Damsels in Disguise: Cross-dressing Women in William Shakespeare's Comedies

Berg, Yacintha van den

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Yacintha van den Berg

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First reader: dr. K. Rolfe

Second reader: dr. J. F. van Dijkhuizen

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‘Tis woman more than man,
Man more than woman, and (which to none can hap)
The Sun gives her two shadows to one shape
- T. Dekker and T. Middleton, *The Roaring Girl*

Introduction

> All the world’s a stage
> And all the men and women merely players
> They have their exits and their entrances
> And one man in his time plays many parts (*As You Like It* 2.7.140)

This first part of Jaques’ speech in William Shakespeare’s *As You Like It* might be one of Shakespeare’s most famous quotes. Here, Jaques compares a man’s life and its stages to a play and its different acts. In short: life is only a play, performed by the world’s actors, on the world’s biggest stage in the world’s biggest theatre. In Early Modern England, theatres were places of social interaction. People would seek companionship as well as a way to be entertained. Different social classes and people of different educational levels would gather within the walls of the theatre and all would enjoy what was performed on stage. The theatre allowed not only the actors to play a part but also its audience had a chance to indulge themselves in pretending to be someone else. However, not everyone could appreciate the theatres and their public reputation of blurring the social boundaries, especially in London society. The theatre was seen as a threat, leading to social changes that were already brewing. According to Jean Howard, “[s]ocial climbers, rogues and vagabonds, unruly women, Catholic priests – the antitheatrical tracts have damning words for them all. Clearly, the theatre became the focus of discharging anxieties about many sorts of social changes or threats to established power” (6). A place that was initially meant for education and entertainment was now a place that instigated a plethora of controversy as well.

Not only was the theatre as an institution and its spectators under attack, but the way plays were performed on stage was also perceived as sinful. Actors would often take on the appearance of all kinds of mythological creatures, or pose as upper-class figures such as royalty, and actors were found to impersonate their opposite sexes. As one of the most famous Early Modern playwriters, Shakespeare is known to use comedy as a mirror image of

society. According to Mary Jo Kietzman, “Shakespeare interpolates the terms of antitheatricalist arguments that theatre was an instrument of Satan or Cupid and players unnatural and inhuman monsters” (268). Apparently, Shakespeare has taken those arguments and has woven them into his plays like a parody of the antitheatrical movement.

In a time when society was still dominated by men, the act of a man appearing as a woman would be seen as emasculating; the act of a woman appearing as a man would be deemed deceiving. Early modern women were expected to confine themselves within clear boundaries and to excel at their roles as wives and daughters. As Bernard Capp explains, during the late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries:

> England […] was ‘patriarchal’ in the loose sense that its political, social, economic, religious, and cultural life was dominated by men. In almost every field women were subordinated, marginalized, or excluded, though many of these social arrangements rested on convention rather than law. There was no patriarchal *system*, rather an interlocking set of beliefs, assumptions, traditions, and practices, and the largely informal character of patriarchy enabled each generation to adapt it to changing circumstances. Male domination was so rooted in the culture that contemporaries found it almost impossible to imagine a society based on fundamentally different principles. (1-2)

Moreover, Helen Wilcox supports this claim, stating that:

> [i]n law, women had no status whatsoever but were only daughters, wives or widows of men; according to the church they were to be silent and listen to the advice of husbands or pastors; in religious and cultural patterns of thought, they were daughters of Eve with a continuing proneness to temptation and a disproportionate burden to guilt (4)

In the early modern period, women had no role in the public theatres other than being part of the audience as consumers, or, if they had the means, they could act as ‘patrons of dramatists and protectors of the acting companies’ (Thompson 109). Commercial theatre was dominated by theatre companies consisting of only men. Even though there is proof of women performing on stage at court before Henry VIII and Elizabeth I during the 1500s, and James I in the following century, it is safe to assume that women were not typically allowed or hired as a professional on a commercial stage.

Because of this, cross-dressing was a quintessential aspect of theatre and without it, many plays would miss half of their cast and meaning. Female roles were played by men, often by male adolescents. According to David Cressy, “[w]hether in real life or in literature,

[…], cross-dressing involved struggle, resistance, and subversion, as well as modification, recuperation, and containment of the system of gendered patriarchal domination" (438-439). It could be stated that cross-dressing was a necessary evil. Cressy adds "[w]orst of all was the unnatural impiety involved of the law of God, since outward apparel intimated inward characteristics and the wearer of cross-sexed clothing trod the slope to monstrous degeneration" (442). Many within the Church of England would have agreed with the literal meaning of the word 'evil' since it relied on the fixed social ranks and religious ideas of what was expected of men and women. Therefore, most criticism about the general perspective of the theatre originated in the Church. Ultimately, "[c]ross-dressing clearly touched a raw nerve and produced, in these reformers, a recirculating rhetoric of anxiety and fear" (Cressy 443). To support this claim, Roberta Barker explains the perception of cross-dressing by stating that "[t]heatrical cross-dressing is sinful because its feigning can transform the very passions of actors and audiences, leading them to transgress against fundamental religious and social codes of gender and sexuality" (463). Even though the church protested against the concept of cross-dressing, society seemed to turn a blind eye or could not be bothered by the fact that the women on stage were not, in fact, female.

Many Early Modern stage plays also included cross-dressing within the narrative and William Shakespeare is a prime example. Within his plays, he seems to toy with cross-dressing as characters disguise themselves as the other sex. Moreover, he often hints at the audience with puns and comical phrases on gender and sexuality as well. Consider the following lines: "stroke your chins, and swear by your beards that I am a knave. / By our beard – if we had them – thou art" (*As You Like It* 1.2.68). Within the narrative, the lines are spoken by Touchstone to Rosalind and Celia. These two ladies do not have any beards as they are female. Moreover, the boy-actresses who would play these female characters would be too young to have beards and therefore lacked facial hair, i.e. masculinity as well. They would, however, grow beards later in life and complete the transition from boy to man. The audience has this knowledge and, therefore, the pun is meant to create a comical effect towards the spectators of the play rather than the ladies within the narrative.

This thesis will focus on four comedies by William Shakespeare, who used the concept of cross-dressing within these plays: *As You Like It, Twelfth Night, Cymbeline* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor.* This thesis will aim to find an answer to the question of whether female characters that cross-dress are more successful in achieving their goals than male characters cross-dressing as women and to what extent the characters experience altering consequences. Firstly, chapter 1 will analyse the motives of cross-dressing in the four different comedies. The reason and necessity that the main characters find will be highlighted and analysed. Chapter 2 will cover the way of physical and verbal disguise. This includes outer appearance but also the way the main characters present themselves in speech. Chapter 3 will look into the main characters' gender and identity issues. Here, the consequences that the main characters are dealing with will be examined. Lastly, chapter 4 will focus on sexuality. The sexuality of the main characters is discussed, as is the way they are eroticised by others. These four main themes in each chapter will be supported by secondary sources and analysed from a historical point of view. Therefore, the anachronistic idea of gender identity is not taken into consideration while this thesis was written. The chapters will set out a framework which will attempt to answer the aforementioned question.

Chapter 1 – Motives

The introduction has presented a historically-informed framework for analysing issues of cross-dressing in Early Modern narratives and performance on stage. This chapter will examine the motives of our key characters who cross-dress within William Shakespeare's *As You Like It, Twelfth Night, The Merry Wives of Windsor* and *Cymbeline.* This chapter will show that the female key characters have similar reasons for cross-dressing, however seemingly different. In comparison to the male character(s), the motives are sound. Some of those reasons are clear-cut and direct, whereas other reasons are more allusive and need more analysis of the absence of the obvious.

When looking at female characters cross-dressing, David Cressy suggests that in Early Modern literature, "[w]omen dressed as men […] for a variety of admirable reasons: to plead at law, regain a fortune, or practice a profession barred to women; to advance a stratagem, win back lovers, or fight a duel; to travel alone, avoid rape or molestation, and to have adventures" (440). It is safe to assume that these reasons either stem from threat or ambition. In both cases, one who moves out of threat or ambition strives, initially, to be heard and taken seriously. As this chapter will show, the motives of the key characters have to do with the threats Cressy illustrates here.

Consider the following lines said by Rosalind to her cousin and best friend, Celia, in *As You Like It*: "Alas, what danger will be to us / Maids as we are, to travel forth so far! / Beauty provoketh thieves sooner than gold" (*As You Like It* 1.3.107). These lines clearly convey the reason why Rosalind is forced to go through her transformation. Here, Rosalind expresses the threat of rape or molestation and therefore the necessity of cross-dressing. In this case, Rosalind chooses to cross-dress from female to male as she is able to pass as a man due to her height, whereas Celia is not. Rosalind cross-dresses because she believes that her impersonation as Ganymede will ensure her safety, which allows her to travel together with Celia and maintain a façade where Celia, disguised as Aliena, travels alongside

a man. Not only does Rosalind protect herself but at the same time, she protects Celia as well.

When it comes to *Twelfth Night*, the reasons why the main female character, Viola, disguises herself as her male alter-ego, Cesario, are not as clear-cut as in Rosalind's case. At the beginning of the first scene, Viola is stranded on the Illyrian shore after being shipwrecked. She inquiries about her location, finds out that she, with the captain and a couple of sailors, has arrived in Illyria and remembers her father speaking of the Illyrian duke: "Orsino. I have heard my father name him. / He was a bachelor then" (*Twelfth Night* 1.2.25). It can be concluded that Viola connects Orsino's marital status of being a 'bachelor' with Orsino's desire to marry, as her father has already mentioned Orsino to her as a possible husband. Since Viola cannot present herself as a potential bride without the presence of her male relatives, she has to cross-dress in order to avoid destitution or, potentially, violation. In addition, she not only impersonates a man, she even chooses to disguise herself as a eunuch. The *Oxford English Dictionary* describes a eunuch as "[a] castrated person of the male sex; also, such a person employed as a harem attendant, or in Asian courts and under the Roman emperors, charged with important affairs of state". Because of the way the eunuchs had been mutilated, they did not pose a threat to the women in the harem who they would look after. In *Twelfth Night,* Viola takes away the sexual threat when presenting herself as such. According to Kietzman:

> The eunuch is a symbol for the actor who transcends gender and who puts us in mind of the adolescent boy actor playing Viola […] on the threshold between youth and maturity, male and female, one identity and another and who will, during the play, project the fictional characters of both Viola and Cesario, mainly through modulations in his vocal delivery (264)

On stage, the boy who had to play Viola must have been a talented young man, as he had to portray a complex character, both as a fictional person and in theatrical performance.

