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Gender, power and disguise: cross dressing women within Shakespeare and Spenser

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GENDER, POWER AND DISGUISE:
CROSS-DRESSING WOMEN WITHIN
SHAKESPEARE AND SPENSER.

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Abstract

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By engaging with Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield's (1994) consolidation, subversion and containment theory this dissertation explores how Edmund Spenser and William Shakespeare incorporated female crossdressers within their works to present fictional women as threatening to established Elizabethan gender codes. Transgressive female characters in these works demand particular attention given the insecure variant of patriarchy that had emerged out of Elizabeth I's reign, and the insistent iconography of female power and constancy that was encouraged throughout the final decades of her rule. This dissertation argues that Spenser and Shakespeare presented crossdressing women as figures who had the *potential* to subvert established notions of patriarchy during the final decade of the sixteenth-century. Shakespeare and Spenser chose to present these female protagonists, during the latter portion of Elizabeth I's reign, as threatening in three distinguishable ways. First, crossdressers conceal their female form beneath male attire, proving both fraudulent in nature and capable of usurping male authority by falsifying their female subordinated gender. Secondly, they evidence a disobedience to masculine authority by using marriage vows and rings to gain advantage over prospective romantic partners while disguised. Thirdly, Elizabethans would have regarded the depiction of women who incorporated a combatant temperament, by wearing weaponry or physically fighting with men, as distinctly provocative. This dissertation examines these figures of transgressive femininity within both the poetic and staged genres. In Spenser's epic poem, *The Faerie Queene*, the warrior maiden Britomart consistently reinforces accepted gender stereotypes, wilfully containing her own transgressions. Contrastingly, Shakespeare's crossdressing women display an array of subversive potential in both their original intentions to defy male authority and their varied abilities to follow through with their intended deceit.

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Introduction: Transgressing Borders and Authority

Throughout the early modern period, women in literature were largely regarded, treated and presented as subordinate to men.¹ Within aristocratic circles, women were expected to view and conduct themselves as such, often being brought up to “efface themselves physically”(Low, 2003, p. 275) and submit to the will of their fathers and husbands. This patriarchal construct was consistently endorsed in fictional representations of women during the sixteenth-century, while Scottish minister John Knox spoke out against women who held positions of power unaided by a male guide, stating in *The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women* (1558) that,

To promote a woman to beare rule, superioritie, dominion or empire
about any realme, nation, or citie, is repugnant to nature, contumelie to
God ... and finallie it is the subuersion of good order, of all equitie and
iustice.

(Knox, 2011)

Knox considered powerful women – particularly queens like Mary de Guise – who did not bend to male dominion repugnant and subversive.² Even after Elizabeth I had become England’s queen in 1559, Knox publically refused to renounce his standpoint. He declared in July 1559, “I can not Deny the Writeing of a booke against the vsurped aucthoritie and Iniust regiment of wemen, neyther yet am I mynded to retract or to call any principall point or proposition of the sam[e].” Refusing to rescind his claims, Knox reiterated the widely held belief that unmarried queens essentially usurp God-given male authority – and in doing so subvert “good order, of all equitie and iustice” – highlighting

¹ Ziegler (1990) affirms, “Women are enjoined over and over again in Renaissance conduct books to remain modest and not to frequent public places or show themselves off outdoors.”(p. 79) Shepherd (2003) also notes that, likewise, “Husbands were instructed to be autonomous, yet also warned that they were mutually implicated in all their wives’ doings. Conduct writers advised wives that husbands held absolute authority over them, to which they should submit without question.”(p. 247) Low (2003) similarly asserts that during this time “Men of wealth and status learned to manifest assertiveness through their bodies, while women at the same social level were taught to efface themselves physically.”(p. 275) Moreover, Newman (1987) stated, “Contemporary conduct books and advice about choosing a wife illustrate the dangers of marriage to a woman of higher social status or of greater wealth. Though by law such a marriage makes the husband master of his wife and her goods, in practise contemporary sources suggest unequal marriages often resulted in dominion by the wife.”(p. 26)

² Jansen (2002) affirms that Knox’s *First Blast* in 1559 “was quickly followed in print by a series of pamphlets that echoed, expanded, disputed and countered his argument that female rule was unnatural, unlawful, and contrary to scripture.”(p. 1)

prominent early modern concerns surrounding the potential dangers posed by solitary female rulers. Indeed Knox's estimation "that women should not wield political authority at any level was neither novel nor particularly controversial."(Dawson, 2008) Two decades into Elizabeth's reign, in 1577, a translation of John Calvin's sermon *A Commentarie upon S. Paules Epistles to the Corinthians* was published in England. Calvin had imagined men as the metaphorical head, and women the body, of a matrimonial unit. He recommended that men should "show the duty of a head in governing her that is his wife: and let the woman show the duty of a body to her husband in helping him."(Aughterson, p. 449) For Calvin, men ideally lead and decide while women follow and serve. Women are silent, functional appendages to be utilised, like the limbs of a human body. The English therefore drew from European sources to raise concerns about female rule in their own country. Later still, during Elizabeth's final years on the English throne, Dod and Cleaver (1598) declared in *A Godly Form of Household Government* that a woman's primary duties in life were,

First that she reverence her husband. Secondly, that she submit herself and be obedient unto him. And lastly that she do not wear gorgeous apparel, beyond her degree and place.

(Aughterson, p. 449)

Queen Elizabeth's duties simultaneously encompassed and surpassed those that Dod and Cleaver had ascribed to English women. From her unique position within society, Elizabeth faced the "vexing problems of finding a suitable husband and risking having to submit herself, and her country, to his authority"(Guy, 2017, p. 401) Resultantly, the young queen was often forced into assuming "various personas to appease her advisors and subjects."(Humphrey, 2017) Elizabeth had quickly learned to exhibit "stereotypically masculine virtues without being regarded as unnaturally mannish or Amazonian."(Hackett, 1995, p. 164) Women of all social backgrounds were subject to the rules of marriage, proper womanly conduct, and adherence to the patriarchal hierarchy of militant males and defenceless females. Yet, throughout her reign, the highest-ranking woman in England strikingly breached those strict early modern gender boundaries. Queen Elizabeth I did not marry or demonstrate unquestioning obedience to any of her subjects, male or otherwise. She even encouraged her writers to associate her with martiality as a decisive and competent monarch – despite her personal aversion to

war – in response to Phillip II of Spain’s Armada after 1588.³ Elizabeth would have also been acutely aware that by not providing a male heir for England and avoiding active engagement in warfare with other nations she had proven her father Henry VIII’s concerns about female rule correct.⁴ Transgressive femininity became more visible within various literary medias during the 1590s, despite the surviving consensus that authoritative, unmarried or martial women were unnatural and monstrously inhuman in their subversion of the edifice of patriarchy that early moderns recognised.

From this historical context, I argue that Edmund Spenser and William Shakespeare presented their female crossdressing characters as figures who had the *potential* to pose a real threat to the established notions of Elizabethan patriarchy. Stephen Greenblatt (1988) stated that for early moderns, “If a crucial step in male individuation is separation from the female, this separation is enacted inversely in the rites of crossdressing; characters like Rosalind and Viola pass through the state of being men in order to become women.”(p. 92) Elizabethan playwrights and writers utilised images of socially inferior, yet transgressive, women to reinforce the notion of gender separateness in their works. Female characters who challenged gender differentiation through crossdressing eventually reinforce the boundaries that they breach – either through believing their actions erroneous or in their successful dedication to anonymity – ensuring that their social transgressions go unpunished by the fictional society that surrounded them. As Dollimore (1994) insisted, “few critics have regarded cross-dressing in Renaissance drama as a triumphant subversion of patriarchy”(p. 142) and it is the potential for subversion – rather than subversion itself – which this dissertation addresses. Sinfield (2006) agrees that when attempting to determine where a text stands within “the subversion/containment debate that preoccupied new historicism in its early phases [...] The writer may impose an ultimate closure on the

³ Healy (2009) asserts that Elizabeth was present at the inspection of the Tilbury troops who awaited the Spanish Armada invasion of 1588 as “what was important was her presence among her troops and the pageantry that could be seen”(p. 166) not the precise wording of her speech or her absence from the sea battle itself. Guy (2017) likewise affirms that Leicester “warned her to keep well away from the coast but assured her that ‘by coming, you shall comfort not only these thousands but many more that shall hear of it.’ [...] he meant from the outset to choreograph Elizabeth’s visit so as to reinvent her forever as the Warrior Queen she had never really been.”(p. 106)

⁴ Guy (2017) states that “With uncanny accuracy, Henry VIII had predicted two areas in which a female ruler would be particularly vulnerable: war and the succession. Whereas he had personally led his armies into battle on two noted occasions, Elizabeth could not. She might address her troops with martial vigour, but war was essentially a male preserve.”(p. 398) Levin (1994) also asserted that “For Henry one of the prime functions of monarchy was that the king could be on a battlefield, which was one of the reasons he was so appalled at the idea of a female heir. The battlefield, he said at one point, was ‘unfit for women’s imbecilities.’”(p. 139)

themes of the text, but the reader is at liberty to mistrust or disregard it.”(p. 121) The figures of disruption focussed upon here are *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*’s Julia, *As You Like It*’s Rosalind, *The Merchant of Venice*’s Portia, *Twelfth Night*’s Viola, and *The Faerie Queene*’s Britomart. Shakespeare and Spenser chose to present these female protagonists, during the latter portion of Elizabeth I’s reign, as threatening in three distinguishable ways. Firstly, crossdressers display a *capacity* for deception by fraudulently concealing their female form beneath traditionally male attire as disguises, becoming two persons simultaneously and allowing them temporarily to ‘pass for’ men.⁵ Secondly, writers present them exhibiting an evident insubordination to masculine authority by using marriage vows and ring symbolism to gain advantage over their lovers and fiancés, or husbands. Finally, to varying degrees, the fictional women incorporate combatant temperaments into their chosen masquerades, by wearing weaponry as part of their ensemble, or physically fighting with men. The roles often ascribed to female crossdressers within Shakespeare and Spenser’s works largely suggest that women might successfully ‘play’ a man’s part in society, but to take up arms in combative defence of their usurped manliness was an impossibility. The male writers allow fictional women to temporarily ‘talk the talk’ with all goodly female intentions, but their being female nevertheless fails to grant them the autonomy or inclination to successfully ‘walk the walk’. From the male standpoint from which these fictional women were envisaged, imitation and performance of masculinity proves entertaining and intriguing, but the thought that women could replace men as authentic agents of authority within Elizabethan society was presented as objectionable. Even so, I regard the fictional characters focussed upon within this dissertation as potentially threatening to early modern patriarchy, regardless of whether they are presented as initially comfortable or excited by their decision to masquerade or not. As Dollimore (1994) insisted, “the mere thinking of a radical idea is not what makes it subversive ... it has also actually to be used to refuse authority *or* be seen by authority as capable and likely of being so used.”(p. 13)⁶ Shakespeare and Spenser presented female crossdressers as threatening to Elizabethan gender codes in their characters’ actions and decisions

⁵ As Helen Hackett (2011) argues that “Both the warrior woman and the female page, then, are transgressive and morally ambiguous. These disguises also associate travelling women with duplicity, as manifested in their participation in plots involving doubles and mistaken identity.”(p. 128)

⁶ The only exception to this concept – of a radical thought not being inherently subversive and therefore condemnable – is that of imagining the monarch’s death, which was treason during the early modern period.

while they are cross-dressed, not in their initial decision to do so. They did this not because the useful literary device was commonly employed within Elizabethan literatures generally, but because it was exciting or disturbing for their audiences to experience and anticipate the social upheaval that might have been expected to result from female misrepresentation and waywardness.

Duplicity: ‘Conceal Myself What I Am’

Early modern society expected women to emulate truth and chastity. Cavanagh (1994) interrogates Britomart’s ‘exemplar’ status within *The Faerie Queene* given that “Her relations with ... imperiled virgins help emphasize that her role as exemplar of female chastity very rarely includes the protection of other women’s integrity.”(p. 142)⁷ Sixteenth-century women were routinely measured by their ‘virtues’ and so maintaining an unblemished reputation was of the utmost importance. Without this, women could be subjected to public ridicule, emotional and physical violence, and, more often than not, familial exile.⁸ Elizabeth famously banished her maids of honour who had engaged in sexual relationships with male courtiers, as the English court could not tolerate illicit behaviour and unsolicited, or inadequate, marital matches. Famous cases include the secret marriage between Lettice Knollys and Walter Devereux the First Earl of Essex in 1578, and Elizabeth “Bess” Throckmorton’s secret marriage to Sir Walter Raleigh in 1591.⁹ Engaging in sexual relationships with men out of wedlock, or men of an inadequate social rank, was disastrous for the reputation of any early modern woman’s family. Elizabeth therefore reasonably expected her courtiers and handmaidens to exhibit proper chastity and morality as the exemplars of English respectability that they signified.¹⁰

⁷ Cavanagh (1984) argues that Spenser’s Britomart, as a shadow of Elizabeth I, “serves as an exemplary female”(p. 140-143) within the poem. Woods (1985) likewise argued, “the beginning of canto iiii argues for the physical power and exemplary virtue of women.”(p. 144) McManus (2002) noted the potential dangers that Spenser’s textual female ‘exemplars’ posed to Elizabethan society’s female audiences as Britomart’s “transformation in to a lady knight reveals the danger implicit in women’s reading history: the ability of women readers to appropriate the autonomous power and perhaps even the gender subversion enacted by many female exemplars of civic virtue.”(p. 131)

⁸ Reinke-Williams (2011) states that “what women wore affected the reputations of their fathers and husbands”(p. 83) while Bennett & McSheffrey (2014) assert “Cross-dressers certainly faced harsh treatment – marched through a hostile city, shamed at Cornhill, and exiled forever. But this was standard fare for all prostitutes and bawds. Only a token punishment was added for the extra offence of cross-dressing – usually a manly hat, a picture, or a text that told onlookers the woman had compounded her whoredom with cross-dressing.”(p. 3)

⁹ Adams (2008) states that “Elizabeth’s animosity towards [Lettice] after 1579 was bitter and unforgiving” and that “Elizabeth banned her from the court for attempting to outdress her.” Nicholls & Williams (2015) similarly recount of Raleigh and Elizabeth “Bess” Throckmorton’s case that “in 1591, with Bess pregnant, she and Raleigh were married in secret, fully aware that news of this union, once it leaked out, would gravely displease the queen.”

¹⁰ John Guy (2017) supports that Elizabeth expected her maids of honour to conduct themselves as the female exemplars they were. He explains that she expressed disappointment “with reports of scandals involving [her] maids of honour [...] thoroughly disgusted at such behaviour,”(p. 211) especially considering that any young woman admitted into Elizabeth’s bedchambers as a maid of honour “has sworn to serve her royal mistress

Unsurprisingly then, Spenser's Britomart "was all abasht"(III.iii.20.2) after the wizard Merlin exposed her first beggarly disguise in Book III Canto iii. Spenser here validates the Elizabethan belief that female deception was scandalous, shameful and embarrassing. Early modern writers presented cross-dressing characters as transgressive in nature, through their inaccurate self-presentations. This section therefore discusses Elizabethan writers' conveying female crossdressers as challenging to traditional gender codes through the physical and emotional concealment of their authentic selves. It explores how gender often becomes confused through crossdressers' adherence to the necessity of performance to which they have committed themselves. Audiences can appreciate the dual gender identity created when fictional women convey a version of maleness to mask their authentic female bodies.¹¹ Therefore as Hackett (2011) stated, "the cross-dressing travelling woman is a source of moral and narrative turbulence"(p. 140) during this time. Elizabethan boy-actors on stage complicate this duality in fictional presentations of women by Shakespeare and Spenser.¹² Gender differences become paradoxically bound up with fictitious depictions of homoeroticism, as the notion that Elizabethan gender difference was established through characters' experiencing 'the other' gender first hand. As Greenblatt (1988) argues, "in Renaissance stories, paradoxically, [...] sexual difference, the foundation of all individuation, turns out to be unstable and artificial at its origin"(p. 76) as "characters like Rosalind and Viola pass through the state of being men in order to become

'faithfully and honestly', and by that Elizabeth understood the girl[s] to have also promised to be chaste."(p. 213) Breaching such promises branded the women false in Elizabeth's estimation.

¹¹ Schwarz (2000) asserted that "The doubleness of martial women [...] enable[es] them to battle knights and at the same time provide the prize, idealized feminized body that remains when the armour comes off."(p. 146) Contrastingly, Hackett (2011) insists that the crossdressing woman figure is "transgressive and morally ambiguous. These disguises also associate travelling women with duplicity, as manifested in their participation in plots involving doubles and mistaken identity."(p. 128)

¹² Hyland (2011) has highlighted the "the complex resonance set up by the Elizabethan boy actors"(p. 11) onstage, while Rackin (2005) noted that in *As You Like It* the "fainting scene provides an occasion to reiterate the instability of the performer's layered identity as male and female, actor and character."(p. 130) Crawford (2005) has likewise determined that "Many critics point out that crossdressing highlighted the social construction of gender roles, suggesting that the differences between the sexes were a matter of costume and behaviour rather than essence,"(pp. 141-2) as Orgel (1996) had argued "Clothes make the woman, clothes make the man: the costume is of the essence."(p. 104) Orgel (1996) suggested that in *As You Like It* in particular, "the idea of the boy displacing the woman appears in its most potentially threatening form, the cadamite for whom Jove himself abandons his marriage bed."(p. 57) Likewise, Weimann (1994) has stated, "Shakespeare's cross-dressed boy heroines [...] tend to undermine at least some of the [Elizabethan] illusions of ideology, standards of patriarchy, representations of decorum."(p. 798) Kimborough (1982) also agreed that Shakespeare had presented "the girl-as-boy motif is presented as somewhat, though innocently, unnatural"(p. 28) within his crossdressing plays. Yet, Sinfield (2006) has said that, "boy actors were a prominent and distinctive feature of this theatre, but whether this or that social group was thrilled, disgusted, amused, or just rather bored, remains obscure."(p.121)

women”(p. 92).¹³ Allusions to Queen Elizabeth I’s ‘two bodies’ are also considered in two ways. Firstly, as a female sovereign, frictions between Elizabeth’s ‘body politic’ and ‘body natural’ were “reworked with some subtlety”(Levin, p.106) during her reign.¹⁴ Levin (1989) asserts that, “Elizabeth’s body politic was seen as pure and virginal, and the incarnation of the sacred principle of male monarchy; but with the talk of lovers and illegitimate children, people viewed her body natural as potentially corrupt in a manifestly female way.”(pp. 106-107) Therefore, the unmarried English queen herself brings female duality and proper purpose starkly into question, throughout the 1580s and 1590s.¹⁵ The second dualism presented by Elizabeth I manifests itself in her ‘mask of youth’, which emerged in a series of fictional representations that the queen encouraged during late sixteenth-century, which acclaimed the enduring strength and virginity of the female sovereign, rather than affirming the aging, barren reality that her physical body had become.¹⁶ Ways in which Shakespeare and Spenser explored female duality and misrepresentation in their depictions of crossdressing women are significant with Elizabeth I’s own various representations in mind.

For both women and men during the Elizabethan period identity was determined by everything from where you lived, to how you behaved, what you wore and whom you married.¹⁷ When writers incorporated crossdressing in their plots, internal and external representations of the female ‘self’ could distort. Performance becomes everything. What it means to look like a woman or man is

¹³ Dusinberre (2003) noted that “Acting a woman disguised as a boy, the boy actor looked all too like himself,”(p. 233) while Fisher (2001) argued that “boy actors would have been as much ‘in drag’ when playing the parts of men as when playing the parts of women.”(p. 155)

¹⁴ Hackett (2011) detailed the conundrum that Elizabeth I had when presenting herself to her subjects in *Virgin Mother, Maiden Queen*, as the queen needed to exhibit “stereotypically masculine virtues without being regarded as unnaturally mannish”(p. 164). Cobb (1990) has stated that Spenser reflected this “In *The Faerie Queene*, [as] Elizabeth is depicted as not just exceptional among women, but exceptional among queens. [...] there are several other queens in the poem who are cast in a dubious light. The standard of ideal queenship is set by Gloriana.”(p. 102) Jardine (1983) had persuasively argued that “it is of some importance that the public (literary) representation of one woman – Elizabeth I – was a matter of national concern. [...]It led to [writers’] reaching back into the literary past in search of representations which would redeem and enhance the majesty of the sovereign, *in spite* of her femaleness.”(p. 169)

¹⁵ Reflecting this concept, Eggert (2000) states that Spenser’s “poem diverges from heroic epic into a more digressive genre, the epic-romance, even as it begins to associate poetic power within the feminine power of Elizabeth’s many doubles in the poem, including Britomart and Gloriana.”(p. 15) Associating Britomart with Elizabeth does not cancel out her transgressive nature, but highlights it as problematic.

¹⁶ Guy (2017) states that “the preferred face pattern of Elizabeth’s final years is | one that would become known as the ‘Mask of Youth’. [...]Hilliard’s] image consciously abandoned any attempt to depict the reality of a woman in her sixties. Instead, Elizabeth’s features were airbrushed back to become those of a young woman in her late twenties or early thirties.”(pp. 294-295)

¹⁷ Aughterson (2001) asserts that “masculinity, where discussed, is defined always in contradistinction to femininity: whether on matter of household duties, conduct, dress, social or political position”(p. 420)

broken down when a girl elects to present herself as a boy, a member of the 'stronger' sex, for whatever reason. The female characters who *want* to counterfeit manliness posed a theoretical threat to the Elizabethan gender code, but successful deception – her actions, and critically, society's acceptance that her female body is actually male – embodied a major breach of the status quo. The English early modern cultural mentality understood crossdressers as a threat to the proper order of God's creation, as females could be seen as male, act male, and be mistakenly treated as male, or vice versa.¹⁸ Fictional crossdressing women therefore pose a threat within these plots due to their successful deception. As David Cressy (1996) affirms, "male and female costumes were divinely ordained as God-given markers, so their misapplication subverted the fundamental structure of God's universal plan."(p. 443) Clothing often revealed exactly who somebody was – gender, social status and occupation – on the wearer's behalf. As Reinke-Williams (2011) states, "Clothes were personal material objects [to] which women and men attached multiple meanings. As such they proved crucial in defining the limits of women's agency and the boundaries of female respectability in early modern London."(p. 83) Therefore when a woman chooses to present herself in masculine attire, she subverts the Elizabethan societal codes that determine one's gender and social standing. Shakespeare's Viola calls her Cesario clothing "my masculine usurped attire,"(5.1.246) highlighting not only that masculinity and gender are somehow imbued within the fabric itself (an outer version of the self rather than the body beneath), but that masculinity itself, as a physical attribute, can be attained, or stolen, by women.

Resultantly, clothing, and indeed numerous versions of bodily prosthetics, prove very important tools within these early modern texts, in terms of determining gender.¹⁹ Elizabeth I 'put on' the semblance

¹⁸ In addition to writings like Joseph Hall's 1559 satirical poem, which was "typically condemnatory of any man or woman cross-dressing"(Aughterson, 2001. p. 418), early seventeenth-century works by pamphleteers such as Stephen Gosson (*The Schoole of Abuse*) and Philip Stubbes (*The Anatomie of Abuses*), argued that "men who adopted supposedly 'feminine' fashions were unmanly"(Aughterson, 1998, p. 418) David Cressy (1996) likewise affirms that "Transvestism, Stubbes reiterated, was offensive to God."(p. 443)

¹⁹ Fisher (2001) claims that "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 a few)."(p. 157)

of monarchical authority during the lengthy dressing preparations she chose to endure each morning.²⁰ As Catharine Howey (2009) argues, “Elizabeth’s image as a virgin queen depended less on the state of her hymen and more on the pearls and clothes that covered her purportedly virginal body.”(p. 204) Superficial appearance, to uphold a reputational image, was therefore very important to the English queen, perhaps even more so than the truth of her body beneath the clothing. Johnston (2011) even suggests that Elizabeth wore large ruffs as an expression of her masculine authority, to “remind the viewer of her phallic possession.”(p. 160)²¹

The early modern sociological belief that clothing could define people’s reputations made clothing a powerful tool for fictional crossdressing women, then, as male body parts – the hidden penis in particular – remained unobtainable.²² Yet, as Grinnell (1996) argued, “Whether or not Rosalind, or Viola, or Nerissa, or Portia, or any other cross-dressing woman from the Renaissance theatre should be read as a powerful subversion of the dominant gender system, each dramatizes the importance of sartorial display.”(p. 172) Rosalind-as-Ganymede wears the sexually redundant curtle-axe and boar-spear weaponry to indicate her masculinity. Shakespeare coupled Rosalind’s pastoral shepherd disguise with hunting imagery in her chosen weaponry, to offer another fictional reference to Elizabeth who “was a keen huntswoman ... still hunting in September 1600, when she was 67.”(Dusinberre, 2006, p. 52) Yet Rosalind’s choice of weaponry appears to reference Elizabeth’s own redundant claim to kingly authority, rather than as representative of a traditional pastoral

²⁰ Guy (2017) outlined the various methods that Elizabeth used during the latter years of her reign to maintain her reputed beauty in *Elizabeth: The Forgotten Years*, p. 240, additionally noting that “behind her back, male courtiers joked that it was quicker to rig a royal navy ship than dress the queen.”(p. 17)

²¹ Johnston (2011) states that, “It is tempting [to] read the starched lace collar that frames Elizabeth’s face in contemporary depictions of her ... as an illusion to her princely beard and the values inhering in it, particularly since male ruffs were often designed to accommodate, incorporate and frame the beard. [...] Elizabeth’s spectacular ruff...reminds the viewer of her phallic possession by allusively supplying rather than decorously augmenting the spectacle of facial hair.”(p.160)

²² Reinke-Williams (2011) asserts that “Clothes were personal material objects which women and men attached multiple meanings. As such they proved crucial in defining the limits of women’s agency and the boundaries of female respectability in early modern London.”(p. 83) Stallybrass (1992) clarifies that on the Elizabethan stage, “prosthetic production was dramatically staged and speculated upon, as the boy actor undressed...the fixations of spectators were drawn back and forth between the clothes which embodied and determined a particular sexual identity and contradictory fantasies of the ‘body beneath.’”(p. 76) Rackin (2005) similarly noted of *Twelfth Night* that “The power of crossdressing it seems, is so great that verified knowledge of Viola’s true sex is insufficient to displace the masculine gender identity established in her costume.”(p. 123) Dusinberre (2003) also stated, “A woman in a man’s clothes seemed to be the Jacobean not simply eccentric in dress, but really in part a man, and thus monstrous and unnatural.”(p. 239) However, Howard (1988) has insisted that “Ironically, rather than blurring gender difference or challenging male domination and exploitation of women, female crossdressing often strengthens notions of difference by stressing what the disguised woman cannot do.”(p. 439)

shepherd of the early modern era. Possession of male authority, through the ownership and display of a phallic weapon, appears the goal for Shakespeare's comedic crossdressers. Portia-as-Balthazar dons a lawyer's gown to produce a semblance of professionalism, wearing a "dagger"(3.4.65) to produce an image of maleness. Yet, the fact that Portia chooses to incorporate a dagger into her disguise is strange, as daggers are not weapons traditionally used in a lawyer's occupation. The size of a dagger, however, makes it easily concealable – unlike Britomart's assorted weapons or Rosalind's boar-spear. Moreover, daggers are arguably better suited to female martiality, being lightweight and therefore easier to wield. Weaponry 'standing in' as a substitute phallus might be the comedic reasoning behind Shakespeare's presentation of crossdressers imagining themselves carrying masculine weapons at all.²³ Portia claims that she would "*wear my dagger with the braver grace*"(3.4.65, my emphasis) while conversing with Nerissa, highlighting the performative function of weaponry by both physically ornamenting herself with a blade and by outwardly projecting a male persona in a feigned *masculine* "grace". Portia can actually imagine wielding a dagger herself as a woman, and so describes carrying one while she enacts her male disguise. Nevertheless, Portia proves a truly dangerous figure by carrying a dagger, given how misplaced such weaponry is within a court scene. The dagger firstly symbolises concealment and deceit, in terms of Portia's secret gender. Secondly, it symbolises the legal conflict that 'Balthazar' engages in to free Antonio. Portia-as-Balthazar orders Nerissa, "Clerk, draw a deed of gift"(4.1.390), potentially alluding to a man drawing his sword before physical combat. Thirdly, the dagger symbolises Portia's breach of societal boundaries in the male world of law, making her actions transgressive indeed, as her unconventional education in law allows her to function underhandedly within a male-dominated landscape. Nerissa, on the other hand, disguises as Portia/Balthazar's clerk but does not mention carrying weaponry herself. Within *Twelfth Night*, Viola plans "such [a] disguise as haply shall *become* / The form of my intent"(1.2.51-52), that is, role-playing the eunuch Cesario, somewhere between adolescence and adulthood, as Malvolio perceives during 1.5.152-153. In Orsino's estimation clothes certainly appear to dictate gender, as Viola "shall be"(5.1.379) Cesario while dressed in male clothing, reverting back to 'Viola' after returning to her

²³ This would have been comedic both by the allusion to a woman play acting as a man, using a weapon to prove her masculinity to outer society, but also by the ridiculousness of a blade being used during sexual encounters to penetrate female bodies.

