a bed,” Constantia takes the offer in exchange for the secrets of the house (2.2.95). Constantia encourages the advances of Adriana and allusions to a sexual relationship between the two women are frequent; however, Constantia consistently takes advantage of Adriana’s interest to gain information and access in her pursuit of Boutcher. How far she delves into her dalliance with the unsuspecting servant is ambiguous; but her willingness to imply sexual attraction is clear. Nevertheless, these actions are taken with the motive to ultimately attract a man, not a woman. After entering the house with the woman, Constantia is summarily glossed over for several scenes. She appears once to witness an exchange in the fourth act where she enters as Boutcher’s servant and is told by the men to leave; however, she presumably stands to the side to eavesdrop as she briefly insults the man to whom Boutcher is speaking. She reappears in the final scene of the play.

After this extensive interlude, Constantia’s sharp tongue does not dull. She intercepts Boutcher on his way to visit the widow Taffeta in the morning and is harsh in her estimate of his actions. Referencing a prophecy that Boutcher will be undone by a widow, a point of constant strife for the man, the boy servant scolds her master with, “The weaker you. You are forbid a widow, / And ‘tis the first thing you would fall into” (5.3.36). The admonition continues with a list of archetypes deemed more suitable by Constantia, mainly varieties of young virgins. Though Constantia uses her faculties as a boy with more pronounced social manipulation, base masculine toned communication, and sexual involvement than female crossdressing characters that precede her, her agenda does not waver and remains firmly founded in her goals as a heterosexual woman pursuing her man. These efforts far outweigh the flirtations Constantia engages in with Adriana; her sexual priority is a man.

However, her success is not explicitly spawned by this agency or effort. Boutcher learns that Taffeta has remarried, and he becomes despondent; the object separating Boutcher and Constantia is removed tangentially, with no reference to Constantia's action. Though she did not actively remove the barrier to her love, perhaps her flawed advice to Boutcher contributed to Taffeta's rejection. The heroine uses her disguised position a final time to facilitate a reunion between her feminine self and her love. Boutcher attempts to hang himself in his grief, an act which is witnessed by Constantia, but she finds herself unable to act. Despite her persistent masculine posturing and aggressive attempts to be inserted into masculine situations, Constantia becomes overwhelmed in the moment and desperately calls for help, "Murder! Murder! If any gentleman / Can hear my complaints, come forth and assist me!" (5.3.78). Though her body does not fail causing her to faint, it cannot act, and subtly excluding herself, Constantia calls for 'any gentleman.' She cannot face the violent situation as a man and chooses to revert to her feminine self to resolve the drama. After Boutcher is rescued without her help, Constantia uses her acquired knowledge to arrange a marriage between 'Constantia' and the gentleman (5.3.130). On the condition of repentance from Boutcher and on the presumption of his survival, Constantia decides to forgive him and reunite. She chooses not to reveal herself immediately, but rather to go away and return as her feminine self, foregoing a public revelation in exchange for the chance to be in a fully feminine presentation when confronting Boutcher.

In the interim, Lady Somerfield, Constantia's mother, arrives, furious that her daughter is missing. With a company of officers, she threatens to arrest any man responsible for the abduction of the heir to her late husband's fortune. Confusion ensues before Constantia arrives, restored to femininity; this arrival provides a reunion uncomplicated by any masculine physicality. Though she discusses her time in disguise, it is while dressed as a

woman, with the goals of her feminine identity fore fronted, and her masculinity is only in retrospect. Constantia announces to the gathering,

Here I present the page. And that all doubts  
 May here be cleared, here in my proper shape,  
 ...  
 Here will I choose a husband. This be the man  
 Whom, since I left your house in shape of page,  
 I still have followed. (5.3.303)

Lady Somerfield immediately offers her consent to the union of her daughter and Boutcher. Visually, there is no reminder of Constantia's masculinity; Boutcher does not have to reconcile his love for Constantia with a masculine form or associate her with the wild youth who has served him. When asked by the transformed page if she is welcome, he promptly accepts her as his new wife. Though Boutcher offers no repentance for his pursuit of Taffeta, her marriage and his near death are enough to appease Constantia without discussion. Faced with the presence of all society and an available, virginal, wealthy woman, Boutcher concedes. On her own terms, after a confrontation with a violent scenario with which she is unable to cope, Constantia reverts to femininity with no lingering indications of masculinity, placates her mother, and achieves the object of her foray into masculine disguise, a man without a damaged reputation or tangible consequence. She receives a full reconciliation and restoration to her feminine identity.

Constantia represents a progression in eagerness for a crossdressed heroine to participate in masculine culture and action, particularly sexual elements. She is able and willing to integrate into both her role as a member of lower-class society and into a breadth of masculine performances. However, as Lucy Munro suggests, "In *Ram Alley* violence is written as part of the comic fun" and this violence is Constantia's limit (*Children* 114). Her

only limitation and the catalyst for her return to femininity occurs after an encounter with Boutcher's suicide attempt and his harmed body. While Constantia escalates the assimilation into masculinity while in disguise, she fully reverts to her feminine identity, going so far as to change her appearance in private without public association between her masculine appearing body and feminine identity. She is both an evolution of the trope and a continuance of several traditions including a heroine in pursuit of a wayward lover and the assumption that early modern heroines in disguise cannot cope with violence and must return to their former state when faced with it.

#### D. *The Dumb Knight* (c. 1608)

*The Dumb Knight*, by Lewis Machin and Gervase Markham, features Mariana, an ingenious young woman who, like Shakespeare's Portia, uses disguise to save her love interest, Philocles, and not for her own bodily safety. This play, published in 1608 but potentially written earlier, also shares similarities with works by Middleton and Heywood; it marks transitional interests, particularly in the conclusion, between Elizabethan and Jacobean audiences (Adams 1; Dawson 346; Schelling, *Vol. 1* 204).<sup>51</sup> The first four acts of the play include a dramatic relationship between the two lovers; Mariana originally convinces Philocles to prove his love to her by not speaking for an entire year which serves to also cease his persistent courting. In the interim, the king becomes frustrated that Philocles does not speak and that the reason cannot be diagnosed. Mariana offers to make him speak on the penalty of her own death. When the terms are agreed, she releases Philocles from his vow, but he still does not speak. This leads to Mariana's near execution and a last-minute break of

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<sup>51</sup> Laura A. Hibbard argues that the play is Jacobean and Lesel Dawson argues that it is Elizabethan (Hibbard 4; Dawson 346).

that silence. Mariana is spared; however, a plot against them accuses Philocles of an affair with the queen, which leads to their arrests on the grounds of treason.

In response, Mariana devises a plan to return the favor and save Philocles's life (5.1, p. 443).<sup>52</sup> Although willing to die for the man she loves Mariana chooses explicitly non-violent means by which to pursue his release. She bribes the jailor, gains access to Philocles and, after leaving the stage, the two return in each other's clothing: Mariana now dressed as a man, Philocles, and vice versa. This change is enough to convince the jailor, who cannot distinguish between the two bodies or voices and relies only on the visual representation offered. While Philocles expresses some hesitation at leaving Mariana in the dangerous position of a person imprisoned for treason, he is ultimately convinced to leave her behind. Significantly, this use of masculine disguise intentionally places a woman in physical danger. Though the masculine sphere frequently subjects a disguised woman to acts of violence, the disguise is rarely designed for a dangerous situation and here Mariana risks potentially lethal capital punishment. Furthermore, her choice of disguise is also unusual as she impersonates a specific person rather than a generic caricature of a boy, page, servant, or nonspecific brother. While *Twelfth Night's* Viola disguises herself as her own brother, he is unknown to those she initially encounters and her disguise falters when she is faced with people who know them both. *Love's Cure's* Clara takes her brother's name and the heroines of *Gallathea* take their fathers,' however these crossdressers seem to perform their own version of these identities rather than imitate the specific men. Mariana's disguise is dependent on her ability to assume the identity of a particular man for the benefit of people who have already encountered him. Despite such obstacles, she successfully deceives not only a nondescript jailor, but also members of the court who are more intimately familiar with Philocles.