Even though mentioned in this passage, it seems as if Viola's façade as a eunuch does not reach Orsino. In scene 2 act 3, Orsino asks whether Cesario has a woman, i.e. a lover, suggesting he is not 'sexless'. Here, Viola has already fallen for Orsino and answers cleverly:

ORSINO. What kind of woman is't?

VIOLA. Of your complexion.

ORSINO. She is not worth thee then. What years, I'faith?

VIOLA. About your years, my lord.

ORSINO. Too old, by heaven. Let still the woman take

An elder than herself, so wears she to him;

So sways she level in her husband's heart.

For boy, however we do praise ourselves,

Our fancies are more diggy and unfirm,

More longing, wavering, sooner lost and worn

Than women's are. (*Twelfth Night* 2.4.24-34)

In this passage, Viola pretends that there is a woman who is similar to Orsino, where there is no one. Here, Orsino portrays a picture of fixed gender roles when it comes to age. This contradicts the tone of this play as it toys with fixed gender roles and questions whether these fixed roles should be fixed in the first place.

Both previous examples portray women showing agency over their own disguise, choosing cross-dressing to travel alone or avoid rape or molestation. Considering *Cymbeline*, Innogen is advised by Pisanio rather than it being her own idea. As Bonnie Lander states: "[t]hat Innogen is the only Shakespearean cross-dresser to whom breeches have been recommended as a strategy, as opposed to something the heroine has devised for herself, is not incidental. Loyal Pisanio offers a solution that not only provides Innogen with a way out of her predicament but suggests that she might be something other than her role" (177). Innogen experiences a similar threat as Rosalind and Viola do; Innogen's life is at stake after her husband finds out she has allegedly committed adultery.

Innogen and her husband, Posthumus, are separated during the first scene of the play and in scene 2 act 2, the reader finds Innogen in her bed reading. After she falls asleep, Giacomo appears from a trunk, observes the room and Innogen as she lies in her bed, kisses her while asleep and steals her bracelet. Convinced by Giacomo's lies that his wife

Innogen is unfaithful to him, Posthumus orders Pisanio to murder her. However, Pisanio's loyalty lies with Innogen. He proposes Innogen's feigned death and in her desperation, she asks him:

> Why good fellow,
> What shall I do the while, where bide, how live,
> Or in my life what comfort when I am
> Dead to my husband? (*Cymbeline* 3.4.129)

Here, Innogen has no idea how to pretend to be dead and live her life without Posthumus. As becomes clear at the beginning of the play, Innogen shows agency by marrying Posthumus instead of Cloten, however, her motive for this does not seem to come from her own strength as the last line suggests that her female identity is inextricably connected to her marriage with him. Pisanio takes her out of that comfort zone and advises her to completely discard the only part she knows about herself. He advises impersonating everything that is not female: "You must forget to be a woman" (*Cymbeline* 3.4.155). Eventually, Innogen accepts her fate, saying: "This attempt / I am soldier to, and will abide it with / A prince's courage, Away, I prithee" (*Cymbeline* 3.4.183). In chapter 3 the thesis will revisit Pisanio's line and the accompanying passage on gender as the chapter will dive deeper into identity.

In contrast to the last three plays, *The Merry Wives of Windsor* has a different approach to cross-dressing and reason for disguise. In this play, the main character, Falstaff, does his utmost to escape the wrath of Mistress Ford's jealous husband, including hiding in a laundry basket and pretending to be a woman. Unlike the aforementioned characters, Falstaff is portrayed as a fat, lecherous fool. He schemes to visit Mistress Ford when her husband has left the house, but as it turns out, he reveals all his plans to the very Master Ford who is disguised as Master Brook. The dramatic irony adds to the foolishness and a comedic cat-and-mouse chase reveals on stage. The first of Falstaff's attempts is hiding in the laundry basket together with dirty laundry. The second attempt to escape is Falstaff's impersonation of Mistress Ford's maid's aunt, the fat woman of Brentford. It becomes clear that Mistress Ford and Mistress Page play a joke on Falstaff:

> MISTRESS PAGE. On my word, it will serve him. She's as big as he is […]

> MISTRESS FORD. I would my husband would meet him in this shape. He cannot abide the old woman of Brentford. He swears she's a witch, forbade her my house, and hath threatened to beat her. (*The Merry Wives of Windsor* 4.2.68-78)

As has been shown in the previous examples, the female main characters choose to cross-dress to avoid violence, whereas Falstaff takes the risk of molestation without even realising it. In *Male-to-Female Crossdressing in Early Modern English Literature*, Simone Cress mentions that:

> Falstaff's crossdressing is motivated by his fear of being caught seducing Mistress Ford rather than by his own internal identity or interest. […] Yet, when he passes for the witch of Brainford, Falstaff makes himself more, not less, vulnerable to violence. Already a fat, fool character, Falstaff's cross-dressing makes him even more ridiculous, which is the point of the joke (1)

As Falstaff's motive to cross-dress differs completely from Rosalind's, Viola's and Innogen's motive, it is safe to assume that the female characters who have a noble reason are more successful than when you disguise themselves to simply advance a stratagem.

In conclusion, the reasons why Rosalind, Viola, and Innogen use disguises are fairly similar to each other. They felt threatened and were forced into hiding. Fortunately for them, the plays' resolutions eventually give them what they wanted as their disguises have prevented them from harm. On the contrary, Falstaff's life was never in danger, had he not tried to invade the private sphere of Mistress Ford and Mistress Page. In the next chapter, the practicality of the disguises is examined, building up on the argument that the disguises of the women in Shakespeare's plays are better thought-out than Falstaff's cross-dressing.

Chapter 2 – Disguise and Performance

The previous chapter has focused on the motives of characters from the different plays. This chapter will look into the different methods of physical and verbal disguise and the different advantages and disadvantages the main characters face as a result of their disguise.

According to Cressy,

> [men dressed as women] might occasionally don an item of female dress, or have one put on them, while carousing or drunk, like Falstaff in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. Prisoners sometimes dressed as women in order to escape. Some men may have disguised themselves as women in order to infiltrate a forbidden place or to make a rendezvous with a lover. […] With more serious purpose [women dressed as men] occasionally disguised themselves as men in order to travel, to serve in the army or navy, to meet or accompany a lover, or to avoid sexual attentions (459)

All these examples show that cross-dressing and taking on a disguise allow characters to move through and within spaces they would not have access to if they had not impersonated the opposite gender. Moreover, according to Cress:

> the female crossdresser, passing for male, undermines the sex-gender order and reveals cultural fears about women's autonomy more broadly; crossdressing is used to side step the system and to show its machinations. […] Female characters dress as men as potentially liberating since these moments reveal gender roles and imbalance by enabling [Female-To-Male] crossdressers to access the social and cultural privileges unavailable to them as women and otherwise given only to men (4)

It is safe to conclude that when it comes to cross-gender disguises, most men disguised as a woman try to go where they are not allowed out of wantonness, whereas women disguised as men have a more 'serious purpose' of why they feel the need to disguise. This chapter will examine to what extent disguise plays a part in the different plays when it comes to behaviour and speech. In particular, the key issues of infiltrating forbidden places and finding one's agency and voice will be focused on while analysing the cross-dressing characters: the female characters show their skill in persuasion. They are persuasive in impersonating the opposite gender and in the way they speak. The male character Falstaff, however, does not seem to possess any of these skills.

As Rosalind is being prosecuted by her uncle who has usurped her father's title, she is forced to cross-dress. Rosalind's disguise is skilful: "I met the Duke yesterday, and had much question with him. He asked me of what parentage I was. I told him, of as good as he,

so he laughed and let me go" (*As You Like It* 3.4.31). Here, Rosalind tells Celia about her encounter with her father, Duke Senior. As he asked Ganymede about his ancestry, Rosalind cleverly answers that her bloodline is as good as the duke's. Duke Senior does not know what she means by this and laughs, but the audience knows that Rosalind is his daughter and is therefore literally from the same blood. This conversation is proof of Rosalind's successful disguise that even her own father does not recognise her. Alan Brissenden, the editor of the Oxford World's Classics edition, agrees with this in his notes on this passage: "The passage, as well as providing opportunity for a joke, reminds the audience of the continuing lives elsewhere in the forest and the success of Rosalind's disguise" (179). Duke Senior's question about her 'parentage' does not only stem out of interest for Ganymede as a person but more so out of interest for Duke Senior himself. Not only has Rosalind disguised herself distinctively, but she has also even persuaded him to believe Ganymede is a man of high social status that could possibly join the Duke's retinue. Rosalind's witty remark shows her agency and voice as she dares to be witty towards someone of higher social status.