“maid’s garments.”(5.1.271) Androgyny does not exist in Orsino’s eyes, due to the clothing that covers Viola’s body. Shakespeare’s earliest crossdresser Julia proves the least comfortable with allowing clothing to misrepresent her gender to outward society. Indeed, Julia enacts – as best she can – the Sebastian pageboy role while bereft of her “farthingale”(2.7.51), the female signifier which would never “fit as well”(2.7.50) the male façade she adopts. Spenser even often attributes male pronouns to his crossdressing knight throughout *The Faerie Queene*, as her male knight disguise consistently fools other knights and women within the narrative.²⁴ Britomart’s disguise – her armour, helmet, spear and shield – conveys the potential for female subversion of Elizabethan social boundaries as both achievable and effective.

Arguably, then, while clothed in a doublet and hose fictional women could be seen to ‘become’ men in sixteenth-century society’s estimation. However, female reputations of chastity and respectability face interrogation as a result.²⁵ Of course, in *Twelfth Night* Feste remarks of Cesario, “Who you are and what you would are out of my welkin [sky]. I might say ‘element’,”(3.1.55-57) implying Feste’s failure to determine the authenticity of Cesario’s actual gender.²⁶ The clown notices that Viola-as-Cesario is not all that ‘he’ seems, but acknowledges his inability to discern the whole truth. Previously jesting with Viola-as-Cesario that “Jove...send thee a beard”(3.1.43) Feste had initially accepted her projected page-boy façade. Feste acknowledges Cesario’s strangeness, exploring the possibility that the Viola-as-Cesario figure is beyond his understanding. Discerning Viola-as-Cesario’s authentic gender-identity remains out of Feste’s “element”(3.1.57). Employing the comedic use of height within the phrases “sky” and “element”, Feste *alludes* to his inability to discern Cesario’s gender, in terms of it ‘going over his head’ or being too socially convoluted for his mind to grasp. Feste outwardly accepts Cesario’s male persona because Cesario has adopted male dress, not because he finds Viola’s

²⁴ Spenser refers to Britomart using male pronouns 52 times throughout *The Faerie Queene*. Of Book Three, 31 times, III.i.4.3-8, III.i.5.2-9, III.6.4-5, III.i.30.3, III.i.54.9, III.ix.12.6-8, III.ix.13.2-7, III.ix.14.2-4,6-7, III.ix.15.1-2,8, III. Of Book Four, 20 times, IV.i.8.1-3, IV.i.12.6,8, IV.iv.44.1,8, IV.iv.45.8, IV.iv.46.1, IV.vi.6.1-5, IV.vi.7.8-9, IV.vi.8.1-5, IV.vi.9.8. Of Book Five, once, in V.vi.34.5. Hamilton (2013) remarks of Book III Canto ix in particular, that, “The nearly dozen uses of he, him, himselfe, in the dozen lines from 12.5 to 13.7, and four uses in the next stanza, prepare for the surprise of ‘his’ identity”(p.372)

²⁵ As Reinke-Williams (2011) states “Indeed what women wore affected the reputations of their fathers and husbands, not least because it was often they who financed the purchase of such attire.”(p.83)

²⁶ Findlay & Oakley-Brown (2014) explain how Shakespeare presented characters having “difficulties with seeing clearly”(p.17) throughout the play, particularly while Feste “mock[s] Olivia for clinging to her rosary and the past [and as he] catechizes the enclosed Puritan, Malvolio, for being buried in ignorance...”(p. 17)

performance believable. Viola's reputation as a chaste, respectable woman of high status could have been at risk during this moment of confusion, but Shakespeare presents Feste's lack of understanding as an allusion to Elizabethan society's own acceptance of crossdressers' strangeness. The threat has been contained.

The women often exhibit a fascination or obsession with expressing believable male potency while disguised. They often consider adopting combatant demeanours and wearing weaponry to convince others of their maleness. Most significantly Spenser's crossdressing knight Britomart carries her enchanted "dreadful speare and shield"(III.iii.53.4), while Shakespeare's Rosalind pictures herself bearing a "curtle-axe"(1.3.114) and "boar spear"(1.3.115) and Portia her "dagger"(3.4.65). The final section of this thesis addresses this theme of persuasiveness in carrying combatant weaponry in more detail. The crossdressing women who choose not to incorporate weapons in their disguises, opt to pose as prepubescent boys. Viola argues that her ability to sing would entertain the duke, while Julia diverts any conversation away from actually wearing male clothing such as "breeches"(2.7.49) or "a codpiece"(2.7.53), declaring such practices "ill-favoured"(2.7.54), and therefore the woman's mission to secure her lover's favour.

Julia struggles to play her pageboy part as convincingly as other crossdressers do. In 2.4 of *As You Like It*, despite her weary state from travelling, Rosalind declares that "a doublet and hose ought to show itself courageous to a petticoat."(2.4.6-7) While disguised, Rosalind judges any expression of her internal female emotions a "disgrace [to the] man's apparel"(2.4.4-5) that she wears. The personification of the doublet and hose and petticoat in Rosalind's speech implies that Shakespeare presents the crossdresser's "courage"(2.4.7) as drawn from the clothing itself, and by extension the social construct it is part of.²⁷ The following line "Therefore courage, good Aliena"(2.4.7-8) clearly references the gendered disguises that each woman adopted, in Rosalind's calling Celia by her alias' name Aliena. Rosalind-as-Ganymede reinforces the social paradigm of her 'stronger' identity, embodied in male 'the doublet and hose', by providing emotional support and encouragement to the

²⁷ Grinnell (1996) notes this concept of a crossdresser drawing masculine traits from external clothing too. He argued that, even by this early point in the play, Shakespeare presents how "Rosalind has been changed by her clothing to the point that she adopts the masculine position in her relationship with her Cousin Celia [...] as if the clothing were the operative part of Rosalind's identity."(p. 171-2)

“weaker”(2.4.5) ailing one, embodied in ‘the petticoat’. Rosalind acknowledges that for her Ganymede disguise to remain persuasive, she must act male while wearing male attire.

Moments when authentic emotions dictate a crossdressing woman’s reactions to her immediate environment – despite the masculine guise that she wears – are important to note in this study. As Davies (1989) suggested, “dressed in male garb, the women display some difficulty maintaining the masculine disguise to the exclusion of their own feminine inclinations.”(p. 172) In 4.2 of *Two Gentlemen*, Julia-as-Sebastian’s guide, named Host, notices the pageboy’s dislike for Proteus’ love song to Silvia, “How now, are you sadder than you were before? How do you man? The music likes you not?”(4.2.53-54), as the girl fails to conceal her pain. Julia’s facial features, though taken for male, reveal her female jealousy and grief during Proteus’ betrayal. The clothes cannot change her physical reaction to emotional pain. Rosalind likewise displays an inability to convince her peers of Ganymede’s unquestionable masculinity, physically fainting when Oliver produces Orlando’s bloodied napkin. Oliver suspiciously questions, “You a man? You lack a man’s heart.”(4.3.163-164) The comedic irony of Oliver’s statement clearly resides in its factual accuracy, both for the fictional character and the Elizabethan boy-actor onstage. Rosalind even immediately chooses to “confess”(4.3.164) that a feminine heart beats within Ganymede’s chest, rather than attempt any further deception. Viola’s feminine physicality is noted by Orsino, as “all is semblative a woman’s part”(1.4.32-34), and by Malvolio that ‘Cesario’ “speaks very shrewishly”(1.5.156). Olivia remarks in Viola-as-Cesario’s absence, “Thy tongue, thy face, thy limbs, actions and spirit / Do give thee fivefold blazon,”(1.5.284-285) ironically reversing the traditional protocol for appreciative anatomisation of the female body by men. Further ironic is that Olivia mistakenly blazons a female body, as Viola fails to omit her own femininity from the Cesario performance, making the scene homoerotic rather than a simple inversion of a woman blazoning a man’s body. Evidently Viola’s feminine emotions and physical bearing could not be concealed consistently beneath her male disguise, or prevent a social reaction from infusing the moment with distinctly transgressive homoerotic timbre. Often, actions betray female identities within Shakespearean comedies, as the essence of a female identity remains within each crossdresser depicted. Rosalind is guilty of fainting in response to Orlando’s bloodied

napkin in 4.3. Viola is almost outsmarted by the play's fool Feste in 3.1. Julia and Silvia share a moment in 4.4.136-137 where Julia's presence is almost discovered as the crossdresser's direct verbal gratitude to Silvia not accepting her ring from Proteus, incites the rival's question "What sayest thou?"(4.4.137) Persuasiveness in performance proves challenging to achieve for most of Shakespeare's crossdressing women.

Portia appears to be the only Shakespearean crossdresser capable of maintaining a poker face. During the court scene, Portia's disapproval of her husband's pronouncement to Antonio "my wife and all the world / Are not with me esteemed above thy life"(4.1.280-281) is made aloud, not as an aside. Her highly effective lawyer disguise allows her to talk of herself in the third person. This amplifies Portia's moral authority – and the comedic irony – within the scene; both responding as a lawyer and Bassanio's wife, she voices her disapproval impulsively, without reservation, and in earshot of the entire audience both 'at court' and onstage. Yet, in commenting from the perspective of a third party onlooker to Bassanio's words, Portia conveys her capacity for executing a male role *rather* than her own. She declares, "Your wife would give you little thanks for that / If she were by to hear you offer it"(4.1.284-285). Despite the layers of performance attributed to the scene, the fact that any woman would disapprove of Bassanio's words destabilises all pretence of the male-dominated court scene, and, by extension, the Elizabethan theatre. Shakespeare constructs a dominant female perspective using Portia's crossdressing disguise, allowing her to refute Bassanio with true emotional clarity, in reaction to her husband's words, unhindered by her previous position of feminine inferiority. Male authority and privilege is rendered answerable to female emotion while Portia-as-Balthazar responds to Bassanio's declaration. Furthermore, Portia's use of "if"(4.1.285) demonstrates her resolution temporarily to forgive Bassanio's statement, highlighting her decision to exercise her emotionally 'political' advantage over him when, or 'if', she chooses. The crossdresser's disguise thus proves a destabilising tool capable of endowing suppressed female entities with the quality of a protagonist's authority usually reserved for men alone. Playwrights used this tool perhaps because of its potential to threaten Elizabethan patriarchy, as crossdressing plots had been popular in Italy, where carnivalesque

and politically charged satirical works were prominent.²⁸ The highly comical final scene of *The Merchant* is noteworthy as the undisguised women make fools of their men yet still relinquish the upper hand by the play's resolution. Audiences cannot ignore that the fictional women have gained such memorable advantages over their male superiors by persuasively crossdressing. A message emerges in *The Merchant of Venice*, that to underestimate a woman's resourcefulness and sense of self-autonomy is a miscalculation indeed, particularly while a rich education, several ensembles of clothing and unsupervised time are at their disposal.

Within *The Faerie Queene*, Spenser's message appears to differ. Britomart proves capable of unwavering deception while disguised. She accomplishes this by wearing a full-face helmet with her knightly attire, thereby concealing not only her body parts, but also, critically, her facial expressions. Of course, Britomart's face is concealed twice: from other fictional characters in the landscape of the poem, and from the actual readers of Spenser's poem. Unlike Shakespeare's fictional women, whose faces are obscured behind the youthful faces of boy-actors' performance of femininity onstage, Spenser envisages Britomart using her disguise to hide emotional reactions from those she converses with, until she decides how a male knight would respond. Cavanagh (1994) argues that disguise endangers the reputation of honest female beauty and chastity as concept altogether, as "countless images of women throughout *The Faerie Queene* reflect a nervousness about potential female dissembling; an apparent belief in the difficulty of distinguishing between 'good' and 'evil' women."(p. 29) The countless disguises, and numerous physical illusions, that both 'good' and 'evil' female characterizations adopt throughout the epic poem, regularly challenge the dependability upon the figure of ideal womanliness. Characters such as Duessa, Ate, and False Florimell (Snowy Florimell) dirty an ideal image of virtuous womanhood in deceiving others, which is expected of characteristically false individuals. Yet similarly, the inherently 'virtuous' female characters Una and

²⁸ Laroque (2011) notes that "It is interesting and significant that, in some of the plays he wrote between 1592 and 1606, Shakespeare's representation of Italy and performance of scenes borrowed from Italian popular drama should include carnivalesque elements with masques, torches, fifes and drums, cross-dressing as well as more subversive aspects such as those concerned with sexuality and satire."(p. 180) However, important to remember is the fact that Smith (1992) also stated that "Provocative as their speeches may be, Shakespeare's Julia, Portia, Rosalind and Viola can hardly speak for the more than seventy-five female pages, in scripts by nearly forty different playwrights, who appears on the Elizabethan, Jacobean and Caroline stage."(p. 137)

Britomart also camouflage their bodies, ensuring that an infallible ‘ideal woman’ figure can never be achieved within the poem.²⁹ Britomart’s armour, though devised with the best of intentions, is still evidence that virtuous women may also deceive men, and even surpass them in similar roles. Spenser redeems Britomart’s deceptive attire due to its protective function, deterring “The loose encounters of lascivious of men”(2.7.40-41) as Julia argues in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*. However, Britomart’s armour simply prevents others from discerning her gender. Her armour is not just protective of her female chastity but is a manifestation of that virtue she represents. It functions exactly as it ought to – as is the case with all male knights – protecting her skin from physical penetrative wounds, and symbolising an erotic preservation of the female body from male aggression and sexual pursuit. Britomart’s armour remains subversive at its core: the notion that a woman can only preserve her chastity within male-dominated landscapes by deceiving men tarnishes the capacity for a virtuous reputation within Spenser’s epic. Anderson (2009) notes Spenser’s differentiation between Britomart’s armour and other knights’:

Britomart’s armour has been a queen’s from the start [but] has never explicitly received the descriptor “mayle” (or male), a recurrent Spenserian pun applied to other knights.” (p. 90)

Britomart’s deceptive armour is clearly situated in opposition to other knights’ within the epic. Spenser’s special treatment of the Knight of Chastity – who hides behind a guise of maleness to protect her femaleness – is owed to two concepts. Firstly, Spenser alludes to Britomart’s sovereign heritage in the rhyming lines “Be thou faire Britomart, whose prayse I wryte, [...] O soueraine Queene, whose prayse I would endyte,”(III.ii.3.2-4), relating her to “the queen [Elizabeth I] she partially figures”(Cavanagh, 1994, p. 140). Secondly, Britomart is the only woman who purposefully disguises her female form to ensure her desired personal destiny, but who “demonstrates that female virtue becomes more palatable when it is personified by a manly woman, particularly one who honours the constrictions limiting her ‘place’ as female.”(Cavanagh, 1994, p. 139) Spenser

²⁹ Spenser consistently pictures Una as wearing a distinctly feminine signifier of the facial veil, while Britomart armours her entire body with the male dress of a knight. Both coverings are supposed to preserve feminine chastity, but are deceptive in nature. Both women are deceptive in their self-presentations, placing their virtuous reputations in jeopardy.

intrinsically links Britomart's identity to her armour, certainly, but not in a gendered "mayle" sense, as Anderson notes. Instead, her armour and identity link through its protective function of insurance: that she may remain sexually chaste by becoming hypothetically "male". She performs the role of a knight, but does not naturally think as a male knight, as is notable in her very first combat encounter after donning her disguise. Unlike Marinell, Britomart fights defensively, battling him only after she has been attacked, as "With hasty gallop towards her did ryde; / Her dolour [lamentation] soone she ceast, [...] Her former sorrow into sudden wrath."(III.iv.12.3-6) Britomart had been languishing in her emotional state of helplessness prior to Marinell's unprovoked attack, and battled him in angry self-preservation, continuing directly "forward"(III.iv.18.2) in her journey to find Artegall afterwards. Spenser depicts Britomart's "mist of grieffe dissolu'ed [dissolving] ... into vengeance powre"(III.iv.13.9) after being attacked by Marinell. Spenser's crossdresser does not plan active subversion of the patriarchal structure that she functions within during her very first combat encounter, as, after having successfully defended herself, she immediately flees the scene.

Other characters certainly perceive Britomart as thinking like a male knight, but this can be better accredited to her male disguise deceiving outer society rather than the female knight's inclination for battle without sufficient cause. Malecasta mistakes Britomart for a male knight in III.i, not through any actions of Britomart's but in reaction to her male attire. Similarly, in Book V, Dolon mistakes Britomart for Artegall because she wears his armour. Perhaps the major evidence countering this argument is Britomart's participation in Satyrane's tourney during IV.iv and her decision to refrain from divulging her true gender to Amoret in IV.i.7, to maintain her protective charade. However, even whilst considering those instances described, Britomart is always mistaken for a male knight due to her armour, which in itself emits a codified message to every other occupant within Spenser's fictional landscape. Other characters perceive her as male by her clothing, which allows her to occupy two separate subject positions during a single moment and from within the same physical space. She is nevertheless a female princess who travels in the guise of a male knight, to serve her heterosexual and traditionally accepted ambitions: to be chaste and to secure her prearranged marriage to a suitable and worthy spouse. She is deceitful only as far as other characters accept her protective outward

semblance on its face value. Internally, she virtuously remains true to her original and ‘natural’ female identity.

As discussed above, crossdressing disguises function to conceal female bodies. They allow women to simulate masculinity, as far as they dare, to achieve their personal objectives while wearing whatever version of armour they deem fit, whether a pageboy’s attire, a lawyer’s gown, or a knight’s armour. In doing so, they often find themselves occupying both male and female subject positions at once, as outlined by the following discussion. However, some of these fictional women fail to fully conceal their inner, often more authentic, emotions in crossdressing alone. The most successful dissemblers – notably, Portia and Britomart – manage to either execute a male disguise persuasively despite any ‘feminine’ sentiments they might have, or relish in a newfound autonomy provided by a counterfeit male identity. Duplicity proves an exciting and dangerous attribute to explore in fictional women within sixteenth-century literature as those who display a capacity for concealing their ‘feminine’ emotions produce an image of gender subversion that had the potential to unsettle Elizabethan society.

Crossdressing characters often employ androgynous identities whilst disguised, because then ‘they are’ *and* ‘are not’ women once they assume the substitute identity. Early modern writers often present crossdressing women as ‘she’ and ‘he’, or s/he, simultaneously, as fictional onlookers read physical attire and simulated behaviour as essentially male despite the fact that no physical or biological alterations have occurred. However, whether or not a sense of mental androgyny has developed over the course of a crossdressing experience remains contestable within each example examined here, proving a useful idea to track. Shakespeare’s Julia and Jessica – and to some extent Spenser’s Britomart – associate their disguises with shame, viewing their actions as a misrepresentation of identity. Contrastingly, Rosalind, Portia, Nerissa and Viola – though experiencing unanticipated confusions throughout their male performances – clearly enjoy the concept of a dissembling identity and at times delight in the experiences that masculine attire grants them. Yet, the very nature of crossdressing disguise means that without the help of asides, soliloquies and the authority of an overarching narrative voice, audiences remain uncertain as to whether fictional crossdressing women privately wish to retain the male privileges, that God denied them at birth, after they have relinquished

their ‘unnatural’ positions of authority. Patriarchy is restored as the ruling societal system when women hand back their breeches. Nonetheless, despite their united silence at the resolution of every play, each Shakespearian crossdresser remains threatening to the Elizabethan patriarchal structure. Their initial intentions to “usurp”(5.1.246) male authority by dressing as, and deceiving, men is still problematic, particularly when we consider Viola who exits the *Twelfth Night* stage still dressed in her male costume. Clearly, Shakespeare refuses to conclude *Twelfth Night* with Viola – the potential threat to the established gender structure – safely contained. The “reassurance” that Sinfield (2006) suggests most early modern playwrights attempted to provide by their ultimate containment of divergent agents within the plots, “by inviting the audience in on the joke at the beginning, or by ensuring that everyone is restored to their proper gender by the end of the play,”(p. 121) is ultimately unachievable in this case. Only the nature of the carnivalesque and *Twelfth Night’s* comedic genre prevents Shakespeare from being branded a truly digressive playwright in his characterisation of Viola. The crossdresser can leave the stage still attired in male pageboy clothing because s/he has agreed to return to her “maid’s garments”(5.1.217) and given that the nature of carnivalesque allows for breaches of social constructions, the festival production of *Twelfth Night* has not yet concluded.³⁰

During the sixteenth-century, England’s female ruler, who remained unmarried until her death, thrust androgyny, as a concept, into the public imagination. Early modern society understood that “a Renaissance king [was] a hybrid creature, at once a being, a body, and also an image of absolute power.”(Lorenz, 2013, p. 6) Elizabeth complicated this established image of sovereignty, as she was a “creature” who lacked a king’s necessary biology while also claimed sovereign rights to rule through her paternal bloodline. Her sister Mary I also did this, to win the throne from Lady Jane Grey in 1553.³¹ Both sisters believed that their authority derived purely from their father’s authority,

³⁰ As Elam (2008) suggests that Shakespeare seems to have envisaged *Twelfth Night* not simply to act “as a synonym of carnivalesque revelry”(p. 18) but with “the revels associated in early modern England with the last day of the Christmas season”(p. 18) distinctly in mind. The ‘world turned upside down’ where social rules and boundaries are inverted temporarily, make the resolution of the play appear more acceptable, then. Especially given that the play was reputedly performed on the very last day of the Christmas seasonal of twelfth night, thus acting as a precursor to the evening’s inverted social norms for the final night of the Christian festival celebrations.

³¹ Kewes (2017) affirms, “Mary herself had initially asserted her right according to the terms of her father’s last succession statute and will. That was the tenor of what she had said to her entourage when proclaiming herself queen in Kenninghall on 9 July, and of the letters she had dispatched on the same day to the defunct Edwardian

disregarding their half-brother Edward VI's will in 1553, to claim that they were worthy candidates for the succession of the English throne.³² However, Hackett (1995) asserts that, "especially after it became clear that she would never marry, Elizabeth was an unprecedented and potentially disturbing figure"(p. 164) for England. Elizabeth's version of kingship proved particularly controversial to her subjects because during the latter decade of her reign the 'image of absolute power' (derived from the God-given authority that all legitimate kings possessed) was often coupled with persistent iconography that associated the queen's body with the Virgin Mary. In tandem with the 'ethereal' body of a ruler, the queen's physical body became associated with a goddess' during the 1590s.³³ Elizabeth's transgressive refraining from marriage, or providing a solution to the succession question, proved controversial indeed, as she opted to argue that she had married her country on her coronation day, rendering a husband was unnecessary.³⁴ Mary I had also previously utilised a similar allusion to her own coronation ring in public, using it as a symbol that "reinforced her own commitment to the country but also reminded her subjects of their obligation to her."(Duncan, 2012, p.36) Elizabeth would likely have viewed her half-sister's decision to marry Phillip II of Spain as erroneous, weakening her position of authority as the English monarch.³⁵ In later life, Elizabeth I existed as mother to England *and* the Virgin Queen, forever an impenetrable and chaste entity (one recollects her motto *semper eadem*, 'always the same'). Her ethereal nature was often alluded to in representations of her as akin to the Greek goddess of the moon and the hunt Diana (and Cynthia and Phoebe), and Spenser's Gloriana was the "static, remote icon of monarchy"(Cobb, 1990, p. 51) who

council, to Sir Edward Hastings and to many others. However, by 18 July when the momentum behind her accession appeared unstoppable, she issued a proclamation firmly asserting her hereditary credentials (and keeping silent about statute and will), a powerful sign of how she herself conceived of her title."

³² Kewes (2017) states "The events of June to July 1553 demonstrated vividly that the sisters' political fortunes were inextricably linked: the two would sink or swim together. Certainly, contemporary exclusionists saw no difference between them."

³³ Collinson (2012) asserts that "Virtually every flattering female deity of classical and biblical mythology was pressed into service: from the Old Testament, the heroines, Judith and Deborah; from Greece and Rome and Renaissance Italy, Diana, Cynthia, and the Petrarchan mistress, the Platonically learned Laura." Cobb (1990) likewise discusses references to Elizabeth I as Cynthia, the moon-goddess (p. 226), while Lisa Hopkins (2011) argues that "both the phoenix and the moon-goddess Phoebe/Diana/Cynthia [were] favored emblems of the queen."(89)

³⁴ Levin (1994) has noted that "Camden's version of Elizabeth's 1558 speech to Parliament, where she claims to already be married to England, is often used as an example that Elizabeth from the beginning of her reign had made the decision never to marry."(p. 41)

³⁵ Guy (2017) noted Elizabeth's wariness of "risking having to submit herself, and her country, to [a husband's] authority, as her half-sister had done."(p. 401)

dominated the epic poem despite being completely absent throughout.³⁶ Popular writers and playwrights often utilised imagery of purity, sanctity and the mask of ‘eternal youth’ in paintings, sonnets, plays and verse, to represent the queen’s female form, projecting her into the public eye as an impenetrable and supreme sovereign. The hybrid image of Elizabeth Tudor as both king and queen, a physical and ethereal entity, both typified and glorified her power. The conjoining images of the untarnished female body and unbreakable body politic together bolstered the legend of Queen Elizabeth’s enduring reign. Nevertheless, Tudor rule remained under threat from the lack of a physical, legitimate, male successor.

