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“WHEN THOU ART A MAN”:
THE CONTINGENT GENDER IDENTITY OF SHAKESPEARE’S PAGE-BOY

By
Heron Kennedy

An Honors Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for Honors
in
The Department of Arts and Sciences

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“WHEN THOU ART A MAN”:
THE CONTINGENT GENDER IDENTITY OF SHAKESPEARE’S PAGE-BOY

An Undergraduate Honors Project Presented

By

Heron Kennedy

To

The Department of English

Approved:

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Project Advisor                  Date

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Honors Committee Chair           Date

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Department Chair                 Date
Part 1. An Introduction to Early Modern Sex and Gender

At the level of biology, the early modern conception of sexual difference was, in many ways, much more fluid and less rigidly compartmentalized than our contemporary constructs. Galen’s second-century one-sex theory of male and female anatomy was commonly accepted by not only the general public, but also physicians and scientists, until the end of the sixteenth century (Schiebinger 76). According to Thomas Laqueur, Galen’s theory was “the most powerful and resilient model of the structural . . . identity of the male and female reproductive organs” (4), and central to this theory was the idea “that women were essentially men in whom a lack of vital heat—of perfection—had resulted in the retention, inside, of structures that in the male are visible without” (Laqueur 4). In his model, by which Galen asserts that the only fundamental difference between men and women was a level of heat, Galen asks,

Think first, please, of the man’s [external genitalia] turned in and extending inward between the rectum and the bladder. If this should happen, the scrotum would necessarily take the place of the uterus with the testes lying outside, next to it on either side. . . Think too, please, of . . . the uterus turned outward and projecting. Would not the testes [ovaries] then necessarily be inside it? Would not the neck [the cervix and vagina], hitherto concealed inside the perineum but now pendant, be made into the male member? (qtd. in Laqueur 25-26)

Galen’s polite request that we imagine the male reproductive organ within a body, and then the female reproductive system outside of it, not only makes a case for the inherent sameness of male and female anatomy, but also suggests that “the sexes are linked” by shared anatomy, rather than divided by differing physicalities (Laqueur, *Making Sex* 26).
Galen was one of many voices in the early modern study of human sexuality, and as his ideas and their variations were phased out, bodily differences became more central to the discussion of sex and gender difference. Prior to the trend toward opposite sexes during the eighteenth century, however, almost every difference between men and women was attributed to either too much heat, or not enough. Even physiological processes, such as menstruation, were linked to heat. Laqueur writes, “In the blood, semen, milk, and other fluids of the one-sex body, there is no female and no sharp boundary between the sexes” (35). Women menstruated, in the one-sex view, because they lacked heat and therefore were more likely than men to produce an excess of nutriment. Hippocrates believed that both menstruation and nosebleeds were indicators
that a fever would soon break, and it was also believed that women menstruated less in summer than in winter. Like blood, milk was also thought to be the result of coolness, and Aristotle stated that some men did produce small amounts of milk, and could produce more if milked frequently and consistently (Laqueur 36). Every bodily difference stemmed from how much heat a body had, and since heat was thought to fluctuate, such as during a fever, the level of warmth within a body was never stable. By extension, the unstable nature of heat meant an inherent instability of sex and allowed for slippage between male and female functions and behavior.

The one-sex theory that dominated early modern thought distinguishes far less between men and women than later sex/gender systems and allows for a higher potential for movement between male and female, and thus, Shakespeare’s time was one in which “at least two genders correspond to but one sex, where the boundaries between male and female are of degree and not of kind” (Laqueur 25). These differences of degree, different from later beliefs in differences of kind, were fairly easy breached, as is evidenced by the fact that the solely female task of producing milk was thought to be open to men. Therefore, gender difference in early modern England was not firmly rooted in biological difference. According to Jean Howard, “Because male-female difference was . . . less grounded in ideas of absolute bodily difference than is typical today, much emphasis was placed on behavioral differences and on distinctions of dress” (“Introduction” 1595). Because of the emphasis on socially constructed gender difference, crossdressing and the adoption of behaviors primarily associated with the opposite gender undo gender at its most potent level—that is, the level of social discernment rather than biological difference. Bearing in mind the one-sex mentality of Shakespeare and his early modern audience allows us, as contemporary readers and audience members, to accept perhaps more readily that the characters’ physical bodies do not tie them to the gender they have been ascribed. In fact, the
bodies themselves have little bearing on the gender of the characters, since on the page their bodies are hypothetical, on the stage they were all male, and in the dominant ideology, they were all one sex distinguished only by fluctuating degrees of heat. That a male actor could convincingly embody a female character was already a given, so a female character extending the dynamics of gender fluidity that were already an accepted aspect of their stagecraft and appropriating traits associated with societal standards of masculinity would not be outrageous to an early modern audience. As women became more defined by their physical bodies toward the end of the seventeenth century (Schiebinger 70), the opportunities for gender play and fluid gender identity both on and off the stage take on a different significance. The one-sex theory provided a cultural atmosphere within which gender had great potential for fluidity, but that potential did not disappear with the emergence of binary gender; rather it took on different meanings in that new context.

Valerie Rohy’s concept of contingency provides one way of approaching gender fluidity in the era of the one-sex theory of biological sameness. Rohy defines "contingency" as "the condition of . . . being open to the play of chance, or of free will . . . of being subject to chance and change, or of being at the mercy of accidents" (59). Rohy discusses contingency in terms of sexuality, arguing that desire is mutable, and not fixed in orientation, as she likens sexuality to a constantly turning wheel. According to Rohy, sexuality is not inherent; it is instead contingent upon circumstance or accident, and always has the potential to turn. She frames her discussion of contingent sexuality around Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, a play in which "the language of conversion is striking" (56), and focuses her discussion on Celia, whose affections seem to shift rather abruptly from Rosalind to Oliver by the play's close. For Rohy, contingent sexuality opens the door to sexual identities that remain in constant motion, which both act upon and are acted on
by external circumstances. Though her queer analysis focuses on sexuality, Rohy’s model of contingency also offers a lens through which to investigate the similarly unstable world of gender in both the contemporary world and early modern England. In light of the one-sex theory’s unstable gender system, as well as contemporary understandings about sex and gender, gender could be seen to be as contingent as desire.

This project expands upon Rohy's ideas of contingent sexualities to explore contingent gender identity in Shakespeare’s crossdressing plays—that is, to borrow from Rohy's model of contingent sexual identity to understand the gendered self as constantly in motion, and never fixed or rooted in a stable gender binary. *As You Like It* contains, in addition to Celia’s contingent desires, a trope common in Shakespeare's works: a lovely, cross-dressed girl, whose transition from young lady to page-boy to young lady mirrors Celia's sexual conversion that Rohy discusses; like Celia’s sexuality, Rosalind's gender is fluid and changeable. She, as well as the other cross-dressed heroines in Shakespeare's page-boy plays, exhibits an ability to transcend the gender binary and exist in a state of constant mobility, in which her gender, like Celia's sexuality, always has the potential to turn. These characters exist within two liminal worlds—an early modern culture which does not root gender in biological difference, and the transient, performative world of theatre, in which all identities are contingent. These two environments afford them considerable room for movement, which extends the gender mobility that existed in reality to the even more mobile world of the stage. This project interrogates to what extent Shakespeare’s page-boys are able to move between genders, occupying one, two, or none, at any given time, through the lens of a genderqueer approach, and it is my belief that the insights provided by this queer approach to gender may assist modern audiences in retrieving the gender ambiguity in which these heroines were first crafted and performed. The discussion of
contingency in gender does not, and is not intended to, discount the validity of gender identities, but rather to explore and expand the ever-growing possibilities of gender and gender identification. Of course, crossdressing characters like Rosalind, Viola from *Twelfth Night*, and Portia from *The Merchant of Venice* have all been discussed considerably by critics who approach these characters' arcs, staging, and gender fluidity from a variety of angles, including feminist, gender, and queer theory. However, these discussions are almost all rooted in gender binaries—whether through discussion of boy actors becoming women characters, or women characters becoming men—and neglect to consider the liminal space outside of the gender binary, in which characters transcend traditional gender classification by simultaneously embodying characteristics of the social constructions of both "man" and "woman." By expanding the conversation to include genderqueer studies, I will argue that these characters function as proto-genderqueer, and discuss a contingent gender identity that these characters may lay the groundwork for. My primary focus will be on Rosalind/Ganymede in *As You Like It*, Viola/Cesario in *Twelfth Night*, Innogen/Fidele in *Cymbeline*, and Portia/Balthasar in *The Merchant of Venice*. Each of these figures utilizes crossdressing, as well as other types of gender performance, as a form of contingent gender identification, and each is impacted by their adoption of "masculine" garb and characteristics, with Rosalind as the prime example of contingent gender identification.