Furthermore, Rosalind's disguise as Ganymede allows her to speak her mind. As a man, Rosalind feels more accepted and taken seriously. Against the duke, of higher social status, she dares to be witty but towards Phoebe who is of lower social status, Rosalind does not mince her words when contradicting her:

> And why, I pray you? Who might be your mother,
> That you insult, exult, and all at once
> Over the wretched? What though you have no beauty –
> As, by my faith, I see no more in you
> Than without candle may go dark to bed
> Must you be therefore proud and pitiless?
> Why, what means this? Why do you look on me?
> I see no more in you than in the ordinary
> Of nature's sale-work! (*As You Like It* 3.5.36-44)

Here, Rosalind as Ganymede shows how skilful and persuasive she is with words. After Rosalind leaves, the shepherdess reflects on what has been said to her, and by whom:

> Think not I love him, though I ask for him
> 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 who hear.
> It is a pretty youth – not very pretty –

> But sure he's proud; and yet his pride becomes him.
> He'll make a proper man (*As You Like It* 3.5.110-16)

Phoebe is taken by the way Ganymede has spoken to her. Even though she denies it, in this instant she falls in love with Ganymede which will be discussed later in chapter 4.

Conversely, Rosalind also shows agency by not using her voice at all. When Oliver brings news of Orlando being attacked by a lion, Rosalind faints. One way to read this event is Rosalind being a fair maiden, in love with Orlando, who is unable to stand the possibility of her great love dying. Alternatively, one could approach this scene where Rosalind, as Ganymede, cannot show her affection and love for Orlando to Oliver. Instead of revealing her true identity, she simply fakes fainting, taking away the obligation to react. In comparison to Rosalind's skilful word-use, she seems just as clever without using any.

In addition to finding agency over her voice, Rosalind's disguise as Ganymede allows her to move safely through the forest of Arden while not being recognised by Duke Frederick and his men. As Ganymede, Rosalind does not hesitate to be upfront, which is contradictory to the scene where Duke Frederick banishes her:

> DUKE FREDERICK. Mistress, dispatch you with your safest haste
> And get you from our court.
> ROSALIND. Me, uncle?
> DUKE FREDERICK. You, cousin.
> Within these ten days if that thou beest found
> So near our public court as twenty miles,
> Thou diest for it.
> […]
> ROSALIND. Yet your mistrust cannot make me a traitor:
> Tell me whereon the likelihood depends?
> DUKE FREDERICK. Thou are thy father's daughter – there's enough. (*As You Like It* 1.3.37-56)

In this passage, Rosalind is trying to persuade Duke Frederick, but all is in vain. As a woman, she dares to speak, respectfully so, but this does not have the same desired effect as when she speaks, disguised as Ganymede.

Rosalind's agency and strength become more and more evident throughout the last scenes. She even makes ambiguous remarks towards Orlando, as she feels that her disguise as a man allows her to move away from female reticence:

> ORLANDO. Who could be out, being before this beloved mistress?
>
> ROSALIND. Marry, that should you if I were you mistress,
>
> or I should think my honesty ranker than my wit (*As You Like It* 4.1.75-8)

As Ganymede, Rosalind is allowed to 'play the mistress' as she portrays herself as a man. As Rosalind, she would never have the same freedom to play the mistress while being a woman. Again, Rosalind shows the audience how clever and skilful she is by being a woman, impersonating a man, who pretends to be a woman. The ambiguity of the remark 'my honesty ranker than my wits' can imply a sexual innuendo of her chastity being more enticing than her actual body.

Rosalind is at her strongest in the last scene of the play. Here, she meta-theatrically stages a scene where she reveals her true identity and puts her fellow characters into place:

> 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 your word, Phoebe, that you'll marry me,
> Or else refusing me to wed this shepherd.
> Keep your word, Silvius, that you'll marry her
> If she refuse me; and from hence I go,
> To make these doubts all even. (*As You Like It* 5.4.18-25)

Initially, Rosalind chose to cross-dress to be able to travel together with Celia and be safe from violence, but throughout her time as Ganymede, she has found freedom and her voice as well. At the end of the play, Rosalind appears 'wearing a dress fit for a wedding' (Brissenden 227). She addresses the audience freely and shows that her true gendered identity as Rosalind has found both freedom and voice, but also found love with someone who is willing to marry her.

Viola has a similar outcome of her disguise regarding space and agency. With the help of the ship's captain, Viola cross-dresses into her alter ego, Cesario: "Conceal me what I am, and be my aid. For such disguise as haply shall become the form of my intent" (*Twelfth Night* 1.2.50-2). Cesario is instantly liked by Duke Orsino. The other characters around them, such as Valentine, notice this: "If the Duke continue these favours towards you, Cesario, you are like to be much advanced. He hath know you but three days, and already you are no stranger" (*Twelfth Night* 1.4.1-4). As Cesario, she is allowed to move through and within spaces in Illyria Throughout the play, this becomes evident as Cesario is allowed to enter noble households, which would have been closed to her as Viola.

As Duke Orsino trusts Viola and sends her away on a personal matter at the beginning of the play, he believes Cesario is better suited for the job since he is young and handsome:

> Dear lad, believe it;
> For they shall yet belie thy happy years
> That say thou art a man:
> […]
> I know thy constellation is right apt
> For this affair (*Twelfth Night* 1.4.29-36)

Cesario is even granted more freedom than Viola could wish for as Orsino promises Cesario the following: "Prosper well in this / And thou shalt live as freely as thy lord, / To call his fortunes thine" (*Twelfth Night* 1.4.38-9).

Just like Rosalind, Viola finds her voice when trying to convince Olivia of Orsino's love. Upon their first encounter, Olivia immediately falls for Cesario's slick tongue: "The rudeness that hath appeared in me have I learned from my entertainment. What I am and what I would are as secret as a maidenhead: to your ears, divinity; to any others', profanation" (*Twelfth Night* 1.5.205-9). Here, Olivia is instantly persuaded to send away her maid Maria and the other attendants. Cesario then tries to recite the lines Orsino had prompted, but without luck. Olivia must have heard this a million times before. It is then that Cesario dares to speak his mind since the disguised Viola knows what a woman wants to hear. Here, Viola shows her agency and freedom of speech:

> I see you what you are, you are too proud,
> But if you were the devil, you are fair.
> My lord and master loves you. O, such love
> Could be but recompensed through you were crowned
> The nonpareil of beauty. (*Twelfth Night* 1.5.239-243)

Olivia discards her dismissive attitude and takes Cesario seriously in his quest to persuade her of Orsino's love. However, Cesario's words cannot convince her. Instead, she wants to know how Cesario would woo her instead of Orsino. Only when Cesario improvises, it is shown to Olivia and the audience how witty Viola is with words:

> Make me a willow cabin at your gate
> And call upon my soul within the house,
> Write loyal cantons of contemned love,
> And sing them loud even in the dead of night;
> Halloo your name to the reverberate hills,
> And make the babbling gossip of the air
> Cry out 'Olivia!' O, you should not rest
> Between the elements of air and earth
> But you should pity me. (*Twelfth Night* 1.5.257-65)

Even though Cesario is not able to convince Olivia of Orsino's love, he does make Olivia fall in love with him. This becomes evident when Olivia asks Cesario about 'his parentage'. Similar to Rosalind, this question does not simply rises out of interest for the man, but in this case, Olivia tries to find out if Cesario is of romantic interest to her. If he proves to be of sufficiently high lineage, Cesario could be a potential husband. Compared to Orsino, her marriage to Cesario would not bereave her of her own agency as the lady of the house. After Cesario leaves the estate, Olivia reflects on what has unfolded. Her last couple of lines is proof of how skilful Viola has been in her disguise. She has not only impersonated a man, but also a handsome gentleman:

> I'll be sworn thou art.
> Thy tongue, thy face, thy limbs, actions, and spirit
> Do give thee five-fold blazon. Not too fast. Soft, soft –
> Unless the master were the man. How now?
> Even so quickly may one catch the plague?
> Methinks I feel this youth's perfections
> With an invisible and subtle stealth
> To creep in at mine eyes. Well, let it be. (*Twelfth Night* 1.5.281-8)

Here, Olivia even describes her growing love for Cesario as 'the plague'. This shows how successful Viola has been in her physical and verbal disguise. Conversely, when Cesario

reflects on his encounter with Olivia, he describes her as not speaking fluently at all: a contradiction to the way Viola found her voice in their first meeting and Olivia did not: “What means this lady? Fortune forbid my outside have not charmed her. She made good view of me, indeed so much that straight methought her eyes had lost her tongue, for she did speak in starts, distractedly” (*Twelfth Night* 2.2.17-21). Here, Viola shows the audience that, unlike the lady Olivia, she is extremely skilful with words in a moment of passion.

Furthermore, Viola feels free to contradict Orsino in an intimate conversation with him. Orsino orders Cesario to go to Olivia again and as Viola shows her agency, she questions her superior: “But if she cannot love you, sir?” (*Twelfth Night* 2.4.86). Viola dares not only to contradict Orsino, but also feels at liberty to give advice: “Sooth, but you must. Say that some lady, as perhaps there is, hath for you love as great a pang of heart as you have for Olivia. You cannot love her. You tell her so. Must she not then be answered?” (*Twelfth Night* 2.4.88-91). Obviously, Viola has fallen for Orsino, but because of her disguise, Orsino takes her question and advice seriously.

In many ways, Rosalind and Viola are very much alike when it comes to finding their agency and voice. However, both main characters meet a distinctive ending. As Rosalind only keeps on getting stronger and more in control, Viola loses her voice, almost literally, at the end of *Twelfth Night*: “My lord would speak, my duty hushes me” (*Twelfth Night* 5.1.102). Almost pedantically, Orsino calls her ‘dissembling cub’ and when Viola tries to protest, she is overruled by Olivia. Upon Viola’s reveal as a woman, Orsino still calls her ‘boy’ and does not even seem to identify Viola as a woman. Lastly, Viola’s agency seems to diminish as Orsino decides their marriage to be settled without asking Viola’s consent:

> You master quits you, and for you service done him
> So much against the mettle of your sex
> So far beneath your soft and tender breeding
> And since you called me master for so long
> Here is my hand, you shall from this time be
> Your master’s mistress. (*Twelfth Night* 5.1.312-7)

Even though both women find agency and voice in their skilful disguise, it does not guarantee a future where they are also in control as well.