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<sup>52</sup> Dodsley's edition does not include line numbers. Page numbers are in reference to the 9<sup>th</sup> volume of *A Select Collection of Old English Plays*.

After being taken to the court for execution, Mariana listens to the queen defend herself against the accusations of an affair. While physically bound and at the edge of execution, Mariana uses her masculine voice to incite the shift that saves her life. The power of that voice, though in a vulnerable situation, prompts the queen to request combat between two champions to solve the issue. The king agrees and his champion is the duke, the man who created the rumors of the affair and is also Mariana's brother. The champion who arrives for the queen is a disguised Philocles who almost instantly prevails and forces a full confession. When her brother addresses her directly and she responds as herself, the truth of Mariana's identity is rather unceremoniously revealed. Curiously, it is not clear whether he sees through her disguise, or if he is speaking to her generally assuming she is absent and unexpectedly receives a response; either way, no shock or commentary is expressed by the witnesses. Furthermore, when Philocles becomes known, his replacement's identity goes unnoticed: in this play, a crossdressed heroine is quite literally unremarkable.

A small progression, this play increases the stakes of disguise: Mariana puts her life at risk and must mimic a specific man in the presence of people who know him. Yet these advancements in the trope are paired with a novel disinterest in a grand revelation of disguise. In the end, Mariana is forgotten and not openly restored to her feminine identity. This passivity towards a staple element of the trope points to a growing apathy and familiarity towards crossdressing heroines; the next play in this list also denies restoration to its heroine, though it is done publicly. No longer obligated to be redeemed publicly, the re-feminization of these women is not the priority and no longer the most interesting conclusion to the narrative.

E. *The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois* (c. 1609-1610)

George Chapman's pseudo-historical play, *The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois*, not to be confused with its prequel *Bussy D'Ambois*, presents Charlotte, a young woman whose brother is the title character (Hillman, *The Tragic* 23). In the previous play, D'Ambois is a poverty-stricken soldier looking for new prospects. He fights his way up through society in dramatic fashion, only to be killed in an ambush. The second play features Bussy's brother seeking revenge with a cameo from Bussy's ghost. While D'Ambois is a rambunctious and rebellious character, his brother, Clermont, by stark contrast, is a religious stoic. While less action packed than its predecessor, this play engages with questions of sexuality, homoeroticism, and crossdressing. Though her role in the first play is minimal, in *Revenge*, Charlotte is an opinionated and passionate character willing to challenge and chastise her brother, Clermont, who is beloved by all.

Clermont is markedly averse to direct action and struggles with his quest for revenge. Though she expresses loyalty and affection for her brother, Charlotte sees him as weak and frustrating. In a long and heated argument, she urges him to pursue the revenge she craves hastily and with purpose, accusing Clermont of delaying and not being committed to the cause. These chastisements are brutal; she proclaims, "Some foole hath put this tricke on you, yet more / T'uncover your defect of spirit and valour, / First showne in lingring my deare brother's wreake" (3.2.93). This passivity affects Charlotte's view on her brother's character; she equates his unwillingness to participate in violence with his moral status and ultimately his masculinity. To her, his hesitation and lack of passion is evidence of personal failure. Clermont mounts little defense for himself but leans on a philosophical argument. He does not wish to meet violence with violence or evil with evil; he asks his sister, "Shall we revenge a villanie with villanie" (3.2.89). Decrying vigilante justice, Clermont regrets his pursuit of

revenge and laments all violence in the pursuit of good. While he does not appreciate his sister's vigor, other men remark on her forceful nature with approval and respect; for example, Renel reassures her "there will be time enough / For all the vengeance your great spirit can wish" (3.2.121).

In addition to her anger at her brother, Charlotte demonstrates continued frustration for her own husband, whom she swore to this revenge as a condition of their marriage. As Bussy's brother, Clermont's vow of revenge supersedes Charlotte's husband's claim to enact revenge, but Charlottes retains her dissatisfaction against both men for not swiftly acting. Clermont continues to attempt to calm his fiery sister which brings her to the brink of her patience. Charlotte threatens to embarrass the men by relinquishing the limits of her feminine clothing and identification to pursue revenge personally.

I would once  
Strip off my shame with my attire, and trie  
If a poore woman, votist of revenge,  
Would not performe it with a president  
To all you bungling, foggy-spirited men. (5.1.154)

In her anger, Charlotte confronts and challenges all the men who have failed her, making her intentions boldly public. Indeed, it is the absence of masculine actions that serves to excuse her passion to fulfil it. If no man will rise to the necessity of the occasion, she can call for the action to be taken, attempt to shame and influence her brother, and openly desire masculine agency for herself. The responsibility for her masculine behavior is shifted to the men. When they perform their masculinity, there is no purpose for women to become masculine; but in an absence or failing, women are driven to augment the insufficiency of their counterparts. This is an echo from earlier plays where women pursue men who have not fulfilled their social obligations and broken trysts and women like Bess Bridges in *The Fair Maid of the West* who

defends her own home and servants or *The Merchant of Venice*'s Portia who goes to court instead of a man.

Clermont's deficiency extends to impotence and overt questioning of his sexuality and sexual capacity. A lord comments, "How strangely thou art lov'd of both the sexes; / Yet thou lov'st neyther, but the good of both" (5.1.154). This reputation for lacking a sexual or romantic drive compounds the characteristics assigned to Clermont that demean his position of authority. Claremont finds it necessary to clarify that he has a sexual urge, specifically for women, just one that has been dampened by heartache; subsequently he decries love generally, a stance which further ostracizes his views from his peers (5.1.160). Where a lack of sexual performance often exonerates the masculinity of women by confirming their underlying dedication to the expectations of their internal feminine identity, for Clermont, abstinence is a deficiency in masculine performance. His insistence in remaining outwith the looming societal expectation creates the space for his sister to attempt her own revenge.

Charlotte returns disguised as her own servant. As in *Ram Alley*, she appears to Tamyra, Bussy's former love, using her own name to provide a reference and is not recognized. Charlotte clarifies that her service is dedicated to revenge: "Madame, I am bound to her vertuous bounties / For that life which I offer, in her service, / To the revenge of her renowned brother" (5.3.3). Tamyra offers her confidence in the stranger but remarks that though Charlotte has an "unmatched spirit," she believes that the boy will be unnecessary as Clermont will fulfill his duty in the end (5.3.10). She counsels Charlotte, "Her living brother will revenge her dead, / On whom the dead impos'd the taske, and hee, / I know, will come t'effect it instantly" (5.3.11). Charlotte remains vehement that her male presence is unequivocally necessary and a direct result of the incapacity and ineffective actions of her brother. Nevertheless, the nobles remain convinced that Clermont will not only achieve what he is sworn to, and that he will not allow an outsider to participate. In the final scene, this

prediction becomes true; Clermont faces his enemy in the name of his brother, and he wounds the man who killed Bussy, Monsturry, before Charlotte returns.