This concept is mirrored within early modern crossdressing texts, where female characters may easily pass for men, and occupy intrinsically male spaces or roles in society, but remain bereft of the necessary biological equipment to ‘prove men’. This is most clearly recognisable when Viola berates Olivia for her decision to remain aloof from courtship and to “leave the world no copy”(1.5.235) after her death. Viola argues that Olivia must marry to bear children and create human copies of herself to pass on the beauty she possesses, just as men should pass on their strength and authority. In response, Olivia presents her capacity for duality by listing off her socially ‘valuable’ body parts as if they appeared in a will. Her body, she states, “shall be inventoried, and every particle and *utensil* labelled to *my* will,”(1.5.237-238, my emphasis) referencing both the perceived functionality of female “lips...eyes...neck...chin and so forth”(1.5.239-240) and that she herself would have her body itemised and reproduced in her printed will to her, “my”(1.5.238), liking. She wishes for society to remember her for her own identity, or desirable body parts, rather than for any copies that she might produce through childbirth, like Elizabeth. Shakespeare thus uses the crossdresser’s subscription to traditional notions of patriarchy to warn and remind the most powerful – and independent – lady of rank in the

³⁶ Guy (2017) notes the “toxic element”(p. 402) of the famous Gloriana ‘cult’. During the final years of her reign, Elizabeth “left it to her courtiers to promote the ‘cult’ of Gloriana by commissioning ever more flattering and iconographically abstruse portraits as small armies of labourers toiled for a month or more at a time to create Arcadian fantasies during her summer progresses.”(p. 401) As such, writers would flatter but not overextend their representations of Elizabeth in their works. For example, Hopkins (2011) asserts that in *As You Like It*, Elizabeth is referenced in the “character called Phoebe, [because] the phoenix and the moon-goddess Phoebe/Diana/Cynthia [were] favored emblems of the queen.”(p. 89) Similarly, Woodcock (2004) outlines the “other figures of Elizabeth in *The Faerie Queene*, such as Una, Belpheobe, Britomart and Mercilla. Rather than ever getting to see the fairy queen in person, as it were, we find that she is presented as a story or a text.”(p.108)

play that to die “leav[ing] *the world* no copy”(1.5.235) would be scandalous and “cruel”(1.5.233) indeed. Viola even goes so far to state that the whole “world”(1.5.235) would suffer by Olivia’s failure to produce children. The question arises of who is more transgressive a character in this moment: the woman who is pretending to be a man or the countess who refuses to engage herself to one? The significance of this moment in *Twelfth Night* is clearly recognisable as a commentary upon Elizabeth’s own succession challenge throughout her reign.³⁷ As Guy (2017) reminds us, “The succession had presented her with a second, more practical dilemma. To assure the continuation of the dynasty, she would need an heir.”(p. 401) Shakespeare comically applied Viola’s crossdressing disguise in criticism of female nonconformity to patriarchal tradition. Moreover, Viola’s disagreement with Olivia on the subject of the necessity of ‘copies’ served as a reminder to early modern audiences of Elizabeth’s own once-anticipated yet non-existent male heir. The transgressive and duplicitous crossdresser scolds the countess who refuses to duplicate her identity through providing a male heir to her estate.

Similar to the ways in which Mary I, Elizabeth I and Mary Queen of Scots consistently referred to themselves as princes in speeches and letters, critics have noted the significance of the male names that crossdressing characters choose for themselves. They highlight how successful disguises were often deemed complete by the female schemers once masculine aliases had been adopted. Each of the names which these crossdressing women choose serve as metaphors for their intended façades. The women recognise that generating a truly convincing disguise requires not only a physical duality of male clothing to mask their feminine bodies, but also a more abstract duality in the form of a male pseudonym and false backstory.

³⁷ Hopkins (2011) explored how “the question of the succession did not simply disappear after the death of Elizabeth.”(p. 17) Contrastingly, Kewes (2017) examines the ‘exclusion crisis’ of 1553, where Edward VI attempted to overwrite his father’s 1544 Act of Succession, noting, “had it taken effect, [Edward VI’s] exclusion of Mary and Elizabeth would have spelt the end of Henry VIII’s line”(p. 472) altogether. Likewise, Robison (2017) asserts that Elizabeth’s “proximity to the throne put her increasingly at risk between Henry’s death in 1547 and her accession in 1558,”(p. 237) while acknowledging that “Elizabeth’s subjects spend her entire reign not knowing whom to expect as their next ruler.”(p. 244) Guy (2017) graphically affirms, “*A Conference about the Next Succession to the Crown* was the equivalent of a stick of dynamite thrown into Elizabeth’s coach,”(p. 247) as the sequel tract *News from Spain and Holland* made English “succession the hottest of hot topics. Elizabeth greeted it with undisguised horror [...] And when smuggled into London, [it] caused a run on the bookshops.”(p. 248) Collinson (2012) stated, “The long-running Elizabethan succession crisis had been reactivated in the 1590s, as the sands of time were seen to be running out.”

Julia is called Sebastian in *The Two Gentlemen* for the first time by Proteus himself, collectively affirming the disguise success and the imprisonment that the new identity eventually represents for her. Until Proteus recognises that ‘Sebastian’ is actually Julia, she believes that she must perform the Sebastian role within the play, not her own. The name Sebastian embodies Julia’s new sense of duality just as much as her veil of clothing does. Unsurprisingly, Julia incorporates a convincing backstory for herself during 4.4 while self-referencing more than any other point in the play. She uses the pageboy disguise as physical evidence for her semi-fictional backstory while conversing with Silvia, her rival, creating a semi-truthful memory of experience through a revelation that the Sebastian pageboy ‘knows’ the absent Julia, “almost as well as I do know myself.”(4.4.141) Through Sebastian’s backstory and the astonishing number of self-references in 4.4, Julia-as-Sebastian clearly demonstrates that her identity has been split into fractions by the disguise, as there is a past tense Julia, a present tense yet ‘absent’ Julia, and the physically present, yet disguised and not emotionally divested, Julia. The levels of identity created by the Julia-as-Sebastian disguise clearly generate difficulties for Julia in spite of its initial function to enable safe passage to her lover abroad.

In *Twelfth Night*, Viola envisages the Cesario disguise, so that she might privately conduct herself within a strange land while veiled by a protective male identity. She imagines Cesario as a figure modelled from her supposedly deceased twin-brother Sebastian. Viola comically reveals to countess Olivia that “what I am and what I would are as secret as maidenhead”(1.5.210) alluding to her own authentic gender concealed beneath male clothing. Olivia’s failure to notice Viola’s self-reference is comedic indeed, particularly when we consider that Viola had in the previous scene revealed that “myself would be his [Orsino’s] wife”(1.4.42) rather than the countess she had been sent to “woo”(1.4.42). The crossdresser’s gender is very well concealed from the prying, curious countess and the oblivious, self-centred duke.

Throughout 2.4, Viola-as-Sebastian makes reference to Cesario’s femaleness and attraction to Orsino eight times, with increasing obviousness. These are when Viola directly informs Orsino that Cesario is in love with a person “of your favour”(2.4.25), “your complexion”(2.4.27), and “your years”(2.4.28). Then Viola employs a hypothetical reference to herself, that “some lady, as perhaps

there is”(2.4.89) might love Orsino. She continues to use the hypothetical past tense example of Cesario’s fictional sister who, as a woman, “never told her love, / But let concealment like a worm i’t’h’ bud / feed on her damask cheek.”(2.4.110-112) Viola in this scene reflects a weariness with the effective use of crossdressing disguise and reinforces the concept that women who conceal themselves often fail to reap any immediate emotional benefits. Quite opposite, they often find that those men they love display unattractive attitudes that are emotionally painful to witness. Even when Viola attempts to refer to her own emotional attachment to the duke, defending her secret love for him, “Ay, but *I* know –”(2.4.103, my emphasis), the duke shuts such an argument down. Viola’s strongest self-references are “I am all the daughters of my father’s house / And all the brothers too,”(2.4.120-121) and “perhaps, were I a woman, / I should [love] your lordship”(2.4.108-109), but the duke fails to understand her hidden message while a male identity shrouds her feelings from discovery. Viola’s self-references in *Twelfth Night* allow her, like Julia, to make honest references to her authentic female emotions and backstory while remaining protected by the guise of maleness. Nevertheless, it does nothing to resolve her newfound desire to attain a romantic relationship with Orsino. We know that it is Olivia’s mistaking Viola’s twin Sebastian for Cesario – and Sebastian’s rash acceptance of Olivia’s affection – that allows the crossdresser her freedom from the disguise created, not the disguise itself.

Portia’s pseudonym Balthazar examples the transformative nature of independent and capable women, given that Portia appropriates her servant’s name – Balthazar who briefly appears in 3.4 – to pass for a lawyer in Venetian court and save Antonio. The servant Balthazar leaves Belmont under Portia’s orders, and a lawyer Balthazar attends Antonio’s court hearing in his defence with the authority of a forged letter. With little notice, Portia is able to shift her wifely ‘servant status’ to a lawyer’s – or proves able to temporarily commandeer Balthazar’s servant identity – to steer the play’s outcome toward her own personal inclinations, ousting Antonio from his position of power in Bassanio’s life.³⁸ The crossdressing is certainly important for Portia to successfully evince a male

³⁸ Newman (1987) asserts “Portia gives more than Bassanio can ever reciprocate, first to him, then to Antonio, and finally to Venice itself in her actions in the trial which allow the city to preserve both its law and its

identity, but the usurped name is surely significant as it supposedly maintains the gender-power balance expected within Venetian society. Portia had appropriated an image of service from her own servant in 3.4. Balthazar *serves* justice in court for the wronged Christian and is viewed as male at the time. Portia-as-Balthazar wins the trial, “delivering”(4.1.412) the accused men from the constraints of lawful punishment. She creates a feminine image of delivery, from childbirth, after having freed the men from their lawful bindings, while additionally tying them in “love and service”(4.1.410) to the lawyer Balthazar, herself, for “evermore.”(4.1.410) Portia saves them in lawful and bodily terms, as a pregnant woman frees her hitherto dependent children from the confines of her womb once they are properly prepared for the world. Portia grants Antonio’s rebirth by freeing him from his forfeited bond with Shylock. As such, she gains supremacy over the pair through her wisdom and their deliverance, reversing the servant-status that she had taken from her own servant Balthazar. Portia’s use of crossdressing serves as evidence that women could be presented as a challenge to early modern notions of male dominance and power, as she proved a more convincing lawyer than the two men she saved within the male-dominated court landscape.

Another way of interpreting Portia’s choice of name is in biblical terms, which illuminates the elevation of social and cultural status that she, as a cross-dressing heroine, attempts to assume. Unlike the biblical Balthasar who gifts baby Jesus treasure, Portia possesses treasure in the form of her father’s material wealth, which she gifts to Bassanio with her ring: “This house [...] I give them with this ring”(3.2.171-172). But in the court scene, Portia-as-Balthazar proves herself not just the possessor of her father’s treasure, but a *protector* of treasure, saving her husband’s valuable friend Antonio from death. It could be argued, by extension, that Portia attempts to protect her own treasure, symbolised by her promise ring, from being passed on to others during her deceit of Bassanio in 4.2. Yet Portia alludes to the biblical Balthasar in her chosen pseudonym, who bestowed myrrh upon Jesus – a substance associated with the anointment of kings and symbolic for death and bodily embalming during the early modern era. The gift of myrrh that the Balthasar brought Jesus could relate to Portia’s gift of legal deliverance for Antonio by her settling his pound of flesh debt (a death sentence) with

precious Christian citizen. In giving more than can be reciprocated, Portia short-circuits the system of exchange and the male bonds it creates, winning her husband away from the arms of Antonio.”(p. 26)

Shylock. Portia-as-Balthazar preserves Antonio's life using her wisdom of legality and oaths, heightening her potential reputation to that of the wise king from the bible, in her deliverance of Antonio. The ring that Portia then asks of Bassanio in thanks for her helping Antonio bears a dual significance. Far from representing a promise of bondage between two lovers, Portia's ring comes to symbolise a potential union between man and his saviour. Bassanio allows Antonio to deliver Portia's ring to Balthazar to thank the lawyer for saving Antonio's life, similar to Saint Balthazar's paying homage to baby Jesus, man's saviour, in the Gospel of Matthew. Seen in this light, Portia becomes an immensely high-status protagonist through her crossdressing disguise. She underhandedly assumes a commanding role within the male-dominated society, saving men from themselves as the lawyer Balthazar, revealing male dominance and female submission as fabrications of patriarchal Elizabethan culture. However, she also reinforces the importance of the Elizabethan marital system by making Bassanio swear to keep her ring and then encouraging him to give it away, utilising it as a promise of fidelity in one moment and then as a means for reprimanding hi, in the other. Simultaneously 'Portia of Belmont' and 'Balthazar the lawyer' by her ability to play whichever role whenever necessary, Portia proves herself a genuinely threatening force refuting the rigidity of Elizabethan gender codes.

In *As You Like It* Rosalind creates an impressive illustration of 'duality', by creating a kind of metadrama of the self, using a disguise within a disguise. Rosalind resorts to duplicity by deciding to protect her female body beneath male attire to survive her exile from court with her bodily chastity intact. In this play, too, man and woman seemingly occupy the same physical space, as with the other crossdressing women examined in this study. Yet Rosalind-as-Ganymede offers to cure Orlando from his lovesickness by imitating Rosalind. Rosalind-as-Ganymede is able to reveal versions of her feminine self whilst in Orlando's presence, despite her transgressive male attire, producing for the early modern audience two images of Rosalind occupying the same space: the disguised Rosalind who wears male clothing, and the fictitious Rosalind that Ganymede so helpfully imitates for Orlando's benefit. Rosalind's many layers of gendered performance range from her genuine physical female self to outright parody of maleness while she and Orlando converse in the forest of Arden. The layers of duality in this play are therefore rich with pretence, imbued with multiple suppositions and

misunderstandings of identity on both Rosalind's and Orlando's parts. Even as Rosalind becomes capable of acting out a semblance her femininity through Ganymede's imitation, she and Orlando constantly misunderstand one another on exactly how Rosalind would have conducted herself had she stood beside them.³⁹ Rosalind-as-Ganymede-as-Rosalind consistently fails to convince Orlando that the 'absent', real, Rosalind would act in unexpected ways, as he is always caught up in his idealised figure of "my Rosalind"(4.1.57, 110, 148, 186).

The only layer of identity that ought to remain separate from Rosalind's authentic female identity – her Ganymede disguise – proves intrinsically linked to her actions. Shakespeare employs the Ganymede name not a simply a tool for Rosalind to hide her femininity, but rather as a symbol for its own function: personal transformation. This is especially true when we consider the personal transformation that the mythological Ganymede experienced after Jove (disguised as an eagle) abducted him to serve the Gods as a cupbearer.⁴⁰ In his transformation, Ganymede is able to serve his superiors, just as Rosalind is able to serve Orlando the as-it-turns-out future duke of *As You Like It*. She is linked to the mythological Ganymede in her choice of name, in the function she attributes to herself as "Jove's own page,"(1.3.121) seemingly inherent to the traditional early modern cross-dressed heroine figure, the transformative nature of role which the two characters experience, and in their similar servitude to people of immense authority.

Clearly then, Shakespeare's crossdressers acknowledge their duplicity by publicly referencing their female identities while cross-dressed. This self-referencing in public functions in varied ways: firstly as characters' internal recognition of the androgynous nature of crossdressing; secondly, as a reminder that a crossdressing heroine can, to some extent, control public reception of her; and thirdly, that self-referencing can convert otherwise respected and authoritative members of society into a source of comedic ridiculousness.

³⁹ As Venkatesan (2014) notes "The ruse of Rosalind-as-Ganymede-as-Orlando's Rosalind gives her immense freedom and scope to put her substantial skills to entertaining use, something she could never have done in the confines of the palace under the scrutinizing eyes of Duke Frederick."(p. 31).

⁴⁰ Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (2002) details the abduction and servitude that Ganymede experienced due to Jove's love for him, stating that Jove, "...soaring in the air with borrowed wings, trussed up / The Trojan boy, who still in heaven even yet doth bear his cup."(Book 10, lines 165-6)

Early modern writers present duality not simply in the characters who have opted to cross-dress but also within the fabric of the societies in which they exist. Barbara Everett (1996) argues that *Twelfth Night* contains “a surprising amount of connoisseurs’ praise, of compliments and civilities, some meant and some not,”(p. 205) highlighting the landscape of pretence that Shakespeare depicts. Malvolio judges Olivia’s praise of his recent stylistic clothing choice as sincere, leading to the debacle of 3.4. Sir Andrew consistently misunderstands Sir Toby’s flattery which functions as a veil over exploitative requests “for money,”(2.4.180) for honest friendship. Likewise, in 5.1, Orsino rewards Feste by paying him for the superficially flattering allusion to their friendship, “it please you to be one of my friends”(5.1.23-24), despite the transgressive social connotations of friendship betwixt Fools and Dukes. Orsino’s rewarding Feste for such a suggestion is ironic given Feste’s previous claim that “by my friends I am abused”(5.1.18). Olivia fails to recognise in Cesario’s bold praises both the female body beneath the clothes and Viola-as-Cesario’s message within the audacious evaluation of Olivia’s appearance. Viola was rude to dissuade the countess from engaging in emotional or marital negotiations with the duke. More ridiculous, is Sebastian’s naïve belief that a countess would knowingly marry a complete stranger, as he continues to assess the situation as an “accident and flood of fortune”(4.3.11). Clearly, *Twelfth Night* is full of examples of self-interested pretence and miscalculations, both in terms of the flatterers and the flattered. The masks, or ‘parts’, that all characters assume throughout the play work to emphasise the power, or perhaps indeed even necessity, of feigning and invention within court settings. Joseph Summers (1972) noted that “Within comedy, the character who thinks it is possible to live without assuming a mask is merely too naïve to recognise the mask he has already assumed.”(p. 87) Sebastian’s failure to assume a mask when he lands in Illyria is in fact the mistake that enables him to social climb to such remarkable heights of countdom. Nevertheless, in his failure to adopt a disguise when he lands in Illyria he unwittingly becomes Cesario without intending to, functioning as the solution to the play by mistakenly adopting Viola’s disguise in 4.1, 4.3 and 5.1, and marrying the deceived countess.

This fundamentally simulative landscape renders Viola’s cross-dressing especially powerful, as she gains immediate advantage on everyone she meets, with the help of her feigned persona. She has

embezzled the authority and potency of a male identity as a form of personal protection, effectively appropriating an assumed position of power within the social landscape that she inhabits. Shakespeare conveys that Viola's actions while disguised assist the persuasiveness of her performative "intent"(1.2.52), as Olivia remarks upon Viola-as-Cesario's masculine behaviour and countenance, saying, "Thy tongue, thy face, thy limbs, *actions and spirit* / Do give thee fivefold blazon,"(1.5.284-285, my emphasis). Olivia's deep unintentional homosexual attraction in 1.5 does not disprove that 'male' clothing may convincingly mark a female body as male, but rather, proves that, coupled alongside the traditionally male markers of clothing, a woman's ability to mimic masculine mannerisms can prove highly misleading and indeed disruptive to the conventional sixteenth-century structure of gendered power. Clearly, Viola wants to prevent Olivia from becoming enamoured with the duke (1.4.41-42), and yet there is no intention to divert attraction from the duke to her own feigned form: "Fortune forbid my outside have not charmed her."(2.2.18) Exaggerated masculine behaviour – in conjunction with external markers of maleness – proves counterproductive to Viola's internal intentions and desires; Shakespeare presents Viola's intentions to diffuse any budding attraction between the duke and countess from escalating, she instead instigates Olivia's fancy for a disguised identity. The crossdressing disguise proves an unpredictable and uncontrollable force for Viola.

Likewise, Proteus ironically mistakes Julia for a pageboy of "good bringing-up, fortune and truth"(4.4.67), despite her dissembled female form, "chiefly for thy face and thy behaviour,"(4.4.65). This highlights how, once disguised, Julia's actions in particular help her to maintain the level of pretence in Verona that these early modern texts anticipate, while simultaneously generating an unintentional self-entrapment within her own disguise. In much the same vein, once adorned in her knightly attire Britomart is considered male because her physical bearing and combatant capabilities reinforce the image of manliness that those in Faerie Land expect. After discovering that Britomart is actually female, the Redcrosse knight:

Made her dissemble her disguised kind:
Faire Lady she him seemed, like Lady drest,

But fairest knight aliue, when armed was her brest.

(*The Faerie Queene*, III.ii.4,7-9)

While the disguised princess would initially prove threatening to the established gender positioning of *The Faerie Queene* due to her imposing knightly simulation, her duplicity is strongly conveyed to Spenser's readership. The lady bravely searches for the man whom she believes is her destined husband under the very effective and well executed male disguise, privately keeping from Redcrosse her personal objective to marry Artegall. Spenser presents her physical reaction to Redcrosse's interrogation as reactive in nature:

Thereat she sighing softly, had no powre
To speake a while, ne ready answer make,
But with hart-thrilling throbs and bitter stowre,
As if she had a feuer fit, did quake,
And euery daintie limbe with horreur shake;

(*The Faerie Queene*, III.ii.5,1-5)

Spenser describes how the maid beneath her male armour is rendered an unthreatening presence after Redcrosse questions her on her manly disguise. Spenser destabilizes Britomart's power over the situation once her crossdressing disguise has been revealed. Her entire body reacts to the question as if the Knight of Holiness had physically attacked her, as she is unable to speak, her heart throbbing, body quaking and expressing an internal horror at the prospect of responding with her honest feminine answer. Her body is revealed as physically female with the "daintie"(III.ii.5,5) state of her limbs, despite "her dreadful strokes"(III.i.66,4) and "wrathfull steele"(III.ii.66,6) accredited to her fighting capabilities during the previous canto. This starkly contrasts with her debut appearance within *The Faerie Queene* when she is presented to the readers as "the famous Britomart"(III.i.8,6), easily overthrowing Marinell on her first martial encounter. In Britomart's physical reaction, then, Spenser reassuringly presents the female knight's two personages as thoroughly distinct from one another. Despite the interconnectedness of Britomart's dual identity, which actualises both marital and martial inclinations, her inner female nature and outer male semblance prove to be two sides of a distinctly feminine coin. The function of Britomart's armour is emotionally and physically protective: it enables

the protection of her chaste body within a man's world; it disguises her female mission of securing a marriage beneath the guise of masculine combat; and lets her conceal any reactive physical emotions from a judgemental and prescriptive landscape. Her martial abilities are derived from female courage, not male competence.

Clearly, despite the implicitly female response presented by Spenser in stanza 5, Britomart's emotional reaction is very private, as "At last the passion past she thus him answered."(III.ii.5,9) Rather than honestly revealing that she loves the stranger Artegall, Britomart adheres to the male landscape of conflict – that she has entered into by dressing as a knight – by claiming grievance with Artegall, claiming he "hath vnto me donne / Late foule dishonour and reproachfull spight,"(III.ii.8,7-8). In this, Britomart gains a pleasing character reference on Artegall from Redcrosse while also protecting her true agenda to adhere to patriarchal expectations of women in Elizabethan culture: marriage to male authority. Her elated response likewise occurs privately, as Britomart "woxe *inly* wondrous glad,"(III.ii.11.1, my emphasis) to hear her fated husband described so, reinforcing her characterisation as a model of modest feminine virtue and chastity to Spenser's audience. Britomart's concealed joy "softly sunk into her molten hart; [as] Such secret ease felt gentle Britomart"(III.ii.15.2-7) at the news of Artegall's own personality. She is modest in her joyful response, and does not articulate her pleasure at the expense of her disguise, despite Redcrosse and Britomart's awareness that a manly disguise is in place, covering up the female body beneath. In early modern culture, exemplary women were expected to be demure despite any strong emotions, because women were considered naturally unwise, emotionally flighty and irresponsible if they were 'overly' expressive of their feelings. Consequently, modesty and chastity were the most attractive qualities in women, as they attested to an adequacy for wifhood. Britomart does everything correctly, as a candidate for marriage to Artegall. She proves herself a chaste, modest and dedicated woman, capable of beating men in combat, but unwilling to do so with her husband (as shown most notably in IV.vi, and V.vii). If Britomart were ever inclined to disobey her husband, she would be a major threat to the notions of patriarchy and gender hierarchy to which early modern English culture subscribed. As Spenser does

not present her in this manner, we can only assume that she is a model character, unthreatening to the gender codes understood by Elizabethans.

We can conclude then, that in terms of the potential for the duality of femininity in crossdressing characterisations within the early modern era, Shakespeare presents female duplicity, and dishonesty, as inherently problematic both for the crossdressing heroine and the gender structure which she often inadvertently challenges. Viola's problems are solved by Sebastian's appearance. Julia fails to deliver her own ring to a rival because Silvia refuses to receive it, thereby allowing her to mix up the revelatory rings in 5.4. Rosalind puts an end to all misplaced affections by marrying everyone off from her unique position of understanding generated by the deceitful disguise. These women are proven disruptive in their crossdressing duplicity. But for Spenser, crossdressing has the potential for commendation, once recognised as a romantic gesture of a woman's love for her partner. Britomart is essentially 'let off' by the narrator who only allows her to transgress as a solution to her determination to subscribe to patriarchal notions of power and authority. She is double only in that her mission to marry inspires in her a militant determination for discovery and success: she physically yields only to her fated lover, Artegall, and in this, her deception is forgiven. Only Glauce her maid, Merlin the wizard, Amoret whom she saves (in the 1596 version), Scudamour and Artegall (when the lovers battle) become aware of Britomart's true female identity, and so she largely traverses Fairy Land successfully concealed beneath her exterior armour. Her secret is safe and so despite the *potential* challenge that Britomart represents to patriarchal authority in her transgressive male disguise, outer society fails to discover her deception.

Marriage: Exchanging and Keeping Promises

The previous chapter addressed the dual effects that a crossdressing disguise might have over a female protagonist. The capacity for societal subversion that a crossdressing disguise provides is clear, when writers present their fictional women as willing and able to deceive, and thus undermine the authority of, her male superiors. This is especially clear while we consider the contrasting bodies that each of the crossdressing women come to represent.

This section draws upon its predecessor in that the crossdressing characters studied here threaten to subvert the traditionally male authority that presided over almost every female subject in early modern society, Elizabeth Tudor being a crucial exception. The focus in this section falls upon the deceit of prospective marital partners resulting from a female character ‘putting on’ male clothing and masculine mannerisms. Themes of female chastity, female deceitfulness, and the duties of a ‘good wife’ are prevalent throughout these texts, in light of the transgressive actions of crossdressing women.

Early modern heroines are often presented as very concerned with their personal chastity, or achieving a chaste marital union with an acceptable husband, and therefore often express their subscription to such values so that they might rationalise the crossdressing disguises they envisage. As Hamilton (2013) states of Spenser’s Britomart, “her quest is to yield her virginity to a stranger whose face she has seen in a looking-glass,”(p. 10) after having been informed by the wizard Merlin that he is her predestined spouse. Thus, Britomart’s sole reason for choosing to cross-dress as a male knight is so that she may locate Artegall, her fated husband, safely. Yet Britomart becomes a formidable warrior in order to complete her quest, and Spenser even describes his crossdresser as developing “that great desire / Of warlike armes... / And generous stout courage”(III.iii.57.2-4) at the thought of dressing as a knight. Her powerfully disguised identity, as a female heiress who has elected to spur onward towards her fated destiny alone, places Britomart unquestionably at odds with the soft and passive feminine figure Elizabethan society would have expected her to be. As a king’s daughter, she defies

the misogynistic presumption that after hearing of her fated destiny she would return home to wait patiently for that destiny to come into fruition, without exercising her own autonomous hand in encouraging that outcome. Her decisive decision to cross-dress and breach the boundaries of her domestic home to ensure her marriage with Artegall both denotes a strong subscription to the “ordained”(III.iii.26.1) will of providence, which Hamilton (2013) notes, and also expresses a clear degree of personal self-possession and autonomy. It is relevant likewise that Merlin never actually specifies that Britomart should cross-dress as a knight to search of her destined husband, but he does prophesise that Britomart ought to “doe by all dew meanes thy destiny fulfill”(III.iii.24.9) implying that her actions could prove decisive in fulfilling the fated design. Her transgressive action then, despite its well-meant frontage, suggests that the threatening figure of a crossdressing woman in works like Edmund Spenser’s *Faerie Queene* (1590 and 1595) and Shakespeare’s crossdressing comedies might cast a broader light upon contemporary social and cultural perspectives surrounding issues of gender and authority in sixteenth-century England.