When considering Innogen, her disguise allows her to travel without revealing her true identity: “Now if you could wear a mind / Dark as your fortune is, and but disguise / That which t’appear itself must not yet be / But by self-danger, you should thread a course (*Cymbeline* 3.4.144-47). While on her way to Milford as her alter ego Fidele, she takes shelter in a cave. Here, Belarius, Guiderius and Arviragus take her in as they do not know who she is. Innogen is more closely related to these men than all of them, including herself, realise. Belarius happens to be a lord who has stolen king Cymbeline’s two first-born boys after Cymbeline banished him. The two brothers, who are still under the illusion that Belarius is their father, are, in fact, Innogen’s true kin. The lord and his ‘sons’ care for Innogen when she falls ill and later when she takes the Queen’s poison: “Why, he but sleeps. / If he be gone he’ll make his grave a bed. / With female fairies will his tomb be haunted, / (*To Innogen*) And worms will not come to thee” (*Cymbeline* 4.2.216-18). Here, the forbidden space is presented as the emotional space between brothers and sister. Similar to *As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night*, the disguise allows to reunite families and this is also the case in *Cymbeline*, where Innogen’s disguise allows her to reunite with her brothers and later, also with her father.

Just like Rosalind and Viola, Innogen is a skilful cross-dresser. In her first encounter with Belarius and her brothers, Guiderius feels an instant connection to Fidele. Even though he does not know where this attraction comes from, his affection is clearly evident: “Were you a woman, youth, I should woo hard but be your groom in honesty, Ay, bid for you as I’d buy” (*Cymbeline* 3.6.67-8). Later on, Guiderius even confesses his love to Fidele: “I love thee: I have spoke it; How much the quantity, the weight as much, As I do love my father” (*Cymbeline* 4.2.16-7). Innogen has not only impersonated a convincing male character, she has persuaded the people around her that Fidele is a handsome, attractive young man as well. This creates a rather problematic and incestuous situation where Guiderius, indirectly, falls in love with his own sister.

In comparison to Rosalind and Viola, Innogen does not need to find her voice or agency. From the beginning of the play, she already shows her agency by freely speaking her mind. When Cloten asks her whether she calls him a fool, she replies:

> As I am mad I do.
> If you'll be patient, I'll no more be mad.
> That cures us both. I am much sorry, sir,
> You put me to forget a lady's manners
> By being so verbal; and learn now for all
> That I, which know my heart, do here pronounce
> By th' very truth of it, I care not for you
> And am so near the lack of charity
> To accuse myself I hate you, which I had rather
> You felt than make't my boast. (*Cymbeline* 2.3.99-108)

Throughout *Cymbeline*, having a voice, or the lack of voice, is not an issue to Innogen. In scene 3, act 2, Innogen expresses herself extensively when reading Posthumus' letter. According to the editor, "Innogen's speeches to the end of the scene give a rapturous, even feverish sense of excitement and speed, as one idea tumbles out after the other, often to be corrected. […] Sometimes she is precise and practical […]; sometimes her language is impressionistic, even vague […]. Her own speeches are good examples of what she calls *speaking thick*." (Warren, 159-60) Here, Warren refers to *thick* as "quickly" (160). It seems as if Innogen does not hesitate to share her feelings.

When Innogen returns to court, she presents herself as Fidele. Cymbeline takes an immediate liking to the boy and Innogen sees her chance: "I'll tell you, sir, in private, if you please / To give me a hearing" (*Cymbeline* 5.4.115-6). It is safe to assume that at the end of the play, Cymbeline takes Fidele's word seriously as Fidele is allowed to 'speak freely'. This is only before Innogen reveals her true identity.

Contrarily to the former examples, in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, Falstaff seems to go through the same process, only backwards. In his case, there is no imminent threat and he only chooses to cross-dress to get out of a situation he could have easily avoided. The undisguised Falstaff moves through forbidden spaces, as he tries to seduce the married Mistress Ford, and only disguises himself when he comes to know that the husband is on his

way. As the female cross-dressing characters try to avoid violence, Falstaff is confronted with it when Master Ford finds the maid's aunt of Brentford in his house:

> *Enter Mistress Page leading Falstaff disguised as an old woman.*
>
> *Ford beats Falstaff.*
>
> Out of my door, you witch, you rag, you baggage, you polecat, you runnion! Out, out!
>
> I'll conjure you, I'll fortune-tell you! (*The Merry Wives of Windsor* 4.2.170-2)

The freedom of speech found by the other main characters only thwarts Falstaff as he keeps coming back to Master Ford, who is disguised as Master Brook, and keeps telling him about his plans to woo Mistress Ford:

> I went to her, Master Brook, as you see, like a poor old man, but I came from her, Master Brook, like a poor old woman. That same knave Ford, her husband, hath the finest mad devil of jealousy in him, Master Brook, that ever governed frenzy. He beat me grievously, in the shape of a woman; for in the shape of a man, Master Brook, I fear not Goliath with a weaver's beam, because I know also life is a shuttle (*The Merry Wives of Windsor* 5.2.13-20)

Here, he reveals himself to Master Ford and explains that only as a woman he would be beaten. This is the opposite of what agency and finding their voice means to the other female characters.

In short, as this chapter illustrates, the female cross-dressing characters create their disguises successfully due to their verbal skills and charm. This way they can infiltrate into space which would be otherwise out of bounds. Rosalind and Celia would not have safely escaped Duke Frederick's wrath and Innogen would not have safely searched for Posthumus without their successful disguises. In contrast to that, Falstaff creates a disguise out of unnecessary desire and however successful at first, his big mouth gives away his 'secret' in the end.

Chapter 3 – Appearance, Gender Roles, and Identity

In *As You Like It*, the issue of clothing is often mentioned. Consider the following lines:

> ORLANDO. Where dwell you, pretty youth?
>
> ROSALIND. With this shepherdess, my sister here in the skirts of the forest, like fringe upon a petticoat. (*As You Like It* 3.2.321-23)

This is one of the many examples where clothing is used as a metaphor, in this case, to describe the vicinity. 'The skirts of the forest' presents the imagery of being close to the borders of the forest, just like a 'fringe upon a petticoat'. Naturally, descriptions in plays have a multifunctional benefit. They serve as a tool for the playwrights to paint a picture of what the characters and setting should look like on stage but also for its spectators to imagine the characters and add outward characteristics where costume and cosmetics could leave features to be desired. However, in Early Modern England, clothes were also part of one's identity. Clothing represented social status and 'outward apparel intimated inward characteristics' (Cressy 442). Clothing and appearance were also used as a way of showing off one's wealth. Therefore, cross-dressing was essentially misrepresenting one's personality and identity. As the previous chapter has focused on how the characters from the different plays present themselves, this chapter will examine how the cross-dressing characters are judged. The use of costumes and cosmetics serve as a means to conceal one's true gendered identity and hidden truth, which have significant consequences on the characters' identity and the way fixed gender roles are perceived by them. This chapter will explicitly zoom in on the literal function of clothing as well as the metaphorical purpose as the plays deal with gender roles and the expectation of what those look like.

At the beginning of *As You Like It*, the way Rosalind constructs her disguise regarding outer appearance and clothing becomes explicitly evident:

> Were it not better,
> Because that I am more than common tall,
> That I did suit me all points like a man,
> A gallant curtal-axe upon my thigh,
> A boar-spear in my hand, and in my heart,
> Lie there what hidden woman's fear there will.

> We'll have a swashing and a martial outside,
> As any other mannish cowards have,
> That do outface it with their semblances. (*As You Like It* 1.3.114-21)

Rosalind cleverly addresses both her disguise and her gendered truth, as she describes her own physique and outer appearance, but also points towards the contradiction of the 'hidden woman's fear' which is hidden on the inside and the 'swashing and martial outside'. She clearly associates masculinity with violence, as she makes the 'curtal-axe' and 'boar-spear' part of her disguise. One could also read the bawdy innuendo of having a 'curtal-axe' on your thigh and 'boar-spear' in your hand as part of your manly appearance.

Not only does Rosalind take on an outward disguise, but she also creates a persona that belongs to her disguise. From scene 2, act 4 on, Rosalind takes on the personification of Ganymede, her male alter-ego. Rosalind creates a male character who has certain points of view toward fixed gender roles. It seems as if Rosalind adopts these views, especially Ganymede's views on women, as she expresses misogynistic ideas while in the disguise of Ganymede. Whether this is pretend or conviction is not always obvious. For example, in a conversation with Celia, Rosalind refers to women as 'weaker vessels': "I could find in my heart to disgrace my man's apparel and to cry like a woman. But I must comfort the weaker vessel, as doublet and hose ought to show itself courageous to petticoat; therefore, courage, good Aliena!" (*As You Like It* 2.4.3-8). She even describes the clothing of a man as superior to the clothing of women and therefore suggests that men should be more valued over women. Rosalind as Ganymede expresses another misogynistic idea: "O, that woman that cannot make her fault her husband's occasion, let her never nurse her child herself, for she will breed it like a fool" (*As You Like* It 4.1.159-61). According to the editor, this passage could be read as "If a woman isn't clever enough to turn her errors into an excuse for attacking her husband, then she shouldn't be allowed to suckle her own child, because it will imbibe foolishness with its mother's milk and grow up a fool like herself" (Brissenden 194). It leaves one to wonder whether she actually adopts Ganymede's identity and starts believing that women are inferior and therefore the 'foolish weaker vessels'. Moreover, when reading Phoebe's letter, Rosalind questions whether women should be allowed to speak disdainfully:

"She Phoebes me. Mark how the tyrant writes: *(reads)* 'Art thou god to shepherd turned, That a maiden's heart hath burned?' Can a woman rail thus?" (*As You Like It* 4.3.40-3). The irony here is that Rosalind is, of course, a woman herself, even though she is in disguise and speaks in a similar way.