Though Clermont has ostensibly fulfilled his vow, Charlotte remains discontent. She arrives angry at the scene before her, attempts to interject, and when Clermont asks the servant boy to explain their purpose, replies “I would performe this combat” (5.5.92). Although known to be in the employ of a family member, as this stranger does not hold a blood claim to revenge, they are viewed as an interloper. Charlotte’s challenge that she would fight either her brother or the offender does not engender support for her cause. However, the use of her name once again offers her some attention, and she creates a confrontation in the name of her feminine identity’s shame at Clermont. Furious, she again threatens to fight her own brother,

I care not much if twere  
 Against thy selfe; thy sister would have sham’d  
 To have thy brothers wreake with any man  
 In single combat sticke so in her fingers. (5.5.94)

Clermont is surprised that the boy is a representative of his sister and with that information, asks if the servant thinks that he can do a better job. This passion for an excess of action and lack of content with Clermont’s lukewarm fulfillment of his obligation begins to unravel her disguise and causes onlookers to question the motivations of the strange servant boy. She confronts her brother and is given his response,

CHARLOTTE. And wer’t not I, fresh, sound, should charge a man  
 Weary and wounded, I would long ere this  
 Have prov’d what I presume on.  
 CLERMONT. Y’have a minde  
 Like to my sister, but have patience now (5.5.104)

As the boy, Charlotte claims that she does not fight only because she is too fresh, and Clermont is tired from his previous fight. It is a claim that protects her from accusations that she is not able to fight and puts her in the position of seeming honorable, but also protects her from having to prove any aptitude in violence.

This rivalry extends beyond a belief that Clermont is not doing his masculine duty. Charlotte's anger is no longer rooted in disappointment at a lack of action, but in resentment of Clermont's spirit of intention: his masculine honor is more nuanced than a direct display of violence but must be accompanied with a desire for that action. It is only when he completes his action of revenge and finally kills the enemy, that Clermont appeases his sister. However, though he wins, the passive gentleman is immediately filled with guilt and commits suicide. In a reversal of the heroine crossdressing trope of a woman not being able to face violence; Clermont accomplishes his action, but his internal conflict does not tolerate the violence he has performed. It is only at his death that Charlotte finally condones her brother, and at the same time reveals herself. She cries out,

Well done, my brother! I did love thee ever,  
 But now adore thee: losse of such a friend  
 None should survive, of such a brother  
 With my false husband live, and both these slaine!  
 Ere I returne to him, Ile turne to earth. (5.5.199)

The fresh idolization of Clermont mirrors that of the dead Bussy, a passionate love only in death. Charlotte finds that the respect for her deceased brothers eclipses that of her husband who failed to support her lust for revenge. She swears to die before rejoining the marriage and calls for all onlookers to join her in leaving society entirely. Responding to Tamyra, Charlotte urges, "In cloisters then let's all survive. / Madame, since wrath nor grieve can helpe these fortunes, / Let us forsake the world in which they raigne" (5.5.209). This vow to

become a nun and remove herself from the social order serves to absolve Charlotte's disruptive behavior. Though unfulfilled, her desire to be violent and insistence on masculinity is offset in the extreme. Charlotte is not restored to her previous state because she does not meet the qualifications for complete societal forgiveness and re-integration. She challenged the social gender constructs and her place in them. Charlotte is unrepentant of her choice; her transition was proven unnecessary, and she rectifies the imbalance caused by removing herself from society and her marriage.

Charlotte is a heroine who is both an expressive Jacobean woman with a fresh forcefulness admired by her community and constrained by Elizabethan expectations for the trope that a crossdressing heroine will either revert entirely or face consequences for her masculinity. As an unrepentant crossdresser with unresolved cravings for violence and revenge, Charlotte is required to ostracize herself and atone for her ardor as a woman and her affinity for masculinity during her disguise. Additionally, her disdain for her husband and refusal to reintegrate into her previous role as a wife provides incentive for her self-expulsion. This play is a bridge between Elizabethan restrictions for the resolutions of crossdressing heroines and the new Jacobean affinity for compelling, independent female characters who push social boundaries.

#### F. *The Hogge Hath Lost His Pearl* (1613)

In Robert Tailor's play, a young woman, Maria, is in love with Carracus (Duncan-Jones 1). She invites him into her room; however, she is deceived by a man named Albert who pretends to be the suitor. As a result of the bed trick, they have sex and Maria goes on to marry the real Carracus. Both are unaware of the deception until Carracus notices Maria's ring which she tells him he gave her when they first slept together. He realizes that she has

slept with Albert and feels betrayed by his friend. In his anger, he informs Maria of what has happened, prompting her to collapse. She exclaims, “I have heard enough, my Carracus, / To bereave me of this little breath” before losing consciousness (3.1.79). Carracus never blames his wife or finds fault in her; instead, he affirms his unconditional belief in her honesty and strength of character to the extent that he supposes that since she believed she lost all her breath, she must be dead. Maria’s nurse, a witness to her collapse, is more temperate and attempts to calm the distressed man; she is skeptical and intimates that Carracus is falsely remembering Maria’s perfection. She worries, “His memory begins to fail him” before going to the woman (3.1.90). Though a small moment, she challenges the validity of Carracus’ outbursts, emotions, and assertions, effectively diminishing his narrative authority and complicating Maria’s assumed morality.

The nurse then returns and tells Carracus Maria has indeed died; however, moments later, after Carracus has exited, she reveals to the audience that the woman is alive and explains that Maria has chosen “perpetual banishment” rather than face the shame she feels over the situation (3.1.147). To confirm this, Maria briefly reappears on stage in her new disguise as a man and explains that

Shame hath constrained me fly, ne’er to return.  
 I will go seek some unfrequented path,  
 Either in desert woods or wilderness,  
 There to bewail my innocent mishaps,  
 Which heaven hath justly poured down on me,  
 In punishing my disobedience. (3.2.4)

Though she was raped, Maria believes she deserves self-imposed banishment for the non-marital relations with Albert. She is willing to sacrifice her life and identity as recompense

for a non-consensual encounter of which she was unaware for a significant period. This trauma prompts her to seek a new, hidden self.

In the interim, Albert in his guilt has also fled to the woods and expresses a relief in isolating himself; he is repentant and lives like a hermit. When Maria enters his part of the woods, Albert sees her and unbeknown to her, he overhears her speaks to herself about her new situation and identity. Maria makes it clear that her masculine outward appearance is a disguise created as penance to conceal herself and she welcomes starvation and unhappiness in her chosen state. Albert becomes despondent at his role in her suffering. He vows to find her food, prays that she will offer forgiveness, and hopes to, “save / His wronged beauty from untimely grave” (4.1.37). Scared and hungry, Maria comes to a tree that has a very long, repentant speech carved into it by Albert. She believes the writings on the tree to be in earnest and promptly pities and forgives the man who deceived her, assaulted her, and drove her to her current state of misery. Maria proceeds loudly and extensively to forgive Albert unconditionally, which he witnesses from afar. Stunned, he responds with,

But see, she faints! O heavens, now show your power,

That these distilled waters, made in grief,

May add some comfort to affliction.

Look up, fair youth, and see a remedy. (4.1.92)

Albert marks the failure of Maria’s body as her hunger becomes overwhelming, knowing that she is female. In an involuntary feminine action, Maria faints; but when Albert goes to her, he allows her to retain her disguise and refers to her in masculine terms as her appearance suggests. Honoring her chosen gendered presentation, Albert conceals his identity while Maria remains fatalistic and morose. Consistently calling her ‘boy’ and validating her appearance, Albert shows Maria respect and the two form a comradeship (4.1.99).

While her disguise is not exactly successful in concealing her true identity, Maria has not chosen to reveal herself, nor has she been publicly exposed. Instead, she has been accidentally found out and Albert becomes complicit in her secret without her knowledge. Unlike other crossdressed heroines, she has not chosen him as her confidant or companion. Not knowing the man to whom she speaks, Maria is once again unwittingly at his mercy when she asks to live in the woods; Albert agrees, subsequently insisting that she will live with him, and he will tell her his life's story. There is no hint or reference to the potential for him to abuse her, expose her, or of the complications of a vulnerable woman living with her abuser alone in the isolated forest. His tree confession is taken as truth and her forgiveness is applied to him without her awareness. Though Albert continues to struggle with his crimes and contrition, he sees the cohabitation as an extension of his penance and reformation, but this remains completely on his terms. Though his ambitions have shifted since raping Maria, his actions and deception remain remarkably similar, and the two depart together with Maria completely trusting the stranger.