These texts habitually refer to marital union and contractual promises, such as spoken oaths and marriage vows, and symbolic rings. Often a crossdressing heroine’s personal beliefs and emotional attachments towards rings and marriage are generally prioritised over that of their male counterparts’, as in *The Merchant of Venice* and *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*. Crossdressing heroines often claim emotional or moral advantage over men with the help of their disguises, matrimonial symbolism and rings, Portia’s “vantage to exclaim”(3.2.174) upon Bassanio being the strongest example. The significance of ring symbolism to early modern culture in terms of gender hierarchies is palpable, when the following question recurrently arises when crossdressing women transgress within fictional works. Who actually holds the position of control within the plot when a socially subordinate woman gains moral ‘vantage’ over her male counterpart, when love, marriage and chastity are concerned?

The concept that women could be capable of establishing dominion over their husbands was unsettling for early moderns. Especially so when such dominion was attained by manipulative means. As Newman (1987) evidences “contemporary sources suggest [that socially] unequal marriage often resulted in the dominion by the wife.”(p. 26) Therefore, the subsequent question is, what were early

modern writers communicating to their contemporaries concerning the potential dangers that effective female crossdressers posed to traditionally accepted paradigms of gender and gendered roles within the structure of matrimonial union? Both Spenser's Knight of Chastity Britomart and Shakespeare's witty Rosalind secure their preferred marriage partners by using a crossdressing disguise.

These women gain dominion over their prospective suitors, while effectively cross-dressed, and both subsequently gain a discernible measure of control over their husbands even before a marriage has taken place. By employing crossdressing disguises, both women are able to make physical contact with their destined husbands in person without being constrained by their female identities, and the sociological implications of gendered discourses and behaviours that accompany them. Both crossdressers are able to express themselves very audaciously, occupying a male subject position to negotiate a marriage match unaided. Britomart actually duels with Artegall her fated husband twice, and, according to Glauce her equally cross-dressed maid, vanquishes him in both instances in combat, despite her female identity beneath the warrior armour she wears. Rosalind coerces Orlando into taking part in a mock marriage with Ganymede. This instance illicitly evokes the crossdresser's personal ambition to literally take control over her own marital status without any form of informed consent from a male superior in her life, namely Duke Senior (her father), or Orlando himself, who goes along with the scene as a highly misinformed participant in the 'marriage' which occurs between Rosalind-as-Ganymede-as-Rosalind and himself. Britomart's father is likewise granted a brief mention in *The Faerie Queene*, but Britomart never once voices any concern that her actions may be undermining any of her father's intentions for her marriage. Thus, these two characters attempt to secure marital partners for themselves without the help, approval or consent of any patriarchal superior. I will now outline the instances in which these two crossdressing heroines in particular can be seen as potentially threatening to Elizabethan gender hierarchies in terms of negotiating marriage matches.

Britomart's first appearance in *The Faerie Queene* makes a distinct link between her high status as a king's only daughter – thereby highlighting the potential instability of her father's succession and conservation of familial wealth and public reputation – with Britomart's own internal

acknowledgement or preoccupation with a suitable marriage match. Britomart is identified firstly as a beloved daughter of her father “For nothing he from her reseru’d apart”(III.ii.22.3) but secondly she is problematically identified as the sole benefactor of that king’s dynasty “Being his onely daughter and his hayre”(III.ii.22.4). Thus, the position of emotional stability that she occupies shifts immediately, within a single line, to that of dynastic uncertainty. Spenser provides a solution to the threat that Britomart poses to the succession of her father’s lineage in the next stanza, with that of a marital suitor. While rifling through her father’s closet Britomart wonders about her matrimonial destiny:

So thought this Mayd (as maydens vse to done)
Whom fortune for her husband would *allot*,
Not that she lusted after any one;
For she was pure from blame of sinfull *blot*,
Yet wist her life at last *must lincke* in that same *knot*.

(*The Faerie Queene*, III.ii.23.5-9, my emphases)

The girl demonstrates a clear acceptance of her submissive role accepting a husband in this stanza. Britomart will be ‘allotted’ a husband by Fortune, not through her own wish to marry or with any particular partner in mind. Furthermore, her attitude towards her own marriage is presented in a respectfully passive manner, as the narrative decrees that she “must lincke in that same knot” which would otherwise “blot” her “pure” reputation as a virginal maid. Thus, Britomart’s control over her own fate in this stanza is limited, and Spenser presented her accepting this. The “knot” of marriage simultaneously symbolises the matrimonial bond that she will inevitably make in order to ensure the appropriate succession of her father’s dynasty, and the constructed nature of marriage. Marriage as a conversation has remained closed off to ensure the purity of Britomart’s virginal body and mind until such a time that she would agree to “lincke” with an appropriate suitor.

Paradoxically, the significance of Britomart’s transgressive misrepresentation is emphasised in III.ii because the entire canto where ‘undisguised Britomart’ is depicted actually functions as a flashback. In reality Britomart is already cross-dressed in the audience’s minds, despite the fact that ‘maid Britomart’ has never disguised herself before, precisely because they are aware that *that* decision will be made in the heroine’s very near future. The passive femininity of ‘Britomart the maid’ from the

past becomes superimposed against the transgressive masculine disguise which the present ‘warrior Britomart’ wears as she reminisces upon her reasoning for crossdressing in the first place.

But despite the way in which the narrative highlights Britomart’s transgressive behaviour, by presenting both figures of Britomart alongside one another in opposing states of ‘before’ and ‘after’, Spenser allows Britomart to remain privately silent on her reasons for disguising as a male knight after being questioned on that very subject in III.ii. Rather than reveal her private ambition to fulfil her destiny by marrying Artegall, as Merlin prophesied, Britomart instead discloses how she had “beene trained vp in warlike stowre,/ To tossen speare and shield”(III.ii.6.3-4) calling upon her background as a fighter, not a maiden girl and her father’s heir. Unlike Hamilton’s (2013) suggestion that Britomart provides a “false story”(p. 303) as explanation for her disguise here, my belief is that Spenser presents Britomart shifting the focus of her personal background away from a princess whose sole purpose is to marry the correct man into that of a daughter who was brought up to defend her father’s realm. Britomart’s personal quest to find Artegall becomes one side of her story: on the one hand she has disguised herself to travel safely to her destined spouse and on the other she has become an autonomous knight, capable of defending herself with the combat skills she suggests that she had been encouraged to master from her childhood. Practically, the disguise allows Britomart to bend the truth to her advantage in order to gain information from external sources without needing to reveal her personal motivations or ‘real’ identity. Britomart utilises her male guise – exaggerating her potential suitability for occupying it somewhat – to press her companion for information on Artegall’s reputation and nature, fraudulently attributing to his character “dishonour and reproachful spight”(III.ii.8.8). Nevertheless, the personal (sexual and emotional) privacy gained by crossdressing disguises is clearly exhibited in Britomart’s internal response to Redcrosse’s hasty refutation of her false accusations and inaccurate measure of Artegall’s character, as “the royall Mayd woxe inly glad,/ to hear her Loue so highly magnifyde”(III.ii.11.1-2). The emphasis here is on “inly” as Britomart ensures that her personal motivations for seeking Artegall out remain private until she eventually meets him in person. Of course, the irony of this level of privacy achieved is evident in IV.iv when she and her correspondingly disguised predestined spouse do not recognise each other as potential

lovers as they both dissemble their true identities during Satyrane's tournament for False Florimell. Indeed, as Cavanagh (1994) states, "Artegall becomes the sole focus of her boundless energies, and she undertakes this task with such ferocity that she comically doesn't initially recognize the Salvage Knight as her fated mate"(p. 153) when they face each other in combat over a maiden. It is clear then, that while Britomart's disguise allows her to maintain privacy when it comes to her innermost desires, it is also potentially problematic to that which it was created to solve: successfully journeying to her destined husband to marry him and "submit...vnto his will"(III.iii.24.8). In fact, Artégall must strip the royal maid of her disguise during their second combat scene together in order to identify Britomart as a woman at all, let alone his destined wife.

This mention of Britomart as a marriage suitor is very important too in terms of her male disguise. Britomart consistently assumes the male position within the pursuer / pursued paradigm of traditional early modern courtship. Cavanagh (1994) highlighted such a dynamic within Spenser's epic, as,

The fleeting females remain just out of sight, ever whetting the sexual and visual appetites of their *pursuers*, while the iconic women display themselves and less virtuous women struggle to keep male viewers from looking too closely.

(p. 40, my emphasis)

Cobb (1990) insisted that Britomart "has donned armour only in order to *pursue* the quest for her destined husband."(p. 59, my emphasis) McManus (2002) likewise notes Britomart's active hunting for Artégall, as "Not all of Spenser's ladies have the protection of Britomart's armour, however, and can *pursue* their love with impunity and bravado of the lady knight."(p. 148, my emphasis) Britomart consistently subverts Artégall's position of authority in their relationship while posing as a knight, despite relinquishing that power once her disguise is revealed. She beats Artégall in Satyrane's tournament; she poses a genuine threat to his prevalence over her in their one-on-one battle during IV.vi as the couple become tangled together as both are "sometimes pursewing, and sometimes pursued"(IV.vi.18.2) by the other. Britomart is even mistaken for Artégall altogether by Dolon in V.vi, reversing altogether the maid and suitor roles of sixteenth-century courtship structure. Artégall

is often forced into positions of inferiority and submission to female power within *The Faerie Queene*, despite the fact that his own warlike proficiencies that are noted throughout. Anderson (2018) asserts that Artegall “is overcome by [Britomart’s] beauty, available to him only in her flushed and sweating face, framed by wisps of hair.”(p. 144) Furthermore, Eggert (2000) suggested that “Radigund’s capture of Artegall externalizes what might be Artegall’s nightmare of marriage to Britomart: not only do Radigund and Britomart resemble each other in looks and actions, as many critics have noticed, but Artegall crucially consents to his bondage.”(p. 38) Indeed, Harvey (1992) had already explored Artegall’s shift into a state of inferiority in arguing that, “Above all, Artegall’s enslavement to Radigund is characterised by waiting – waiting for her to tire in battle, for her to decide his fate when he is in prison, for Britomart to rescue him – a position that humiliates and effeminizes him.”(p. 43) Furthermore, as Dollimore (1994) stated, “in some plays and tracts, cross-dressing is used to challenge traditional evaluations of women’s inferior nature and status.”(p. 141) The complete reversal in authority and inferiority positions for men and women is clear in Artegall’s experiences with fighting militant women, then.

When Artegall’s image first appears to Britomart (the virtuous and innocent maid described at the beginning of Book III) in Venus’ magic mirror, Artegall is “rendered ... the object of her own gaze and fantasies in a reversal of the usual Petrarchan pattern”(McManus, 2002, p. 126) which was so prevalent within early modern romance narratives. Furthermore, Artegall fills a particularly feminine role while Britomart saves him from his tyrannous captor Radigund the Amazon Queen of Book V. As Schwartz (2000) argues, “Artegall [is positioned] in the wrong place: in the battle between Britomart and Radigund, the vision of two knights fighting for a lady reappears, but the “lady” is Artegall”(p. 157). For Britomart to restore her husband to his former state of an authoritative male knight, she must first defeat the matriarchal figure that has enslaved him. Spenser presents Radigund as a warning symbol of a mannish and powerful woman who could bring uncertainty and disorder to patriarchal society, as Elizabeth I had in failing to marry and produce England’s next heir. Indeed as Robison (2017) asserts, “A ruler’s most important duties were defending the realm and producing heirs, and failing the latter made the former more difficult.”(p. 234) A less politically sensitive

argument – though still highly significant in terms of transgression and gender hierarchies – is that Radigund’s characterisation might symbolise Spenser’s belief that the capacity for maleness that women and wives displayed should be eradicated, or at least suppressed, in order to ensure the survival of healthy marriage units within sixteenth-century English society. Perhaps both interpretations are applicable at once.

Certainly some critics have recognised that Britomart’s battle with Radigund could also represent the crossdressing heroine’s own internal battle with herself, as her two ‘selves’ fight for prevalence in her character. As Greenblatt (2005) stated “Spenser’s knights live in the profound conviction that there is a moral task set for themselves by virtue of the power of Gloriana, a demonic object out there to be encountered and defeated.”(p. 179) Of course, for Britomart, this would be the threatening image of matriarchy – or her own counter-image – presented as challenging ‘natural’ Elizabethan gender roles. The ‘maid’ must subdue the ‘warrior’ in Britomart so that Artegall may retain his power-position within their matrimonial relationship: authority could not be shared out equally between man and woman in Elizabethan society. This is why Britomart’s disguise is so relevant to her fight scenes. Radigund fights Britomart dressed as she wishes to be received in society, as a subversive figure in Fairy Land whose very authority is drawn from the fact that she does not subscribe to patriarchal values. Unlike Britomart, Radigund is honest in her apparel as a representation of what she believes in beneath her clothing. Spenser allows Britomart to win precisely because she is ‘putting on’ that guise of combatant power in order to save her husband from the horrors of emasculating subjection to patriarchal values and to restore him to his original position of authority. It is true that every time Britomart is unmasked in Artegall’s presence, she immediately assumes the socially subordinate position of the two in their matrimonial relationship.

Britomart’s subscription to female subordination is evident in her relinquishing her control during the second battle between Artegall and herself. Once Artegall knocks Britomart’s helmet off in battle and realises that he actually battles a stunningly beautiful woman, his attacks on her shift dramatically into a “continuall siege vnto her gentle hart,”(IV.vi.40.4) rather than that of physical battery. He immediately decides to court her given that his “passions grew more fierce and faine,/ Like to a

stubborne steede whom strong hand would restraine.”(IV.vi.33.8-9) Artegall’s new approach to Britomart is to seek her hand in marriage, while the “strong hand” imagery is undoubtedly a reference to his own ability to exert masculine control over his “stubborne steede”. Likewise, Britomart immediately reverts to the traditional role of ‘courted maid’ after realising who she fights with, and that she has been discovered. The crossdressing disguise has served its intended purpose in safely delivering the “pure”(III.ii.23.8) royal maid to her destined lover. The very significance of the disguise in this canto is the aptness of its sudden absence, once it has been removed for the intended benefactor. Spenser permits Britomart’s transgressive disguise within the epic, inviting his audience to forgive her previous misbehaviours, because she immediately relinquishes all usurped authority as she stands in the presence of her future husband.

Britomart further redeems herself as an exemplar figure of perfect chastity to Spenser’s early modern audience, not merely because she immediately yields her powerful position once Artegall is available to assume it, but because she pointedly refuses to surrender instantly her feminine chastity once she has located Artegall. She instead forces her suitor to perform the appropriate and anticipated gestures of traditional courtship, making chase for her hand in marriage even though “she paynd with womanish art / To hide her wound,”(IV.vi.40.7-8) of infatuation for him. Emotional courtship is a necessary gesture in *The Faerie Queene* narrative, as Spenser presents it as a genuinely integral practice, which ensures the legitimacy of their matrimonial joinage. Shakespeare disputes this in the characterisation of Rosalind.

In *As You Like It* Shakespeare produces a socially threatening crossdressing lady who revels in her opportunity to toy with her male suitor face-to-face. Rosalind’s male Ganymede disguise effectively protects her social reputation from being tarnished through deceitful concealment. Rosalind is able to school Orlando in the rules of courtship with the use of her Ganymede disguise, particularly in terms of promises made between lovers and attitudes towards marriage and marital relationships. The image of a subordinate woman taking it upon herself to rule over a suitor (or her husband) and direct his behaviour would have been disturbing indeed for traditionalist members of Elizabethan society. Arguably then, Rosalind’s severest transgressions in terms of marriage occur in 4.1 when she

discusses bluntly with Orlando the hypothetically challenging wifely mannerisms that she might habitually call upon once they were wedded, and pushing past the perceived 'point of no-return' when she daringly demands for a mock-marriage between Orlando and 'Rosalind' to take place immediately.

Similar to Spenser's presentation of a love dalliance turned inside out between Britomart and Artegall, where the man is chased by the lady (even despite the lady's determination to preserve her chastity while doing so), Rosalind orders "Give me your hand, Orlando."(4.1.115) This command could only have been considered redeemable through humour to Elizabethan audiences when we consider the dimension of the boy-actor onstage. Shakespeare presents to his audience in Rosalind the castaway lady who cross-dresses to survive in the wilderness: a transgressive act, yet founded in good intentions and a well-known early modern fictional trope. She toys with and deceives her prospective lover, which is offensive still, yet still redeemable in light of Portia's lawyer deceit of Bassanio, still to be discussed. However, worst, Rosalind reverses the courtship hierarchy by ordering Orlando to wed her by giving 'her' his hand in marriage, rather than offering hers. This final lapse in convention, made possible by the use of the Ganymede disguise, would be irredeemable if not for the audience's knowledge that beneath the lady Rosalind's misrepresentative male clothing is in fact a boy-actor's body. This knowledge of the physical presence of the boy-actor onstage rights the fictional crossdressing lady's wrongs to some extent, despite bringing about homoerotic problems of its own.⁴¹ A young boy-actor ordering an adult male actor to "give"(4.1.115) his hand in marriage represents cultural challenges of a completely different nature to that of a woman willingly usurping her male superiors' authority. Unclear as it is to discern which interpretation of this moment would have caused more concern to some of Shakespeare's contemporary audiences, what remains clear is that the notion of an unsanctified martial union is important. As Dusinberre (2016) indicates, "the informal mode of contract was increasingly frowned upon for lacking a church ceremony ... However, the false identity of Ganymede would nullify the contract,"(p. 294) between Rosalind-as-Ganymede-as-Rosalind and Orlando. Therefore, Rosalind's audacity to organise a marital procedure amasses censure, rather than

⁴¹ Yearling (2013) has asserted that within the crossdressing comedies "Shakespeare tantalizes his spectators with suggestions of same-sex love and sexual attraction, both between men and between women."(p. 64)

the ceremony itself given its known illegitimacy from the outset. Ganymede is forgiven for the transgression because Orlando treats the moment hypothetically, just as an Elizabethan audience might be encouraged to forgive the boy-actor for 'playing the woman'. Yet the theatrical figure of the transgressive female cannot be so easily forgiven.

During 4.1, Rosalind is simultaneously in direct physical conversation with the love struck Orlando and acting as a hypothetical agent (a misplaced image of 'Rosalind', which Orlando persistently clings to throughout their dialogue). While Rosalind-as-Ganymede and Orlando confer on the subject of matrimony within this scene, 'Rosalind' remains an absent body – rendering 'her' a dreamlike, abstract idea – due to her supposed residency at court. This is evidenced in Orlando's constant mention of "my Rosalind"(4.1.57, 4.1.110, 4.1.148, 4.1.186) in opposition to the distasteful hypotheticals which 'Ganymede' presents to him. Yet since Rosalind is continually positioned in Orlando's direct presence throughout the entirety of their time in the forest together, her deeds while playing the Ganymede-as-Rosalind 'part' are recognised as transgressive indeed.

When Rosalind-as-Ganymede berates Orlando for being late to meet with her at the beginning of 4.1 she claims that she would prefer to "be wooed of a snail"(4.1.47) rather than him, because "though he [the snail] comes slowly he carries his house on his head – a better jointure, I think, than you make a woman."(4.1.49-52) Rosalind highlights the importance of promises and time-keeping in marriage by her reference to "a better jointure", arguing a snail's promise, though slow to be delivered, would provide her with a more assured "destiny"(4.1.51) than the "tardy"(4.1.46) promise Orlando had made her. Well-kept promises is a weighty theme within Shakespeare's marriage play. Rosalind is aware that a valid marriage contract between Orlando and herself would require robust endorsement from superior agents: namely her father, the Duke, and "a good priest"(3.3.78) who would marry them "well"(3.3.84). The promises Rosalind makes to Orlando, Phoebe, and Silvius in 5.2 must be kept so that her word and intention to marry Orlando can be taken seriously. Rosalind takes control of the marriage negotiations once again in 5.2, with the use of her crossdressing disguise, by assuring Orlando that "if you will [wish to] be married tomorrow you shall, and to Rosalind if you will [want her]."(5.2.70.71) This is an oath of sorts because in response to Orlando's questioning "Speak'st thou

in sober meanings?”(5.2.67), Rosalind-as-Ganymede vows, “By my life I do,”(5.2.68). Rosalind once again chooses to offer herself up in spousal terms to Orlando the very next day “when [Orlando’s] brother marries Aliena”(5.2.62) who is actually Celia (Rosalind’s cousin) accompanying Rosalind into exile disguised as a lower class member of society rather than crossdressing.

It is important to recall that Rosalind has spent a significant proportion of the play attempting to negotiate a marital connection with Orlando but has failed to do so legitimately while in her Ganymede guise. Contrastingly, Celia-as-Aliena establishes a relationship with Oliver (Orlando’s brother) during the single scene of 4.3. In 5.2, Rosalind describes them to have “made a pair of stairs to marriage...in the very wrath of love and they will be together.”(5.2.36-39) Furthermore, the lovers marry in the very next – and last – scene in which they appear, 5.4, indicating that their relationship stood unhindered by Celia’s Aliena disguise, in contrast to the difficulties that Rosalind-as-Ganymede-as-Rosalind had encountered. Hence, to ensure a successful marriage between Orlando and herself, Rosalind feels forced into promising marriages for Orlando, Phoebe, and Silvius in 5.2, and must additionally obtain promises from Orlando and her father, the Duke, in 5.4 that they will agree to the marriage before she is able to undisguised herself. Before exiting the scene to change out of the male disguise, Rosalind reinforces the necessity of promise keeping, to ensure that she is given away to Orlando as she wishes, once she has reverted to her original position of feminine subordination within the scene:

I have promised to make all this matter even.
Keep you your word, O Duke, to give your daughter,
You yours, Orlando, to receive his daughter.
Keep you your word, Phoebe, [...]
Keep your word, Silvius, [...]

(As You Like It, 5.4.18-23)

Rosalind shows concern for the possibility that any of her orchestrated marriage promises might easily face refusal. She is aware of the fact that if any of the participants become unwilling, loose ends in the plot – which she herself had created by interfering as Ganymede – may quickly emerge and cause problems for her scheme to become Orlando’s wife. Her reminder to each character that they

must uphold their promises (with the acceptance of Celia-as-Aliena and Oliver, who have only promised to marry one another and bear no importance to the outcome of Rosalind's own imminent marriage) evidences Rosalind's conviction that keeping one's promise is of the utmost importance, regardless of the insecure nature of spoken oaths. Only by her father keeping his word that he would give his daughter, and Orlando's keeping his promise to accept her, and Phoebe's distaste for Rosalind once she adopts her original feminine classification, and Silvius' acceptance of Phoebe despite having been sexually attracted to another woman, can Rosalind marry Orlando. If any one of these spoken oaths are broken, then there is a loose end in Rosalind's device and she has failed to keep her promise "to make all this matter even"(5.4.18), rendering the outcome of the play unbalanced. An odd number of lovers upon the resolution of a comedic marriage play would be unorthodox, and therefore the success for Rosalind's Ganymede disguise – and whether she is able to get away with her transgressive actions – undeniably rests upon this notion of upheld promises.

When considering promises and marriage within *As You Like It*, it is evident that Rosalind's gifted chain after meeting Orlando in 1.2, as a token that represented her partiality for him, is extremely important. The chain is mentioned only twice during the entire play. The first instance is when Rosalind bestows her chain on Orlando for having wrestled with Duke Frederick's champion successfully. She says,

Gentleman,
[Giving him a chain from her neck]
Wear this for me – one out of suits with fortune,
That could give more but that her hand lacks means.

(*As You Like It*, 1.2.234-236)

As Dusinger (2016) asserts, "the gift of a chain was the mark of royal approval for venturesome exploits and represents one of many links between Rosalind and Elizabeth,"(p. 174) and therefore throughout *As You Like It* "the role of Rosalind spans regality and rebelliousness, sovereignty and subversion."(p. 141) It is clear from Rosalind's speech that the gifted chain poses as a token of regal appreciation for Orlando's bravery and valour while wrestling, but likewise carries undertones of a more personal tenor. This is carried within the mention of "means"(1.2.234) as Dusinger (2016)

argues that “Rosalind could give more – namely, her hand in marriage, the victor’s traditional reward in the trial of chivalry – but lacks the power to do so.”(p. 175) Rosalind’s emotional response to Orlando’s chivalric display is reflected in her acknowledgement that despite the fact that her “hand lacks means”(1.2.236) to join in matrimony with his, he had nevertheless “wrestled well and overthrown / More than [his] enemies”(1.2.243-244) as a result. Therefore, the chain that Rosalind gifts Orlando is relevant to the theme of marriage because the undisguised Rosalind is unable to offer Orlando anything more than a token of appreciation, despite her feelings of attraction to him. While Rosalind resides at Duke Frederick’s court, she remains undisruptive in her actions. Yet her wish for alternative personal circumstances is clear – and the potential for transgressive behaviour hinted at – within the allusion to matrimony. The chain represents for Rosalind a substitute for that piece of jewellery – a ring – which she desires to gift to Orlando as a token of her affection despite her inability to do so. She remains prisoner to her social status and gender positioning within the plot.

Perhaps more significantly, the chain reappears prior to Orlando and Rosalind-as-Ganymede’s first introduction. Where the chain represented unfulfilled emotional attraction in 1.2, it now highlights Rosalind’s changed physical state and how the disguised Rosalind-as-Ganymede can freely assume the marriage-negotiator role generally designated to men in society. The chain likewise functions as a binding force for Orlando as he becomes unintentionally shackled to the idea of Rosalind throughout the play. He asks himself after receiving Rosalind’s chain, “What passion hangs these weights upon my tongue?”(1.2.246) producing the image of a man placed under torture by linking the weight of Rosalind’s chain upon his chest to the medieval practise of *la peine forte et dure*.⁴² Imprisoned by his passion for Rosalind, Orlando perceives his inability to speak by his inverted reference to the unspeaking felon who faces imprisonment and torture from being “pressed” for a guilty confession. Like Rosalind, Orlando argues that he has been emotionally “overthrown!”(1.2.248) by her gift, endorsing the imagery of passionate wrestling between lovers initiates a developing theme of women

⁴² *La peine forte et dure* (French for “hard and forceful punishment”), or crushing execution, was a practice used on Elizabethan prisoners who refused to plead either guilty or not guilty in court. The victims’ limbs were stretched out upon the floor for weights to be applied to their chest for days at a time in order to draw a plea from them, or failing that, death by torture. See, McKenzie (2005) for a summarised history of early modern usage.

controlling men, in opposition to gender roles, but characteristic of love poetry at the time. Orlando clarifies during his self-assessment that “something weaker masters thee”(1.2.249), noting Rosalind’s ‘weaker sex’ taking control of his senses and emotions with her unexpected gift.