As the beginning of this chapter states, the plays discussed in this thesis use clothing and outer appearance as a metaphor and so, it is also used in a conversation between Ganymede and Orlando. Here, Orlando tries to convince Ganymede that he is in love with Rosalind, but Ganymede does not seem to believe him. Ganymede explains that his uncle has taught him what a man in love looks like, but Ganymede's description of a man in love is in fact the opposite of what Orlando looks like:

> A lean cheek, which you have not: a blue eye and sunken, which have not; an unquestionable spirit, which you have not; a beard neglected, which you have not – but I pardon you for that, for simply your having in beard is a younger brother's revenue. (*As You Like It* 3.2.356-60)

The issue of the beard returns in this passage, but, in this case, according to the editor, Orlando's beard is "virtually non-existent, [which] is like a younger brother's income" (Brissenden 171), since the older brother would inherit the family's fortune. In addition, Ganymede almost gives away the disguise as he would not be able to know that Orlando is the younger brother.

As Ganymede lists characteristics of a man in love, he keeps disproving that Orlando is a man in love:

> Then your hose should be ungartered, your bonnet unbanded, your sleeve unbuttoned, your shoe untied, and everything about you demonstrating a careless desolation. But you are no such man. You are rather point-device in your accoutrements, as loving yourself than seeming the lover of any other. (*As You Like It* 364-6)

This passage could be read as a test, as Ganymede/ Rosalind tries to find out whether Orlando is truly in love. Then again, as Ganymede/ Rosalind could assume that Orlando is in fact very much in love, Ganymede plays with the issue of the outer appearance not matching Orlando's true feelings. This is ironic since Rosalind's disguise as her male alter-ego Ganymede does not match her female true identity.

Lastly, clothing as a metaphor for disclosing Rosalind's disguise comes from Celia. While Rosalind becomes closer to Orlando, Celia feels her cousin pulling away more and more: "You have simply misused our sex in your love-prate. We must have your doublet and hose plucked over your head, and show the world what the bird hath done to her own nest" (*As You Like It* 4.1.184-6). In the previous chapter, the misogynistic views of Rosalind / Ganymede are discussed and this passage could be seen as Celia's reaction to it. Ganymede's clothes are a metaphor for an abusive male mindset and she would rather have Rosalind being stripped of them.

From scene 4 onwards, Rosalind starts to let her disguise slip as she comes closer to Orlando. In the confusing make-believe, Rosalind as Ganymede pretends to be Rosalind. She hints at her true female identity as she refers to herself as Rosalind. She also proposes a mock-wedding where she refers to herself as 'girl' and 'woman': "I might ask you for your commission; but I do take thee, Orlando, for my husband. There's a girl goes before the priest; and certainly a woman's thought runs before her actions" (*As You Like It* 4.1.125-8). It could be concluded that her love for Orlando is thus so strong that her own previous convictions are deemed less credible. In addition, it seems as if Oliver, Orlando's older brother, has seen through Rosalind's façade from the onset and throughout. To Oliver, Rosalind's disguise is less successful than with the other characters. Oliver hints at this in his first encounter with Ganymede:

> If that an eye may profit by a tongue,
> Then should I know you by description.
> Such garments, and such years. 'The boy is fair,
> Of female favour, and bestows himself
> Like a ripe sister. The woman low and browner than her brother.' (*As You Like It* 4.3.84-9)

Here, Oliver refers to Ganymede as 'riper sister' and comments on his 'female favour'. Here, he shows that he sees through the disguise. It could be concluded that even though Rosalind manages to fool everyone with her disguise, there are still clues as to her true gendered identity.

At the end of the play, Rosalind reappears on stage in the Epilogue. She addresses the audience:

> It is not the fashion to see the lady the epilogue; but it is no more unhandsome than to see the lord the prologue. […] My way is to conjure you; and I'll begin with the women. I charge you, O women, for the love you bear to men, to like as much of this play as please you. And I charge you, O men, for the love you bear to women – as I perceive by your simpering none you hates them – that between you and the women the play may please. If I were a woman I would kiss as many of you as had beards that pleased me, complexions that liked me, and breaths that I defied not. (*As You Like It* Epilogue.1-19)

According to the editor, the fact that Rosalind speaks in the Epilogue could have been a first, "[a]s no epilogues spoken by women characters in earlier Elizabethan plays have been found" (Brissenden 227). This shows that Shakespeare was already toying with the idea of gender. Since the character of Rosalind would have been performed by a young male actor, the lines in the epilogue would still have been given by a man. True, however hidden, identity reoccurs even all the way to the end.

Contrary to *As You Like It*, clothing is less explicitly present in *Twelfth Night.* Nevertheless, the description of appearance is recurring. At the beginning of the play, Viola comments on the captain's outward appearance which matches his behaviour:

> There is a fair behaviour in thee, captain,
> And though that nature with a beauteous wall
> Doth oft close in pollution, yet of thee
> I will believe thou hast a mind that suits
> With this thy fair and outward character (*Twelfth Night* 1.2.44-9)

Here, Viola simultaneously states that even though the captain's appearance matches his characteristics, nature does not necessarily show on the outside what is on the inside, which refers to Viola's future disguise as Cesario.

Near the end of the first scene, Orsino describes Viola's alter ego Cesario: "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 women's part" (*Twelfth Night* 1.4.31-4). Even as a man, Orsino recognises the soft, womanlike features but interprets them as Cesario being young, not female. Moreover, when Olivia asks what kind of man Cesario is, Malvolio answers in a descriptive way: "Not yet old enough for a man, nor young enough for a boy: as a squash is

before ‘tis a peascod, or a codling 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” (*Twelfth Night* 1.5.150-5). Both instances show Viola’s successful disguise: Cesario is perceived as a young man instead of a girl dressed as a boy.

When Malvolio asks Cesario about the ring after having visited Olivia, Cesario and therefore the disguised Viola is confronted with the consequences of the impersonation:

> I am the man. If it be so – as ‘tis –
> Poor lady, she were better love a dream!
> Disguise, I see thou art a wickedness
> Wherein the pregnant enemy does much.
> How easy is it for the proper false
> In women’s waxen hearts to set their forms!
> Alas, our frailty is the cause, not we,
> For such we are made of, such we be.
> 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? (*Twelfth Night* 2.2.25-36)

Here, Viola refers to her disguise as ‘the pregnant enemy’. According to the editor, ‘the pregnant enemy’ refers to “an enemy who is resourceful, always ready to take advantage” (Warren and Wells 122). As stated by the *Oxford English Dictionary*, ‘the enemy’ in the Early Modern period often referred to the devil. Remarkably, Viola refers to the enemy as pregnant, which is a physical condition that can only refer to women. Viola could refer to her disguise as a female devil who is resourceful and always ready to take advantage of other people’s, specifically other women’s, waxen hearts.

Similarly to Rosalind in *As You Like It*, Viola as Cesario seems to have a misogynistic point of view. Then Viola comments on the ‘women’s waxen heart’. Lynn M. Maxwell explains:

> [w]ax is a material that can be imprinted and inscribed. It can hold a shape but can also be softened and made malleable, melted and re-formed, transformed on every sensory level. […] Just as a signet ring pressed on a piece of hot wax leaves its print on the surface of the wax, so men, at least by the logic of the trope, have the power to shape women, while neither signet ring nor man is transformed by the encounter. According to this schema, women are soft, weak, and vulnerable, whereas men are hard, strong, and impervious. (433-4)

As a man, Viola observes Olivia falling for her. She refers to “the woman’s waxen hearts” (*Twelfth Night* 2.2.30) as was believed that women’s hearts were softer and therefore could sustain impact easier. Viola experiences that it is easy to leave an imprint on a woman’s heart and therefore it is easy to make them fall in love with you even if you are secretly a man. Perhaps there, she also identifies as a ‘monster’ since in her disguise she is both a man and a woman. According to Kietzman,

> an emergent ethic, based on sympathetic identification, is associated with the actor’s use of the word “monster.” When used in and out of scripts, *monster* not only referred to the alleged unnaturalness of the actor but to the actor as “someone whose unnaturalness was held up to the common view.” […] [T]he actor Viola is the first to use the word in self-reference and in a context that creates an analogy between the excesses of her love for Orsino and the excess of feeling spilled by actors and audiences in collaborating to create a fictional character (268-9)

Thus, not only does Viola see her fictional character Cesario as ‘unnatural’ for secretly having two genders, but also hints towards the ‘unnaturalness’ of identifying as two characters, both of whom have their own emotions and are the subject of feeling and receiving romantic attention.

Moreover, the consequences of the disguise leave Cesario, and therefore Viola, with an inner conflict:

> As I am a man,
> My state is desperate for my master’s love.
> As I am a woman, now alas the day,
> What thriftless sighs shall poor Olivia breathe!
> O time, thou must untangle this, not I.
> It is too hard a knot for me t’untie. (*Twelfth Night* 2.2.36-41)

Here, Viola performs a soliloquy as Malvolio leaves the stage. She realises that, as a man, her love for Orsino is hopeless. In addition, as a man, Cesario has made Olivia fall in love with him, even though Viola as Cesario feels no romantic affection for her. The audience is aware of the dramatic irony as well as the fact that the play performed on stage is by a young male actor, impersonating a woman who pretends to be a man.