Part 2. Contingency and Genderqueer Mobility

Much scholarship into Shakespeare’s page-boy plays centers on the potential disruptions, and ultimate restorations, of the gender binary as embodied in the central cross-dressed heroine. Feminist critic Jean Howard, for example, in her essay “Crossdressing, The Theatre, and Gender
Struggle in Early Modern England," discusses how crossdressing can be seen as subversion of gender roles, but also how it can be viewed as a way of restoring traditional gender roles, through the restoration of “proper” gendering at the ends of the plays. Queer critic Mario DiGangi explores how crossdressing reveals homoeroticism in the plays as well as in the lives of Shakespeare's early modern audience. Lisa Jardine interrogates the playing of female roles by boy actors, and the impact this practice had on the presentation of gender. These are just a few examples in a long list of work that interacts with Shakespearean crossdressing, and while each of these explorations is worthwhile, these essays notably focus on how crossdressing subverts a socially stable paradigm of gender, rather than exploring the ways that these gender-fluid characters may actually reveal that the socially constructed paradigm itself is unstable.

Expanding Rohy’s notions of sexual contingency to questions of gender identity, Shakespeare’s crossdressing characters could then be said to move between genders at will, or by chance, or even embody more than one gender at one time, and thus reveal the slippery foundation upon which notions of gender are constructed. For example, Viola, in *Twelfth Night*, describes her cross-dressed self as a "poor monster" (2.2.32). The term "monster" carried slightly different connotations in the early modern period, as a monster was most often meant to be "a mythical creature which is part animal and part human, or combines elements of two or more animal forms" (*OED s.v. monster, n.1*). Monsters, aside from the grotesque, carried the connotation of pluralism, and in Viola’s monstrous plurality, he/she lacks an essential gendered core. By self-identifying as a monster, Viola calls attention to her plural gender identities: she is not just a woman, and has not turned into a man; rather, her gender hovers at the intersection of various gender identities at the same time, and thus, she laments, “I am not what I am” (3.1.131). Viola’s choice of phrasing here — “I am not what I am,” as opposed to the more conventional “I
am not what I seem”—implies that there is no stable identity hidden beneath a disguise. In other words, she lacks an essential core and can only describe her being by negating it; instead, she is caught in a constantly turning state of gender contingency—a plural state that she can only describe as monstrous.

Rohy’s “contingency” is rooted in queer theory, a post-structuralist literary movement that destabilizes identity and addresses sexuality, gender, and other socially constructed identifiers. As a queer theorist, Rohy focusses her argument on sexual desire, arguing that “the notion of conversion presumes that some aspects of character are inessential and impermanent — that is, contingent” (57). Though Rohy is discussing desire, it is not a stretch to apply similar ideas about contingency to gender and gender expression. In fact, sociologist Erin Calhoun Davis echoes Rohy in her article on transgender identification and argues that, “gender perceptions and identities are negotiated with particular people in particular settings and are contingent on the form and function of particular interactions” (100). In Calhoun’s model of gender contingency, as is the case in Galen’s one-sex theory, gender becomes inessential and impermanent and destabilizes the gender binary, just as contingency unsettles notions of same-sex/opposite-sex desire in Rohy’s model. In other words, Davis’s model of contingency “queers” the constructs of gender.

Contingent gender identity is located within a larger genderqueer framework that seeks to destabilize, or queer, the limits of gender. Madhavi Menon writes that queerness “challenges the limits of what we understand as the body. It expands its ambit to include discussions of the universe, animals, and rationality” (7). In short, queer theory destabilizes every kind of boundary, binary, and compartmentalization. The term “genderqueer” is a blanket term that covers any gender identity that sits outside of the gender binary. Emerging in the mid-1990s,
“genderqueer” encompasses, “individuals or groups who ‘queer’ or problematize the hegemonic notions of sex, gender and desire in a given society. Genderqueer people possess identities which fall outside of the widely accepted sexual binary (i.e. ‘men’ and ‘women’)” (“International Spectrum”). Because of genderqueer theory’s acknowledgement of nonbinary gender and deconstructive approach to identity, it is a constructive lens through which to view gender contingency in Shakespearean texts and performances, especially as this kind of nonbinary approach may offer insight into the similarly nonbinary construct of early modern gender.

On a blog called Outward: Expanding the LGBTQ Conversation, a 2015 post titled “What the Heck is Genderqueer?” reveals the diversity of identities that fall outside the binary. Even within the transgender community, individuals often identify with either transmale or transfemale, thereby accepting and living within the binary. Genderqueer, or “nonbinary,” is something else. In fact, it is many somethings else. According to the blog post, “Some genderqueer individuals undergo surgery or take synthetic hormones, while others do not. Some genderqueer people continue to identify partially with one gender, others do not. What they share is a deep, persistent unease with being associated only with the binary gender assigned to them from infancy — apart from that, their expressions, experiences, and preferences vary greatly from individual to individual.” The importance of these widely differing experiences cannot be overstated, as “the increasing diversity of gender experiences challenges the taken-for-granted binary divisions of gender” (Davis 98). Nonbinary individuals destabilize what may feel like an inherent, immovable system. The existence of nonbinary people, however, did not begin with the term genderqueer; anxieties about gender-nonconforming individuals were present in the early modern period as well. According to Howard, in early modern England “there are records of women who did [crossdress], and who were punished for their audacity; and from at least 1580
to 1620 preachers and polemicists kept up a steady attack on the practice” (“Crossdressing” 418). Thus, a genderqueer approach opens up the experiences of early modern gender-nonconforming individuals and characters to be read without the restrictions of a dualistic sex/gender system.

The wide variety of gender identifications that have emerged in the last two decades is a testament to the varied relationships with gender that nonbinary people experience. In a study conducted on transgender discrimination, the National Center for Transgender Equality conducted a survey that included 16 genders other than “male” and “female” that participants could select, along with a space labelled “other, please specify.” Some of these genders included: transgender, transsexual, FTM (female to male), MTF (male to female), intersex, gender nonconforming or gender variant, genderqueer, A.G. or Aggressive, third gender, two-spirit, drag performer (King/Queen), and others (Harrison, et al. 17). Even this list does not encompass all gender experiences. Instead, it provides a peek at the recent expansion in gender studies and identification. One response option, however, directly connects to the idea of gender contingency, and suggests that it is something that contemporary people experience. Under the question “What is your primary gender identity today?” there is an option to select “Part time as one gender, part time as another” (Harrison et al. 17). This directly suggests that it is possible for people to spend time moving between genders, rather than existing stagnantly within one gender identification. This experience could be described as an “endless turning” of gender identification, as Rohy describes contingent sexuality (57). Just as Rohy casts sexuality as a constantly turning wheel, gender can be experienced in the same way.

Although the possibilities for gender identities are expanding, the dominant culture still accepts man/woman as the existing gender binary. As such, when Shakespeare plays are taught, viewed, or read, it is generally under the assumption that the characters are either male or female.
In much the same way that early modern audiences viewed the plays with the one-sex theory as their dominant sex/gender system, contemporary audiences, in turn, approach the plays through the lens of a dualistic sex/gender system. Even with the advancement in queer and transgender studies, the gender binary is still very much a rooted part of contemporary society. This binary is entrenched in biological sex differences, and therefore allows very little room for movement. Queer and trans theory activists often seek to “destabilize gender categories rooted in biologically deterministic gender paradigms” (Davis 98), which expands the world of gender and causes a breakdown of seemingly stable gender barriers. Shakespeare’s page-boy heroines work in a similar way. By embodying more than one gender over the course of a play, and occasionally more than one at a time, these characters destabilize the traditionally accepted gender system, and present a fluid gender identity that reflects on the anxieties that surrounded sex and gender in the early modern period.

Part 3. *As You Like It*’s Protean Ganymede

The title of *As You Like It* immediately prepares readers and audience members for the potential for fluidity, as Ardenne Forest provides space for things to be as one likes them, from one moment to the next. This play offers an alternative perspective to that prescribed by the rigidly defined rules of life at court. Rather than adhering to the rules of birthright, primogeniture, class barriers, and other customs, *As You Like It* allows its characters a contingent space that is free from courtly rigidity, and allows them to pursue their desires, however they may like them.

It is typical for pastoral works like this one to celebrate a romanticized version of life outside the court, and even more significantly, “Elizabethan pastoral forms may have worked to
mediate differential relationships of power, prestige, and wealth in a variety of social situations, and to have variously marked and obfuscated the hierarchal distinctions—the symbolic boundaries—upon which Elizabethan social order was predicated” (Montrose 418). *As You Like It* fully embraces this boundary-breaking concept. Social barriers, including those of class and gender, are dismantled as the characters make their way into the woods. Duke Senior reveals the transformative power of the woods in his monologue that opens act two, in which he exclaims, “Now, my co-mates and brothers in exile,/ Hath not old custom made this life more sweet/ than that of painted pomp?” (2.1.1-3). The Duke, once a man of considerable power, has in his exile accepted his subjects as his brothers. His comparison between the “old custom” and the “painted pomp” of court life and the sweetness of life in the woods is also significant here, in that his words suggest the staleness and artificiality of their traditional, rigidly prescribed ways of living, in contrast to the pleasures of an atmosphere that allows for the free pursuit of desire. This introduction to the play’s primary setting makes it clear to the audience that the social barriers and hierarchies that govern life at court crumble in the face of this new, more fluid environment, and the result is that of pleasure and experimentation. As Howard writes, *As You Like It* “uses the pastoral mode to cast a critical eye on social practices that produce injustice and unhappiness” (“Introduction” 1593). Life at court is juxtaposed against life in the woods, and social constructs and binaries fall apart without the rigid rules of court society.