This makes the second and final reference of the gifted chain even more poignant, while Celia-as-Aliena teases Rosalind-as-Ganymede about her mystery admirer’s identity. Rosalind’s chain now signifies two ideas: first, the original emotional bond forged between Rosalind and Orlando resulting from their exchange; but second, the shift in that bond because of both of the wearers’ transformed characters. The chain that once belonged to Rosalind is now in Orlando’s possession, but despite this, Rosalind possesses him. The perceived emotional change in Orlando is prominent, while Rosalind’s change is more physically drastic. Her outward appearance has altered into the opposite sex, but she claims that her emotions toward Orlando remain unaffected. Celia teases Rosalind in 3.2 while they discuss Rosalind’s unknown admirer who posts badly written love notes upon Arden Forest’s trees:

ROSALIND Is it a man?
CELIA And a chain that you once wore about his
 neck – change you colour?
ROSALIND I prithee, who?

(As You Like It, 3.2.175-178)

Aware of Orlando’s culpability, Celia mentions the gifted chain to jog Rosalind’s memory promptly. She even motions to Rosalind’s blushing cheek, “change you colour”, to aid her. Yet Rosalind feigns an inability to understand the link Celia makes, responding with “who?” Apparently then, since her physical metamorphosis, Rosalind’s memory of the poignant moment in 1.2 has already faded. The chain may not have meant as much to the crossdressing heroine as she once implied: yet Celia’s response “and a chain” links the living man to an inanimate object, connecting the man and the chain into an inseparable unit.

The chain now symbolizes an unstable, breakable bondage in either contractual or emotional terms for the lovers. Doniger (2017) notes in *The Ring of Truth* that a necklace or chain might be broken by the

simple act of unclasping.⁴³ Thus as Rosalind never actually expressed her love for Orlando by bestowing a jewel of more emotional significance upon him, her confused response to Celia's allusion is not indelicate. Rosalind had used the chain primarily to signify appropriate appreciation of Orlando's job well done, not to symbolise a pledge of marriage despite any preferences she articulated during the heat of the moment. In giving Orlando a chain, Rosalind did not breach the acceptable boundaries of society in the way that giving him a ring from her hand might have. Likewise, Rosalind-as-Ganymede has never wore a chain "about his neck"(3.2.176) because the disguised male figure was invented after the chain had been passed on to Orlando. The phrasing of "a chain that *you* once wore about his neck"(3.2.176, my emphasis) is significant to the theme of transgression though, because a link between Rosalind and her admirer is evident in their joint history with the chain. They are in some inextricable way bound to one another, despite the transformations that they have each experienced. Thus, though the chain symbolises an uncertain force of affinity within *As You Like It* (through Rosalind's original allusion to marriage and love and later forgetfulness) it also reinforces an image of emotional bondage between two people, tainting the rest of the play's allusions to marriage and 'joinery' as a result.

Rosalind caused a chain of events in bestowing her necklace upon Orlando as a prize for winning the wrestling match, because Orlando becomes obsessed with the idea of loving Rosalind thereafter. They become joined in mutual – though undisclosed – affection for one another, regardless of the enforced spatial distance between them. But, whilst disguised, Rosalind decides to "slink by"(3.2.245) fully aware that Orlando also wanders Arden forest, to spy on him. She then creates a convoluted persona once they meet in person. Arguably then, the genuine marriage that Rosalind-as-Ganymede organises for Act 5 of the play can be owed to Rosalind's initial bestowal of that chain upon Orlando which incited his infatuation with her, and her own disguise which enables her to ensure her own marriage is arranged 'between men'. Like Portia, Rosalind "short circuits the system of exchange"(Newman, 1987, p. 26) within *As You Like It* by exhibiting a preoccupation with oaths and promises while using her gifted chain and crossdressing disguise. The chain did not symbolise a promise of matrimony

⁴³ Doniger (2017) states that "The ring differs from most other circular jewelry, necklaces and bracelets, in two significant ways: a ring needs no clasp for you to take it on or off, breaking the circle,"(p. 2)

between two people in 1.2, but instead a woman's affection for a man, which ignited his subsequent fixation upon that affection. Unlike a ring, which proclaims the engagement between two lovers, Rosalind's chain binds Orlando to her as a slave to his master. The gendered positions of power embodied in the chain of *As You Like It* are evidently wholly inverted from the traditional structure, and, by utilising her Ganymede disguise, Rosalind's female preference of husband is allocated centre stage and granted the autonomy to construct her own marriage outcome. Similar to the other crossdressing women previously discussed in this section Rosalind has claims an emotional advantage over her lover by using the bonding symbolism of her gifted chain and the Ganymede disguise she adopts.

The Significance of ‘This Ring’

A discussion surrounding the significance of rings and promises within Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night*, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* and *The Merchant of Venice* is now necessary. Rings in the examples that follow are easily categorised into token rings, promise rings, and marriage rings. Significant in two major ways, the rings firstly symbolise the marital union between two lovers, and secondly, they can often symbolise female chastity and virginal purity. Therefore, in the following plays, it is especially important to bear in mind the instances of rings that are exchanged, swapped or mistaken for others, in both erotic terms and as rings symbolising a mutual contract of love and consummated marriage between two people. However, the potential threat to Elizabethan patriarchal values, which are conveyed within crossdressing characters’ use of rings, is noteworthy for this study of subversive female agents throughout the late sixteenth-century.

Within *Twelfth Night*, Shakespeare makes use of potentially four (one plausible and three definite) rings, which are referenced in terms of love and marriage and vividly complement the plot progression by being unmistakably and humorously linked to Viola’s crossdressing disguise. The first ring that appears is the one that Countess Olivia sends after Duke Orsino’s pageboy Cesario as a token of her unspoken – yet well-articulated – passion for ‘him’ in 1.5. This ring proves the most potentially subversive out of them all in *Twelfth Night*, receiving the most attention from Viola as it becomes problematically associated with the Cesario figure. Shakespeare skews the solemnity of the ring as a symbol of adoration and devotion between lovers into a highly comical allusion of unintentional homosexuality. The prominent trope within sixteenth century crossdressing plots of misguided same-sex infatuation is made clearly visible in the first ring of *Twelfth Night*, as Olivia identifies the “invisible and subtle stealth”(1.5.289) of love within her for Duke Orsino’s messenger. The countess reminds herself to control her amorous emotions “Unless the master were the man.”(1.5.286) She expresses her desire that her newfound passion for Cesario might indeed prove socially suitable, musing that Cesario might actually be, “the *master*, Orsino himself, in disguise”(Elam, 2008, p. 203). Contrastingly, as Malcomson (1996) asserts, “Olivia feels the inappropriateness of falling in love with

a servant, but [she has fallen for] a cleverly created illusion, [...] of an upper-class young man.”(p. 164) Findlay & Oakley-Brown (2014) have also highlighted that “The doubling of identities and substitutions [...] centre on the ‘illusion’ of Cesario”(p. 19) within *Twelfth Night*. Olivia develops her passion for a gentleman: either a ‘copy’ of Orsino in his messenger Cesario, or the Duke himself, believing herself to have met Orsino-as-Cesario.

The rich comical irony of this scene is that the countess has indeed encountered a disguise as she wished, but of a more socially subversive nature. Cesario has not disguised ‘his’ class but ‘his’ gender. The crossdressing disguise has effectively veiled Viola’s femininity from Olivia to the extent that the countess misjudges Cesario for Duke Orsino in disguise, who has until recently attempted to court her from afar. As Elam (2008) notes, the Cesario figure becomes “a space into which others project their desires and their own identity anxieties”(p. 27) throughout the play, unveiling the dangers which crossdressing disguises could generate within fictitious social landscapes, in terms of transgressing the rigid Elizabethan boundaries of attraction and desire.

Furthermore Olivia’s declaration to Malvolio that Cesario “left this ring behind him,”(1.5.294) when ‘he’ left her presence becomes comical, not because Olivia is shamefacedly lying to her manservant and sending him on an unfounded errand, but because she is attempting to express her attraction towards another lady, falling victim to Viola’s successful dissimulation. As Olivia complains to Malvolio that she will have “none of it”(1.5.295), audiences can appreciate the crass entertainment, fully aware of a ring’s capacity to symbolise not only a contractual agreement of mutual respect and devotion in love and marriage between a couple, but female sexuality and physical genitalia. In light of Viola’s true gender, the ring that Olivia attempts to ‘return’ to Cesario renders the countess’ desires truly homoerotic. Cesario the pageboy was in possession of a ring while Olivia audaciously blazoned ‘him’, but not of the token ring sort as she claims. Viola-as-Cesario had her own concealed – yet present – female hymen ring during 1.5. The confusion that Viola’s disguise and observable femininity has created is clear at this point within the plot, while a solution remains elusive.

Viola reflects upon her predicament of being gifted a ring by another woman. She first pities Olivia, “Poor lady, she were better love a dream. Disguise, I see thou art a wickedness”(2.2.26.27)

recognising that the fictional character she plays is worse than an illusory dream for the deceived countess. She even communicates her pity for the misguided countess when they next meet, telling Olivia directly, “I pity you.”(3.1.121) Viola’s body brings the Cesario figure to life in Olivia’s eyes, just as the Cesario identity grants Viola a new agency and physical freedom within Illyria. Disguise is portrayed as a corruptive force for each woman, as Viola “compares her transvestism to Satan’s disguising himself as a serpent in Genesis.”(Elam, 2008, p. 210) Correspondingly, Viola had efficiently forced her way into Olivia’s household under Orsino’s wishes. The disguise is therefore both subversive and transgressive all at once, and a clear threat to established societal structures of desire and attraction in Illyria.

Viola promptly turns to self-pity, calling herself a “poor monster,”(2.2.34) before envisioning the potential consequences of this unexpected (to her) scenario. Viola’s “hybrid or androgynous”(Elam, 2008, p. 210) identity is painted in a “desperate”(2.2.37) light in this moment, as she recognises that her crossdressing disguise will now force her to play her role less convincingly. She expresses a distinct lack of control over the situation she has found herself in, speaking the last line of the scene in a rhyming couplet:

O time, thou must untangle this, not I.
It is too hard a knot for me to untie.

(*Twelfth Night*, 2.2.40-41)

Viola alludes to feeling entangled within the Cesario identity which she had created, but also a submission to that very “state”(2.2.37) of entrapment. Perceivable in the rhyming couplet I/tie is a sense of Viola’s own identity amalgamating with the Cesario disguise, regardless of her original “intent.”(1.2.52) The effectiveness of the Cesario disguise declares Viola’s maleness to the surrounding society and so they respond accordingly. In this way, Olivia’s gifted ring is a burden. Viola now possesses both Olivia’s token ring (that Olivia had presumably carried on her person habitually until this point) and her own symbolic genital ring. Viola has acquired a stranger’s ring that does not belong to her, but cannot find a way to untie the “knot”(2.3.41), or emotional bond, which it represents as Orlando had done in *As You Like It* with Rosalind’s chain. Whether Viola keeps Olivia’s

ring beyond this scene is unknown, as it receives no further attention. Yet Shakespeare's comedic picture of the crossdressing heroine debating with herself about whether to keep the problematic ring poses a moral question. If Viola elected to retain Olivia's ring by "stooping"(2.2.15) for it – stooping here, implies both a physical and social downward motion – she prevents it from becoming "his that finds it"(2.2.16) left forsaken on the ground, but she also retains the homosexual tarnish implied from having received another woman's token ring of physical attraction. The opportunities to read transgressive behaviour in Viola's actions resulting from her Cesario disguise breeds continually.

Another *potential* occurrence of a ring acting as a token of expressed affection lies in 2.4 when Orsino asks Viola-as-Cesario to deliver "this jewel"(2.4.123) to Countess Olivia. Keir Elam (2008) clarifies that the word 'jewel' could imply "an ornament or piece of jewellery, such as a ring,"(p. 236). However, this remains uncertain given that the early modern practice of gift giving could manifest itself in innumerable ways, and sometimes by unexpected means. Elizabeth I was often gifted jewels and trinkets by her courtiers and potential suitors as bargaining chips to gain her favour, but was also grandly presented with an elephant by Henry IV of France in 1593 (Heal, 2014, p.159). As such, the 'jewel' with which Orsino entrusts Cesario could be any item, of any economic value, size, rarity or sentimentality, and his failure to specify what the gift actually could express a lack of interest in any aspect of the jewel's potential financial or emotional value altogether. Shakespeare presents the jewel largely as a side thought. He is, after all, reminded by Viola-as-Cesario that love is indeed "the theme"(2.4.122) of their discussion, finishing her half of the line "Sir, shall I to this lady?"(2.4.122) Note that Orsino references the vague idea, or "theme"(2.4.122) of love, whereas Viola-as-Cesario measures the gesture by its intended recipient, a person, and worse for the love-struck Viola, not "this lady"(2.4.122) who stands before him, but the "lady"(2.4.122) Olivia. Orsino regards the jewel as a mere trifle, as its intended function is to validate his love for Olivia in her estimations. Orsino would never have knowingly expressed such a flippant attitude towards the practise of romantic gift giving while in the presence of a high-status woman like Viola, highlighting Shakespeare's indication of exactly how effective and subversive a crossdresser disguise can be. Social barriers are easily dismantled when a woman dons the clothing and semblance of man.

The final two rings within the *Twelfth Night* plot appropriately feature as a matrimonial pair. Their existence is revealed in the very last scene of the play, by the Priest that Olivia calls upon to support her assertion that she has married Cesario, therefore holding a stronger claim upon ‘him’ than Orsino. Yet the newlyweds Olivia and Sebastian remain unaware of the unsubstantiated and convoluted nature of their marriage, as Olivia (having mistaken Sebastian for Cesario) believes that Viola-as-Cesario standing before her is undeniably her husband. Sebastian, Viola’s twin and Olivia’s husband, remains offstage at this time. The Priest, equally tricked by Viola’s crossdressing disguise, evidences the union by way of their:

...contract of eternal bond of love,
Confirmed by mutual joinder of your hands,
Attested by the holy close of lips,
Strengthened by interchangement of your rings,

(*Twelfth Night*, 5.1.152-155)

The nouns of this utterance “bond”, “joinder”, “close” and “interchangement” all express a strong image of union between the ‘couple’ Olivia and ‘Cesario’, both in terms of the *emotional* bond between lovers and a lawful *contracted* matrimony. Elam (2008) notes that “joinder of your hands”(5.1.153) is an “allusion to the ceremony known as handfasting, whereby couples clasped hands and exchanged vows before witnesses ... as a non-canonical form of marriage.”(p. 333) Particularly ironic in this moment is the Priest’s assertion that Viola and Olivia have clasped hands in ceremonial matrimony.

Instead Sebastian and Olivia have been bound in matrimony by their “interchangement”(5.1.155) or contractual “exchange”(Elam, 2008, p. 333) of wedding rings, which serve as physical evidence to outsiders of their shared “bond of love”(5.1.152), and as symbols to themselves in commemoration of their wedding day. Calling out to Viola-as-Cesario “Cesario, husband, stay!”(5.1.139), Olivia believes that she addresses her husband. She presumes that Cesario wears one of the two rings from their wedding ring pair. But Viola-as-Cesario does not carry the corresponding ring. Through the powerful nature of Viola’s crossdressing disguise, Olivia and the Priest are both unable to discern any difference between female Viola-as-Cesario and male Sebastian. Thus despite how wedding rings function as definitive proof of a marriage legally made between two people, they cannot prevent the

chaotic events caused by a crossdressing disguise. The rings in themselves cannot “untangle this”(2.3.40) complex plot. In exactly the same way, Olivia’s lone wedding ring in 5.1 cannot serve as proof of her marriage to Cesario without Sebastian’s corresponding ring present. The wedding ring pair between Sebastian and Olivia serves as another more recent “knot”(2.3.41) which messily yet definitively replaces the first token ring that was sent to ‘Cesario’. The initial token ring represented Olivia’s attraction for Cesario (a girl disguised as a boy), but is forwarded on to Sebastian (a far more suitable candidate for union) in the new pair of rings. The wedding ring pair, unlike the other two singular rings within *Twelfth Night*, symbolizes proper reciprocation of love – a politically correct marriage match. In this way, rings and marriages serve as both the symbols for and complications of, and resolutions to, Shakespearian comedy plots in their affinity with knots and bonds between people. They often function alongside the “blank”(2.4.110) disguise figures like Cesario within comedies, implying that the havoc wrought by the transgressions of crossdressing women like Viola may be solved by suitable matrimonial contracts. Olivia unwittingly ties the correct “knot”(2.3.41) in marrying an acceptable male body, Sebastian, rather than the unacceptable ‘Cesario’ whose physical body is undoubtedly female.

In Shakespeare’s very first crossdressing heroine plot, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, an emotional and contractual bond is presented by an exchange of promise rings between two lovers in 2.2. Unlike *Twelfth Night* however, the marital ring pair from this play function alone, threatened instead from being torn apart by Proteus’ fancy for Silvia. Proteus undermines the value of Julia’s promise ring by choosing to send it on. Yet, Julia’s crossdressing as a pageboy Sebastian ensures that Proteus never successfully degrades her ring. Proteus himself instead unsuspectingly returns it to Julia for safekeeping. Thus the transgressive nature of Julia’s disguise, despite its potential threat to the authority of men over women, actually protects the notion that two rings symbolise the marital security of two people. William Carroll (2004) notes that as a “familiar device of comedy, the lovers’ exchange of rings will be central to the plot resolutions of the final scene.”(p. 174) However, Carroll fails to specify that the crossdressing heroine Julia experiences first-hand the dramatic irony connected to the rings which function as the plot’s resolution. Julia, it transpires, is the ‘resolver’ of

the play's complications by gathering up both rings into her possession. Her crossdressing disguise allows her to journey alongside the pair of rings within Verona, as they become as much disguised from her unfaithful lover Proteus as Julia-as-Sebastian is.

The contract made between the co-protagonists in 2.2 exhibits all the traditionally accepted elements that emulate matrimonial union, already explored in *Twelfth Night*. The “eternal bond”(TN, 5.1.152) and “close of holy lips”(TN, 5.1.154) are expressed in Julia's line “seal the bargain with a holy kiss”(TGV, 2.2.7) consolidating the matrimonial image. The ‘handfasting’ practice, which Elam describes of *Twelfth Night*, likewise arises in Proteus' response, “Here is my hand for my true constancy.”(TGV, 2.2.8) Most importantly though, is the couple's “interchangement of rings.”(TN, 5.1.155) Julia first gifts hers labelling it as “this remembrance”(TGV, 2.2.5) of her, while Proteus counters with “Why then, we'll make an exchange: here, take you this.”(TGV, 2.2.6) Proteus returns her promise ring with his own, in a symbolic display of mutual love and their promise of matrimonial engagement. Ironically, Proteus breaches the contracted promise between them despite having suggested himself that they make an “exchange”(2.2.6) of rings in the first place.

Julia herself first refers to the forged bond in the exchanged rings while imagining her crossdressing disguise. Paradoxically, Julia directly links her transgressive decision to cross-dress as a pageboy with the notion of honest true-love ‘knots’ which unify lovers. Rather than wait for his return, Julia chooses to travel to Proteus cross-dressed as a pageboy, adamant that the disguise would not alter any aspect of her feminine identity. Acting instead as a veil over her female body, the disguise would simply allow her to transform into a female “pilgrim”(2.7.9) who journeys safely to her lover's side. The transgressive disguise should only grant her enough autonomy and masculine power to ensure the success of her journey.

Julia – unaware of Proteus' decision to “forget that Julia is alive”(2.6.27) in favour of Silvia, the Duke's daughter – perceives her risky disguise as consolidation of the “bargain”(2.2.7) lately struck between her and Proteus. She would rather “knit [her hair] up in silken strings / With twenty odd-conceited true-love knots”(2.7.45-6) than “cut”(2.7.44) it off as Lucetta suggests when they consider the intricacies of Julia's disguise together. Julia wishes to remain true to her female body beneath the

disguise, perhaps naïvely believing that to cut her long hair would weaken the bond between her and her lover. Davis (1989) agrees that Julia sees her hair as “representative of her femininity.”(p. 128) Thus, in choosing to pile her “perfect yellow”(4.4.187) hair atop her head and risk its falling out of her control into sight, the heroine hazards detection and a “scandalized”(2.7.61) reputation in favour of remaining true to herself.

In erotic terms too, Julia attempts to strengthen the safety of her physically virginal ‘ring’ in her decision to cross-dress, paradoxically linking the notion of female transgression with the proper protection of an honest feminine body. Julia adheres to the sixteenth-century notion that respectable women should remain unwaveringly chaste by arguing that her disguise would “prevent the loose encounters of lascivious men”(2.7.40-1). She argues without hesitation that she could better protect her virginity once concealed beneath male attire. Julia doubles up the connotations of a ‘love knot’ as a symbol of true love with the allusion to her own safely preserved ‘virgin’s knot’. Shakespeare here uses the image of Julia’s faithful virgin body with the good faith that Julia optimistically displays in her newfound alliance with Proteus, making Julia’s crossdresser plan appear not only transgressive and dangerous, but also honestly misguided and therefore tragically ironic. Shakespeare invites audiences to pity Julia for devising her plan, rather than reprimand her.

Proteus transgresses in his decision to ignore the legitimate “bargain”(2.2.7) he and Julia made in the form of the rings’ exchange. Furthermore, and worse still, he has decided to ignore her existence altogether in devaluing Julia’s ring to almost nothing. The ring no longer symbolises Julia’s “remembrance”(2.2.5) for Proteus, once he becomes fixated upon Silvia. Julia contrastingly transgresses, by fixating upon the strength of their original treaty, having chosen to undertake an unsolicited and “unstaid ... journey”(2.7.60) dressed in male clothing. She attributes her own body with the images of bondage and promises, imagining that under her male veil she will protect both her ‘virgin knot’ and her femininity by tying her hair into “twenty ... true-love knots”(2.7.45-6). These contradictory responses to the matrimonial agreement between Julia and Proteus place the inviolability of promise rings at stake within *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, leaving Julia’s transgressive crossdressing disguise the only hope of righting Proteus’ wrongs. The vulnerability of

rings' power is perceived as equal to the vulnerability of Julia's virgin body beneath her Sebastian disguise.

When Proteus meets Julia-as-Sebastian in 4.4 for the first time, Julia uses the word "token"(4.4.72) to describe her ring in acknowledgment of its devalued state. Just as in 4.2 when Julia looked on as Proteus attempted to court Silvia, the crossdressing disguise forces Julia into referring to herself in the third person past tense despite speaking face-to-face with Proteus "methinks that she loved you as well / As you do love your lady Silvia"(4.4.77-78). The Sebastian figure allows Julia to present herself as absent while she is in fact present, which in turn provides a doubling dynamic to the scene, where 'she' is in fact also 'I'. Thus Julia prompts Proteus to think on the significance of his request that Sebastian "deliver"(4.4.70) Julia's ring to Silvia as a token of his love. By crying "Alas!"(4.4.74) – which buys Proteus' very brief attention – Julia tries to control the situation playing out before her. She compares each of the 'absent' women for him, "She dreams on him that has forgot her love; / You dote on her that cares not for your love."(4.4.79-80) Julia reveals an image for Proteus which allows him to anticipate the outcome of the love plot he has created, where love is passed on to the next lover without thought for the last, creating a never ending line of incompatible love matches.

Unfortunately, despite Julia's attempts to bring the conversation towards pity and remembrance of herself, Proteus ignores Sebastian's dissatisfaction with passing on Julia's ring to Silvia by repeating his original order "Well, give her [Silvia] that ring, and therewithal, / This letter."(4.4.83-84) In referring to Julia's ring as "that ring"(4.4.83) Proteus appears to pose as an extreme precursor to *Twelfth Night's* Duke Orsino, who labours in discussion over "that ... theme"(2.4.122) of love with Viola-as-Cesario, expressing a flippancy that lies in stark contrast with Julia's own estimation of the ring's value once she is left alone onstage:

This ring I gave him when he parted from me
To bind him to remember my good will.
And now am I, unhappy messenger,
To plead for that which I would not obtain,
To carry that which I would have refused,

To praise his faith which I would have dispraised.
I am my master's true confirmed love,
But cannot be true servant to my master
Unless I prove false traitor to myself.
Yet will I woo for him, but yet so coldly
As, heaven it knows, I would not have him speed.

(*The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, 4.4.95-105)

Proteus has returned Julia's promise ring, and she would want to keep possession over the misused 'jewel' for herself rather than pass it on to a rival. Especially since both Julia's and Proteus' rings are now held together as a pair in Julia's ownership, even if in a totally "contrary"(4.4.81) manner to that which she had initially intended while planning her crossdressing adventure in 2.7. The pronoun "I" is mentioned twelve times within this utterance which implies that Julia's sense of identity has not been altered significantly by her decision to pose as Sebastian, but that the disguise itself is proving challenging to effect any real plot shift in Julia's favour. The line "I am my master's true confirmed love"(4.4.101) evidences Julia's distinct self-awareness, and likewise shows that Julia believes that her place within the play is still at Proteus' side. Yet she fails to recognise any obvious solution to the predicament of having to "deliver"(4.4.70) the ring, as if it were her own child, to another woman. This issue with inappropriate deliverance is echoed in her own incredulous line "To *carry* that which I would have refused"(4.4.99, my emphasis), implying that to bear the ring to Silvia is unthinkable, even physically burdensome and emotionally exhausting. The verb "carry" also serves as a reminder of the repeated phrases linked to childbearing throughout these plays. Viola reflects in *Twelfth Night* that within the crossdresser Cesario disguise lingers the "pregnant enemy"(2.2.28) – the Devil – highlighting Julia's own aversion to allowing such a transaction to occur. In *The Merchant of Venice*, too, Portia's "delivering"(4.1.412) Antonio highlights the potential restorative effects which crossdressing disguises can provide for women, allowing them the authoritative power to release men from their own mistakes. Spenser's epic poem likewise alludes to Britomart's ability to ensure Artegall's rebirth, or deliverance, releasing him from contracted enslavement to Radigund the matriarchal Amazon queen in Book V. Britomart restores her husband once "she him anew had clad"(V.vii.41.8) in armour, rather than the "womanishe attire,"(V.vii.37.7) Radigund had forced him to adopt. Julia's opposition to 'carrying' her own promise ring to be delivered to Silvia is not only

emotionally understandable, then, but additionally symbolises her opposition to supporting Proteus is ungentlemanly, erroneous choice to forsake his original marriage plans.

When Julia asks herself “How many women would do such a message?”(4.4.88) the themes of transgression and rings become even more important, while linked with her disguise. Julia-as-Sebastian’s soliloquy evidences Julia’s newfound measure of unsolicited control over the next section of the scene. Despite Julia’s male guise, her wish to salvage a resolution between Proteus and herself as a marital pair is evident. She struggles towards a solution between acting the “true servant”(4.4.102) to Proteus as Sebastian but a “false servant”(4.4.103) to herself, in passing on her own symbolically valuable ring to Silvia.

Her decision to sabotage Proteus’ mission to “woo”(4.4.104) Silvia by conducting herself “so coldly”(4.4.104) allows her to remain concealed as Sebastian the pageboy, do Proteus’ bidding, and perhaps most importantly would likely ensure Silvia’s refusal to accept Julia’s ring.⁴⁴ Luckily for Julia, Silvia does not intend to accept the abused ring, “though his false finger have profaned the ring, / Mine shall not do his Julia so much wrong.”(4.4.134-135) The moment of honesty between the Julia and Silvia, while in discussion over Proteus’ mistreatment of Julia’s ring and their contract, generates a slippage in Julia’s performance as the pageboy Sebastian:

JULIA: She thanks you.