In his grief, Carracus wanders to the same woods. He encounters the goddess Echo and is led to believe that Maria is still alive. Maria does not settle into her new life, space, or identity well. She walks through the woods longing after Carracus though she claims her desire is only for him to see the tree apology from Albert and not to be reunited. She remains frustratingly naïve and does not recognize Albert, "How the good hermit seems to share his moans" (4.3.12). Yet in her long speeches, the woman only despairs at the suffering the hermit inflicts on himself. This is followed by a dance from satyrs and finally Albert and Carracus mysteriously appear before her, together. Though her disappearance was of her own volition and not forced or prompted by her husband, Maria rejoices at the sight of him. With the first indication of hope since her ostracization, she exclaims, "O, see, 'tis Carracus! / Joy, do not now confound me!" (4.3.30). Carracus enters explaining that he has seen the tree and

also fully forgives and pardons Albert. At his declaration of “Yet I forgive him,” Maria reveals herself with “So doth Maria too” (4.3.50, 4.3.51). She does not test her disguise against her husband; in fact, her disguise is never tested. While she accidentally revealed herself to Albert, here Maria chooses to unmask herself to Carracus. Not only does she rarely refer to her boy self, but she constantly converses with herself from her feminine perspective. Though she believes she has fooled the disguised Albert, there is no assimilation or attraction to her life as a boy and she does not embrace it. This provides the means for an uncomplicated return to her feminine life, Carracus never faces attraction to a boy form and Maria never struggles with releasing the privileges of existing as a male. There is no question of her devotion to her feminine self or any anxiety that she might have permanently assumed masculine qualities because she never assumed masculine action even temporarily.

Carracus is surprised that Echo was correct, and he rejoices that his wife is alive. Maria’s account of her journey to him again emphasizes unconditional forgiveness based on contrition. She affirms her dedication to that principle, by applying this forgiveness to herself. The fact that both parties have shown penitence, which has received Carracus’ blessing, allows Maria to grant herself a full exoneration from her relations with Albert (though she is the only one who insists on exoneration in the first place). When Maria thanks the hermit and Carracus confesses that he was also saved, Albert reveals himself and all three are fully reconciled. Maria sees this reunion as stronger due to the betrayal and subsequent restoration. Carracus feels similarly and remarks “Thus by the breach of faith our friendship’s knit / In stronger bonds of love” (4.3.108). Disturbingly, Maria appears almost grateful for her assault but finds strength in the recovery of her identity, marriage, and friendship. The lovers refuse to allow Albert to remain in the woods and the final act consists of the three returning to the house of Carracus’ father and resuming their former lives in harmony. Carracus mirrors

Maria's sentiments from the earlier act in his parting words and finds that the pain endured produces an appreciation for their happiness.

This play concludes with a focus not on morality, justice, or individuality, but instead on harmony and restoration. It is an extreme form of the restoration narrative that minimizes both Maria's trauma and her experience in disguise. She does not acclimate to masculinity, nor does she engage in physical actions associated with masculinity and the involuntary feminine action of fainting betrays her identity. Donned for personal safety and anonymity in the tradition of many other heroines, her disguise is flimsy and upheld only by Albert's acquiescence. Her femininity remains entirely intact, and her restoration is only necessary on the surface, she faces no internalized identity conflict. When this restoration occurs, it is to the extent that all harm caused to her feminine self-prior to disguise is also erased. There is no progression for her life: no new relationship, agency, or location. Maria is returned completely to her marriage, friendships, and home as they were before her betrayal. Tailor creates an absolute version of a restored heroine who uses masculinity in only the most superficial and temporary of ways and reverts so wholly to her feminine self that even the damage done to her as a woman, prior to her disguise, is forgiven and forgotten.

#### G. *Hymen's Triumph* (c. 1615)

In *Hymen's Triumph*, a Samuel Daniel creation, Thirsis is devastated at the reported death of Silvia, the woman for whom he professes his enduring love (Greg 59). Cloris is a young woman who had been jealous of this love and was not sorry for Silvia's death, though she admits pity for her apparent demise at sea. Cloris sends her shepherd, Clarindo, to Thirsis with a message, believing that he will be receptive due to the boy sharing vague features with the dead girl, which he confirms in an offhand comment: "for sure, methinkes, noting thy

forme and grace / That thou hast much of Siluia in thy face” (1.2.251). For the attentive audience, this is an obvious indication of likely disguise. The conspicuous hint is shortly acknowledged as Clarindo spends the following scene in a lengthy soliloquy detailing how she is, in fact, Silvia who has escaped pirates.

While expressing the pain of seeing Thirsis frequently from afar, Silvia explains that her father wants her to marry Alexis, so she used her shepherd persona to remain hidden until after his imminent marriage. Yet now she is worried that Thirsis will not remain loyal to her memory and will move on before she can reveal herself as his attention now seems to be directed toward a third woman, Amarillis. Uncomfortable in her masculinity and aware of the dichotomy of her position, Silvia agonizes, “in what case am I? what doth availe / this altdred habit that belyes my sexe?” (1.3.332). Silvia openly despises her role as a boy, feeling that her body is at odds with her clothing and that her identity is undermined by her appearance.

In the meantime, another young woman, Phillis, is accused of shunning men and potentially being “in loue w<sup>th</sup> one is not a man” (1.5.432). This ironic statement is directed toward Clarindo, referencing the appearance that the figure is a boy, not a man. However, Phillis is pursued by Montanus, an aggressively masculine, violent man. Montanus brags of his “manly ancestors” and boasts of “Being neuer foyled in any wrastling game,” qualities which he equates with his manhood (2.1.583). Yet he is jealous of Phillis’ attentions to the shepherd and openly threatens that Clarindo, “shall deerly pay for his misfortune, that / Hee was belou’d of her of whome I would / Haue none on earth beloued, but my self” (2.1.607). He is counselled by a friend that his anger is misplaced and could be the result of a misunderstanding or a projected belief on Montanus’ part. As Clarindo, Silvia only avoids the altercation by defining the standards of masculine behavior through convincing Montanus that fighting someone weaker than himself is not manly. However, Phillis remains attracted to Clarindo and Montanus later struggles with her attraction to a boy who does not prove to

be as masculine. In his confusion, Montanus confesses to the woman he loves, “[I] did imagine that in beeing a man, / who might deserue regard, I should haue been / Prefer’d before a boy” (2.3.47). The man does not understand how the qualities which are defined as wholly masculine and revered by society do not allow him to be prioritized by Phillis. It is against his sense of logic that a boy could be favored over a proven man. Montanus has a basic concept of his place in the societal hierarchy and Clarindo’s presence disrupts this order.

In his grief at her presumed death, Silvia’s father, Medoras, laments that he forbade the match for which his daughter hoped. Unusually, he comes to this conclusion before being pressured by societal approval at the end of a comic narrative. Without a crowd of witnesses, he acknowledges that the forced betrothal was unnecessary and based on selfish financial intentions. Though the gesture is believed to be futile, he tells Thirsis’ father that he no longer objects to the marriage of their children. Thus, Medoras sets the foundation for Silvia to restore her feminine identity far in advance and without any knowledge that his daughter is even still alive. He removes the necessity for her disguise, his lack of approval, and the tension for Silvia’s situation remains only in her ignorance.