Fittingly, Duke Senior’s moment of forest-induced clarity comes immediately after Celia and Rosalind hatch their plan to escape to the woods in disguise, with Rosalind dressed as a young man named Ganymede. As Rosalind travels through the woods, the line between pretending to be Ganymede and actually identifying as Ganymede blurs. Her setting parallels her own fluidity, as it is a forest, seemingly wild, yet filled with nobles. Shakespeare has carefully
mirrored his binary breakdowns, situating Rosalind, who disrupts the gender binary, in the forest, which disrupts the binary of untamed woods versus noble court. Duke Senior further displays the blurring lines of nobility and wilderness in his speech in act 2, scene 1, as he describes the “chiding of the winter’s wind” as “counsellors,” and tells his company that he “finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks, sermons in stones, and good in everything” (2.1.7-17). By introducing nobility and concepts that are typically reserved for civilized society into the wilderness of the forest, Duke Senior is flipping traditional notions of “civilized” versus “uncivilized,” and likewise turns the forest into a place of fluidity. This fluid forest setting matches Rosalind’s own fluid identity, as he/she moves freely between court and woods, just as he/she does between the seeming binaries of gender. By structuring these two scenes back to back, Shakespeare parallels two violations of social order, and in doing so implies that gender, like class hierarchy, may not be as stable outside of the highly regimented world of the court.

When Rosalind chooses her new identity, it is no coincidence that she selects the name “Ganymede.” Just as Celia’s new name, Aliena, “hath a reference to [her] state” (1.3.121), so too does Rosalind’s. While “Aliena” refers to Celia’s exiled status and her estrangement from her home and family, “Ganymede” refers to Rosalind’s gender nonconformity. The name “Ganymede” has its roots in Greek mythology, and was the name of “a beautiful boy whom Jove desired and whom he seized and carried to Mount Olympus to be a cupbearer to the gods” (Howard, “Introduction” 1596). The name carried strong implications in Shakespeare’s time, and was generally used to refer to any young male subject of homoerotic desire. As DiGangi points out, “homoerotic desire for a male subordinate informs the early modern institution of personal service for which the myth provided a recognized classical analogue. Orlando and Ganymede are therefore legible as a sexually involved gallant and page—a familiar couple in . . . late sixteenth
century London” (57). The audience’s first introduction to Rosalind’s Ganymede is in act 2, scene 4, which Rosalind begins by announcing, “O Jupiter, how weary are my spirits!” (2.4.1). Her exclamation of “O Jupiter” is a reference to her new identity as Ganymede, since Jupiter is an alternate name for Jove. It is important to recognize that in this moment, the only characters onstage with Rosalind/Ganymede are Celia and Touchstone, both of whom are aware of Rosalind’s alternate identity. There is no need for her to pretend in this moment. Her connection to Jupiter, and by extension, Ganymede, does not come from a place of deceit, but instead is the conscious choice of someone choosing their own identity, and the result of what Rohy calls an “endless turning” (57). Rosalind endlessly turns between Rosalind and Ganymede; from her telling exclamation at the start of this scene to the switching she attempts later in the play when coaching Orlando, Rosalind’s gender is never stable from this point on. By naming herself Ganymede, Rosalind fully embraces her androgyny, and her state as a gender-fluid individual.

Rosalind/Ganymede also makes it clear that she/he is still sexually available to Orlando. The mythological Ganymede is always depicted as a lovely boy, technically male, but having features that are feminine and beautiful. Marlowe, Shakespeare’s contemporary, describes “a lovely boy in Dian’s shape” (qtd. in Johnson 191). This was not an uncommon description for Ganymede. As Nora Johnson notes, “the celebration of an eroticized fluidity of self relies implicitly on the fixity of the boy as an androgynous erotic object, giving him a sexuality that has little or no relation to any desires he might be imagined to express. His body is, thus, paradoxically both fluid and fixed: fluid in its failure to adhere to any one gender and fixed in its permanent ambiguity” (Johnson 191).

Rosalind mirrors Ganymede’s paradoxically fixed and fluid state: though she adopts a male identity in order to pursue her love, once she does so, her desires become largely irrelevant
to those around her, which is why she is almost forced to marry Phoebe. Those surrounding 
Rosalind/Ganymede become captivated by her/his androgynous beauty, to the point where 
Phoebe falls instantly in love with Ganymede. Her description of Rosalind’s Ganymede is typical 
of Ganymedes in general, and she speaks of a kind of beauty and attractiveness that only exists in 
a person who does not conform to binary gender:

‘Tis but a peevish boy. Yet he talks well. 
But what care I for words? Yet words do well 
When he that speaks them pleases those that hear. 
It is a pretty youth—not very pretty . . . 
He’ll make proper man. The best thing in him 
Is his complexion; and faster than his tongue 
Did make offence, his eye did heal it up . . . 
There was a pretty redness in his lip, 
A little riper and more lusty red 
Than that mixed in his cheek. (3.5.110-123)

Strikingly, Phoebe’s description of Rosalind/Ganymede is laid out in remarkably fluid language 
in this passage, as she describes each of Rosalind/Ganymede’s attributes as an undefined, liminal 
quality between polarities. Phoebe details the alluring, slippery nature of her subject of desire, 
describing her/him as a “pretty youth,” though “not very pretty”; as “peevish,” but who still 
“talks well”; and as someone who “did make offence,” but who also healed that offence. Her 
language here describes someone who lives in the in-between spaces of seemingly rigid binaries: 
someone who is able to be both pretty and not pretty, offensive and inoffensive, and annoying 
yet eloquent. Everything about Rosalind/Ganymede is in a mixed state, even down to the color
on their cheek. The uniqueness of this Ganymede is that he/she is a combination of masculine and feminine traits, which Phoebe cannot help but find erotic. Before this scene takes place, however, these genderqueer polyerotics are already heavily suggested by Rosalind’s new name. That she chooses the name through her own autonomy suggests that her gender fluidity is, at times, in her control.

Where the gender play becomes complicated is when Rosalind begins to interact with Orlando as Ganymede. Not only do her interactions with him create moments of queer eroticism, they also blur the lines of gender so thoroughly that it is difficult to tell where Rosalind ends and Ganymede begins. Rather than switching back and forth between the two personas, and therefore two genders, Rosalind spends such a significant amount of time turning that her gender exists mainly in a liminal space between “male” and “female.” In an effort to determine Orlando’s true feelings for Rosalind, Rosalind/Ganymede creates a role-playing game in which “he” will pretend to be Rosalind so that Orlando can overcome his infatuation with “her.” It is during these role-playing activities that the layers of gender play are once again increased, as the boy actor playing Rosalind has taken on the masculine role of Ganymede, who is adopting yet another role as the fictionalized, feminine Rosalind. Rosalind/Ganymede has now turned, yet again, to a new identification, this one more complicated than the last. The Rosalind that appears before us now both is and is not the Rosalind we, and Orlando, first encountered onstage. Rosalind’s constant turning between identities undermines any stability that might be found in her/his gender identities, and therefore she/he proceeds in a contingent state. To further illustrate this point, during the role-playing interactions with Orlando, Rosalind continuously refers to herself as Rosalind in one moment, and then refers to Rosalind in the third person in the next. “Am not I your Rosalind?” she asks, and in her next line asserts “Well, in her person I say I will not have
you” (4.1.75-79), demonstrating her fluid movement within her varied gender identities. Her plan to train her love to woo her is particularly indicative of her ability to turn. She tells Orlando that she has successfully helped another fall out of love, and describes the encounter as such:

He was to imagine me his love, his mistress; and I set him every day to woo me.
At which time would I, being but a moonish youth, grieve, be effeminate, changeable, longing and liking, proud, fantastical, apish, shallow, inconstant, full of tears, full of smiles; for every passion something, and for no passion truly anything, as boys and women are for the most part cattle of this color—would now like him, now loath him; then entertain him, then foreswear him; now weep for him, then spit at him, that I drave my suitor from his mad humor of love to a living humor of madness, which was to foreswear the full stream of the world and to live in a nook merely monastic. (3.3.365-376)

Like Phoebe, Rosalind/Ganymede describes her/himself as someone who moves between binaries, as she/he will one moment be “full of tears,” the next “full of smiles,” then would “like him, now loath him; then entertain him, then foreswear him.” The language here echoes Phoebe’s earlier assessment of Rosalind/Ganymede as existing in a perpetual, unfixed state of transformation. It is also most telling that she describes women and boys as being linked by common behavior. She does not even separate them in her speech by commas; they instead are together as one entity of the same “color.” It is similarly fitting that she describes herself as moonish, which means “changeable” or “fickle” like the phases of the moon (OED s.v. moonish, adj. 1). Rosalind/Ganymede is indeed a changeable youth, and changes her gendered behaviors constantly throughout the play, and even here within a single scene. One particularly illustrative moment is when she tells Orlando that Rosalind “will laugh like a hyena . . . when thou art
inclined to sleep” (4.1.132). Not only is the image of a hyena appropriate here because hyenas are known for their seeming laughter, but it is also appropriate because “according to medieval and Renaissance animal lore, the hyena experienced an annual sex change” (DiGangi 57). Appropriately, Rosalind aligns herself with the sex-bending hyena in her ability to switch between the identities of Rosalind and Ganymede, and her choice of phrasing here implies that she is aware of her mobility of gender.