SILVIA: What sayst thou?

JULIA: I thank you, madam, that you tender her.

(The Two Gentlemen of Verona, 4.4.137-138)

Julia is forced to accept that a dual nature is an unavoidable by-product of disguising oneself in this moment, as ‘I’ and ‘she’ hold equal reference to herself but neither are wholly true. As Sebastian she must use ‘she’ which consolidates that Julia is indeed elsewhere, but as Julia-as-Sebastian she ought to use ‘I’ which is her honest response to Silvia’s words. Both of these responses prove inconsistent with Julia’s persistent argument that she is a true and honest woman despite her decision to cross-dress. Her disguise taints the moment with a sense of dramatic irony that is often associated with

⁴⁴ This is similar to Viola’s decision to conduct herself rudely to Olivia in 1.4.42 to dissuade attraction between the duke and countess.

women disguising themselves as men, and entering into situations that they otherwise would never have done.

Evident then is that despite Julia's decision to corrupt Proteus' intentions by using her disguise to prevent her ring from being passed on to another woman, her stratagem actually proves ineffectual to the plot resolution. If Julia had not been present in Verona disguised as Sebastian she would not have witnessed Proteus' "contrary"(4.4.81) nature and they might have married nonetheless. The crossdressing disguise provides Julia an insight into Proteus' weak character, but she consistently fails to utilise her potentially advantageous tool by actually bringing about any immediate change in his behaviour. Unlike Viola, who manages to create genuine disorder while playing her Cesario pageboy role to its full effect, the Julia-as-Sebastian pageboy becomes a ghostlike figure, using asides instead of speaking aloud for the duration of 5.2, for example. Julia appears to genuinely enjoy the mischievous potential of her disguise in this scene, but remains a silent onlooker throughout, even left forgotten onstage by the three love-fuelled male speakers at the end of the scene. It is only when direct reference is made to Julia's ring in 4.4 and 5.4 that her voice – either Julia-as-Sebastian's voice or Julia's own – emerges at all. This is especially true within the final scene of the play, when Valentine appears to offer Proteus Silvia's hand in marriage as a display of true friendship.

There is critical controversy over whether or not Julia actually faints during this scene, and if so, whether it is intentional. I believe that Julia does faint, and in direct response to Valentine's line "All that was mine in Silvia I give thee"(5.4.89), believing that she must soon endure eavesdropping upon a marriage between Silvia and Proteus. Whether Julia reveals herself intentionally by crying out "O, me unhappy!"(5.4.84), she quickly assumes her pageboy persona, delaying the moment of revelation further and exhibiting again her enslavement to the crossdressing doppelgänger Sebastian she has created. Julia-as-Sebastian explains her presence in the scene with the undelivered ring that Proteus had asked her to deliver to Silvia. Regardless of whether Julia resolves to expose the disguise of her own volition, she realises that she has little choice:

JULIA: Oh good sir, my master charged me to deliver a ring to
 madam Silvia, which out of my neglect was never done.
PROTEUS: Where is that ring, boy?

JULIA: Here 'tis; this is it.
 [Gives him a ring.]

PROTEUS: How? Let me see.
 Why this is the ring I gave to Julia.

JULIA: Oh, cry you mercy, sir, I have mistook.
 This is the ring you sent to Silvia.
 [Shows another ring.]

PROTEUS: But how came'st thou by this ring? At my depart
 I gave this to Julia.

JULIA: And Julia herself did give it me –
 And Julia herself hath brought it hither.
 [Reveals herself.]

(*The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, 5.4.86-98)

These lines are truly significant, as Shakespeare chooses this precise moment to reveal Julia's female identity to the other characters, as Freeburg (1915) stated, "...the revelation of disguise is precipitated by a swoon, and identity is verified by the rings"(p. 69). Her swoon could be interpreted in two ways. Either Julia's genuine terror that Proteus might accept Valentine's offer of Silvia's hand in marriage leads her to confuse the two rings, or, Julia decides that Proteus' inconstancy has reached its due demise and so uses the incorrect ring and disguise as evidence against him. If the former is true, then of the contracted pair of rings that Julia-as-Sebastian now carries Julia's is indeed "mistook"(5.4.93) for Proteus', because Julia – emotionally incensed underneath her male disguise – proves unable to control or maintain her 'Sebastian' charade. If, as I argue, the latter is true, then Julia clearly views her disguise – and just as importantly, the pair of rings that symbolise the initial promise of union made between Proteus and herself – as the only logical means by which this new marriage proposal between Proteus and Silvia would terminate immediately. In the first instance, Julia fills the helpless innocent role, a mere bystander to her own feminine failure and reputational ruin (resulting from divulging to a hostile group her dissimulated form), and in the other instance, she is Proteus' saviour who prevents him from stepping over the point of no return. Either way, Shakespeare uses the rings and the Julia-as-Sebastian disguise as necessary tools by which the *Two Gentlemen* plot may appropriately unravel, and cease to denote tangible social disorder.

Effectively, within the final scene, Julia uses three palpably physical objects that ought to have ensured Proteus' "true constancy"(2.2.8), her ring, Proteus' ring, and her own disguised body, as

evidence against him in her public trial.⁴⁵ She first presents Proteus with the ring he himself had given to Julia symbolising their initial “exchange”(2.2.6). Proteus expected to receive Julia’s ring from Julia-as-Sebastian, and is astonished when he receives his own ring instead, which ought not to be in Verona. Julia then gives Proteus her ring – the one she had gifted him in 2.2 – to prove that the pair is reunited. The final evidence, Julia’s own undisguised body, is revealed and whose physical attributes have changed in equal measure against Proteus’ emotional alterations. Julia uses the display of her female body, which ought never to have been forsaken by Proteus’ attempted infidelity, to shame him further. The pair of rings and Julia’s forsaken body stand alongside one another in the case against Proteus, and he must acknowledge his culpability.

As Davis (1989) persuasively states, “certainly Julia’s constancy proves to be medicinal to Proteus, [remedying] his waywardness”(p. 156) akin to Portia and Nerissa using their rings in *The Merchant of Venice*, and Rosalind using her ‘handfasting’ method in 4.1 of *As You Like It*, to discipline – or provide guidance for – their male counterparts. Similar to Portia’s warning Bassanio to take heed of his contracted bond, Julia employs her crossdressing disguise to both witness Proteus’ transgressions – despite transgressing herself to do so – and claim moral superiority over him. Julia argues that Proteus’ negligence of her ‘virgin ring’ causes a breakdown in the gender roles of Elizabethan society, generating patriarchal upheaval. Julia subverts Proteus in this play. However, Julia and Portia’s experiences of using rings and a crossdressing disguise to gain an advantage over their male social superiors differ because Julia witnesses the confirmed transgressions of her spouse while Portia uses the devices to function as a warning against any potential future transgressions. Julia experiences her own victimisation to the whims of patriarchal ideology, while Portia anticipates and acts to prevent it. Perhaps for Portia, witnessing Bassanio’s exaggerated claim that he would sacrifice “life itself, *my wife*, and all the world”(4.1.280, my emphasis) in order to save Antonio bears evidence enough for her husband’s capacity for future infidelity.

⁴⁵ That Shakespeare depicts Julia presenting the ring pair in separation from one another is significant. Presenting them in isolation not only highlights that the lovers have been physically separated by distance but also that the rings embody separate vows made by two individuals: those joint vows are shown to have been undermined by Proteus’ treating Julia’s ring as if it had never been part of a pair.

Shakespeare produces his most socially threatening crossdressing heroine in Portia. She demonstrates an unwavering ability to perform her role as Balthazar the young male lawyer within the Venetian court, successfully dismantling any illusion that women cannot occupy traditionally male occupations within society. Yet, because she is cross-dressed, Portia does not actually commit dismantling of ideological structures within the literary Venice landscape: she proves her competence in court but no ambition to reveal that competence to outer society. Therefore, her actions appear to support the gendered hierarchy purportedly accepted by Elizabethan society, while actually posing a more potentially disturbing threat to the concept of gendered order within the marital setting.

While the Portia-as-Balthazar disguise is an undeniably impressive demonstration of Portia's unusual level of self-determination and empowerment, the supplementary function of her disguise allows Portia to accomplish something just as challenging. Portia's crossdressing disguise grants her the autonomy to supervise Bassanio's conduct while they are 'apart'. In gaining Bassanio's favour inconspicuously, Portia studies Bassanio's commitment to their newly formed matrimonial partnership, gauging a measure of his trustworthiness and fidelity to her as a husband. Portia-as-Balthazar tests Bassanio's word by utilising the widely noted theme of contractual value within Venice with her gifted ring. Portia-as-Balthazar attempts to devalue the ring in Bassanio's estimation by using the perspective of a stranger to test how strong Bassanio's attachment to it – and by extension her – actually is. As reward for successfully defending Antonio in court, Portia-as-Balthazar demands from Bassanio the very wedding ring that she had previously made him swear to keep forever in remembrance of their mutual love for one another. Portia-as-Balthazar, secretly pleased by Bassanio's refusal to give up her ring 4.1, exits the scene unaware that Bassanio will immediately change his mind after some encouragement from Antonio. The final scene of the play therefore focusses upon the crossdressing women's joint decision to punish their husbands for breaking their promises by passing on both rings "unto the judge ... and ... his clerk"(5.1.180-181). Portia's deceit successfully probes her husband for his weaknesses, in a highly transgressive manner.

However, had Portia refrained from her scheme of crossdressing to usurp a male role and demand the ring from Bassanio, the likelihood that Bassanio and Antonio would have faced death due to

Shylock's demand for "the penalty and forfeit of [his] bond"(4.1.214) is evident. In this sense, Portia's involvement in Antonio's public trial scene – where she gains a significant advantage over Antonio in her claim to Bassanio – is just as advantageous to her as her own personal trial scene which she conducts using her Portia-as-Balthazar disguise in order to obtain from Bassanio the very ring which she had made him swear to protect. As Newman argues, Portia is able to gain a moral advantage over her husband through her knowledge of the physical and symbolic travels of her gifted promise ring. By the final scene of *The Merchant of Venice*, Portia's ring:

no longer represents the traditional relationship it figured in III.ii. On its figural as well as literal progress, it accumulates other meanings and associations: cuckoldry and this female unruliness, female genitalia, woman's changeable nature and so called animal temperament, her deceptiveness and potential subversion of the rules of possession and fidelity that insure the male line.

(Newman, 1987, p. 31)

Portia's use of disguise is highly relevant to this scene then, given her knowledge that Bassanio has passed on the ring he swore to keep to another 'man'. The ironic comedy of the scene is thus utilised as emotional refuge from the fundamental transgressions present within this scenario. The man has given away his wife's ring to another man, instigating an implied sharing of the female ring. That his wife happens to be the 'male recipient' remains the only safety granted to the husband within the situation, and yet the powerful social position gained from such circumstances presents an outwardly 'morally superior' female character as socially threatening. While overhearing Portia's damning judgement of Gratiano's mistreatment of Nerissa's ring, Bassanio admits that, "I were best to cut my left hand off / And swear I lost the ring defending it"(5.1.167) than confess his identical guilt. Bassanio's aside expresses a fear of Portia's knowledge that he willingly passed on her ring to another man. Being placed in a position of inferiority to his wife would be disastrously embarrassing for him. Further comedic is that if Bassanio attempts to lie to his wife, Portia's power over him would be tenfold given her full awareness that he had willingly yielded the ring to Portia-as-Balthazar.

The dramatic irony of Bassanio's situation is of course that the "vantage to exclaim"(3.2.174) has already been attained. Both women, aware that their husbands gave away the rings, proceed to mercilessly toy with them, to emphasise both the gravity of the men's oaths and ultimately their own capacity for self-possession. Therefore, the crossdressing disguises function as effective means for attaining untraditional authority for Portia and Nerissa. Their deceitfulness is produced as a two-fold stratagem: their initial decision to cross-dress and travel outside the boundaries of their designated matrimonial landscapes; and utilising their initial transgressions to challenge the authority of their husbands even after having removed their crossdressing disguises.

Testing her Mettle: Prosthetic Weaponry and Walking the Walk

This chapter focuses upon depictions of crossdressing heroines' combatant behaviour and physical fight-scenes within Shakespeare's crossdressing comedies and Spenser's *Faerie Queene*. Given that "duelling was generally perceived as inconsistent with feminine modesty, a substantial element of female honour"(Low, 2003, p. 275) during the Elizabethan era, Britomart in particular would have been regarded as a subversive and potentially troubling figure to Spenser's contemporaries. This chapter highlights the significance of prosthetic weaponry to sixteenth-century society as markers of gender, such as clothing, men's swords, scabbards, daggers, shields, and armour, or women's hair, makeup, and jewellery.⁴⁶ Physical beauty is even presented as a form of weaponry, which female characters can utilise to overcome male aggressors. References to characters' body parts, such as hands, arms, and even knees, and their actions while fighting provide insight into how early modern combat was codified in distinctly gendered terms.⁴⁷ Moreover, Spenser and Shakespeare embellished their crossdressing women with the actions and trappings of maleness to explore the potential dangers of manly women to such gender codes. This chapter establishes that, for these early modern fictional figures of transgressive femininity, the difference between fantasising about – and "bragging"(*The Merchant of Venice*, 3.4.69, 3.4.77) about – fighting and *actually* fighting are disparate ideas altogether. As such, most female crossdressers are presented with no desire to engage in any form of conflict, remaining well within the boundaries of their prescribed female 'place' in early modern society. Low (2003) explains that, for characters like Spenser's Britomart,

⁴⁶ Stallybrass (1992) asserts, "Sexual difference may, in this case, seem essentially prosthetic: the addition (or subtraction) of detachable (or growable/cuttable) parts."(p. 66) Fisher (2001) argued, "that 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 a few)."(p. 157)

⁴⁷ For instance, Garber (1997) notes that the "Early modern man kneels to demonstrate his entire connectedness to the body of the state. But the woman's knee is often a stand-in for her sexual parts, and women who kneel in homage like men are often, in literary terms, a cause of consternation."(p. 28) Thus following who kneels to whom will prove a worthy exercise.

combat itself bore a different meaning [to male knights' warfare] and the female knight emblemized purity as an aspect of true nobility. But in social practice, the typical fighting women would have been perceived in just the opposite way.

(Low, 2004, pp. 276-277)

Consequently, while Shakespeare's crossdressers are unthreatening figures to sixteenth-century notions of femininity and masculinity – because women's fantasies about fighting versus physically fighting are presented as completely isolated and unconnected concepts – Spenser's Britomart, Belphoebe and Radigund are displayed as *potentially* threatening to the Elizabethan patriarchal culture. They exhibit varying levels of personal autonomy and physical power, challenging, and often defeating, their peer male knights in battle. Cavanagh (1994) notes that “Belphoebe's social and political status defies categorization. Non-humans do not fit easily into standard hierarchies [...so Spenser] situates Belphoebe outside the rule and boundaries of ordinary sexual exchange”(pp. 130-131) within the epic, while Radigund defies the gender structure of *The Faerie Queene* outright, exhibiting an “improper use of female beauty to effect political tyranny [using her beauty] to enervate her opponent[s].”(Woods, 1985, p. 153) However, while Britomart has “the potential to reveal a fissure in the ideological foundation of patriarchy,”(Villeponteaux, 1995) Spenser instead ensures that his powerful female vision of chaste womanhood subscribes and submits to the gendered hierarchy of Elizabethan society. While the concept of a crossdressing woman would seem scandalous or monstrous to early moderns, these figures of feminine transgression are presented by their writers as ultimately failing to pose a threat to patriarchal notions of gendered social order. Those who *are* threatening are disqualified like the celestial Belphoebe, or eliminated as with the matriarchal Amazon queen Radigund.

This dissertation argues that fictional crossdressing women often adorn themselves with weaponry to convince others of their supposed masculinity. Due to the sixteenth-century belief that high-status men were defined by martiality and high-status women by modesty, Elizabethan writers consistently convey that crossdressing women must use weaponry to compensate for an absence of masculinity within their disguises. Critics widely acknowledge that weapons are often symbolic for masculinity in

early modern works, especially in erotic terms, as daggers and swords could metaphorically ‘stand in’ as prosthetic phalluses.⁴⁸ Schwartz (2000) claims that “Only Britomart can take women to bed and remain a hero,”(p. 169) because she lacks male genitalia. Shakespeare’s female crossdresser’s choice of weaponry confirms the Elizabethan notion that weapons were substitutive for male potency and authority.⁴⁹ Lucetta highlights Julia’s lack of male genital by insisting, “You must needs have [her male clothing] with a codpiece, madam.”(2.7.53) The notion that Julia should require an ‘extra’ flap of material attached to the breeches of her male disguise is comedic considering that its function was to cover and extenuate the penis: an appendage that Julia lacks.⁵⁰ When Sir Andrew challenges Viola-as-Cesario to duel for Olivia’s affections, Viola proclaims in an aside “a little thing would make me tell them how much I lack of a man.”(3.4.293-294) Viola admits to and highlights “the absence of the male ‘weapon’ that would enable her to combat”(Elam, 2008, p. 59), and is thus presented by Shakespeare as a truly unthreatening figure of masculine simulation here. Furthermore, Viola denies herself any claim to supposed male sexual potency through her crossdressing disguise in 1.2, deciding to present herself “as an eunuch”(1.2.52) to Orsino. Shakespeare could have depicted Viola claiming undue authority within Illyria with her male disguise, but instead presented the shipwrecked girl as respectably private in her opting to cross-dress to protect her chastity. Contrastingly, Rosalind imagines wearing a “curtle-axe upon my thigh”(1.3.114) and “boar spear in my hand”(1.3.115) as part

⁴⁸ Villeponteaux (1995) asserts that Spenser presents “Britomart [as] literally invincible because she wields a potent magic spear – a powerful phallic symbol that at the same time connotes her woman’s chastity,” while Anderson (2018) marks Britomart and Radigund’s weaponry during their fight scene as significant because they “do not first fight with spears on horseback but on foot with curved swords, whose semicircularity qualifies their phallic potency.”(p. 117)

⁴⁹ In *Twelfth Night*, Howard (1998) asserts that Viola “freely admits that she has neither the desire nor the aptitude to the man’s part in phallic swordplay”(p. 431) whereas Traub (2001) argues that, “to the extent that masculinity is embodied in the sword, it depends upon a particular kind of performance rather than any biological equipment.”(p. 145) Maslen (2005) likewise notes that, “Clearly the abortive combat Sir Toby sets up between the unmanly man Sir Andrew and the womanly boy Cesario is no more than an elaborate comparison of penises.”(p. 202) Elam (2008) has conveyed this too, highlighting Viola’s “admission in the duel scene that ‘A little thing would make me tell them how much I lack of a man’ (3.4.295.6) [which] discloses the absence of the male ‘weapon’ that would enable her to combat.”(p. 59)

⁵⁰ Furthermore, the fact that male wearers of the codpiece often utilised its capacity for amplification to enhance their own desired self-representation as very powerful men is satirised in this scene, given that, by the same rule, a woman could present herself as a potent masculine figure. Fisher (2006) argues that “despite the overall trend, there were early texts that distanced the codpiece from masculinity in one way or another (such as in Shakespeare’s *Two Gentlemen of Verona*).”(p. 75)

of her Ganymede ensemble.⁵¹ Rosalind argues that wearing weapons as props, rather than functioning objects, would sufficiently convince others of her masculinity just as “other [male] mannish cowards”(1.3.118) do. Here, Shakespeare places Rosalind among those mannish women and effeminate men that Elizabethans regarded as “monstrous and unnatural”(Dusinberre, 2003, p. 239), after putting on her shepherd’s clothing. Similarly, Viola perceives that the disguise renders her a “poor monster”(2.3.34) after recognising that Olivia had developed feelings for her false identity Cesario. Portia claims she “will wear my dagger with the braver grace,”(3.4.65) arguing that *how* the weapon is worn matters more than actually using it, in terms of persuading society of her maleness. Moreover, Portia explains that the persuasiveness of disguise rests upon how she will “speak of frays ... Like a fine bragging youth, and tell quaint tales”(3.4.68-69) – even “twenty of these puny lies,”(3.4.74) – to evidence martial capability. In Portia’s reasoning Shakespeare explores the comical notion that unbelievable stories delivered by young “bragging jacks”(3.4.77) could ensure that a woman was accepted as male by her peers. Portia recognises the usefulness of prosthetic weaponry but comically explains that a well-told false story could be an effective method of demonstrating ‘masculinity’. Her opinion is that performed masculinity alongside an endorsed reputation of manliness proves more effective for a crossdressing woman than actually demonstrating martial capability.

Therefore, Shakespeare articulates that successful crossdressing is not achieved through superficial indicators of manliness alone. Equally important was the potential martial reputation that weaponry could provide for women while disguised. Baldesar Castiglione’s 1561 *The Book of the Courtier* informed Elizabethans that “the principal and true profession of a Courtier ought to be in feat[s] of arms ... and to be known among others of his hardiness,”(Aughterson, p. 160) highlighting that a European courtier’s perceived masculinity was determined by his *reputation* for aggressiveness and combatant victories.⁵² For Shakespeare’s female crossdressers, the need to establish a masculine

⁵¹ Dusinberre (2006) explains that Rosalind believes that her false ‘masculinity’ is “advertised by her two weapons, a *cutlass* and *boar-spear*.”(p. 186) Her lack of using such weaponry, or indeed alluding to them, throughout the remainder of the play exposes her belief that merely performing a male role is enough to convince others to believe her disguise authentic.

⁵² Baldesar Castiglione (1478-1529) was a prominent Italian Renaissance courtier and author who in 1528 published an instructive book, *The Book of the Courtier*, which was then published throughout Europe for

reputation was just as important as the external disguise adopted, then. Indeed, Castillogne further explained the contradistinctive model of male martiality versus female modesty by drawing similarities between each gender experiencing a damaged or diminished social reputation:

even as in women, honesty once stained doth never return again to
the former estate: so the fame of a gentleman that carrieth weapon,
once take foil in any little point through dastardliness or any other
reproach, doth evermore continue shameful in the world and full of
ignorance ...

(Aughterson, 1998, p. 160)

Castillogne compared the image of a man's pride and honour being lost due to combative failure to a woman's damaged or diminished reputation for honour and chastity. Julia in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* claims that she had been disgraced by her "immodest raiment"(5.4.105) after revealing her true identity to Proteus, "possibly by taking off a hat and shaking her hair loose, as ... heroines [do]"(Carroll, 2004, p. 278). Rather than use any masculine weapon against Proteus in her prosecution against him, Julia reveals her feminine hair, which had been hidden beneath the "shame"(5.4.105) of a misrepresentative disguise. The physical weaponry that Julia uses to charge her errant fiancé with "perjury"(5.4.102) of their engagement is her modestly concealed hair. Shakespeare exaggerates Julia's damaged reputation with Julia's line, "O Proteus, let this habit make thee blush"(5.4.103). Julia uses her crossdressing disguise as evidence against Proteus, not only to express her own shame, but also to reverse power positions within the scene, by emphasising through her "scandalized"(2.7.61) body, his own diminished reputation. As Reinke-Williams (2011) asserts, for Elizabethans "what women wore affected the reputations of their fathers and husbands, not least because it was often they who financed the purchase of such attire."(p. 83)

Portia's prosthetic weaponry is the forged letter used during 4.1 to bolster her Balthazar-lawyer's reputation (4.1.142-142) in court. Providing herself with a forged letter of recommendation from Bellario (carried onstage by her crossdressing friend Nerissa, disguised as a lawyer's clerk) during 4.1.142-162, Portia uses words rather than weaponry to gain entry to the male-dominated court scene. Balthazar's reputation is endorsed by the absent Bellario, who says "let his lack of years be no

decades. The 1561 Thomas Hoby translation was well received as it "enjoyed at least a pervasive influence ... in Elizabethan England."(Bull, 2004, Introduction).

impediment ... for I never knew so young a body with so old a head.”(4.1.158-160) Portia also uses her ring – symbolising the oath she made one another – to weaken Bassanio’s honourable reputation, viewing it as weaponry against her husband in 5.1. Resembling Julia’s own expressed shame, Portia uses the fabricated shame of her body – “Pardon me, Bassanio, / For by this ring the doctor lay with me.”(5.1.258-259) – to emphasise the importance of a broken oath. Both crossdressers test the constancy of their male counterparts by using the reputation of their female bodies as evidence – or weaponry – to gain a position of power before revealing their transgressive deception. Julia similarly reasons, “It is the lesser blot, modesty finds / Women to change their shapes than men their minds.”(5.4.107-108) arguing that her constancy – ironically, given her externally altered appearance – proves more honourable than Proteus’ emotional changeability. Portia likewise uses her body to cruelly accuse Bassanio of having both a literal “double self”(5.1.245) by seeing himself in the reflection of her two eyes, “In both my eyes he doubly sees himself, / In each one eye”(5.1.244-245), and an abstract double-self in his apparent ability to break “an oath of credit!”(5.1.246) between them. The sarcastic, almost scathing, tone within Portia’s exclamation further shames Bassanio and proves her a particularly punishing character.

Clearly, Shakespeare presented his crossdressing women as utilising various forms of weaponry to convince others of their false identity, and physically *imply* martial prowess. However, Shakespeare also portrays each crossdressing woman lacking a will to wield weapons in combat, presenting weaponry as wholly redundant in these fictional women’s estimations. Their preferred weapons remain characterised in solely feminine terms. Their female reputation and bodies, their feminine hair, and their forsaken rings that could be frittered away or forsaken by lovers, prove powerful tools for women who want to gain a moral advantage over men. Likewise, by consistently reiterating the perception that simply wearing weaponry can demonstrate maleness in crossdressing disguises, Shakespeare interrogated the Elizabethan image of maleness as a means of identifying men within society. A persuasive male disguise is achievable by external accessories, the projection of masculine behaviour, and endorsement by personal recommendation or reputation.

However, as Michel de Montaigne argued in *Essais* (1595), “Saying is one thing and doing is another.”(p. 429)⁵³ For example, when Viola is forced to use her weaponry during 3.4 she expresses clear doubts in her own abilities, expressing no desire to fight. Viola-as-Cesario’s martial reputation is therefore “implicitly questioned”(Elam, 2008, p. 291) when Sir Toby calls him “A very dishonest, paltry boy, and more a coward than a hare”(3.4.382-383). Indeed, Cesario’s martial reputation faces dispute until her unknowing brother Sebastian is mistaken for him during 4.1, uncharacteristically ordering Sir Andrew to “draw thy sword.”(4.1.41) For Shakespeare, crossdressing women can perform manliness only so far: comedic crossdressing figures like Viola are ultimately unthreatening to Elizabethan notions of male authority, given that they only use male weaponry in purely prosthetic terms to imitate masculinity temporarily.⁵⁴

In stark contrast, Spenser’s Britomart is a threatening figure within *The Faerie Queene* because she is unafraid of wielding the array of prosthetic weaponry at her disposal. As Schwartz (2000) states “Weapons are for her not fetishes or metaphors, but objects that get things done.”(p. 151) Britomart’s “goodly Armour”(III.iii.58.7) had belonged to the Saxon Queen Angela, associating her with “strong Amazonian connotations.”(Benson, 2010, p. 288)⁵⁵ Britomart uses her “helmet”(IV.vi.19.1), “flaming sword”(III.i.66.2) and “dreadful speare and shield”(III.iii.53.4) to properly imitate a male knight, while also embodying the female Knight of Chastity that Spenser had pictured. The discernible difference between Britomart and Shakespeare’s crossdressers, though, is her resolution to *use* the weaponry she carries. Even further transgressive is that Britomart uses her weaponry against other *male* knights, and critically, consistently vanquishes them. Another difference is that the crossdressing princess actually becomes a knight in her own right, putting forward a new characterisation of capable

⁵³ Michel Eyquem de Montaigne (1533-1592) was a French Renaissance philosopher, whose influence upon Shakespeare’s works has received much scholarly attention. Robertson in 1897 stated that “we are forced to admit that Shakespeare may have been influenced by Montaigne,”(p. 19) while Robert Ellrodt’s 2017 book *Montaigne and Shakespeare: The emergence of modern self-consciousness* argues that the English dramatist was undeniably influenced by the French essayist. Quote taken from Peter Coste’s 2008 digitized edition of *The essays of Michael de Montaigne* (1811).