For his own part, Thirsis and his friend Palaemon debate the nature of their masculinity and their role in society. Palaemon offers the more succinct definition when he declares, “This is to be no man, to haue no powers. / Passions are womens parts, actions ours” (3.4.1189). Thirsis grapples with more complex elements of what he believes defines his identity as a man; he still believes that his honor as a man is tied to continued loyalty to Silvia. He asks, “Can there be in the worlde more worthines / Then to be constant? Is there any thing / Shewes more a man?” (3.4.1194). This proof of masculinity by constancy is curious. Frequently an indicator of both feminine and masculine character, loyalty and constancy is a universal value that is hoped for in both men and women, unlike violence

which is considered the sole purview of men. Yet Thirsis marks constancy as potentially the fundamental characteristic of his manhood, above displays of violence, arguing that men are constant, and women are prone to inconstancy. When Palaemon suggests that he does not need to mourn any longer, Thirsis responds, “what would you haue me change? / That were to haue me base, that were indeed / To shew a feeble hart; and weakely sett” (3.4.1195).

Thirsis is convinced that a lack of emotional loyalty, even to a dead woman, is attached to his masculinity and can serve as a determinant to his reputation and personal integrity. Yet, his enduring love and unwavering resolve are not mutually exclusive to concepts of violent behavior. He assures his friend that he has physical enemies to face that will also test his mettle and speaks of his tangible relationships in martial terms. His existence as a man still necessarily includes confrontation; there is an obligation to provide evidence that he acknowledges the requirement to engage in such action and prove capable of physical defense through violent performance.

As these questions of masculinity continue to be foregrounded, Silvia again expresses discomfort in her new role: “O could I now but put of this disguise” (4.3.1431). Her lack of adjustment to masculinity preserves her image as a figure out of place and clarifies her desire to return to her former appearance. As the conflicted figure of a boy, Silvia encounters Thirsis, but she does not entirely recognize him; however, the man seems familiar, and emotion overcomes her. His presence prompts Silvia to disclose her discomfort and to cryptically share her internal discord. “I cannot sing, but I could weepe... / Because I ame not as I wishe to be” (4.3.1462). Indeed, she explains that she originally adopted her new clothing for safety on the advice of the sea captain’s wife,

But daring not in such a place as that  
To trust her self in womans habit, crav’d  
That she might be apparell’d, as a boy:

And so she was, and as a boy she serv'd. (4.3.1591)

As Clarindo, Silvia is not able to compartmentalize her female identity from her masculine facade. Her intense emotional expressions are detrimental to her attempt to maintain the integrity of disguise. There is no question of assimilation to masculinity, and she does not display enjoyment or acceptance of her new identity.

Montanus pursues and finds Silvia, still visibly Clarindo; he arrives furious that Phillis remains interested in the boy. He promptly stabs Silvia and takes a garland off her head, an adornment given to her by Thirsis which particularly infuriates him. Thirsis is a witness and becomes hysterical at the brash violence. He is rendered strangely paralyzed by the scene and cannot reconcile his hope to help the bloody Silvia or to chase and attack the offender. Thirsis desperately cries out, "Ah monster man, vile wretch, what hast thou don. / Alas, in what a straight am I ingaged heare? / If I pursue reuenge, I leaue to saue" (4.4.1655). Overcome by his own emotions for what he still sees as a boy, Thirsis loses some of his own capacity for masculine action. He begs an onlooker to become his proxy and pursue violence in his stead. Rendered unable to act, Thirsis depends on help and can only retell the trauma. Tenderly he explains that "A gentle[r] creature then a lambe" has been murdered (4.3.1664). His passion for a boy affects his own masculine performance and he remains briefly confused and incapacitated.

However, Thirsis soon begins to recognize the body in his arms. Seeing details previously missed, her body becomes familiar to him in this state. He comments on what he suddenly notices,

What have we here, the mole of Siluia too?

What? and her brests? what? and her hayre, what? all

All Siluia? yes, all Siluia, and all dead

And art thou thus returnd agayne to mee? (4.5.1692)

Continuing to grieve at length, Thirsis becomes despondent. The manner of their reunion devastates him, and he cannot cope. Having already relinquished his masculine duties, Thirsis decides on a more extreme reaction. He announces to his deceased love, “I ready ame / T’accompany thy soule, and that w<sup>t</sup> speed. / The strings, I feele, are all dissolu’d, that hold / This wofull heart” (4.5.1718). Without the stamina to avenge Silvia, Thirsis determines suicide to be his only choice. The community arrives and the two bodies are found together; everyone recognizes Silvia. In her unconscious state, her body fails to project masculinity, though she is physically unchanged. When she faced violence against her body, she could not cope, and her façade dissolved involuntarily.

The final act repairs the societal damage created without the influence of the protagonist couple. Palaemon shares that though the two are presumed dead, they were taken away and recovered. Both survive, but neither appear again. The final moments detail attempts to conceal and compensate for the rifts in the patriarchal status quo caused by Silvia’s crossdressing. Phillis is ashamed of her attraction to Silvia and worries that her reputation and sexual identity will remain impacted by the expression of feelings she had made. She frets,

now am I  
vtterly sham’d, this youth turnd yoman is,  
Clarindo...  
now must I needes be made a comon iest  
& laughing stocke to every one that shall  
but heare how grossly I behaue’d my self (5.2.1858)

Phillis is concerned that she will continue to be judged by actions she took and homoerotic affections she held while ignorant. Her space in the community depends on her reputation and her ability to be attracted to an appropriate partner. Her attraction becomes a

transgression that is not automatically absolved. The people manipulated by Silvia are given a voice to share their distress and a larger social repair must occur to satisfactorily conclude the drama. Phillis' loyal companion Lidia becomes the catalyst for this process and offers an option for absolution. She counsels,

say thus, how yo<sup>w</sup>  
 knew well enough it was no man whom yo<sup>w</sup>  
 affected so, who never could loue man  
 nor ever would, & that by meere [instinct]<sup>53</sup>  
 and sympathie of Sex, yo<sup>w</sup> fancied him (5.2.1869)

Lidia's advice comes with a condition. For Phillis to pass off her remarks of love toward Silvia as merely a joke, Phillis must claim she both knew that the figure was not a man, and that love was generally impossible. Lidia offers advice to the second woman influenced by Silvia. Counselling Cloris to also feign knowledge of Silvia's disguise and to claim to have purposefully sent the girl boy after Thirsis, Lidia also advises Cloris to laugh off her role in the matter. She reminds the woman that it will look like a noble sacrifice of her own feelings and exonerate her completely. Since she acted in attraction to a man, Cloris' vindication is simpler. She needs only to reframe her narrative but suffers no punishment other than the loss of Thirsis. Though neither woman had any agency in the events prompted by Silvia's crossdressing, each face potentially significant impact to their lives and reputations. These are best solved by pretending that that they were in on the secret, changing the narrative for their benefit, and laughing with those who will laugh at them.

*Hymen's Triumph* evades tragicomedy by offering comedic restoration and assumed romantic bliss for the heroic couple. However, the tragic scene of two bodies, the lack of seeing the jubilant reunion, and the difficulties the community faces in the aftermath of

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<sup>53</sup> 'Instinct' is forgotten in the 1994 Malone Society reprint. See Early English Books Online reprint.

Silvia's crossdressing foregrounds lasting consequences of crossdressing and points to a generic shift in the trope. This play indicates the now established move towards tragicomedy seen in plays such as *Cupid's Revenge* and *The Maid's Tragedy* and blends that mode with previous comedic narratives. The scars left behind create an atmosphere that does not entirely condone or permit a final mitigation for flouting the rules of gender performance. Silvia experiences acute trauma throughout her journey and leaves visible damage in her wake. Community members do not immediately accept the resolution of the crossdressing and must contend with how they have been impacted by their actions. Again, the restoration of the heroine is less of a priority than seen in earlier plays and a shift towards exploring the reaction of the larger community toward crossdressing rather than the personal journey of the heroine takes precedent.