Rosalind’s mobile gender identity bears significant ramifications for her relationship with Orlando, which develops while Rosalind is identifying and behaving as Ganymede. Aside from the homoerotic implications of the name Ganymede, the relationship that Orlando and Rosalind/Ganymede cultivate is one that heavily mirrors the traditional relationship of a gallant and a subservient boy. While Orlando began his interactions with Ganymede in the spirit of role-playing, as the relationship develops, he seems genuinely to embrace Ganymede, or at least, Ganymede’s Rosalind, as his love. One scene in particular that implies Orlando’s acceptance of Ganymede as Rosalind is act 4, scene 1, in which Celia “marries” Rosalind/Ganymede and Orlando. Celia asks Orlando, “Will you, Orlando, have to wife this Rosalind?” Celia’s phrasing in asking if Orlando will take “this” Rosalind is key here, in that the insertion of the word “this” suggests that another Rosalind—presumably the one Orlando first encountered at Court—exists, and that Orlando has a choice of Rosalinds. His assent signals his ready willingness to accept this version of Rosalind, though he understands her to be a role-playing Ganymede, as soon as Celia can marry them. The interaction that follows does not suggest that Orlando wishes to wait for the “real” Rosalind, but instead suggests that this one, this combination of boy and woman, has perhaps become his new “real” Rosalind:

ORLANDO. I will.
ROSALIND. Ay, but when?

ORLANDO. Why now, as fast as she can marry us.

ROSALIND. Then you must say ‘I take thee, Rosalind, for wife.’

ORLANDO. I take thee, Rosalind, for wife. (4.1.111-116)

Also significant here is the fact that during the early modern period, it was not necessary for clergy to be present for a marriage to be legitimate (Muir 37). The requirements for marriage differed by location, but the consistent rule was that “church law merely required the mutual consent of both parties to be valid” (Muir 37-38). Since both parties here are clearly consenting, it can be read that Celia truly is marrying Orlando to Rosalind/Ganymede.

In addition to this scene, Orlando’s love for Rosalind/Ganymede (as opposed to just Rosalind) is once again displayed two scenes later, when Oliver comes bearing a message from his brother. Orlando’s description of Ganymede, we discover from Oliver, is that “the boy is fair,/ Of female favour, and bestows himself/ Like a ripe sister” (4.3.84-86). Once again, like Phoebe’s depiction of Ganymede, he/she is described using language that is slippery, in its assignation of both “boy” and “female.” In addition, Orlando charged Oliver to deliver his blood-soaked handkerchief to “that youth he calls his Rosalind” (4.3.91). A gesture so in keeping with traditional lovers’ escapades would seem odd if Orlando loves the Rosalind of the court, and not the Rosalind he has found in Ganymede, but Orlando’s request to find the youth he calls “his Rosalind” shows that there is no real distinction between the two for Orlando. Further, the image of a blood-soaked handkerchief is also reminiscent of the blood-soaked wedding sheets that represented the consummation of marriage, which further confirms the idea that Orlando really has married Ganymede/Rosalind. Bloodletting, or “the letting of blood (both a private and a public act) is the coup de maître of . . . economic and sexual matrimonial rights” (Little 222), and
the gift of the blood-soaked handkerchief immediately following the wedding suggests a consummation of Orlando’s marriage to Ganymede’s Rosalind. This scene is queered further by the fact that it is Orlando’s blood on the handkerchief, not Rosalind’s, which implies that Orlando has taken on the female role in this bloodletting ritual. This act not only allows Orlando to mirror his love’s gender contingency, but it also demonstrates their shared physiologies, as prescribed by Galen’s one-sex theory. It also adds another moment of sudden gender conversion, in keeping with the constant turning that permeates the play.

As Oliver delivers the handkerchief, he also tells the story of Orlando’s fight with the lioness, and includes the detail that he “cried in fainting upon Rosalind” (4.3.148). In turn, Rosalind/Ganymede faints at the news and at the sight of Orlando’s blood. In response, Oliver tells Rosalind/Ganymede, “Be of good cheer, youth. You a man!/ You lack a man's heart” (4.3.191-192). Sheepishly, Rosalind/Ganymede acknowledges this behavior as being a feminine reaction, but blames it on the “Rosalind” role “he” is playing. While Rosalind’s fainting could be seen as a revelation of a feminine core, that stability is destabilized by the fact that Orlando has also just fainted. If fainting is, in fact, a female physiological process, it is also an act shared between genders, and, in this moment, by two figures who are caught in an endless turning. This moment, therefore, further destabilizes the gender binary.

The gender subversion that the crossdressing in *As You Like It* and other page-boy plays generates has not been ignored by scholars. However, critics have argued that Shakespeare only reaffirms gender stereotypes and the essential nature of womanhood by including typically feminine behaviors that slip through the heroine’s disguise, such as Rosalind’s fainting spell at the sight of Orlando’s blood. In the words of Linda Woodbridge, “a woman’s essential nature . . . shines through any kind of clothes” (qtd. in Ko 22). Not only is this view locked into a binary
that assumes Rosalind could not embody more than just either male or female genders, it also
does not take into account the importance of clothing in expressing and creating gender
difference in early modern England. Given the inherent instability of sexual biology within the
one-sex theory, gender itself was comprised primarily of clothing and behavior. As discussed
previously, the Galenic one-sex theory did not attribute gender difference to bodily difference to
nearly the same degree that contemporary sex systems do. Significant emphasis was placed on
clothing to distinguish between the sexes, since bodily difference did not. Dress and behavior
were heavily regulated by clergy in order to keep these distinctions sharp. Clothing was used to
categorize and delineate differences between class, gender, royalty, and more. The importance of
clothing could not be lost on Shakespeare’s audiences, who lived with these laws, and within the
one-sex ideology, every day. In a one-sex world especially, “female crossdressing, however
playfully undertaken, always threatened to expose the artifice of gender distinctions, by showing
how easily one sex could assume the clothes and ape the behavior of the other” (Howard,
“Introduction” 1596). To further this point, female crossdressing also questioned the basis of
sexual hierarchy, as “the cross-dressed woman, liberated into the realm of patriarchal privilege,
suggested the potential subversion of the male right to control female action, so behind the comic
device was a deep-rooted complex of anxieties” (Hyland 141). By providing women freedom via
masculine clothing, their inherent “lesserness” is put into question. According to Peter Hyland,
the widespread use of disguises used onstage in this time period, including cross-dressed
disguise, reveals “a deep-seated anxiety about the nature of the self in early modern culture”
(136). These anxieties were directly tied to the importance of clothing in early modern culture,
and since dress was directly connected to the self, the removal of that important signifier by
crossdressing would leave gender in a state of uncertainty. By having Rosalind and others adopt masculine clothing and behaviors, the inessential nature of gender is revealed.

Celia even points out that Rosalind’s new identity is influencing her, and acknowledges the importance of clothing by exclaiming, “We must have your doublet and hose plucked over your head, and show the world what the bird hath done to her own nest” (4.1.172-174). Celia is implying that Ganymede exists in the clothing Rosalind wears, and that without the disguise the boy would disappear. But in her admonition of Rosalind, Celia points out that her behavior, too, has become more suited to a man. Celia tells Rosalind that she had “simply misused [their] sex in [her] love-prate” (4.1.172), implying that her disguise has turned Rosalind into a misogynist. Celia is acknowledging that Rosalind has become what she has been pretending to be. By embracing her new identity, Rosalind seems to switch between her traditional female identity and her new masculine one at will, which creates an identity which is intersexual and never stable.