As has been mentioned in the introduction, the issue of ‘beards’ or, rather, the lack of beard often reoccurs in Shakespeare’s plays. Beards were used as a simple disguise but also as a sign of masculinity, however, in *Twelfth Night*, Feste cleverly plays with the

absence of Cesario's facial hair. It could be implied that Feste sees through the façade and tries to lure Viola out of her disguise by implying that God has not given Cesario a beard yet:

> FESTE. Now Jove in his next commodity of hair send thee a beard.
>
> VIOLA. By my troth I'll tell thee, I am almost sick for one, though I would now have it grow on *my* chin. (*Twelfth Night* 3.1.43-6)

Since Viola is secretly a woman, disguised as a man named Cesario, she could never 'grow a beard on her own chin'. With this remark, Feste subtly questions Cesario's masculinity. Moreover, Feste hints more and more towards the discovery of Cesario's disguise halfway throughout the play: "Who you are and what you would are out of my welkin" (*Twelfth Night* 3.1.56-7). Here, Feste simply marks that he knows something is going on, however, who Cesario truly is or who he is trying to be, does not concern him.

Towards the end of the play, Viola concerns herself more and more with the consequences of her disguise. At one moment, Viola is almost driven by desperation to reveal her true identity: "Pray God defend me. A little thing would make me tell them how much I lack of a man" (*Twelfth Night* 3.4.290-1). Here, Viola is being bawdy but then again also very serious. Only a small gesture of removing her hose would prove she lacks a penis, which would expose her secret. Olivia's love becomes more daunting and her love for Orsino cannot be reciprocated as long as she is Cesario. In the last scene, Cesario reveals his true identity as Viola, but as has been mentioned in the previous chapter, this leaves somewhat to be desired. Not only does Viola lose her voice and seemingly her agency, but Viola's reveal, as the sister to her brother Sebastian, seems equally unimportant, even to Viola herself. While reuniting with Sebastian, Viola refers to herself in the third person, as if her identity is detached from her own. Moreover, she sees herself as a usurper by disguising as Cesario:

> If nothing lets to make use happy both
> But this my masculine usurped attire
> Do not embrace me till each circumstance
> Of place, time, fortune do cohere and jump
> That I am Viola (*Twelfth Night* 5.1.243-7)

After Viola's confession, Orsino still calls Viola 'boy': "Boy, thou hast said to me a thousand times thou never shouldst love woman like to me" (*Twelfth Night* 5.1.261-2). It seems as if Viola's reveal as a woman does not seem to be accepted as well.

Similarly to *As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night*, appearance and its description reoccur within *Cymbeline.* However, the importance of clothing is only present in a couple of key instants:

> Poor I am stale, a garment out of fashion,
> And for I am richer than to hang by th' walls
> I must be ripped. To pieces with me! O,
> Men's vows are women's traitors. All good seeming,
> By thy revolt, O husband, shall be thought
> Put on for villainy; not born where't grows,
> But worn a bait for ladies. (*Cymbeline* 3.4.51-7)

Here, Innogen refers to herself as a 'garment out of fashion'. Remarkably, she uses this metaphor to illustrate the transformation she has to undergo. As she states, she is 'richer than to hang by the walls'. She feels the need to reinvent herself as she is too good to be left 'unused'.

In addition, Cloten disguises himself as Posthumus, he wears his clothes and in a soliloquy, he speaks about how well Posthumus' clothes fit him: "How fit his garments serve me! Why should his mistress, who was made by him that made the tailor, not be fit too?" (*Cymbeline* 4.1.1-4). Here, Cloten claims that as well as the clothes belonging to Posthumus fit him, the woman belonging to Posthumus should fit him just as much. The sexual innuendo where Cloten would 'wear' Innogen as well as Posthumus' attire will be revisited in chapter 4.

Earlier in the thesis, it is stated that Pisanio advises Innogen to disguise herself as a man, he has already prepared her costume:

> First make yourself like one
> Forethinking this, I have already fit –
> 'Tis in my cloak-bag – doublet, hat, hose, all
> That answer to them. (*Cymbeline* 3.4.168-71)

Besides Pisanio's description and Cloten's dress-up, the play concerns itself more with personal character rather than with outer appearance. Especially concerning Innogen, the people around her tend to describe her more than she expresses herself. However, unlike *As*

You Like It and *Twelfth Night*, the way Innogen is described is more on an emotional scale rather than on the superficial outer appearance. Furthermore, it is remarkable that even though Innogen cross-dresses from female to male, gender does not seem to play a role in how she is perceived by others. When Innogen is described, the people around her use words that describe an object rather than a person; this is different from the way Rosalind and Viola are perceived by the people around them. Cymbeline calls Innogen 'disloyal thing' and 'foolish thing' at the beginning of the play, and in a conversation with the Frenchman and Giacomo, Posthumus compares her to a diamond, which is again genderless. By doing this, he describes her as a divine creature he adores rather than using more tangible terms like wife and therefore sexual partner: "She holds her virtue still, and I my mind" (*Cymbeline* 1.4.61). Moreover, when the men in the cave are about to leave for their hunt, Arvigarus expresses his affection towards Innogen, but not because of Fidele's appearance:

> If it be sin to say so, sir, I yoke me
> In my good brother's fault. I know not why
> I love this youth, and I have heard you say
> Love's reason's without reason. The bier at door
> And demand who is't shall die, I'd say
> 'My father, not this youth'. (*Cymbeline* 4.2.19-24)

Here, Arvigarus sees eye to eye with his brother Guiderius. The persona Fidele/ Innogen makes them love without apparent reason. Again, the affection towards Fidele is not concerned with outer appearance. Equally, towards the end of the play Cymbeline presents Fidele, describing his 'female' qualities rather than his features:

> "Let him be ransomed. Never master had
> A page so kind so duteous, diligent,
> So tender over his occasions, true,
> So feat, so nurse-like (*Cymbeline* 5.4.84-8)

Contrarily to Rosalind and Viola, Innogen's character is more important and comes across more evidently than her image.

In *As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night*, the main characters seem to adopt the identity of their alter egos. In *Cymbeline*, there is no clear evidence of Innogen and her sense of identity. However, when considering the different characters around her, they seem to have clear ideas on identity and gender. One of those characters is Posthumus' servant Pisanio.

As has been mentioned in chapter 1, Pisanio advises Innogen to impersonate a man, using the following lines:

> 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 a waggish courage,
> Ready in gibes, quick-answered, saucy and
> As quarrelous as the weasel. (*Cymbeline* 3.4.155-60)

The stereotypical female character traits are presented here as being obedient, anxious and nice whereas the male character traits are deemed to be courageous, witty, free to make sexual innuendos and 'quarrelous'. In the play, the willingness to fight is strongly present in the war between Britain and the Roman empire and, as has been suggested by Cloten, the courageous position in the army is seen as a positive feature of one's character. The second character who believes in fixed gender roles is Pisanio's superior, Posthumus:

> O lady, weep no more, lest I give you cause
> To be suspected of more tenderness
> Than doth become a man. I will remain
> The loyal'st husband that did e'er plight troth. (*Cymbeline* 1.1.94-7)

Here, Posthumus expresses his view on gender roles as he and Innogen are separated at the beginning of the play. Their marriage has not been approved by Cymbeline and the Queen, as Innogen was intended to be married to Cloten, her stepbrother. In this passage, Posthumus asks Innogen to stop crying as he might join her in their weeping and to do so would not be masculine. Furthermore, when Posthumus is under the impression that Innogen has committed adultery, he is explicit about fixed gender roles and (negative) stereotypes:

> Could I find out
> The woman's part in me – for there's no motion
> That tends to vice in man but I affirm
> It is the woman's part; be it lying, note it,
> The woman's; flattering, hers; deceiving, hers;
> Lust and rank thoughts, hers, hers; revenges, hers;
> Ambitions, covetings, change of prides, disdain,
> Nice longing, slanders, mutability,
> All faults that man can name, nay, that hell knows,
> Why hers, in part or all, but rather all –
> For even to vice
> They are not constant, but are changing still
> One vice but of a minute old for one
> Not half so old as that. I'll write against them,
> Detest them, curse them, yet 'tis greater skill

> In a true hate to pray they have their will.
> The very devils cannot plague them better. (*Cymbeline* 2.4.153-87)

Somehow, Posthumus claims that everything that men do wrong are female traits: 'it is the woman's part'. Again the negative stereotypes of men and women are presented in Posthumus' misogynistic perception. According to Posthumus, women are flattering in general. As stated in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the adjective *flattering* refers to "[o]f a person, his actions, utterances, etc.: That flatters or tries to please by praise, generally insincere." In addition to women being flattering, Innogen is deceiving, lustful, vengeful and proud. Interestingly, in addition to those negative characteristics, being a woman with ambition is also perceived as wrong by Posthumus. Furthermore, he also describes Innogen as fickle as her negative personality changes by the minute. Lastly, Giacomo has a clear view of the roles of men and women as he expresses himself during his time in the war:

> "The heaviness and guilt within my bosom
> Takes off my manhood.
> […]
> Knighthoods and honours borne
> As I wear mine are titles but of scorn.
> If that thy gentry, Britain, go before,
> This lout as he exceeds our lords, the odds
> Is that we scarce are men and you are gods." (*Cymbeline* 5.2.1-10)

Here, Giacomo feels as if he is less of a man by the crime he has committed. The prestige of being a knight and the honour that comes with it are threatened by his dishonesty and deceitfulness. In *Cymbeline*, there are clear views on gender and identity, it is evident that personal character traits and the way people perceive characters within the play are more important than outer appearance.

Similarly to *Cymbeline*, the issue of fixed gender roles reoccurs in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. The beginning of the play presents the viewers with one particular moment where the issue of gender and the freedom, or the lack of, of gender is questioned. Remarkably, in scene 2; act 1, Mistress Ford asks Mistress Page for advice:

> MISTRESS PAGE. What's the matter, woman?
>
> MISTRESS FORD. O woman, if it were not for one trifling respect, I could come to such honour!

MISTRESS PAGE. Hang the trifle, woman, take the honour. What is it? Dispense with trifles. What is it?