⁵⁴ Indeed Yearling (2013) agrees, “*Twelfth Night* is transgressive in its questioning of gender roles and constructions, yet it also suggests that gender confusion and homoerotic playfulness cannot be allowed to continue forever.”(p. 64)

⁵⁵ Britomart’s personal state changes when she wears Amazonian armour, because “So vested, Britomart is no longer the merely frustrated and enclosed pubescent child, the sheltered girl, of the second canto, but suddenly a female knight...”(Anderson, 2009)

female martiality dissimilar to that of the matriarchal Radigund. Within the following section, I discuss further the various ways that Spenser depicts Britomart's behaviour while engaged in physical combat with male opponents.

Combatant Encounters: Bodily and Animalistic Metaphors

This section deals primarily with Spenser's use of bodily and animalistic symbolism within *The Faerie Queene* fight scenes to depict female combat and establishes the contrasting instances of battle within Shakespeare's comedies. It establishes how Spenser's allegorical "shadow"(III, Proem, 3, 8) for Elizabeth I, Britomart, was able to effectively transgress sixteenth-century gender boundaries and norms. Yet despite – or perhaps due to – her association with Elizabeth, Britomart was a problematic knight for Spenser, because

The woman warrior was a problematic figure for an age like Spenser's, which was so anxiously concerned with outward, distinguishing signs that were believed to reveal the innate qualities of an individual, such as station and gender.

(Villeponteaux, 1995)

Indeed, aside from the social problem that Britomart posed as a princess performing a knightly role – undertaking an occupation designated to people below her social station – and the gender problem that she posed as a crossdressing woman, Britomart was an allegorical conundrum for Spenser. His embodiment of female virtue both physically fights with, and consistently vanquishes, male knights, but intended to, at least in some small part, symbolise his female sovereign.⁵⁶

Spenser expresses an uneasiness about depicting a princess-knight, highlighting her gender in his 1589 letter to Sir Walter Raleigh, "Britomartis, a lady knight, in whome I picture chastity."(Hamilton, 2013, p. 716)⁵⁷ Spenser clearly viewed Britomart's gender as extraordinary give he specifically emphasised to Raleigh. Furthermore, within the Book III proem itself, his narrator pleaded with Elizabeth I,

... But O dredd Souerayne
Thus far forth pardon, sith that choicest witt

⁵⁶ Adams (2015) persuasively claims, "For the Elizabethan reader, the image of Britomart acting in both male and female genders would naturally evoke Queen Elizabeth, particularly since Spenser includes Elizabeth among Britomart's descendants."(p. 4)

⁵⁷ Spenser's full letter to Raleigh is available within Hamilton's 2013 edition of Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, pp. 713-718.

Cannot your glorious pourtraict figure playne,
That I in colourd shows may shadow itt,

(Book III, Proem, 3, 5-8)

Spenser clarifies that he envisages Britomart as a “coloured ... shadow”(Book III, Proem, 3, 8) of Elizabeth. However, Cobb (1990) notes that,

unlike Belphoebe or Gloriana, Britomart is not a direct representation of Elizabeth; she is her mythical ancestor. Hence they may share some characteristics, without being identical. [...] Thus the image of the masculine warrior-maiden is both *detached* from Elizabeth, and softened by stress on her biological femaleness.

(Cobb, 1990, p. 59, my emphasis)

Britomart is thus an imperfect illustration of a single facet of Elizabeth I’s “pourtraict [portraiture]”(III, Proem, 3, 7) which “does not endure as an acceptable avatar for Queen Elizabeth, and soon her own martial prowess becomes unacceptable”(Villeponteaux, 1995) within the epic. Spenser refrained from presenting his martial crossdresser – a woman of royal lineage, like Elizabeth – as a direct mirror image of England’s problematically unmarried queen, instead assuring Raleigh that he imagines caricatures for Elizabeth I in many of the epic’s female characters. The ever-present, yet unobtainable, faerie queen Gloriana is the clearest envisioning. The warrior-goddess Belphoebe is martial, yet celestial, mirroring of one of Elizabeth’s “favoured emblems”(Hopkins, 2011, p. 89) for herself without directly linking the queen to any combatant behaviour. In this sense, Britomart’s figuration as a shadow of Elizabeth – rather than a mirror image – saves Spenser from accusations of portraying Elizabeth “playne [plainly]”(III, Proem, 3, 7) and through such a transgressive persona. Rather than suggest that Britomart was an imperfect but reflective figuration of his queen, Spenser claims that the crossdresser is a distorted imagining of Elizabeth, like when someone views their own stretched out shadow upon the ground. Spenser diffuses Britomart’s dangerous relationship with Elizabeth by conceptually distancing them, as Britomart is “not a direct representation of Elizabeth”(Cobb, 1990, p. 59). Through this detachment, Spenser presents Britomart as a contained entity that represents the potential subversion of early modern gender codes.

Nevertheless, Britomart's martial nature makes her an icon of controversy as an exemplar of womanly chastity. Spenser's allusion to Elizabeth in Britomart is also perceivable in her armoured disguise, as Elizabeth was reputed to wear armour when she addressed her Tilbury troops in 1588, while England anticipated Spanish invasion, just two years before Spenser published his first edition of *The Faerie Queene*.⁵⁸ Elizabeth's alleged words, "I myself will take up arms, I myself will be your general, judge, and rewarder of every one of your virtues in the field,"(Healy, 2009, pp. 166-167) indicates Elizabeth's fabled martial intent towards foreign male aggressors like Phillip II of Spain, and strength of her resolve.⁵⁹ Elizabeth's Tilbury Speech distinctly correlates with Spenser's presentation of Britomart's own "wrathful stowre"(III.iv.13.8) at the prospect of being attacked by male knights within *The Faerie Queene*. Elizabeth had declared that she would "take foul scorn that Parma or any prince of Europe should dare to invade the borders of my realm."(Elizabeth I, 1588) The armoured body of Spenser's Knight of Chastity reflected the notion that Elizabeth presented in 1588. The queen had pictured the stately realm of England as her own impenetrable female body as a landscape that required defence from male aggressors. Guy (2017) clarifies, however, that Elizabeth would never have personally fought the Spanish fleet and that the speech was more than likely fabricated by the Earl of Leicester who had intended to "choreograph Elizabeth's visit [to Tilbury] so as to reinvent her forever as the Warrior Queen she had never really been."(p. 106)⁶⁰ As such, Spenser's figuration of Britomart as Elizabeth's *shadow* was sensible, considering militant nature that the crossdresser princess consistently exhibits. This section consequently explores Britomart's combative transgressions. Following how Spenser depicts Britomart's body – and perceived control over her body parts – during combat helps to explain the poet's caution in directly linking a fictional crossdresser with his queen.

Undoubtedly, "Spenser is never entirely comfortable with the warfaring chastity he creates,"(Villeponteaux, 1995) in Britomart. The poet subsequently employs a variety of bodily and

⁵⁸ The image of Elizabeth as a martial queen would still remain conspicuously within contemporary imagination, as Guy (2017) agrees that while "Nothing is known about what she wore, despite proliferation of legends depicting her as a latter-day Boudica, or as Britomart from Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene*."(p. 107)

⁵⁹ Healy (2009) states that even though "Few would have heard what Elizabeth directly spoke at Tilbury (though her words were repeated by public orators at the event)"(p. 166)

⁶⁰ There is little question of this given that the Earl of Leicester was then Lieutenant of the Tilbury battalion and Elizabeth's speech explicitly commands the troops "obedience to myself and my general,"(Healy, 2009, p. 167)

animalistic imagery while depicting her battles to rationalise the problematic characterisation of a capable *female* warrior. Spenser initially introduces Britomart as a capable fighter, not through her personal bodily skill, but due to the “magic weapons”(Woodcock, 2004, p. 81) that she carries. Spenser’s narrative voice is keen to reassure the conquered Guyon (Book II’s Knight of Temperance) that the defeat was

... not thy fault, but secret powre vnseene,
That speare enchanted was, which layd thee on the greene.

(*The Faerie Queene*, III.i.7.8-9)

For Shakespeare’s crossdressers, successful female subversion is presented as resulting from the clothing and weapon-accessories that women wear, not their own fighting abilities. Similarly, Spenser accredits Britomart’s victory over Guyon to the weaponry she carries, rather than her courage, or physical strength and skill. Therefore, female characters never physically defeat men in these plots, but rather the objects they carry (which embody male strength or female chastity) give the transgressive crossdressers their advantage. Indeed Spenser’s denial of Britomart’s personal martiality continues throughout the rest of ‘her’ Book III, as Spenser presents her victories as possible by the aid of her “enchanted” weaponry and magical armour. Furthermore, when Guyon attempts to attack Britomart again on foot, and “his Palmer saw, he gan to feare, ... For death sate on the point of that enchanted speare.”(III.i.9.6-9) Spenser uses the natural imagery of a horse’s fear to emphasise the strangeness of Britomart’s spear, and its supernatural powers providing her an advantage over her male opponent. Even despite the narration’s attempt to temper the shocking message of Guyon’s defeat – a male knight so easily conquered by a woman – the tone becomes mocking, as “Much greater grieve and shamefuller regret ... That of a single damzel thou wert mett”(III.i.8.2-4). Yet the knights cease fighting, not because Britomart (Chastity) physically overcomes Guyon (Temperance), but because “he had seene / The secrete virtue of that weapon keene,”(III.i.10.4-5). It is the weapon’s virtue, not Britomart’s, that Spenser highlights in Guyon’s defeat.

Soon after, Britomart saves Redcrosse from Malecasta’s six knights, using “her mortall speare”(III.i.28.6) to put “three on the ground”(III.i.29.1) before the final “two did yield before she

did them smight.”(III.i.29.6) Spenser depicts Malecasta’s knights placing “vnderneath her feet their swords they mard,”(III.i.30.6) displaying their defeat and pledging fealty to Britomart. Spenser’s reinforces in the “mard”(III.i.30.6) swords the concept that knights are defined by their weaponry. As they must kneel to place weaponry upon the ground, Britomart is placed in a position of power, standing physically above the broken weapons.⁶¹ Yet Spenser’s decision to focus upon those male weapons at her feet diminishes the crossdresser’s victory. The reminder of the “mortal speare”(III.i.28.6) is placed in stark contrast with the broken “swords”(III.i.30.6) stealing attention away from Britomart’s triumph altogether. Therefore, the “matchlesse might”(III.i.30.2) which Malecasta’s knights reference becomes inextricably linked with the conflict of male weapons, rather than the gendered human bodies that wielded them. Britomart’s “matchlesse might”(III.i.30.2) is not accredited to her personal strength, but the “straunge”(III.i.8.7) nature of “that enchanted speare”(III.i.9.9) used. Even from the narration’s perspective then, Britomart’s gender is rendered as conceptually insignificant as her physically disguised, invisible, female body. Spenser contained Britomart’s transgressive actions by shrouding her gender from view, both within the plot from Malecasta’s knights and from the readers by focussing upon the male weapons rather than the female body that vanquished them.

By the end of canto i, however, Spenser appears to be demonstrating Britomart’s capabilities as a skilled fighter, when in Malcasta’s castle she is forced into “threatning the point of her auenging blaed,”(III.i.63.8) and “with her dredfull strokes”(III.i.66.4) defend herself against the attacking knights in Castle Joyeous. Britomart is revealed as a “warlike”(III.i.63.6) woman, to the surprise of all onlookers. Her ‘masculine’ weapon starkly contrasts with Spenser’s presentation of her female attire and body. Her “snow-white”(III.i.63.7) night gown expresses Britomart’s metaphorical innocence and reinforces the softness of her physical body: she is the Knight of Chastity – and dangerous – but has a female body which in the privacy of her own chambers is attired in line with the prescribed gender codes. As Cobb (1990) stated of Spenser’s lady-knight, “the image of masculine warrior maiden is ...

⁶¹ Malecasta’s knights weapons can be interpreted as “damaged”(Hamilton, p. 294), and symbolic of the “debased (the honour of) their swords by placing them under Britomart’s feet in a vow of loyalty that they do not mean to keep”(Hamilton, p. 294)

softened by stress on her biological femaleness.”(p. 59) Her hair, an early modern symbol of femininity, is “vnbownd”(III.i.63.7) indicating her having been caught off-guard, unprotected from unwanted sexual encounters. The absence of her knightly armour is conspicuous, but this does not inhibit her ability to threaten Malecasta’s execution for trespassing upon her personal space. As Britomart remains a “threatning”(III.i.63.8) force as she executes “dreadfull strokes”(III.i.66.4) upon her attackers, demonstrating both intent and successful execution of *defensive* combatant behaviour. Spenser presents her as a potentially autonomous figure of transgressive power by the end of her introductory canto, then. Nevertheless, Britomart’s martial powers abide within the “auenging blaed”(III.i.63.8) of her sword, an object that Spenser imbued with emotion, as “wrathfull steele”(III.i.66.6). Britomart is threatening in her emotional response to her immediate surroundings, but the potency of her threats reside within the masculine agents of the sword or spear she holds.

During the rest of Book III Spenser reveals his uneasiness about Britomart’s characterisation, jumping from expressing the prosthetic qualities of Britomart’s weapons, which promote and enable her victories, and the assertion that the militancy of feminine chastity should be recognised as a powerful virtue in its own right. Britomart overthrows Marinell with the “length of her launce,”(III.iv.16.7-8) displaying all the borrowed imagery of ‘masculine’ potency discussed earlier, but also contrastingly deters the lustful giant Ollyphant from corporal interaction, due to his “feare, / [of] Britomart, the flower of chastity”(III.xi.6.1-3) that she embodies. Spenser presents Britomart’s virtuous hands as the dominant entity from which Ollyphant flees, “For he the power of chaste hands might not beare,”(III.xi.6.4) rather than the powerful launce or phallic sword often accredited to the victories of her previous combatant encounters. Similarly, a confusion between Britomart’s protecting herself in Busyrane’s castle with the “welpointed weapons about her did dresse”(III.xi.55.9) and the power with which “So mightily she smote him, that to ground / He fell halfe dead,”(III.xiii.34.1-2) is apparent. Despite his ambivalent attitude towards representing female militancy within *The Faerie Queene*, Spenser makes it clear that the disguised woman is known as “famous Britomart”(III.i.8.6), having earned her reputation through her interaction with her, albeit allegorical, destiny, rather than by enacting a “bragging jack”(3.4.77) as Shakespeare’s crossdressers often do.

When Britomart and her destined husband Artegall finally meet in person Spenser's ambivalence towards disguise re-emerges as a prevalent theme. Due to Britomart's crossdressing disguise, and Artegall's own "stranger knight ... disguise,"(IV.iv.39.2-3) both concealed bodies fail to recognise an authentic identity in the other. Britomart unknowingly emasculates her future husband – she "did his glorie shend"(IV.iv.43.8) – physically mastering him during Satyrane's tournament. However, this transgressive action is pardoned somewhat, in the narration's use of male pronouns attributed to Britomart throughout this canto (IV.iv.44.1, IV.iv.44.8, IV.iv.45.8, IV.iv.46.1) reminding the readers of her disguise, reinforcing the superficial image of combat between men, but more importantly, ensuring that Britomart's martial prowess is once again indebted to the spear she holds:

He at his entrance charg'd his powrefull speare
 At *Artégall*, in the midst of his pryde,
 And therewith smote him on his Vmbriere

(*The Faerie Queene*, IV.iv.44.1-3)

Britomart is transgressive in her actions, but escapes condemnation because nobody knows that the "stranger knight"(IV.iv.43.8) has a female body, and her success is rendered possible by the "powrefull speare"(IV.iv.44.1) she carries. Spenser demonstrates a confusion in gender roles within this moment because Britomart attacks Artegall first, assuming the more 'masculine' position in a battle between male knights. But she also unknowingly fills the more erotically predatory role between a man and woman during courtship, as she "charg'd with [her] powerfull speare"(IV.iv.44.1) towards Artegall first. Once again, Spenser depicts the homoerotic image of a prosthetic magical penis that vests his crossdresser with the necessary ability to vanquish other men in a fight, in order to resolve his uneasiness about the warrior princess. Spenser's contemporaries might have expected an alternative outcome when the maid attacked her destined husband, but, as with Britomart's previous opponents, and those who follow in the tourney – Cambell (IV.iv.44.7), Triamond (IV.iv.45.3), Blandamour (IV.iv.45.9) and "many others ... likewise"(IV.iv.46.1-2) – Artegall is overcome by "the force of that enchaunted speare, / The which this famous Britomart did beare"(IV.iv.46.4-5). This moment highlights the irony of Britomart's emasculating Artegall in physical combat, due to each of their disguises. Britomart's disguise enables her to adopt a transgressive militancy but it cannot help

her identify the very man she searches for, even when she comes launce-to-launce with him. They meet face-to-face in IV.vi when Artegall's physical strength outlasts Britomart's during their one-on-one combat, evidencing Spenser's own belief that gender difference can be established through male stamina and strength. The crossdressing disguise does help Britomart to develop a renowned reputation however, and so when Artegall and Scudamour recognise and attack her in canto vi, the revelatory fight scene between the soon-to-be couple ensues.

During the revelation scene of IV.vi, Spenser depicts the Salvage Knight Artegall assuming a position of power by attacking Britomart first, quite unlike the previous situation of Satyrane's tournament of iv. The animalistic imagery used to describe Artegall's assault upon Britomart creates the expectation of male dominance and authority for Elizabethans, because despite his initial failed attack (IV.vi.11.8-9), he is associated with the hunting imagery of "an eger hound"(IV.vi.12.3). The sexually charged Canto depicts the two fated lovers in animalistic terms to reassert the established gender roles of Elizabethan society. Artegall assaults Britomart until he strikes "on her horses hinder parts"(IV.vi.13.6), referencing her animal's damaged body to reflect Britomart's own reduced power position in being unhorsed (IV.vi.13.9). Hamilton (2013) asserts, "Since the horse – usually called a steed – serves throughout the poem as a symbol of passion, the wounding of its hindquarters is sexually significant."(p. 453) The linkage with Britomart and her horse, attacked by Artegall, the hunting hound, shows that Spenser used animalistic references to signify the image of a brawling couple, to re-establish the chaser and chased dynamic within *The Faerie Queene*.⁶² Until now, "Britomart's male guise ... [had helped] distance her from the traumatic chases endured by the other women"(Cavanagh, 1994, p.106). It is fitting, then, that Spenser chose to present Artegall as the only knight capable of successfully hunting Britomart, as he is the very knight to whom she intends submission. Furthermore, Artegall's weapon becomes animalistic as the blade of his sword was "byting deep"(IV.vi.13.7) into the flesh of Britomart's horse. Artegall has not physically penetrated Britomart yet, but has wounded her equine companion.

⁶² Cavanagh (1994) highlights the landscape of male-dominated pursuit of female bodies within *The Faerie Queene*, as "women are repeatedly presented for extensive literal and figurative disrobing by both knights and readers. Only male garb or exceedingly swift feet exempt female character from such voluntary or forced revelations."(p. 35)

Although Artegall unhorses Britomart, Spenser still presented her as a formidable opponent within stanza 15 as she draws human blood first (IV.vi.15.6-7), rendering Artegall one step behind Britomart her. Sexual allusions to Britomart's counter-assault on Artegall are expressed by her "first heat"(IV.vi.15.1) and her blow that "Shew'd all his bodie bare"(IV.vi.15.9) highlighting the cruelty of her sexual battery. The phrase "first heat"(IV.vi.15.1) also signifies Britomart's animal-like fervour in response to Artegall's hunting her like prey.⁶³

Within stanza 16, however, Spenser creates a landscape of power-play in which Artegall can overcome Britomart, solving his problematic figuration of gendered authority in Britomart's characterization. Artegall overcomes Britomart, because,

At length when as he saw her hastie heat
Abate, and panting breath begin to fayle,
He through long sufferance growing now more great,
Rose in his strength, and gan her fresh assayle,

(The Faerie Queene, IV.vi.16.1-4)

The eroticism of this stanza is evident in the repetition of Britomart's "hastie heat"(IV.vi.16.1), her "panting breath"(IV.vi.16.2), and Artegall's "growing more great,"(IV.vi.16.3) as the references to sexualised motion are constructed. Spenser imbues the battle between the destined lovers with imagery indicative of sexual intercourse, and presents Artegall as conserving "his strength"(IV.vi.16.4) to overcome Britomart. The innuendo associated in Artegall's "Heaping huge strokes, as thicke as a showre of hayle, / And lashing dreadfully at euey part"(IV.vi.16.5-6) of Britomart, shows Spenser's intent to depict Britomart's body as having to endure the powerful stormy weather of Artegall's vengeful "wrath"(IV.vi.8.9). The strength with which Artegall "wreake[s]"(IV.vi.16.9) his revenge upon the Stranger Knight is expressed in the imagery of his "cruell hand, and thrice more cruell hart,"(IV.vi.16.8) mirroring Britomart's previous "cruel dent"(IV.vi.15.9) upon his own body. Spenser reflects the power that Artegall gains over Britomart here in the strength of his punishing hand. The ironic, sighing tone of line 8, "Ah, cruell hand..."(IV.vi. 16.8), expresses the narrator's dismay at Artegall's physical battery of his fated wife.

⁶³ Anderson (2018) agrees that, "In the heat of their encounter the Knights exchange the roles of hunter and hunted recurrently."(p. 111)

Indeed, Spenser demonises Artegall for attacking Britomart, characterizing him as “Certes some hellish furie, or some feend, ... To bath their hands in bloud of dearest freend,”(IV.vi.17.6-8). The rhyme scheme figures Artegall (fiend) and Britomart (friend) as polar opposites, positioning Artegall upon the moral low ground, as the image of bathing his hands in Britomart’s blood is placed into the forefront of the readers’ imagination. The narration condemns him – despite the powerful hands imagery that evokes his control over the situation – by picturing the Salvage Knight as the villain revelling in a lady’s wounds. Indeed as Hamilton (2013) notes, the rhyme scheme of the stanza “seems designed to highlight this crucial moment between Britomart and Artegall.”(p. 453) Spenser does appear to present an image of the husband punishing his wife for her previous subversive actions against him.

The theme of erotic power is again coupled with a hands metaphor of control and power within stanza 18. With “his luckless hand”(18.6) Artegall deals the final blow which almost alters Britomart’s very “destinie”(18.9), from marrying Artegall, to “death”(18.9) at Artegall’s hands. The struggle for power between them seems to cease, as control over the situation falls into Artegall’s “lucklesse hand”(18.6). That is, until Britomart’s “face”(19.5) is revealed. Spenser presents her face as metaphorically feminine, in her “heate of labour”(19.9) expressing her sexual arousal, physical exertion, and childbearing, and her face physically flushed by the “weary fight”(19.9). The unveiling of Britomart’s feminine form has a truly disarming effect upon Artegall, even despite not noticing her revealed state until stanza 22. Britomart’s “yellow heare”(20.1) is granted an entire stanza to express her exposed femininity and its discernible power over the shocked Artegall. Spenser extends the image further, describing how even the “goldsmithes...cunning hand”(20.4) that forged her hair could not capture the essence of Britomart’s powerful feminine nature.⁶⁴ Over the course of stanzas 19 to 22 Spenser shifts the power positions between the lovers significantly, displaying the power that one character may have over the other with the image of uplifted hands.

⁶⁴ Indeed as Adams (2015) asserts that, “Spenser’s favoured method of revealing Britomart’s femininity is through the removal of her helmet, which reveals her long hair.”

Artegall's "hand"(21.1) and "arme"(21.3) both display a "secrete feare"(21.3) to strike Britomart, even while he remains unaware of her uncovered face. Clearly, throughout the duration of their battle, Britomart and Artégall's bodies have had, up until this point, "a kind of form and pattern, a rhythm and, crucially, a progression."(Anderson, 2018, p. 111) Their communication is rooted in body language and coded in erotic terms. Artégall's hands are personified, which "think, obedience"(21.8) and become "benumbd"(21.3) in the presence of Britomart's undisguised face. Spenser focuses upon Artégall's "fingers [which] slacke"(21.5) of their own accord, impressing upon his readers Britomart's disarming effect upon Artégall.⁶⁵ Even Artégall's "cruell sword [...] Fell downe to the ground, as if the steele had sence,"(21.6) emphasising the power which Britomart inherits from Artégall as he strikes her. That she had no control over the undisguising is of little importance, once her "beauties excellence"(21.9) overpowers Artégall's body and senses. Spenser depicts Artégall falling "humbly downe vpon his knee,"(22.2) like Malecasta's knights had. However, he falls "Whilest tembling in horrou"(22.8) at the dishonourable act of battling a woman. Artégall's "sense[s] are assayle[d]"(22.8) by the shame of attacking the "heauenly goddesse"(22.4) he perceives "vnweeting [uncomprehendingly]"(22.5), before him. Artégall's kneeling upon the ground expresses his utter submission to Britomart and a complete reversal in control that each character holds during that short moment. Britomart has the element of surprise when her astonishing beauty is revealed to her fated husband. Within the following stanzas however, Spenser presents Britomart almost immediately surrendering her position of control, favouring instead the traditional patriarchal structure of male authority and female subordination. Here, as Dollimore (1994) states, Spenser reflects the Elizabethan "dominant order seek[ing] to perpetuate itself"(p. 10) regardless of the transgressive character being used to do so.

Spenser also expresses the reversal of power positioning between couple in the use of height. Artégall is submissive in his shame, while Britomart

All that long while *vpheld* her wrathfull hand,

⁶⁵ Anderson (2018) notes that "Both armed encounters of Artégall with Britomart dramatize that his savagery needs softening, refining, civilizing."(p. 96) The crossdressed heroine's presence does instigate this process somewhat, as shown in "His powerlesse arme... From his reuengefull purpose shronke abacke,"(21.4).