Critics who argue that Shakespearean crossdressing does not subvert gender roles base their argument primarily on the fact that at the ends of the plays, traditional gender is restored. For example, “Shirley Staton has remarked that the culminating marriages in numerous plays rebind ‘the anarchic forces of gender-free identity loosed by transvestite disguise. Law, order, and authority—in short, the paternalistic world, is [sic] firmly established’” (Ko, “Mutability and Division” 195). No matter what may seem to be subversive during the play, by the end, the fact that the characters return to their initial selves negates any real comment on gender the play may seem to make. However, while this argument has other flaws, perhaps the most significant is that Rosalind fails to adhere to this pattern. She, unlike any of the other cross-dressed heroines, maintains her gender fluidity through the end of the play and into the epilogue, which expands
the world of the play much like how Rosalind expands ideas about gender and the seemingly rigid categories that gender exists within. Although she does cast off her Ganymede attire, Rosalind reminds the audience of something extremely significant in her epilogue: that her gender has never been stable, and is not still:

> It is not the fashion to see the lady the epilogue; but it is no more unhandsome than to see the lord the prologue . . . I am not furnish'd like a beggar; therefore to beg will not become me. My way is to conjure you; and I'll begin with the women. I charge you, O women, for the love you bear to men, to like as much of this play as please you; and I charge you, O men, for the love you bear to women-as I perceive by your simp'ring none of you hates them- that between you and the women the play may please. If I were a woman, I would kiss as many of you as had beards that pleas'd me, complexions that lik'd me, and breaths that I defied not; and, I am sure, as many as have good beards, or good faces, or sweet breaths, will, for my kind offer, when I make curtsy, bid me farewell. (5.4.1-19)

In this epilogue, Rosalind points to the fact that from the beginning, her gender has been in question: she is a female character played by a boy actor who, in the course of the play, adopts a masculine persona and then impersonates herself. Here, Rosalind refers to herself as both a lady and a boy, by introducing herself as “the lady” in the beginning, but then saying that “if [she] were a lady” (emphasis added), she would kiss all the male audience members that she found attractive at the end. This epilogue suggests that she embodies both the masculine and the feminine at the same time, or that she has the power to embody either at different moments, and that the fluid performance of gender does not end at play’s close, but continues through the epilogue. By embodying both socially constructed genders, Rosalind is able to move beyond this
binary to exist in a constant state of mobility. She reminds the audience here that, not only has she, the character been playing with gender, but he, the actor is a protean figure that moves through several identities, including gender identities. That this speech is delivered as an epilogue further complicates its implications. An epilogue itself is liminal, existing both within the world of the play and outside it, as the player is both in character and yet an actor soliciting response from the audience. It is fitting, then, that this epilogue addresses gender. By including it as an epilogue, it becomes both a metatheatrical reflection and, perhaps, a reminder that gender fluidity may not exist only on the stage.

Part 4. Monstrous Gender: The Dualism of the Feminine Page-Boy

As Rosalind’s epilogue begins to articulate, gender fluidity, particularly as related to crossdressing, existed outside of the London playhouses as well as on the stage, and had become a part of the everyday cultural reality for Londoners in the seventeenth century. Anxieties surrounding androgynous people revealed themselves in the cautionary pamphlets and writings that were published at the time, which warned the public of the dangers presented by people who did not conform to their assigned genders, particularly regarding clothing. Texts such as *Hic Mulier* and *Haec Vir* express these anxieties and serve now as evidence of early modern people who did not conform to gender expectations. *Hic Mulier, or The Man-Woman* is “a rather conventional diatribe against women who betray their sex by assertive or immodest behavior, and particularly by dressing like men” (Gunn, bibliographical note). Published in 1620, *Hic Mulier* presents strong opposition to crossdressing as a practice not on the stage, but in the streets of London. The author writes, “for since the daies of Adam women were neuer so masculine; masculine in their genders and whole generations, from the mother, to the youngest daughter . . .
masculine in Case, euen from the head to the foot . . . they were, are, and will be still most masculine, most mankind, most monstrous” (1). The language of this piece expresses the deep disdain that some felt for women who did not conform to their assigned genders. That these pamphlets existed and so strongly opposed crossdressing supports the idea that Shakespeare’s plays were reflecting offstage anxieties that surrounded issues of gender identity. Another example exists in William Harrison’s *Description of England*, published in 1587, in which he writes of cross-dressed women: “I have met with some of these trulls in London so disguised that it hath past my skill to discern whether they were men or women. Thus it is now come to pass that women become men and men transformed into monsters” (qtd. in Clark 160-161). “Trull” here means prostitute, which further points to anxieties regarding sexuality, and the temptation that could be caused by a mannish-woman. The use of the words “monster” and “monstrous” in both of these pieces specifically implies disgust at the dualistic nature of these masculine women. The word “monster,” as previously discussed, referred to plurality in a way that it does not today. In addition, it also carried the connotation of being “extraordinary or unnatural,” and “malformed” (*OED* s.v. *monster*, n. 1, n. 2, n. 3). These “monstrous” accusations likely encompassed a cross-section of all of these definitions, including plurality, deformity, and an inexplicable extraordinariness.

Plural gender expressions may have been seen as dangerous, even disgusting, as the cautionary pamphlets suggest, however the true dangers of these “monsters” may have resided in the “extraordinary” beauty and eroticism that can be found in displays of a multi-gendered identity. Viola, Innogen, and Rosalind all find themselves attracting sexual attention from both men and women, and each of these polemical tracts seems to caution against the “unnatural” desires aroused by gender noncomformists. Viola’s use of the word “monster” to describe herself
in act 2, scene 2 is, therefore, very much in keeping with how audiences were likely to have felt about people like her. At this point in the play, Viola has found herself caught in a love triangle between Duke Orsino, who she loves, and Olivia, who loves her masculine persona, Cesario (and who is loved by Orsino). In order to find employment and a place to live, Viola has adopted the identity of Cesario, a eunuch who becomes a servant to Duke Orsino. Viola’s choice to be a eunuch speaks to her ambiguity of gender, for eunuchs were considered to occupy a space between the genders, as neither fully male nor female. The confusion engendered by her attire and persona has placed her in an uncomfortable position; she is hurt that she is unable to openly pursue Orsino, and she feels guilt for the hurt she will cause Olivia. As Viola laments,

Disguise, I see, thou art a wickedness,
Wherein the pregnant enemy does much . . .
How will this fadge? my master loves her dearly;
And I, poor monster, fond as much on him;
And she, mistaken, seems to dote on me.
What will become of this? As I am man,
My state is desperate for my master's love;
As I am woman,—now alas the day!—
What thriftless sighs shall poor Olivia breathe! (2. 2. 25-37)

This monologue is particularly telling of how Viola/Cesario views her/his own gender. Beginning with her self-described status as a monster, Viola points to her dualism and the problems it has caused her. Once she outlines her predicament, that she loves Orsino, Orsino loves Olivia, and Olivia loves Cesario, she continues to describe how her dualistic identity impacts her. Notably, like Rosalind/Ganymede, Viola/Cesario describes her/his identity using
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simultaneously masculine and feminine terms: “As [she is] man,” she cannot openly pursue her love, and “as [she is] woman,” she will cause Olivia pain by being unable to receive her love. Her dualism affords her opportunity—of employment, adventure, and eroticism—but it also confuses relationships and creates issues unique to those with plural gender identities. He/she is, as defined by her monstrous identity, both dualistic and extraordinary.

While Rosalind fully embraces her contingent gender identity, both Viola and Innogen, the lead in Cymbeline, represent a different way of living as gender fluid/contingent individuals. Though they both require their masculine identities for survival, and also find excitement and adventure from the adoption of their masculine roles, they also at times resent their dualistic nature and status as a combination of traits that have been socially delineated as masculine and traits that have been deemed feminine. Their resentment of themselves as genderqueer is unsurprising, given the social climate at the time when Shakespeare was writing. The literature and cautionary tales of masculine women and feminine men would have been reflected in Shakespeare’s work, even as he disturbed and dismantled gender hierarchy. Viola’s relationship with Olivia is similar to Rosalind’s relationship with Phoebe, and in this case, it is even more apparent that what attracts Olivia is Viola/Cesario’s non-adherence to any one binary gender. The interactions between Olivia and Viola bear strong resemblance to those between Rosalind and Phoebe, in that Viola is also almost cruel to Olivia, and Olivia responds with adoration. Also like Phoebe, Olivia is attracted to Cesario’s ambiguity of gender, and will not allow him to enter until Malvolio has described his liminal nature:

Not yet old enough for a man, nor young enough for
a boy; as a squash is before ’tis a peascod, or a
cooling when ’tis almost an apple: ’tis with him
in standing water, between boy and man. He is very
well-favoured and he speaks very shrewishly; one
would think his mother's milk were scarce out of him. (1. 5. 139-144)

Though Malvolio does not overtly mention femininity until he describes Cesario’s voice as shrewish, it is clear that there is something about this boy that puzzles him. Malvolio describes Cesario as unfinished, as “a squash is before ‘tis a peascod.” That Cesario is unfinished as a man implies his underlying femininity, as in the one-sex theory, women were unfinished, imperfect men. Though Malvolio cannot seem to find the words to describe this odd youth, his words point to liminality and blurring of gender—especially as he points out that the boy seems full of milk.

It is at this point that Olivia, having already asked about the boy at her gate several times, allows Cesario to enter. Already, she is drawn to his multiplicitous self, and when she finally meets him, she becomes even more seduced. Viola has unwittingly become an alluring Ganymede figure.