MISTRESS FORD. If I would but go to hell for an eternal moment or so, I could be knighted.

MISTRESS PAGE. What? Thou liest! Sir Alice Ford? These knights will hack, and so thou shouldst not alter the article of thy gentry. (*The Merry Wives of Windsor* 2.1.39-48)

In the *Oxford World's Classics* version of the play, the editor suggests that this passage can be read as "an innuendo about Mistress Ford's acquiring, by being knighted, the sexual organs of a man" (Craik 115). After reading Falstaff's letters, it could be assumed that Mistress Ford bawdily jokes about having sex with Falstaff, the knight. If this would be the case, Mistress Ford knows that even thinking about committing adultery as a married woman could have her condemned by others, but to her very good friend, she appears to see no harm in mentioning her fantasy.

In comparison to the formerly mentioned plays, again *The Merry Wives of Windsor* portrays the identity of a person in a comically different way. Whereas outer appearance and personal characteristics are deemed valuable in the previous plays, money does the trick for the characters in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. At the beginning of the play, Anne Page is already assessed by how much she is worth and how much money her father makes:

SLENDER. Did her grandsire leave her seven hundred pound?

EVANS. Ay, and her father is make her a petter penny.

SHALLOW. I know the young gentlewoman. She has good gifts.

EVANS. Seven hundred pounds, and possibilities, is goot gifts. (*The Merry Wives of Windsor* 1.1.53-9)

Furthermore, Falstaff is only interested in Mistress Page and Mistress Ford because of their wealth. He expresses his motives clearly as he compares both ladies to 'exchequers':

> O, she did so course o'er my exteriors, with such a greedy intention, that the appetite of her eye did seem to scorch me up like a burning-glass. Here's another letter to her. She bears the purse too. She is a region in Guiana, all gold and bounty. I will be

> cheaters to them both, and they shall be exchequers to me. They shall be my East and West Indies, and I will trade with them both. (*The Merry Wives of Windsor* 1.3.60-6)

According to the editor, Guiana is "the country between Venezuela and Brazil on the north-east coast of South America. Spanish and English explorers sought there for the fabled 'golden city' El Dorado" (Wells 99). Clearly, Falstaff sees the mistresses as a gold mine that he can draw from. Lastly in a conversation between Fenton and Anne, Fenton expresses his concerns towards Master Page as it appears that Master Page would disapprove of their marriage because of Fenton's lack of wealth:

> He doth object I am too great of birth,
> And that, my state being galled with my expense,
> I seek to heal it only by his wealth.
> Besides, these other bars he lays before me –
> My riots past, my wild societies;
> And tells me 'tis a thing impossible
> I should love thee but as a property. (*The Merry Wives of Windsor* 3.4.5-10)

Even though it seems as if wealth is more important for the characters in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, the issue of clothing and outer appearance is also key as they contribute to the superficial theme of the play.

Falstaff's pre-eminent outer appearance has been noticed by the other characters. They remark and voice their opinions about his looks throughout the play. Mistress Page comments on Falstaff's love for wine and food: "What unweighed behaviour hath this Flemish drunkard picked […] For revenged I will be, as sure as his guts are made of puddings" (*The Merry Wives of Windsor* 2.1.21-9). Mistress Ford shares her views on the *bon-vivant*:

> I shall think the worst of fat men as long as I have an eye to make difference of men's liking. […] What tempest, I trow, threw this whale, with so many tuns of oil in his belly, ashore at Windsor? How shall I be revenged on him? I think the best way were to entertain him with hope till the wicked fire f lust have melted him in his own grease. (*The Merry Wives of Windsor* 2.1.51-63)

When the two women discuss Falstaff's disguise as the witch of Brentford, they find themselves challenged on how to conceal his fat body:

> MISTRESS FORD. How might we disguise him?

> MISTRESS PAGE. Alas the day, I know now. There is no woman's gown big enough for him; otherwise he might put on a hat, a muffler, and a kerchief, and so escape. (*The Merry Wives of Windsor* 4.2.60-3)

Even Falstaff mocks himself about his size: "a death that I abhor, for the water swells a man, and what a thing should I have been when I had been swelled! I should have been a mountain of mummy" (*The Merry Wives of Windsor* 3.5.4-7).

According to Cress, "it makes sense that clothing and accessories were key signifiers of gender and sex, and that clothing could be deployed, swapped, or altered to queer and complicate both gender performance and, possibly, the sex of the body beneath" (6). This chapter agrees and it can be concluded by reflecting on the issues of gender and identity which repeatedly reoccur in the four plays, but are not always evenly strongly presented. One's identity can be valued by multiple different aspects such as clothing, outer appearance, personality traits or wealth. Ironically, the characters reinforce exaggerated versions of their pretended genders and therefore gender, and more specifically gender roles, are part of their identity. The fixed gender roles that were once forced upon the main (female) characters, now play a significant role when it comes to the personification of the cross-dressing characters. The impersonation of their alter-egos is at times exaggerated by adopting misogynistic ideas and also expressing these ideas to others, as well as having extreme ideas on fixed gender roles.

Chapter 4 – Sexuality

As explained in chapters 2 and 3, in Shakespeare's plays, cross-gender disguises have an influence on the character's gender and identity. If so, the issue of sexuality should not be neglected. Cressy agrees as he states that "cross-gender clothing signalled subversion, resistance, and transgression and that the sex-gender system of early modern English was in a state of flux. Cross-dressing […] upset patriarchal values, assaulted cultural boundaries, and unraveled the sexual separators of ambivalence, androgyny, and erotism" (439). The audience of the Early Modern period had multiple ways of interpreting these amorous displays as Chess explains:

> there has been a tendency to read romantic and sexual scenes involving women dressed as men or boys dressed as women as either homoerotic (the [Female-to-Male] crossdressing mechanism stages a kiss between two men; the presence of a boy actor means that even a romance between a male character and a female character is actually between two men) or heterosexual (the [Female-to-Male] crossdresser is a female character kissing a male character; the boy actor plays a female character in love with a man). (8)

The fixed gender roles Chess speaks of, were common knowledge to the people who worked on and around the stage as it were to the theatregoers. As the introduction mentioned, there were no female actors in commercial theatre and women could only be part of a play when financially supporting the theatre company. Female roles were performed by boy actors or boy-actresses. In Early Modern England, the audience was aware of this: the 'women' on stage were actually young male actors. Nevertheless, it seems as if Shakespeare took his chance to bring issues on gender and sexuality to light by using these boy actors. These boy actors would function as a substitute for women outside of the play who could have never taken the stage to express themselves in the same way. Catherine Thomas adds, "[t]he indetermination produced by this layering of clothes and performed gender roles necessarily focuses the audience's attention less on the individual's sexual identity and more on the acts of desire in which s/he is engaged" (Thomas 308). While sexuality and desire play a big part in the plays discussed in this thesis, the judgement that could easily be voiced is left absent. It seems as if one's object to sexual admiration does not necessarily coincide with the

character's gendered identity and therefore, one could be attracted by another character of the same sex. By doing this, Shakespeare gives way to interpret his work in a modern way without creating anachronisms. Ultimately, the characters find themselves in a heterosexual resolution at the end of the play.

This chapter will not only focus on the interaction between the 'clown' characters, the disguised characters, and the other characters around them, but it will also examine the different ways of expressing sexuality, and the influence of gender on doing so. Especially when it comes to the women in the plays, their sexuality is measured by the degree of their chastity or their loyalty to their husbands. It seems that the main female characters can only freely display their sexuality when they are disguised as men since the overt expression of sexuality by women was perceived as inappropriate and would evoke anxiety. When it comes to the male cross-dressing character, Falstaff, his sexuality (and greed) is not hidden and contrarily works against him rather than to his benefit.

With regard to expressing sexuality, *As You Like It* is one of the prime examples in which bawdy language is used to express emotions and ideas in a light and comical way. In the Early Modern English theatre, humour was used to address issues that were not appropriate in a serious conversation. Therefore, the double entendres in this play are often obvious and descriptive, however, sometimes the sexual innuendo is implied and the comprehension of the joke depends on the knowledge of the audience. For example, the hidden meaning behind the name, Ganymede. According to the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Ganymede is a character in Greek mythology:

> Because of his unusual beauty, he was carried off either by the gods or by Zeus, disguised as an eagle, or, according to a Cretan account, by Minos, to serve as a cupbearer. In compensation, Zeus gave Ganymede's father a stud of immortal horses (or a golden vine). The earliest forms of the myth have no erotic content, by the 5th century bc it was believed that Ganymede's kidnapper had a homosexual passion for him; Ganymede's kidnapping was a popular topic on 5th-century Attic vases.

It is remarkable that Rosalind would specifically choose this name for her alter-ego. The editor of the Oxford World's Classics version adds that choosing this name indicates "[t]he start of the game of sexual ambiguity. The word [Ganymede] was also a sixteenth-century

term for a catamite, a youth who was the object of a male homosexual's passion" (Brissenden 123). In the play, this becomes evident when Ganymede pretends to be Rosalind. In this suggestive play within the play, Orlando 'practices' his wooing of Rosalind with Ganymede. In theory, he uses his seductive language and gestures in interaction with another man.

Sexual language does not always suit every character in Shakespeare's plays. For example, bawdy language within a tragedy would feel out of place. However, Shakespeare's comedies contain a traditional character who has the freedom to express sexually loaded language without anyone taking offence. In traditional Early Modern English theatre, the 'clown' or 'fool' character belonged to the play but never completely took a place within the narrative. The character had the luxury to be included in the lives of the (main) characters but always had an 'outside' perspective. As Richard Preiss explains in *Clowning and Authorship*, "[c]lowning […] typified an embodied paradigm of theatre whose internal relationships increasingly needed resolution: relations between production and reception, poet and player, player and audience, performance and text" (220). As can be understood, the role of the clown is multifaceted compared to the other characters on stage. The clown does not only watch and comment on the side-line, it is also a medium between player and audience. On the side-line, the clown moves in a space between the narrative and the audience, the performance and the 'real world', and comments on what happens. This contributes to the reception by the audience.