These contributions by authors who write only one crossdressing narrative illustrate the growth of the trope as a popular movement. Playwrights built on each other's work as part of a movement that is interested in heroine crossdressing as a burgeoning genre. The number of playwrights who contribute to the form speaks to a general fascination with heroine crossdressers and the accompanying desire to engage in questions of gender presentation and identity. These plays both demonstrate patterns of conventional use throughout the early development of heroine crossdressing narratives and provide unique insight into the evolutions and individual progressions playwrights create as the trope becomes widespread and familiar. The volume of contribution points to a genre that cannot not be defined by one author's work but is rather invented through the participation of a substantial cohort of writers and the diversity of character archetypes created.

## VII. Conclusion

The proliferation of crossdressing heroines marks a wider interest in questions surrounding gender and the fringes of binary identities than is often considered in modern criticism. This breadth of characters is far greater than a handful of Shakespearean heroines or a small smattering of characters from his contemporaries with which to compare to him: Michael Shapiro's *Gender in Play*, which contains the list that inspired this project, dedicates a chapter each to Shakespeare's traditional heroine crossdressers; Marjorie Garber includes a section on Shakespeare in *Transvestite Logics*, because "Shakespeare has virtually come to define theatrical representation in Western culture;" several scholars specifically address only Shakespeare's crossdressing (Garber, *Transvestite* 122; see also Johnová, Klett, Parker, and Schoenfeldt). While Peter Hyland writes on disguise more generally, his broader scope means that the specifics of heroine crossdressing is less focused and necessarily incomplete. All too frequently, Shakespeare is used to epitomize early modern crossdressing: Shakespeare's few figures have been used to define gender, sexuality, and crossdressing for the Elizabethan and Jacobean period without the context of more than fifty other plays and their heroine crossdressers. Collectively, the plays and characters of this thesis provide new insight into breadth of such material. When viewed together as body of work, the scale suggests nothing less than a subgenre. While most of my chapters have been organized according to authorial principles, in this conclusion I take a chronological approach to examine patterns of continuity and discontinuity across the period in which they were produced, that is c. 1570-1625. To assist with this analysis, I include an appendix that lists the plays in chronological order, divided into decades, according to the most recent understanding of their dates of composition; some of these dates differ from those originally suggested by Shapiro.

The 1570's see the dawn of heroine crossdressing on the early modern English stage with *Clyomon and Clamydes*'s Neronis. As she both disguises herself as a page and enters service as a form of protection, she represents the first of her kind as these conventions reverberate through heroine crossdressing plots for decades. In *Promos and Cassandra*, the only other play to feature a crossdressed heroine in this decade, the titular character's motivation for crossdressing is to protect her when she fears for her life, a central motif in the sub-genre as it develops. A decade later, *The Tragedy of Soliman and Perseda* is the first tragedy, we find the first indication that crossdressing may not protect the crossdressed heroine as Perseda dies for her failure to perform masculinity through violent action. Significantly, no other tragedies feature such a heroine until the 1610s, when the cultural attitude to crossdressing shifts. The first of Shakespeare's crossdressed heroines appear in the transition between the 1580s and 1590s. Julia uses the façade of masculinity to pursue a wayward lover, vehemently clinging to her femininity along the way.

By the early 1590s the genre booms and Shakespeare presents his women in armor, Joan and Margaret, through the *Henry VI* plays, both women who face peril in their attempts to mix masculine signifying dress and actions on openly female bodies. *Gallathea* pushes boundaries that no other play will do this decade or for decades after and creates the opportunity for a heroine crossdresser to not only enjoy living as a boy but to transition permanently to a masculine identity – and potentially even to do so physically – with the full support of the community. While most of the plays being produced at this time establish expectations and parameters for the behavior of heroine crossdressing characters and emphasize their social and physical limitations, *Gallathea* offers an alternative that remains a progressive outlier across the period discussed here. As popularity for these plays clearly expands, Shakespeare creates three heroine crossdressers in *The Merchant of Venice* where Portia and Nerissa famously enter the masculine social sphere of legal court that would be

barred to them as women; however, their successes are tempered by Jessica feeling ashamed in her masculine attire. In Heywood's first instance of heroine crossdressing, *The Four Prentices of London*, The Lady travels vast distances in the security of her masculine clothing. From here it becomes established that a heroine crossdresser can be the primary protagonist of a play and single handedly drive the narrative: in another Heywood drama, Bess Bridges successfully defends her household, commissions and captains a ship, pursues a wayward lover, rescues that man, and engages in international diplomatic relations. By contrast, in *As You Like It*, Rosalind eagerly dons a masculine disguise but faints in the face of violence and, like Dorothea in *The Scottish History of James the Fourth*, happily returns to her feminine identity.

*Antonio and Mellida* marks the turn of the century and introduces what will become a staple element of heroine crossdressing narratives: a father that thwarts disguise by his capacity to recognize his daughter. *The Maid's Metamorphosis* is most significant for presenting the only character who explicitly physically transitions. While in *Gallathea* there is only an implicit suggests of such a transition in the context of a consensual relationship, here Eurymine prays to be turned into a boy to protect herself from sexual assault. As such, she is not in disguise and is recognized as both herself and a boy; Eurymine clings to an internal feminine sense of self despite her physical change and her female body is restored to facilitate the play's conclusion. *Cynthia's Revels* marks a transitional moment in which the trope of heroine crossdressing has become so familiar that is merely referenced as a form of entertainment.

Fittingly, *Philotus* – one of only two surviving Scottish plays – ushers in the Jacobean era in which the figure of the heroine crossdresser flourishes, and the boundaries of well-established conventions begin to be pushed. In an evolution of a noble-born hapless virgin who pursues a wayward lover trope, Bellafront, of *The Patient Man and the Honest Whore*, is

a moral sex worker who uses a page disguise to pursue a client who has forsaken her, and in Heywood's *The Wise Woman of Hogsdon*, it is not enough to have only one crossdressing heroine but two of the same name – Luce and second Luce – appear as boys for extended periods and are involved in multiple, complex scenarios. By this point in his career, Heywood unabashedly capitalizes on the popularity of crossdressing and the practice continues in John Day's *The Fair Maid of Bristow* and fleetingly alluded to in Middleton's *Your Five Gallants*. The evolutionary trend is cemented by the sex workers Florida and Felecia (*The Fleire*) who attempt to follow in the tradition of serving as pages for their love interests but are unsuccessful. Here, Sharpman appears to play with his audiences' expectations: he follows the conventions but takes them in an unexpected direction. In another new development, in *Ram Alley or Merry Tricks*, Constantia adapts so wholeheartedly to a crossdressed life that she engages in open sexual flirtation with a woman, although the precise nature of their relationship remains ambiguous. Mariana switches clothing with her brother to save him from execution in *The Dumb Knight* but is atypical insofar as her feminine self is not restored on stage.

The final four plays produced in this decade suggest a shift in the perception of the crossdressed heroine. The iconic Moll Cutpurse of *The Roaring Girl* is not in disguise, but she does unabashedly flout masculinity on her female body. Her counterpart, Mary, represents the traditional expectations for heroine crossdressing and pursues a wayward lover while Moll, inspired by the real woman, breaks the mold. In *The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois*, Charlotte has no patience when the men in her life refuse to enact the revenge she craves and uses masculine disguise to goad others into performing violence. She also remains unrepentant for her actions and, rather than reintegrating into her former social role, she takes herself off to a convent. Although Alizia in *A Christian Turn'd Turk* finds safety aboard a ship in her disguise and is fully supported by her crew, her eventual tragic suicide is

indicative of this Jacobean shift in genre beyond comedy. Amid these rapid evolutions and new developments, Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* – listed as a tragedy in the first folio – seemingly connects him with his contemporaries through his final crossdressing heroine, Imogen; however, even the modern argument for a genre designation of romance diverges from a strict comedy. Yet, in line with his earlier comic heroines, she is comparatively conservative. Harking back to the earlier conventions of heroine crossdressing, Imogen is noble and moral, dislikes her disguise, unequivocally avoids displays of violence, and is fully and publicly restored to her feminine identity.