Olivia’s reaction to Viola/Cesario is strong and wistful, and she “feel[s]this youth’s perfections” deeply, even though she has sworn off men since the death of her father (1.5.266). It is fitting, then, that the youth she falls in love with is not fully a man, but rather exists in the space between boy and woman.

The comparison between Viola/Cesario and Ganymede grows stronger by the fact that, similar to how the mythological Ganymede was a cupbearer to Jove, Viola/Cesario is a servant to Orsino. Their coupling, even before she reveals herself to be Viola, would be familiar to London audiences, as previously discussed with the coupling of Rosalind/Ganymede and Orlando.

Similar to Malvolio’s description of Cesario and Olivia’s erotic attraction to him, Orsino too seems attracted to Cesario’s liminal beauty. The moments of intimacy that Viola/Cesario and
Orsino share point to Viola’s dualism, and display how Orsino further eroticizes his young page. Orsino states:

Dear lad, believe it;
For they shall yet belie thy happy years
That say thou art a man. Diana’s lip
Is not more smooth and rubious; thy small pipe
Is as the maiden’s organ, shrill and sound,
And all is semblative a woman’s part. (1.4.28-33)

His description of Cesario is reminiscent of Marlowe’s “lovely boy in Dian’s shape,” and similarly conflates boyhood and womanhood. His comparison of Cesario’s “small pipe” to a “woman’s organ” has, fittingly, a double meaning. His small pipe is, of course, his high pitched voice, which Orsino compares to a woman’s voice. But it also refers to Cesario’s small penis, which, Orsino says is like a “woman’s organ”—that is, a vagina. The doubleness of this innuendo further destabilizes Viola/Cesario’s gender identity, and creates an identity that combines multiple elements of “maleness” and “femaleness.”

Similarly, Innogen’s Fidele is alluring as a boy whose femininity attracts admirers and creates moments of polyeroticism. Like Viola, Innogen’s boy identity is born of necessity—she has been threatened with murder by her love, who believes her to be unfaithful, and must also avoid being wedded to the cruel Cloten, her stepmother’s son. When Innogen does adopt her boy persona, she finds herself similarly attractive to older males, which ultimately saves her. When Innogen meets Belarius, Guiderius, and Arviragas in the woods, their response to Fidele is to lament that he is not a woman, and then resolve to love him as a brother since they cannot woo him as a woman:
GUIDERIUS. Were you a woman, youth,  
I should woo hard but be your groom. In honesty,  
I bid for you as I'd buy.

ARVIRAGAS. I'll make't my comfort  
He is a man; I'll love him as my brother:  
And such a welcome as I'd give to him  
After long absence, such is yours: most welcome!  
Be sprightly, for you fall 'mongst friends. (3.6.67-72)

As with Ganymede and Cesario, Fidele seems to have an attractive quality that is almost magical. The extraordinariness of her monstrous gender makes her alluring as a figure that is almost mythical. The love that these two suddenly bear for her is what prompts them to care for her in the woods, and vow to keep her safe from harm. That these people, at first glance, should love Fidele (as Phoebe loves Ganymede, and as Olivia loves Cesario) seems as supernatural as the nectar that causes Lysander to love Helena. The mystical quality of these youths stems from their beauty as figures who fall somewhere between masculine and feminine, as the laments of those who love them display.

Innogen/Fidele’s journey through place and time, like Rosalind/Ganymede’s journey through the woods, matches her fluidity of self. The structure of Cymbeline is more similar to As You Like It than it is to Twelfth Night, in that the structure itself is unstable, and environments and tone change quickly. In one moment, audiences watch an unsettling near-rape in Innogen’s bedroom in Britain, in another, Posthumus and Giacomo arguing in Rome, and soon afterwards meet the jovial brothers in the woods of Wales, who, even when murdering Cloten, are funny. The disjointed nature of the play itself, like the binary-destabilizing woods in As You Like It,
matches Innogen’s contingency of gender. Innogen’s adoption of her new identity is, of course, prompted by more dire circumstances than Rosalind’s. Innogen and Viola both adopt their masculine identities due to necessity of circumstance. This, however, does not negate the contingent nature of Innogen and Viola’s gender identification, as the “transversing and inhabiting of multiple gender categories remains context and purpose specific” (Davis 100-102), an assertion that Pisanio’s description of how Innogen must become Fidele supports:

You must forget to be a woman; change
Command into obedience, fear and niceness—
The handmaids of all women, or more truly
Woman it pretty self—into waggish courage,
Ready in gibes, quick answered, saucy, and
As quarrelous as the weasel. Nay, you must
Forget that rarest treasure of your cheek,
Exposing it—but O, the harder heart!—
Alack, no remedy—to the greedy tough
Of common-kissing Titan, and forget
Your laboursome and dainty trims wherein
You made great Juno angry. (3.4.154-164)

Pisanio’s description here is not that of disguise, but of transformation. Innogen must not disguise her womanhood; she must forget it entirely. The “handmaids of all women,” or, as Pisanio corrects himself, the markers of womanhood itself, must change to masculine traits, and even her delicate face must become more rough by being exposed to sunlight and weather. It is significant that where Pisanio locates gender is not rooted in the biological, but instead refers to
learned, performable characteristics. Pisanio’s assertion that “woman it pretty self” is defined by “fear and niceness,” and that masculinity is defined by traits such as quarrelousness, speaks to the fact that gender is built on a series of performances, including learned behavior and clothing choices. Pisanio’s suggestion of transformation is met readily by Innogen’s response, in which she tells him, “I see into thy end, and am almost / A man already” (3.4.166-167). The phrasing here suggests not only that she is receptive to adopting a masculine persona, but that she has already begun her transformation into a man. Innogen’s identity changes rapidly, and, based on her assertion that she is suddenly a man, is clearly contingent on her circumstances Evidence of her immediate conversion further exists in her next lines, in which she states that she is “soldier to” the plan, and that she will “abide it with a prince’s courage” (3.4.183-184). Her identification with a soldier and a prince speaks both to her dualism of class, as she is a princess turned servant, and her dualism of gender.

Pisanio’s somber description of how Innogen must appropriate traits associated with masculinity is similar to the gleeful plan hatched by Portia in *The Merchant of Venice* to adopt her own masculine persona. She, too, appropriates traits that are associated with the socially regulated masculine gender identity. Unlike Innogen, Portia’s plan is her own, and is therefore more similar to Rosalind’s willing transformation. In order to save her new husband’s friend from what seems to be certain death, Portia proposes that she and Nerrissia will dress as boys. She tells Nerrissa,

I’ll hold thee any wager,

When we are both accoutered like young men

I’ll prove the prettier fellow of the two,

And wear my dagger with the braver grace,
And speak between the change of man and boy
With a reed voice, and turn two mincing steps
Into a manly stride. (3.4.62-68)

Though Portia spends less time turning than Rosalind, her monologue about how simple it will be to assume masculinity is worth examining. She, too, shows potential for protean gender, and even speaks of her voice being in the liminal space between a man and a boy’s. Rosalind’s conflation of women and boys is echoed here, and the implication is that Portia’s “reed voice” will be indistinguishable from a boy’s, as well as from a woman’s. Portia moves away from detailing how she will manifest masculinity in a physical way to begin discussing the masculine behavior that she will adopt. She continues that she will:

. . . speak of frays
Like a fine bragging youth, and tell quaint lies
How honourable ladies sought my love,
Which I denying, they fell sick and died.
I could not do withal. Then I’ll repent,
And wish for all that that I had not killed them;
And twenty of these puny lies I’ll tell,
That men shall swear I have discontinued school
Above a twelvemonth. I have within my mind
A thousand raw tricks of these bragging Jacks
Which I will practise. (3.4.68-78)

According to Portia, the markers of masculinity can be boiled down to bragging, lying, fighting, and taking large strides. This passage is a strong example of why crossdressing on the stage was
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a subversive act. Portia deconstructs masculinity to its most base elements, and argues that

gender is nonessential, to which the logical conclusion is that it is possible to move through and

between genders. Neither the clergy nor sumptuary laws can control identity, be it gender or

otherwise, if individuals refuse to follow these regulations. Nerrissa echoes this concern, asking

Portia in her next line, “Why, shall we turn to men?” (3.4.79). This line has a double meaning,

the first being simply “shall we turn into men?”, but also has sexual implications: “shall we turn

to men” also asks if they will turn to men for sex, evoking, once again, the gallant/Ganymede

sexual relationship. Perhaps they do not turn to men, but rather participate in the constant turning

introduced by Rohy, between and in between binary genders.