With fell intent, on him to bene ywroke,
And looking sterne, still ouer him did stand,

(*The Faerie Queene*, IV.vi.23.2-4, my emphasis)

Incorporating the hand symbolism of control, with the notion of Britomart's "intent"(23.3) to exert her rightful "wrath"(23.1), and power-positioning through height, Spenser depicts a reversed image of female power over male authority. Britomart stands "ouer him"(23.4) as he kneels, begging for mercy "for so great inirie"(23.9), evoking utter control on one side and total submission on the other. Britomart's upheld hand embodies this image of female power and control. This scene of female dominion was problematic for Spenser, not merely because Britomart figured as a shadow of Elizabeth, but because the image depicts more generally a woman standing over her future husband, who kneels in subservience. But despite Britomart's ordering Artegall to rise so that she might "ywroke [avenge],"(23.3) herself in combat, Artegall refuses to obey her. Spenser's Knight of Justice cannot justifiably attack a woman, so "for nought he would vpstand"(23.5). Ironically, despite the submissive positioning in which Spenser places Artegall, contrasting Britomart standing with her upheld hand "threatening to strike"(23.5) him, he actually retains his original position of power as a result of his submission, both in terms of his obedience to knightly chivalrous conduct and in refusing to physically rise from his knees to meet Britomart's challenge. Furthermore, Artegall retains an authoritative male position precisely because he disobeys Britomart's command – even after having wrongly attacked her – and his obedience to chivalric protocol. Despite the wide critical consensus that Artegall was overcome by Britomart's feminine beauty, his disobedience exhibits his subscription to masculine autonomy of bodily expression. In refusing to rise to Britomart's 'level' he accepts his wrongdoing but asserts his pacifism for male versus female combat.

Spenser's solution to the problematic image of a woman bearing dominion over her husband is wilful female submission. Britomart, "looking sterne"(23.4) upon the prostrate Artegall, slowly recognises her destined lover's face, which she had seen "in that enchaunted glasse..."(II.ii.26.6) and her "wrathful courage gan appall, / And haughty spirits mekely to adaw, / That her enhaunced hand she

downe can soft withdraw.”(26.7-9)⁶⁶ Almost instantaneously, Britomart assumes the subordinate position within the scene, relinquishing the power and authority she has gained while cross-dressed. Spenser’s depiction of female submission solves the problem of Artegall’s “errour ... That had done outrage in so high degree”(22.6-7) because his mistake is rendered inconsequential once Britomart realises who he is. Just as Britomart’s undisguising renders Artegall powerless, Artegall’s revelation causes Britomart to revert back to her “Mayd”(III.ii.23.5) characterization of Book III.

From stanzas 27 to 43, Spenser adopts a more traditional metaphor of ‘love’s chase’, as the image of proper courtship between aristocratic lovers reduces the impression of wrongdoing that a man battling a woman, and a woman crossdressing, would have produced. Spenser replaces the homoerotic charge of the previous physical battle with a hetero-erotically charged emotional battle between the more traditional female Britomart and male Artegall couple construct. Once undisguised, Britomart battles her own feminine emotions, attempting to control her external markers of passion as female aristocratic figures of modesty were expected to. In vain, she attempts to deploy a “feyning choler”(27.2) and, using her body to protect herself, she “arm’d her tongue”(27.7) with a hand “again vpheld”(27.1) against the kneeling Artegall. Spenser imagines Britomart unable to sustain emotional distance, however, as her “hand fell downe, and would no longer hold / The wrathfull weapon gainst his countenance bold,”(27.4-5) just like Artegall’s sword in stanza 21. Just like her hand that “would no longer hold”(27.4) her weapon, Spenser depicts Britomart’s personified tongue’s preference to have “brought forth speeches myld”(27.9) rather than “scold”(27.7) Artegall for attacking her. Spenser depicts Britomart’s internal battle as just as reliant upon performance as her knightly disguise had been. She feels a “secret feare”(29.3) at the thought of giving up her authority to Artegall, despite the “sudden ioy[joy]”(29.3) she experiences upon recognising her fated husband. Yet she “fayned still her former angry mood, / Thinking to hide the depth by troubling of the flood”(29.8-9) continuing to simulate an emotional distance from the man kneeling before her. Britomart’s intention to control

⁶⁶ The power and control which female lovers are shown to have over their male counterparts, as a result of their piercing and militantly innocent female gaze, is noteworthy here. Britomart’s authority over Artegall is perceivable in her *looking down* upon the kneeling man before her while he begs for forgiveness. The pair of female eyes over masculine authority is also noted as Shakespeare in *The Merchant of Venice* when Bassanio swears by the power and clarity of Portia’s “own fair eyes.”(5.1.242) McManus (2002) similarly argues that “Britomart assumes the role of desiring subject, rendering Artegall the object of her own gaze and fantasies in a reversal of the usual Petrarchan pattern.”(p. 126)

her emotional “flood”(28.9) testifies to her powerful emotional attachment to Artegall and her modest attempt to conceal it – an effort for which Spenser’s contemporaries would have applauded her. The animalistic erotic love chase must still ensue, though, once the crossdresser’s female body is revealed.

Both Artegall and Britomart conceal their emotional responses to Glauce’s pronouncement of their conjoined “love, / That is the crowne of knighthood, and the band”(IV.vi.31.6-7) of matrimonial rings:

Thereat full inly blushed Britomart;
But Artegall close smyling ioy’d in secret hart.

(The Faerie Queene, IV.vi.32.8-9)

Britomart, not unlike her actions while cross-dressed during Book III (ii.11.1; ii.15.3; iv.11.1) conceals her shamefastness at Glauce’s unabashed declaration, while Artegall is secretly pleased by Glauce’s mention of matrimony, keeping his own “secret hart”(IV.vi.32.9) concealed from spectators. Stanza 33 depicts Artegall’s initial attraction to Britomart, because of her “modest countenance”(IV.vi.33.5) and “princely aw,”(IV.vi.33.5). Spenser rationalised the attraction in hierarchical terms, with the use of animal imagery to express how Artegall plans to pursue her. His “passion grew more fierce”(33.8) while he imagines wooing Britomart and bringing her under his control “Like to a stubborne steede whom strong hand would restraine.”(33.9) Again, the motif of the masculine “strong hand”(33.9) subduing Britomart re-emerges. Spenser envisages her in animalistic terms as a disobedient horse, as a potentially controllable force if placed under Artegall’s custody.

As expected, Artegall effectively overcomes Britomart, wooing her by laying a “continual siege vnto her gentle hart, ... How euer she paynd with womanish art / To hide her wound,”(IV.40.vi.4-8). Spenser’s implication is that a “gentle [gentile]”(40.4) woman’s ability to feign indifference can only last for so long, if she is attracted to a gentleman. In this way, Spenser reassures his audience “that at length vnto bay he brought her,”(41.3) evoking hunting imagery once more. Hamilton (2013) states that Britomart is wooed “vnto bay”(41.3) by Artegall “to the last extremity when a hunted animal is forced to face its pursuer.”(p. 457) The emphasis upon Britomart’s having been forced to disclose her attraction towards Artegall, being “content / To lend an eare, and softly to relent,”(42.5) is significant.

Artegall wins the game of courtship as Spenser's contemporaries would have expected. Yet Britomart's victory is clear in her insistence that Artgall should assume the chivalrous pursuer role, as she relinquishes her 'unwomanly' martial potency in favour of traditionally 'feminine' flirtatious indifference. In adopting the standoffish countenance of an early modern noblewoman, Britomart ensures that Artgall commits himself to the expected courtship performance that elite early modern society anticipated of two lovers while forging marital bonds. Once she has been relieved of her crossdressing disguise, Britomart immediately assumes a new simulation: of her original innocent characterization. Yet Artgall's understanding of the two shifts diminutively, from pursuing an armed military opponent, to the taming and ownership of a wilful 'horse', the metamorphosed woman. Spenser only presents Britomart's final weapons against Artgall in their battle for power – her feminine beauty (21.9), hair (20.1) and "angels face"(19.5) – as momentary distractions. He swiftly persuades her to marry him, and "shortly"(42.9) afterward, he even "wonne her will to suffer him depart;"(43.2) to continue his quest alone, so quick to "forsake"(42.9) her. Britomart must once again "inly"(44.3) contain her emotions, despite having cast off her knightly apparel to become Artgall's wife.

Britomart's military disguise appears divested of its magical powers after the couple's marriage, as Anderson (2018) notes, "Britomart's armor, having made its point, has little import in the rest of Book IV,"(p. 115) and she seemingly reverts to a more submissive role within *The Faerie Queene* after achieving her own quest to wed Artgall. When Britomart and Scudamore are attacked in VI.ix by Claribell, Blandamour, Paridell and Druon, the "warlike Dame"(IV.ix.30.1) proves unable to overcome them singlehandedly, as she had in Satyrane's "late Turney"(IV.ix.28.7) of IV.iv, before she had married Artgall. Britomart attempts "To speake to them, and some emparlance moue,"(IV.ix.31.2) rather than physically overcome the four men as she would have done before her marriage, perhaps because her "armour now appears more practical than further significant"(Anderson, 2009) having served its functional purpose to deliver the virgin to her "Lord"(IV.vi.41.8) with her chastity intact. Spenser utilises the "cruell hands"(IV.ix.31.3) motif and animalistic imagery again, likening the attackers to "eager mastiff[s]"(IV.ix.31.5), to express that the

attackers have the combatant advantage in battle. Britomart's distinctly feminine, defensive, response to these attackers typifies her new role as a knight's wife, rather than a "warlike Mayd"(III.i.63.6), mirroring the concept that Shakespeare integrated into *Twelfth Night* when Duke Orsino claims that Viola had performed the page-boy role "so much against the mettle of [her] sex,"(5.1.316). Likewise, having married Artegall, Britomart acts in a manner better suited to her marital state and gender, Spenser argues. Furthermore, Britomart's inability, or rather, unwillingness, to conquer the assailants provides "the Briton Prince"(IV.ix.32.1) Arthur with ample room to fill the 'capable saviour' role within the plot, which Britomart no longer claims for herself. Prince Arthur fights in Britomart's stead – "he to their aide address,"(IV.ix.32.5) – in similarity to Sebastian's unsuspectingly passing for his sister Viola-as-Cesario in 4.1 while he duels Sir Andrew. Spenser's Sebastian-figure Arthur fills the combatant role that the female crossdresser has thus far "usurped"(5.1.246). Spenser presented Britomart as an unthreatening figure to Elizabethan norms after she secures her matrimonial objective: the crossdresser now chooses to epitomise the perfect image of womanly submission.

Only when Britomart hears of Artegall's capture and enslavement to another woman in Book V does she present any threat to male knights within *The Faerie Queene* again. Anderson (2018) asserts that it is this very news that "reopens the issue of the armor's signification with a vengeance."(p. 117) Britomart fights the Amazon queen Radigund in V.vii to claim her husband back from a physical embodiment of, what Spenser deems "malicious"(V.iv.29.8), matriarchy. During Artegall and Radigund's first fight, she is likened to a queen "Bee"(V.iv.36.7), a "Lionesse"(V.iv.39.6), "a Beare"(V.iv.40.6), and "A Goshauke"(V.iv.42.4) short-winged hawk impeaching upon Artegall's "Eagle ... Empire"(V.iv.42.1-2). She is more animal than human, and when her humanity is referenced it is done in a matriarchal fashion as Artegall's "huge stroke ... had [almost] depriu'd her mother of a daughter."(V.iv.41.5-7) Her female followers "in clusters swarmed"(V.iv.36.7) on Artegall, metamorphosing as often as their leader, seemingly as changeable in nature as a herd of chameleons. They become birds who "flockt"(V.iv.43.6) supportively around their queen when she is struck, and are considered "like a sort of sheepe"(V.iv.44.7), many in number but unintelligently and blindly following their leader. During this battle, the Amazons are animals, while their ringleader is

characterised as anything but a ‘natural’ human woman: “half like a man”(V.iv.36.8) but merely imitative.

During Radigund and Artegall’s second encounter, Radigund is again called a “greedie Beare”(V.v.9.7) before Artegall overpowers her in hand-to-hand combat. It is her revealed body – her beauty, much like Britomart’s – that proves the decisive force in defining an outcome. Radigund’s “face, ... A miracle of natures goodly grace”(V.v.12.1-3) surprises Artegall and grants her the ultimate advantage. He, “with pitifull regard, ... cursing his hand”(V.v.13.2-4), wilfully submits his control over the conflict.⁶⁷ Spenser depicts Artegall surrendering his power by returning to the falconry imagery of their previous battle, with one distinct difference. Hamilton (2013) states that “Artegall is no longer the royal eagle driving the scavenger goshawk from its prey ... but a gentle Faulcon, a *female* peregrine falcon beaten by a buzzard.”(p. 541) Spenser not only uses a less powerful bird to describe Artegall metaphorically here, but also highlights his effeminised state resulting from the experience. Artegall embodies that weakened, once-authoritative, male figure that Spenser’s contemporaries dreaded. His “womans weedes”(V.v.20.7) complete the then unsettling characterisation of the effeminate man who faces “the crueltie of womenkynd, / When they haue shaken off the shamefast band,”(V.v.25.1-2) and awaits his rescuer wife. Unquestionably, Britomart’s armour becomes highly significant when contradistinguished with Radigund’s warlike attire and her husband’s “vnmanly maske”(V.v.37.9).

Throughout the warrior-women’s battle, both are characterised as predatory felines, “a Tygre and a Lionesse”(V.v.30.1), who fight over the possession of “some hungry pray”(V.v.30.2) – Artegall – with “equall greedienesse”(V.v.30.3).⁶⁸ Hamilton (2013) states that “The Tygre is Radigund, a beast noted for its cruelty (e.g. viii 49.7-8), as she is; ... The Lionesse is Britomart, the royal beast, which

⁶⁷ Worth mentioning, however, when distinguishing the Amazonian warrior queen from the Briton crossdressing princess, is that Radigund achieves victory over Artegall through the revelation of her beautiful face, not the surprise that she is a woman, nor because of her femininity. Her hair – unlike Britomart whose “yellow heare”(IV.vi.20.1) receives an entire stanza to prove the purity of her femaleness – receives no mention whatsoever. Radigund is not deemed feminine in any way by Spenser, and Artegall chooses to submit to Radigund through pity and because he would not wish to spoil the “miricale”(V.v.12.3) of her unlikely superficial beauty. She is even referred to as male in stanza 13 in an effort, I argue, on Spenser’s part to assure his audience that the man-like woman (V.iv.36.8) is still unnatural despite her outer beauty.

⁶⁸ Schwarz (2000) interprets the scene as a reversal of gender roles, as “in the battle between Britomart and Radigund, the vision of two knights fighting for a lady reappears, but the ‘lady’ is Artegall.”(p. 157)

she carries on her shield.”(p. 228) I suggest that these figurations cannot be clearly defined like this however. Spenser figures Radigund as “a fell Lionesse”(V.iv.39.6) claiming royal lineage and power as an Amazon queen. Both are referred to as cruel throughout the epic, not merely during this fight.⁶⁹ Moreover, the indistinguishability of the women during their animalistic scrap over Artegall is evident in stanzas 29 to 31, having been widely acknowledged by Spenserian criticism.⁷⁰ Eggert (2000) argues that “the two women warriors *are* distinguishable: the fray is described as a challenge between a tigress and a lioness,”(p. 41, my emphasis). Yet, the lion and tiger are animals that, despite their exterior superficial differences and their separate geographical ‘territories’, hold relations with one another as the two of largest species within the *Panthera* genus. The women’s weapons are, like many throughout the poem, regarded as animalistic entities which can physically bite into their prey. Radigund’s blade, or “claws”(30.4), as detailed in stanza 30, “bit / Vnto the bone”(33.2-3) of Britomart’s shoulder before the crossdressing warrior promptly beheads the Amazon queen. Spenser presents Britomart and Radigund with equal martiality, as mirror image representations of one another, fighting over the same spoils and deriving from the same animalistic family and social background. This explains how Radigund can to inflict such “a grisly wound”(33.3), not simply, as Anderson (2018) indicates, because Britomart’s “armour is now mere armour, finally and fully drained of its potency and multivalence.”(p. 118) Indeed, as Adams (2015) has suggested, “The fight between Radigund and Britomart is presented not so much as a clash of opposites but instead as a clash of similarities.”(p. 7) The two women’s bodies become truly indistinguishable as Spenser

⁶⁹ In Book IV Britomart deals Artegall a “cruell dent”(IV.vi.15.9) and the readers are reminded of “that cruell stroke / Which Britomart him[Marinell] gaue, when he did her prouoke”(IV.xi.5.8-9) in Book III, iv. This point however should not detract from the weightier cruelty of Radigund throughout Book V. Radigund’s warrior women have “cruell hands”(V.iv.23.8) the first time Artegall encounters them, and Radigund’s “cruel hate”(V.iv.30.1) is referenced a further eight times throughout Book V (iv.30.1; iv.39.3; iv.40.6; v.7.3; v.14.4; v.25.1; v.47.1; vii.33.1).

⁷⁰ Cobb (1990) persuasively argued, “Spenser often presents us with good and bad examples of the same kind of figure. Thus Britomart represents an acceptable warrior-woman [...] opposed to the unnatural, mannish Radigund.”(p. 110) Harvey (1992) noted that “they [are] described in similies that suggest equality, but, at certain moments, they become virtually indistinguishable,”(p. 41) while Cavanagh (1994) states that “Ironically, Britomart shares more prominent personality traits with these two critically abjured women [Acidia and Radigund] than she does with her fellow virtuous virgins, such as Florimell and Amoret.”(p. 169) Eggert (2000) points out “not only do Radigund and Britomart resemble each other in looks and actions, as many critics have noticed, but Artegall crucially consents to his bondage”(p. 38) to Radigund and that “Britomart’s task is, evidently, to subdue herself.”(p. 41) Bellamy (2010) suggests that “the provocative Amazon queen, [is] quite possibly Britomart’s alter ego.”(p. 281)

depicts the conflict in dualistic terms, as “their sides ... their armes ... their liues”(31.6-8) are amalgamated into a significantly intertwined unit. Spenser even dehumanizes Radigund and Britomart altogether as they “hackt and hewd, as if such vse [of weaponry] they hated,”(29.9) implying that the women’s beastly instincts are reflected in their wish to fight one another without falchion blades at all, instead using their bare hands.⁷¹ Moreover, because they are so similar in nature, Radigund is able to “wound”(33.3) Britomart deeply, like no other character has managed before.

These warrior women cannot be distinguished simply from having been labelled as either ‘good’ or ‘bad’ by Spenser. They are formulated as mirror images, or “alter-ego[s],” (Bellamy, 2010, p. 281) of one another, both have a noticeable capacity for cruelty and battle with an indistinguishably “*equall greedinesse*”(V.v.30.3, my emphasis). There are distinct resemblances between them. Both women are dangerous to Spenser’s version of patriarchy within his epic poem, but as Adams (2015) notes, “Spenser never refers to Britomart as an Amazon”(p. 6) unlike Radigund. What is important here is not which woman proves more threatening to patriarchal authority – given their equal capacity for cruelty and competency in martial combat – but *how* they are threatening in their independent ways. Does Spenser present them as exerting their transgressive martial prowess to consolidate, or subvert, or reject altogether, traditional Elizabethan gender codes? Radigund represents a brazen alienation from female subordination, symbolising instead a brazen female rejection of servitude to enforced patriarchal structures, like marriage, and offering an alternate destiny for Britomart.⁷² The Amazonian queen is a possible figure that the martial princess could have become throughout the course of Books III to V, as she consistently conquers male opponents, winning women for herself only to permit their wandering free of their own volition, like Snowy Florimell (IV.v.20-28) and Amoret (IV.vii.4; IV.vi.34-35). Her powerful female militancy against male aggression would have been a distinctly

⁷¹ Spenser pictures the women using “their faulchins [...] Which they now hackt and hewd”(V.vii.29.1-9) at one another’s bodies and “dainty parts, which nature had created / So faire and tender”(V.vii.29.6-7). Hamilton (2013) notes that the “faulchins”(V.vii.29.1) were short weapons associated with rouses and bandits, very unlike the knightly spear and sword which Britomart usually utilises during combative episodes, further emphasising their animalistic approach to battling one another. Indeed Anderson (2018) agrees that their weapons’ “semicircularity qualifies their phallic potency [but that] the whole encounter suggests, their battle is the undoing of Mars and Venus, tiger and lionesse, both.”(p. 117)

⁷² Hamilton (2003) notes that Radigund’s name “may allude to the sixteenth-century French nun Radegund, who refused to consummate a forced marriage. [...] Or to the valorous Persian queen Rhodogune, in Philostratus, *Imagines* 2.5, who prays to conquer men. Or to Rhodogune who killed her nurse for even suggesting that she remarry (T. Cooper 1565).”(p. 536)

threatening image to Spenser's readership, as she did "restore / The prize to knights of Maydenhead that day,"(IV.iv.48.1-2) in Satyrane's tourney, overcoming "all of them"(IV.iv.46.2) that faced her. Significantly, despite her consistent victories over male antagonists, Britomart beheads Radigund "with one stroke"(V.vii.34.6) and favours "restoring [Radigund's followers] / To men's subiection, [and by doing so] did true Iustice deale"(V.vii.42.6-7) in Spenser's estimation. It is Radigund and Britomart's differing preferences of rule and authority – not how animalistic, how cruel, or how militant they are, or are *not* – that mark them as 'different' from one another. As Harvey (2006) asserts, "Britomart's encounter with Radigund, as a parodic version of herself and a perverted example of female heroism, shows that heroism in women is laudable when it serves (and is subservient to) male heroism."(p. 967) Britomart's chose to endorse male authority in Fairy Land, rendering her an anti-villain, exactly the mirror image of tyrannous Radigund. Britomart's crossdressing disguises are conveyed as servicing the status quo, not retaliating it, regardless of that clear potential to do so. Spenser illustrates Britomart as a 'shadow' of Elizabeth I again, when "she there as Princess rained,"(V.vii.42.3) after defeating the embodiment of dangerous matriarchy Radigund.⁷³ Spenser depicts an alternate ending for Elizabeth's fictional shadow, given Britomart rules "in Artegall's name [as] she restores true Iustice ... to the commonwealth"(Hamilton, 2013, p. 560). In clear contradistinction from Elizabeth's own version of queenship, Britomart marries Artegall, and governs from a position of accepted subordination to an authoritative ruling male agent. Artegall's absence is unimportant. Spenser ensures that his heroine's willing subscription to patriarchal values forgives her transgressive militancy and self-misrepresentation throughout his epic poem.

⁷³ Britomart is even referred to as being regarded by Radigund's original followers as their adored "Goddesse"(V.vii.42.8), highly indicative of Elizabeth I's own preferred emblems throughout the duration of her reign. Of course, Spenser's ensuring that Britomart rules and deals (significantly) Justice in Artegall's stead would have been a very thin line to tread, in terms of dedicatory references to England's own unmarried "Princess"(V.vii.42.3).

Conclusion

The aim of this dissertation has been to engage with Dollimore and Sinfield's (1994) "consolidation, subversion and containment"(p. 10) model to explore how images of feminine rebellion in Edmund Spenser and William Shakespeare's works could potentially threaten established gender norms of Elizabethan culture. Figures of female transgression within these works are due particular attention given the insecure variant of patriarchy that had emerged out of Elizabeth I's reign, and the insistent iconography that was encouraged throughout the final decades of the Virgin Queen's rule. Guy (2017) surmises that during the 1590's "there was no point in urging marriage upon a barren woman, but it also highlighted the succession issue all the more acutely"(p. 401) and writers began to broach the taboo subject ever more persistently, both onstage and in print.

Spenser presented a facet of Elizabeth's persona in *The Faerie Queene's* crossdressing Knight of Chastity, Britomart. The fictional martial princess infringes upon the social borders of her father's kingdom to fulfil her supposed destiny, and consistently vanquishes other male knights within the Fairy Land when attacked. However, Spenser presents her subversion of Elizabethan patriarchy as forgivable, due to the self-containment of her own transgressive powers that she displays throughout the poem. Britomart disguises herself to break the rules, but opting to function as an invisible agent wherever possible. She never knowingly defeats her future husband Artegall in battle, and submits to his authority when they are together. She even restores him to his position of power as husband after defeating Radigund the figurehead of matriarchy within *The Faerie Queene*. Spenser therefore consolidates early modern notions of patriarchy in exhibiting Britomart's self-containment.

The Shakespearean crossdressers examined in this dissertation do not assemble into a subversion, containment or consolidation category together, as should be expected. Julia exhibits the notion of containment in the clearest way of them all, as she only reveals herself during the revelation scene of *The Two Gentlemen* to explain why she would "neglect"(5.4.88) her assumed pageboy duty in not passing on Proteus' second-hand ring to Silvia. She shifts the blame of transgression from herself to

Proteus, in terms of emotional constancy when she proclaims, “it is the lesser blot modesty finds, / Women to change their shapes than men their minds.”(5.4.107-108) Viola, probably gladly, falls under the containment category due to the carnivalesque structure of *Twelfth Night*, and because Viola’s Cesario figure becomes a wholly uncontrollable entity as social situations thrust themselves upon the fabricated male identity: an affectionate admirer; a duel with a rival; and a marriage between the male identity and an admirer that the crossdresser cannot recollect. Indeed *Twelfth Night* requires containment, in the form of a problem-solving twin brother, or, failing that, the reassurance that the comedic festival play will doubtlessly reach its conclusion. *As You Like It’s* Rosalind is a genuinely subversive figure in her actions while cross-dressed, undermining male authority in terms of marriage and courtship. Nevertheless, she subscribes to patriarchal values of marriage, producing for herself a situation where she can contain the mayhem generated from the powerful transgressive Ganymede disguise she had created. The marriages at the end of the play assert that, despite Rosalind’s transgressive behaviour while posing as the Shepherd boy Ganymede, her vow to “make these doubts all even”(5.4.25) is upheld, and audiences may decide for themselves “to like as much of this play as please you.”(Epilogue, lines 12-13). Portia’s instance of subversion is convoluted. She operates as an obscure force of knowledge which helps the ‘good’ Christian men of *The Merchant of Venice* escape Shylock’s “sentence”(4.1.294), and then returns home to Belmont undiscovered. She safely contains the transgressive deed committed, even aiding her husband’s wishes in the process. However, while disguised as Balthazar the lawyer, Portia gains her “vantage to exclaim”(3.2.174) upon Bassanio by receiving her own wedding ring from him as a token of his appreciation for saving Antonio in court. She therefore simultaneously contains the immediate threat to Elizabethan gender norms that she poses while acting the lawyer in court, but also subverts the structure of gendered authority that Elizabethan society recognised by gaining control over her husband after returning home. The final lines of the play, spoken by Gratiano, “Well, while I live, I’ll fear no other thing / So sore as keeping safe Nerissa’s ring,”(5.1.306-307) attest to Shakespeare’s suggestion that any woman within early modern society could establish an advantage over their marriage partners, regardless of social station, which could have been both humorous and unsettling for his audiences.

Indeed the potential for female subversion of patriarchal structures appear to vary extensively depending on each crossdressing plot examined. Early modern writers and playwrights clearly made an effort during Elizabeth I's reign to suggest that crossdressing women could be forgiven for their transgressions, if they exhibit their subscription to patriarchal values in terms of marriage and courtship, as with Rosalind and Britomart, or in their valuing male fidelity above all else with Portia and Julia. Yet even as these women are largely forgiven for their misdemeanours, there are moments in every example of crossdressing examined here that imply that female misrepresentation and insubordination can often lead to a dangerous inversion of the power positions between the sexes, from a sixteenth-century perspective. Sinfield (2006) confirms that a "writer may impose an ultimate closure on the themes of the text, but the reader is at liberty to mistrust or disregard it [as] no text can control the terms of its reception."(p. 121) Nevertheless, the answer to whether or not Elizabethan audiences regarded Shakespeare and Spenser's crossdressers as inherently unnatural, eligible for retribution through their belief in, and adherence to, patriarchal values, or unforgivable figures of female subversion, remains ambiguous.

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