Shakespeare's heroines are supported by an extensive tradition of criticism and interest, but this critical attention skews the importance and uniqueness of his undoubtedly fascinating crossdressers. His most famous characters appear over twenty years into the development of crossdressing heroines in early modern drama. While they speak to the popularity of this trope in Elizabethan period, they also reflect authorial preferences. Shakespeare creates limitations for the behaviors of his heroines that are not necessarily required in work that either precedes or postdates his efforts. His heroines are moral, provide a clear motivation for their crossdressing, and without fail return to their feminine identities and presentations. Shakespeare's characters are not crossdressers hidden within a narrative; their female identities are known from early in the play. Each character prioritizes their internalized female sense of self as their primary identity and structures their goals for their disguise through the context of their female identity: Julia pursues her beloved; Viola seeks to protect her maidenhood; Portia rescues a man and reunites with her lover; Rosalind convinces people to use her female name even when she looks like a boy; and Imogen likewise takes the role of a 'housewife' while disguised. Furthermore, they do not struggle with their reversion and each return to their previous feminine identities. These conservative commonalities are

compounded when compared to Shakespeare's armored female characters who are punished for their open association with masculinity.

By the 1610s, Jacobean heroine crossdressing is established and the desire to see new advancements is apparent. Fletcher and Beaumont epitomize this trend as they begin to write heroine crossdressers and their tragicomedy *Philaster* provides Euphrasia who unrequitedly pursues a man above her station without success. Mistress Kate Low-water is neither young nor noble and uses her disguise in a purely predatory manner to court and illegally marry a wealthy woman, albeit without consummation, and manages to abscond with half of her wife's money before her true identity is revealed. Alathe, the hidden crossdresser of *The Nightwalker, or the Little Thief*, is similarly criminal, although she also manages to correct her brother's behavior and reunite with her lover. Following this trend, Lady Ruinous (*Wit at Several Weapons*) is a criminal heroine crossdresser who, with the full support of her husband, uses masculinity freely, although she does end the play in a dress. While the tragicomedy *Cupid's Revenge* uses comedic tropes to a tragic end, *The Honest Man's Fortune* capitalizes on the popularity of such characters by consciously creating a boy who is mistaken for a heroine crossdresser. The unnamed pregnant page and her undeniably female body in *More Dissemblers Besides Women* complicates her disguise as she pursues her derelict lover and gives birth still dressed as a boy. Clara, the heroine raised as a boy in *Love's Cure, or the Martial Maid* grapples with the masculinity and desire for violence and agency to which she was bred. She subsequently struggles to detransition, though eventually she settles into a feminine identity and lifestyle.

The first half of the 1620s completes the Jacobean era and the scope of this project. The plays in these final years bear the mark of long-established forms for heroine crossdressing and the decades of expansion and maturation. In *The Faithful Friends*, Lelia hides in plain sight as a servant before serving her lover as an arms bearer at war but reveals

herself as she cannot cope when he is wounded. Leucothe's use of a boy's disguise to escape and meet her lover is instantly recognized in *The Heir*; in *Anything for a Quiet Life* Mistress Cressingham is hidden but an attentive audience would pick up the allusions; *The Witch of Edmonton*, offers another pregnant page. Middleton and Dekker, along with Webster, belong to the transitional Jacobean period of heroine crossdressing in which this established trope becomes a multi-faceted tool. Multiple styles of plots, diverse character types, and a willingness to forgo moral constraints all contribute to the playwrights' ability to work with varied forms of crossdressing and advance the trope. Hidden crossdressers (Martia and Mistress Cressingham), sex workers (Bellafront), a thief (Kate), and a fictionalized real-life crossdressing celebrity (Moll) all contribute to a repertoire of innovative diversity. These characters draw on a variety of patterns and archetypes while inventing others. The collaborators do not exhibit only one type of character and their work reflects the evolution of early modern heroine crossdressing.

Fletcher's final contributions to this subgenre, *The Pilgrim* and *The Maid in the Mill*, demonstrate its extremes: the former play with its multiple disguises and crossdressings push the trope to its limits, whereas the latter minimizes it so that Aminta's entire foray into crossdressing lasts for only a few lines. As Jacobean playwrights, Beaumont and Fletcher prioritize the creation of crossdressing heroines; they create a large body of work including the trope and frequently center their narratives on their crossdressers. The volume of the material created by the pair lends itself to an array of character usage and frequent innovation. As Beaumont and Fletcher strive for progression, their use of tragicomedy and introspective consideration of gender identity become hallmarks of a new perspective towards heroine crossdressing characters. Nature versus nurture, personal preference, and sexual desire are used to create intimate and transgressive relationships between characters and their gender expression. Clara struggles with re-transitioning to femininity, the gods

intervene in *Cupid's Revenge*, Aspatia dies, characters are hidden (Alathe and Euphrasia), Lady Ruinous is a crossdressing criminal mastermind, and Veramour is a red herring. Beaumont and Fletcher's familiarity with crossdressing characters permits them to push boundaries and to manipulate the experience of audiences who are acquainted with the established forms of heroine crossdressing in drama to create new and progressive characters and themes.

While the authors who contribute more than one heroine crossdressing play offer insight into their style, preference, and growth in the microcosms of their work, the authors who write only one play with crossdressing heroines provide the opportunity to view a variety of approaches in succession. There are authors who draw on classical influences or other early modern playwrights: *Gallathea*, *The Fleire*, and *Hymen's Triumph*. Some feature prominent protagonist heroines, Gallathea and Phyllida, or supportive figures such as Mariana. Those playwrights who rely on established generic patterns for their characters or plots, as in *Ram Alley*, or innovate their themes and character arcs, like *Englishmen for My Money*, are all featured. Each of these plays prove the multitude of individual approaches taken towards crossdressing heroine narratives and collectively provide an overview of the diversity of narratives created for heroine crossdressers as a developing subgenre contributed to by a significant cohort of playwrights.

In their use of crossdressing heroines, these dramas necessarily comment on early modern gender expression. Enacting the distinction between gender identity, gender role and gender style, these female characters draw attention to what it means successfully to appear or perform as masculine. Although some feel uncomfortable doing so, all these characters alter their clothing and language to temporarily project a masculine persona. However, across decades of material, characters, and their writers, it is a confrontation with violence that is consistently the catalyst for an identity crisis: violence emerges as the dominant masculine

signifier which qualifies a person for manhood. Jennifer Feather, Catherine E. Thomas, Derek Cohen, Simone Chess, and Susan Asmussen all see violence as an inherent characteristic of masculinity in this period while Kate Bornstein views violence as enduringly integral to modern male identity. These plays demonstrate that violence is the defining signifier of early modern masculinity.

General tropes are established, recognized, and repeated: fathers reveal their daughters; pages travel and serve men for whom they have romantic feelings; wayward lovers are pursued, encounters with violence end disguises. A genre begins to form with distinct patterns that are acknowledged by both playwrights and audiences. The Elizabethan plays set limitations for their heroines that become a shared formula. Popularity soars by the 1590's and playwrights borrow from and build on these emerging traditions. However, as heroines dressed masculinely becomes familiar and accepted, expectations for feminine performance shift to include more masculine action and dress. By the Jacobean plays, heroine crossdressers expand their motivations for utilizing masculine disguise from basic needs for bodily safety and independent travel to a variety of personal interests: characters lead criminal enterprises, are raised as boys, work long term in masculine environments, lead groups of men, and choose openly masculine lifestyles. Where violence stands as the defining masculine quality that separates women from men in early plays, heroine crossdressers push the strictest of gender boundaries and demonstrate capacity for masculine violence.