The dangers of crossdressing in early modern England, both on and off the stage, have

already been outlined and discussed, and it would seem that each of these characters disrupts the

sex/gender system. However, it can be argued that certain characters actually uphold traditional

gender, mainly by the fact that they return to their assigned gender at the ends of the plays.
Howard argues that Viola’s arc, in particular, is the most recuperative of the female page-boys’.
She feels that Portia, with her gender defying adoption of a masculine career, and Rosalind,

whose epilogue undoes the tidy, restorative ending of the play, are more exemplative of cross-
dressed characters whose crossdressing serves the purpose of undermining traditional gender
(“Crossdressing”). Viola is given no such epilogue, and she dutifully follows her man for the
duration of the play. However, this reading of the play ignores the Ganymede/gallant relationship
established in the play, and the fact that the audience never actually sees Viola dressed like a
woman at the end. She does reveal that her name is Viola, and that she is female, but when

Orsino asks to see her in her “woman’s weeds” (5.1.266), she is unable to produce them. In spite
of this, Orsino still agrees to marry her, having only seen and known her as Cesario. This scene
is similar to the scene in *As You Like It* when Celia “marries” Orlando to Ganymede. In this scene, like the first, what the audience sees is an adult man offering his hand in marriage to a younger boy. Orsino, in fact, may even be aware of the Jove/Ganyemede relationship that is being reenacted. He says to Viola/Cesario, “And since you called me master for so long, / Here is my hand. You shall from this time be / Your master’s mistress” (5.1.313-315). Orsino may simply be referencing the unusual circumstances under which they came to know one another, but it is also entirely possible that by referring to the master/servant relationship, Orsino is acknowledging his attraction to Viola as her plural gendered self, and as his subservient Ganymede figure. That she follows her master dutifully only restores traditional gendering if one assumes that Viola is heterosexual. If one moves away from heteronormativity, then Viola/Cesario’s love for Orsino does not have any bearing on her gender(s).

While these characters are not identical, and they may not all experience gender in the same way, each one blurs the line between the masculine and the feminine and participates in some way in Rohy’s concept of turning. By adopting masculine personas while retaining their own femininity, these page-boy heroines create their own gender identities as they navigate different social interactions and circumstances. While Rosalind’s turning is the most constant, the other page-boy’s also offer moments of fluid identity, and challenge the gender regulations put in place by the clergy and sumptuary laws. By doing so, not only do they become proto-genderqueer figures, they also undermine the sexist gender hierarchy created in the one-sex system. By convincingly appropriating the behavior, dress, and even in Portia’s case, occupations that were thought to be reserved for men, the supposed inherent superiority of men breaks down. That they do so while also questioning the basis of gender and creating their own
identities, makes them particularly revolutionary subjects, whose genders are open to mobility and refuse to be rooted to binary gender.

Epilogue: Expanding Gender from Page (boy) to Stage

At the heart of queer theory is the idea of an unstable identity, or the lack of a stable core. While queer theory emerged as a lens through which to investigate often coded issues of sexuality, queer studies have expanded to include anything that disrupts categorization. According to Madhavi Menon, “Queerness is not a category but the confusion engendered by and despite categorization” (7); rather, queer theory “recognizes the absurdity of limits” (Menon 7), and asks us to reevaluate and challenge boundaries and seemingly stable binaries, wherever those seeming boundaries may reside. The contingent page-boy, then, with his/her refusal to exist within the limits of compartmentalized gender, is a decidedly queer figure. The actor, too, is a queer figure, because of their ability to shift between identities, casting off the old and adopting the new as they see fit. Theatre, being a transient art form, constructs temporary realities in which the players and the audience exist for a short period of time, and then are gone. Actors take on roles, exist within the transient realities constructed during the play, and then relinquish those roles and prepare for the adoption of new ones. Gender identity, as we have discussed, and the performance of gender, mirrors the transience of the theatre and is able to be constructed temporarily, and then left behind when it is no longer needed. Or perhaps, the theatre only mirrors the transient nature of all unstable identity; both are contingent phenomena, acted upon by outside forces and in a state of constant mobility. Just as we “accept the blackcloth forest as ‘real,’” the costumes and personas that the heroines take on may be just as “real,” if only temporarily (Jardine 57). Considering the inherently protean nature of the actor, the gender
contingent page-boys create more layers of queerness and instability when performed on stage, than when they are confined to the page. Not only are the actors’ identities unstable, because of the multitude of identities they inhabit, but the characters’ identities become all the more fluid by the fact that they are played by a variety of actors. The expression of this queerness varies from production to production, and from actor to actor. As the nature of stage plays has changed over time, so too have the representations of gender onstage. Beginning with the boy actor in the early modern period, and continuing through the contemporary multi-gendered companies of today, Shakespeare’s page-boys have proved all the more protean, and all the more queer, shifting as the style of the day demands.

Though the practice of utilizing boy actors in the early modern period was accepted as conventional, it did not escape criticism, particularly from the moralists who opposed crossdressing, and from those who opposed the theatre on multiple grounds. In *Th’ Overthrow of Stage-Playes*, a 1599 diatribe against the theatre, Dr. John Rainoldes wrote that “the appareil of wemen is a great provocation of men to lust and leacherie” (qtd. in Jardine 57). Further, he argues that by putting on women’s clothing, the male actors underneath would be aroused by the memory of the woman that had previously worn the clothes. This and other similar antitheatrical tracts demonstrate the anxieties surrounding the blurring of gender, and therefore desire, that occurs when a boy takes on the clothing and behavior typically associated with women. The “lust and leacherie” that Rainoldes fears is not only that of the actor himself, but what he can stir up in audience members. Lisa Jardine addresses the erotic desire that can be created by the boy actor, and points to early modern poetry surrounding these performers. Specifically, she points to a poem by Thomas Randolph, which “supports [the] suggestion that the boy player is liable to be regarded with erotic interest that hovers somewhere between the heterosexual and the
homosexual around his female attire” (58). The poem asks, for example, why Lesbia pays to keep the boy actor Histrio as a courtier. Randolph’s answer is two-fold; she keeps him on apparently because “he playes the womans part so well” (qtd. in Jardine 59), and to “play the womans part” has a double meaning here: he is a boy actor, so he plays the female roles, thereby keeping his own gender ambiguous, and he is skilled at playing with women’s parts in bed. His female persona is attractive to Lesbia, but so is his masculine sexuality. Jardine’s description of the boy actor’s ability to arouse a desire that “hovers” between hetero and homosexual is similar to the polyeroticism evoked by the gender contingent page-boy characters, who, within the confines of the play, are also actors. It also is reminiscent of Rohy’s concept of contingent desire. The boy actor, acting as a kind of reverse page-boy, also carries a contingent identity, which becomes blurred further when the woman characters he plays take on masculine identities.

As the boy actor fell out of fashion in favor of women actors playing women roles, the blurring of gender took on different meanings in this new context. Women were not allowed on the London stages until 1660, when Charles II reopened the theaters, forty-four years after Shakespeare’s death (Howe 19). When this change took place, audiences were faced with a transition period, during which some companies favored the tradition of casting boy actors, and some took on the opportunity to cast women. Removing the ambiguity that is stirred up by the boy player does change, and perhaps, lessen, the gender play at work in the page-boy plays. Rosalind’s epilogue does not have quite the same effect when she is not reminding audiences that underneath the character is a male actor. However, the contingency of the characters’ genders does not disappear with the appearance of actresses; in fact, when women began to play these characters, the possibility that women really could mimic the behavior and dress of men, and perhaps embody both the masculine and the feminine, became a reality. While some
productions chose to keep the page-boys as feminine as possible, others chose, and choose, to truly embrace the sexual ambiguity of the characters. The effect this decision has on the production cannot be overstated. In versions in which Rosalind (or Viola, or Innogen, or Portia) is represented as traditionally feminine, not only is the fluidity of gender lost in favor of a simple disguise, but the desires and arcs of the other characters are called into question. If Orlando sees Ganymede as simply Rosalind in disguise, then all of the genderqueer polyeroticism created by the fluid character is lost. This can be a directorial choice, if the director chooses to eschew any potential sexuality besides heterosexuality. Other productions, however, choose to blur the lines between the female actress and her masculine persona more fully, which maintains the gender play that exists in the script.

In the images below, one can see two directorial choices regarding the gender play of the page-boys. In the first, we see the 2006 film version of Rosalind, played by Bryce Dallas Howard, who plays a highly feminized Rosalind/Ganymede, whose gender is far from ambiguous. “Ganymede” here is very clearly Rosalind with her hair pulled back, and it seems highly unlikely that Orlando would believe her to be anything but the woman he knows to be Rosalind. Conversely, in the second image, we can see Viola, in the 1996 film played by Imogen Stubbs, and her twin brother, who look almost identical. This choice brings the gender representation closer to the original casting choices of the boy actors, or at least to a more historically informed level of fluid gender display. The actress’s femininity is obscured in order for her to become a boy, much like how the boy actors’ genders were obscured to play girls. In the first production, almost all of the potential for contingency of gender is lost. The second, by creating ambiguity regarding the masculine and feminine elements of the actress and her character(s), retains more of the gender play and potential queerness that is available in the text.
Figure 2: Bryce Dallas Howard as Rosalind and David Oyelowo as Orlando in the 2006 film version of *As You Like It*.

Figure 3: Imogen Stubbs as Viola/Cesario and Steven Mackintosh as Sebastian in the 1996 film version of *Twelfth Night*.
One way of maintaining Rosalind’s gender contingency without a boy actor in the role exists in Paul Czinner’s 1936 film of *As You Like It*. The ending of this version resists the restorative nature of the marriages at the end of the play by maintaining fluidity in Rosalind’s gender representation. Yu Jin Ko writes, “when Rosalind comes on the stage with Hymen in Act V, she appears in the kind of court dress that a fetishized object of the male gaze might very well be dressed in . . . At this crucial moment of narrative closure, the male gaze assumes centrality” (24). Ko continues to describe the restoration of Rosalind from fluid and in control to traditionally gendered and lacking control, stating that “from the moment she assumes her place in the hierarchy [by marrying Orlando], she remains entirely silent. Keeping in mind that Rosalind is a figure whose verbal wit defines her . . . it is difficult not to see her silence as an unmistakable sign of her ‘development’ into the woman of patriarchal desire” (24). This reading of the film recognizes the concerns that Jean Howard voices regarding the recuperative endings of the page-boy plays that reestablish the gender expectations that the crossdressing had subverted over the course of the play. “Yet,” writes Ko, “There is one final twist in the film” (24). In an effort to regain the gender slipperiness that is available when a boy actor plays Rosalind, Czinner uses basic special effects to intercut the epilogue with footage of Rosalind as Ganymede speaking key phrases such as “if I were a woman” (Ko 24). The ambiguity of gender that is created when a boy actor plays the part is reestablished by the use of these gender-blurring intercuts. Whether or not Czinner intended, in 1936, to pursue gender fluidity in his Rosalind is, in some respects, unimportant. Regardless of any social or political aim, “by his remaining true in spirit to the epilogue, he inadvertently introduces a note of ambiguity to the ending of his film and opens up the possibility that all subversive energies are not recuperated by the restorative pressures of the ending” (Ko 24). By actively resisting the restoration of gender roles, this film
resists the stabilizing that can occur from casting the production with cisgendered men and women. Efforts like this harken back to a time when gender on the stage, and in the streets, was more ambiguous, and less grounded in bodily binaries. In response to the lasting effects of all-male theatre, including the fact that there are more male roles than female roles available to actresses, particularly in Shakespeare, several contemporary companies and productions have featured all-women casting. Many of these companies actively seek to subvert gender expectations, emphasize potential fluidity, or simply to provide a space for women to play roles of depth and power that are not available to them in traditionally cast companies. In many versions, the male characters simply become female characters, such as the film version of *The Tempest* in which Helen Mirren’s Prospero becomes Prospera. Other productions, however, cast women as men in much the same way that boy actors were cast as women in Elizabethan theatre. These versions open the door to further questions of gender and performance, and question, as the page-boy characters do, the inherent nature of masculinity and femininity.

![Figure 4: Lisa Wolpe as Hamlet](image)
In the above image, Lisa Wolpe plays Hamlet in an all-female production. In this picture, it is not immediately clear that Wolpe is a woman. She has been dressed with masculine signifiers, including a beard, a sword, and shoulder pads, which obscure her womanhood. Yet, in videos of her performances, as Hamlet, Iago, even Shylock, it is clear that when she speaks, her voice, though pitched lower than when she plays women, retains a feminine timbre that undercuts the masculine signifiers, and creates a performance that is truly liminal. Wolpe is a performer and director who actively seeks to disrupt gender beliefs that contemporary audiences are accustomed to. In an interview conducted in 2014, Wolpe states that she “moved beyond a strict gender binary when [she] was seven” (qtd. in Avila, “Lisa Wolpe”). As the founder of Los Angeles Women’s Shakespeare Company in 1993, Wolpe has been working for over two decades at creating spaces for women to perform as well as creating performances that destabilize binary gender. According to the interviewer, Wolpe believes that “exploring gender through heightened language and performance is the hallmark of the greatest theatrical work of the ages. Shakespeare’s plays were created for gender-bending” (Avila, “Lisa Wolpe”). She is not alone in this belief. Other companies, such as Phyllidia Lloyd’s all-female company, also attempt to destabilize gender within the world of the plays. Unlike Wolpe’s productions, Lloyd’s actors play the male characters as women. They do not put on fake beards, or hide their female bodies. Lloyd stated of the productions, which were set in a women’s prison, “the goal was never to be men . . . But what we did want was to edit out those habits we have that define us as women” (qtd. in Khan, “Badass All-Female”). The habits that Lloyd refers to include talking with one’s hands and constantly apologizing. The result of removing these habits was that “suddenly something happened. We felt entitled. You know, we came in and we just took the space” (qtd. in Khan, “Badass All-Female Shakespeare”). By deliberately removing some
feminine signifiers and maintaining others, Lloyd’s actors created characters who, like the page-boys, cannot be held to one gender or another. The male characters, played by women who are playing female prisoners, become simultaneously male and female. Gender, blurred to this extent, becomes less important in the telling of these stories, and the plays become about power, human relationships, and individual actions, all while destabilizing contemporary understandings of gender and gender relationships.

In addition to all-female casts’ attempts to reimagine gender in Shakespeare plays, contemporary all-male companies and productions have recently resurfaced. These companies are familiar in that they can seem like an outdated look at the past, and an attempt to recreate
theatre as it was in Shakespeare’s time. Yet, these companies are not performing in the one-sex world of Shakespeare’s era; they are performing one-sex theatre in a binary world. Though many feel that all-male Shakespeare is “is part of a wider denial of women’s rights around the world” (“What’s Wrong with All-Male Shakespeare?”), it can also be seen as a way of understanding the gender hybridity that existed on Shakespeare’s stage while also expanding contemporary understandings of gender. A recent example of all-male casting is Mark Rylance’s Twelfth Night.

In this production, Johnny Flynn and Mark Rylance play Viola and Olivia. While Flynn’s portrayal may be similar to an early modern Viola, Rylance is far older than any boy actor playing Olivia would have been. Because Rylance is an adult man, well beyond puberty, his
voice is much deeper than that of an early modern boy actor. Like Wolpe, Rylance is dressed in signifiers that suggest the opposite gender, but his voice betrays him. Or, rather, his voice adds a layer of masculinity to a feminine role, and in doing so creates ambiguity and instability. Twists on the classical boy actor like this one may be necessary in contemoporizing Shakespeare and gender, because “putting boy actors on the contemporary stage in the place of adult women . . . does not assure that the theatrical effect of original performances would as a result be recaptured. For one, the historical context that provided a frame for understanding transvestite performances may not be retrievable in a modern theatre” (Ko 22). The primary difference between the current social context surrounding theatre and the early modern social context is the contemporary binary sex/gender system. Without the one-sex theory grounding these performances, a boy in a dress may not be easily read as a woman. Anticipating this schism in understanding, contemporary all-male Shakespeare must not try to convince its audience that the actors are women. The question these companies must ask themselves is, how do we, in a binary gender world, appreciate genders whose differences are “of degree and not of kind” (Laqueur 25)? By casting men who can create a character that embodies both masculine and feminine traits, like Rylance, this question can be addressed. One-gender casting, in a binary world, is automatically disruptive of societal gender norms, and by emphasizing this disruption by not attempting to fully disguise actors, contemporary productions can create hybrid gender performances that are reminiscent of the contingency that Rosalind’s epilogue, when spoken by a boy actor, created.

As both theatre and understandings of gender evolve, so too do the casts and concepts surrounding these plays. As the number of people identifying as genderfluid, genderqueer and transgender expands, so too does the number of actors whose gender identities fall somewhere other than “male” or “female.” Just as theatre opened up to include women, the theatre world is
currently attempting to extend its arms to nonbinary artists, whose unique experiences may bring a new perspective to texts, including Shakespeare. The Transgender Shakespeare Company located in London is one of the first companies to adapt to the changing world of gender, and to create productions consisting only of transgender performers. Founded in 2015, this company features only transgender artists. Their goals, according to their Facebook page, are to create opportunities for trans people and to educate theatregoers on the existence of trans artists. Right now, there are very few companies that feature solely non-binary people, but as artists whose genders fall outside of the gender binary continue to perform and to be met with acceptance, it is my belief that non-binary performances will become far more common. In the coming years, scholarship surrounding performance and Shakespeare will need to take notice of these groups and explore how their performances further expand Shakespeare’s world of gender, and how the contingent page-boys change as a result of the new perspectives of the actors playing them. In a world in which gender is unstable, and the cultural understanding is that gender can be contingent, will Rosalind’s adoption of her Ganymede role be received as it was by early modern audiences, who believed that gender was not located in the body? Or, as gender fluidity becomes more mainstream, will gender cease to be located in one’s clothes? These questions, and more, are certain to surface in the coming years as gender identifications expand, and the theatre is forced to expand with them. The addition of actors who identify as nonbinary, or as any gender other than simply “male” or “female,” will surely add new layers of identity questions to these characters, and the effects their gender play has on audiences, and provide a broader space for examining what gender is. Discussions of these new performances will provide a platform to discuss how theatre impacts gender identity, and how gender identity impacts theatre.
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