Heroines grapple with their culpability as they dress in masculine clothing and increasingly face the impact performing masculine behavior has on their female identities, as seen with Clara, Moll, and Bess. These characters struggle with a range of emotions spanning discomfort in appearing masculine to desire to remain living a masculine life, epitomized by Phyllida and Gallathea. Some view masculine clothing as a tool that facilitates a specific need with no impact on their internalized sense of identity like Portia or Lady Ruinous. Others,

like Julia, become worried that the clothing is actively shifting their identity when they do not wish it to. There are some characters that embrace masculinity fully for the period of their crossdress (most notably the hidden characters such as Alathe, Martia, and Euphrasia); some who embrace it with relish or enjoyment, only to fully revert to a feminine persona without any problem (like Alinda and Juletta); and others, such as Clara or Joan, who find relinquishing their masculinity difficult. This immense scope of emotional response to gender and one's own sense of identity reflects a fascination with the personal journey of gender expression and the potential relationship a person may have with their identity.

With few exceptions, the crossdressing heroine is created as a female character who then temporarily dresses as male character (most frequently a boy page) before returning to feminine presenting, female identity. As such, heroine crossdressers exist in an undeniably binary framework supported by an omnipresent patriarchal agenda. Many plays affirm these boundaries and consistently limit the actions, especially violent actions, of their heroines and make effort to restore them completely and publicly to their previous feminine identities. Shakespeare's plays decidedly fall in this conservative category along with Heywood's. But as the subgenre grows, plays repeatedly establish, then push, and then break boundaries created for the performance of masculinity by female characters. Some plays, such as *The Maid in the Mill* and *The Faithful Friends*, hold to convention late into the Jacobean period. *Gallathea* and *The Maid's Metamorphosis*, much earlier plays, go so far as to permit physical transitions of sex. Nevertheless, the trend moves towards evolution, exemplified by the works of Middleton, Fletcher, and Beaumont. Spaces for dual representation of both masculine and feminine qualities on one body and complex relationships between a character's internalized sense of gender identity versus a conflicting public gender performance are increasingly invented: Moll is crossdressed without disguise and Clara is raised from childhood as a boy. While such characters combine binary attributes in ways that their society did not recognize

as legitimate, these plays openly consider the potential for mixed gender expression and display gender as transitional. Social expectations and tolerance for crossing gender binaries are redefined by sheer familiarity and popularity of the trope; audiences and playwrights alike grow accustomed to increasingly transgressive gender performance. Though non-binary identities that meet modern definitions remain elusive in depictions of early modern characters, less-than-binary identities, moments, and language emerge through the trope of heroine crossdressing on the early modern stage.

When viewed as a substantial cohort of characters in the context of a large body of work, the impact these characters should have on discussions of early modern gender and sexuality is consequential. Much of modern criticism neglects the non-Shakespearean contributions to this subgenre and is therefore unable to appreciate the compelling depth and breadth of characters and plots available in early modern drama. These characters do not exist in a vacuum separate from each other and the study of gender and sexuality in early modern crossdressing exponentially benefits from the context of these characters and authors. As I hope this thesis has established, if we are to make any definitive claims about early modern heroine crossdressing, we need to move beyond Shakespeare.

## Appendix

**1570s**

1. George Peele?, *Clyomon and Clamydes* (c. 1570)
2. George Whetstone, *Promos and Cassandra* (1578)

**1580s**

3. Thomas Kyd, *The Tragedy of Soliman and Perseda* (1588)
4. William Shakespeare, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* (c. 1589-1593)

**1590s**

5. William Shakespeare, *Henry VI, Part One* (c. 1592)
6. William Shakespeare, *Henry VI, Part Three* (c. 1592)
7. John Lyly, *Gallathea* (1592)
8. Anon., *George a Greene* (1593-1599)
9. Thomas or Richard Farrant, *The Wars of Cyrus* (c. 1593)
10. William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice* (c. 1596-1598)
11. Thomas Heywood, *The Four Prentices of London* (c. 1596-1599)
12. Thomas Heywood, *The Fair Maid of the West Part One* (c. 1596-1603)
13. William Shakespeare, *As You Like It* (c. 1598-1600)
14. Anon., *The Scottish History of James the Fourth* (1598)
15. William Haughton, *Englishmen for My Money, or A Woman Will Have Her Will* (c. 1599)
16. John Marston, *Antonio and Mellida* (c. 1599–1601)

**1600s**

17. Anon., *The Maid's Metamorphosis* (1600)
18. William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night* (c. 1601-1602)

19. Ben Jonson, *Cynthia's Revels* (1601)
20. Joshua Cooke or Thomas Heywood, *How a Man May Choose a Good Wife from a Bad* (1602)
21. Anon. or Samuel Daniel?, *Philotus* (1603)
22. Thomas Middleton and Thomas Dekker, *The Patient Man and the Honest Whore* (1604)
23. Thomas Heywood, *The Wise Woman of Hogsdon* (c. 1604)
24. John Day, *The Fair Maid of Bristow* (1605)
25. Thomas Middleton, *Your Five Gallants* (c. 1606-1607)
26. Edward Sharpham, *The Fleire* (1606)
27. Lording Barry, *Ram Alley or Merry Tricks* (c. 1606-1607)
28. Lewis Machin and Gervase Markham, *The Dumb Knight* (c. 1608)
29. Thomas Middleton and Thomas Dekker, *The Roaring Girl* (1608-1611)
30. George Chapman, *The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois* (c. 1609-1610)
31. Robert Darborne, *A Christian Turn'd Turk* (c. 1609-1612)
32. William Shakespeare, *Cymbeline* (c. 1609-1610)

### 1610s

33. John Fletcher and Francis Beaumont, *Philaster* (c. 1610)
34. Thomas Middleton, *No Wit, No Help Like a Woman* (1611)
35. John Fletcher and Francis Beaumont, *The Maid's Tragedy* (c. 1611)
36. John Fletcher and Francis Beaumont, *The Nightwalker, or the Little Thief* (c. 1611)
37. George Chapman, *May Day* (1611)
38. Nathan Field, *Amends for Ladies* (c. 1611-1618)
39. John Fletcher and Francis Beaumont, *Cupid's Revenge* (1612)

40. Thomas Middleton, *Wit at Several Weapons* (c. 1613)
41. John Fletcher and Francis Beaumont, *The Honest Man's Fortune* (c. 1613)
42. Robert Taylor, *The Hogge Hath Lost His Pearl* (1613)
43. John Fletcher and Francis Beaumont, *Love's Pilgrimage* (c. 1614)
44. Thomas Middleton, *More Dissemblers Besides Women* (c. 1614-1615)
45. Samuel Daniel, *Hymen's Triumph* (c. 1615)
46. John Fletcher and Francis Beaumont (or Massinger?) *Love's Cure, or the Martial Maid* (c. 1615)
47. Thomas Middleton, *The Widow* (c. 1616)

### **1620s**

48. John Fletcher and Francis Beaumont, *The Faithful Friends* (c. 1620)
49. Thomas May, *The Heir* (1620)
50. Anon., *The Partial Law* (1620-1630?)
51. Thomas Middleton and John Webster, *Anything for a Quiet Life* (c. 1621)
52. William Rowley, Thomas Dekker, and John Ford, *The Witch of Edmonton* (1621)
53. John Fletcher, *The Pilgrim* (c. 1621)
54. John Fletcher and William Rowley, *The Maid in the Mill* (1623)
55. Philip Massinger, *The Duke of Milan* (1623)

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