In *As You Like It,* this 'clown' character is depicted by Touchstone. He is the court jester and accompanies Rosalind and Celia when they flee from persecution. Touchstone fulfils the function of the clown as he avoids judgement when his lines are almost always filled with sexual innuendos. In scene 3, Touchstone improvises a rhyme as an answer to the poem Rosalind found on a tree, written by Orlando. Here, Touchstone bawdily mocks the Petrarchan character of the poem:

> If the cat will after kind
> So, be sure, will Rosalind
> Wintered garments must be lined

> So must slender Rosalind
> They that reap must sheaf and bind
> Then to cart with Rosalind
> 'Sweetest nut hath sourest rind'
> Such a nut is Rosalind
> He that sweetest rose will find
> Must find love's prick, and Rosalind (*As You Like It* 3.2.99-108)

This passage is full of double entendres. Where Touchstone compares Rosalind to a cat, Brissenden explains that "a cat will do what is natural to it. Touchstone takes up the sexual sense of "'to do the act of kind' = 'to copulate'" (Brissenden 160). Then Touchstone continues: as 'wintered garments must be lined', Rosalind must also be 'lined'. As the *Oxford English Dictionary* states: "To fill (one's purse, pockets, stomach, etc.) with something that may be spoken of as a lining; to cram, stuff." It could be read that here, Touchstone refers to the 'filling' of Rosalind. Rosalind's virginity is also an object to Touchstone's jokes when he refers to 'nut' versus 'knot'. Touchstone might suggest that breaking her 'virgin-knot' takes going through her 'sourest rind', i.e. her male disguise. Lastly, Touchstone compares Rosalind to a rose. However, he implies that if one would want to find her and take her virginity, he "will have to be sexually aroused and seek out Rosalind', the implication being that she will satisfy him" (Brissenden 160).

Another remarkable character in the play is Phoebe. Phoebe is a young shepherdess who makes her debut in the play when Rosalind as Ganymede and Celia as Aliena travel through the forest of Arden. As has been mentioned in chapter 3, Rosalind reprimands Phoebe for her behaviour towards Silvius and this makes Phoebe find herself falling in love with Ganymede. This affection for the disguised Rosalind takes a problematic turn as, in fact, she falls in love with a woman. She implicitly expresses these affections by citing a well-known love poem by Christopher Marlowe, 'aside' from the conversation which is perceived as speaking to the audience: "Dead shepherd, now I find thy saw of might: Who ever loved that loved not at first sight?" (*As You Like It* 3.5.82). Here, the dead shepherd refers to Marlowe and it seems as if by citing his poem, she addresses him, saying that now that she fell in love she understands his words. As the audience is aware of the disguise, Phoebe's homosexual feelings for Rosalind seem to be accepted and are not judged:

> The best thing in him
> Is his complexion; and faster than his tongue
> Did make offence, his eye did heal it up.
> He is not very tall; yet for his years he's tall.
> His leg is but so-so; and yet 'tis well.
> There was a pretty redness in his lip,
> A little riper and more lusty red
> Than mixed in his cheek. 'Twas just the difference
> Betwixt the constant red and mingled damask. (*As You Like It* 3.5.116-24)

Here, the description of Ganymede does not picture stereotypical manly features, however, Phoebe does not seem to understand that she is falling for Rosalind's feminine features. Again, within the interaction with Rosalind, the sexual attention Phoebe has for Rosalind is not condemned even though it might suggest homosexual feelings towards the main character.

Rosalind as Ganymede feels free to express herself sexually through her disguise. As has been mentioned in chapter 2, the main characters of the plays discussed in this thesis are verbally skilled and because of their disguise as men, they are more often heard and taken more seriously than if they were their true gendered selves. Concerning jokes, being comically bawdy is received better when being a man rather than a woman. The flirty interaction between Rosalind and Orlando at the beginning of scene 4 is proof of this. Here, Rosalind reprimands Orlando because of his tardiness by saying: "Why, how now, Orlando? Where have you been all this while? You a lover?" (*As You Like It* 4.1.35-6). Here, Rosalind implies that either Orlando is not interested in her at all and therefore is not a 'real' lover or that he has an affair with someone else while she was waiting for him. As Ganymede, the remark is perceived as a serious comment in regard to Orlando being late. In contrast, if Rosalind would have made the same remark as a woman, she would have been perceived as being jealous.

In chapter 2, it has also been mentioned that Rosalind's disguise provides freedom to play Orlando's mistress whereas if she were a woman, she could not. Ganymede, pretending to be Rosalind, takes his chance to find out what Orlando would do if he were to be with his Rosalind. The way Rosalind stages this naughty make-believe could be read as Rosalind giving way to her fantasy about Orlando in a sexual way. As Orlando answers her answer

with: “I would kiss before I spoke.” (*As You Like It* 4.1.66), she advises against: “Nay, you were better speak first, and when you were gravelled for lack of matter you might take occasion to kiss. Very good orators, when they are out, they will spit; and for lovers, lacking – God warr’nt us – matter, the cleanliest shift is to kiss” (*As You Like It* 4.1.67-71). Hoping that one day Rosalind could reveal her true identity, she advises him how to act to her liking as she values speech over sexual gestures. However, Orlando is not sure what to do and asks: “Who could be out, being before his beloved mistress?” (*As You Like It* 4.1.75-6). Rosalind reacts bawdily: “Marry, that should you if I were you mistress, or I should think my honesty ranker than my wit.” (*As You Like It* 4.1.77-8). According to the editor in his notes on this passage, “Rosalind naughtily plays on ‘out’ = ‘uncovered, exposed’ […] the secondary meaning, which Orlando perceives, is: ‘If I were your mistress you would be out of your clothes and ready for love-making, or else I would think my chastity (*honesty)* more erotically inclined than my sexual organ *(wit)*’” (Brissenden 190). Rosalind expresses her sexual desires since marriage would grant her sexual freedom with her husband. The word ‘wit’ reoccurs later in the same conversation. Again, ‘wit’ refers to one’s sexual organ in Orlando’s comments on marriage. “A man that had a wife with such a wit, he might say ‘Wit, whither wilt’?” (*As You Like It* 4.1.152-3). Brissenden explains that this particular phrase was used to address a person “whose tongue is running away with him” (194). Literally, this would mean ‘running one’s mouth’, i.e. talking. However, it could also be read as a double entendre when Orlando refers to the sexual satisfaction he would provide by using his tongue. In the following lines, it seems as if Orlando and Rosalind try to outwit each other. Again, Rosalind shows off her verbal skills:

> ROSALIND. Nay you might keep that check for it till you met your wife’s wit going to your neighbour’s bed.
>
> ORLANDO. And what wit could wit have to excuse that?
>
> ROSALIND. Marry, to say she came to seek you there. You shall never take her without her answer unless you take her without her tongue. (*As You Like It* 4.1.154-9)

Rosalind warns Orlando for being so sexually outspoken. One could easily use their same 'wit' with their neighbour and commit adultery. Orlando presumes it is the husband who would cheat on his wife. As Brissenden explains, then "Rosalind turns the tables by changing the sex of the hypothetical neighbour: the clever wife on the way to her neighbour's bed will tell her suspicious husband that she is out looking for *him* because she suspects him of adultery with the neighbour's wife" (194). Again, Rosalind is not condemned for the way she sexually expresses herself, since she expresses herself through her male disguise.

As has been mentioned before in every chapter so far, the issue of the beard does not only have a practical use when cross-dressing or a gendered connotation which has been used cleverly by many different characters. It is again applicable to the theme of sexuality and the interaction the main characters have with the 'clown' character and the rest of the characters around them. As Joost Daalder explains, "Shakespeare was capable of using the word 'beard' as a euphemism for pubic hair, both male and female" (7). In the epilogue, Rosalind appears and addresses the audience by making a remarkable statement: "If I were a woman I would kiss as many of you as had beards that pleased me, complexions that liked me" (*As You Like It* Epilogue.16-8). There is no doubt Rosalind expresses herself in a free, sexual way as she implies that she would 'kiss as many people who have beards that pleased her', i.e. orally satisfy or simply have sex with anyone who pleases her, men and women, without discrimination.

Twelfth Night is very similar to *As You Like It* in many different ways. Just as Rosalind finds her sexual freedom, Viola experiences this freedom to express her sexuality when disguised in Cesario's clothes. Just as Touchstone functions as a character between character and crowd, Feste plays a similar part. The first time Feste appears on stage, his bawdy character immediately shows. In a conversation with Maria, he claims: "He that is well hanged in this world needs to fear no colours" (*Twelfth Night* 1.5.4-5). According to the editor, the literal explanation for this quote is simple: "whoever is well hanged needs to fear nothing (because he is dead)" (Warren and Wells 102). However, being 'well hanged' can also be interpreted differently. 'Well hanged' can also be read as someone who is 'sexually

well endowed'. Feste shows his bawdy character throughout the play, but especially at the end, he takes the stage to sing his bawdy song in an epilogue as it were:

> When that I was and a little tiny boy,
> With he, ho, the wind and the rain,
> A foolish thing was but a toy,
> For the rain it raineth every day.
>
> But when I came to man's estate,
> With hey, ho, the wind and the rain,
> 'Gainst knaves and thieves men shut their gate,
> For the rain it raineth every day.
>
> But when I came, alas, to wive,
> With hey, ho, the wind and the rain,
> By swaggering could I never thrive,
> For the rain it raineth every day.
>
> But when I came unto my beds
> With hey, ho, the wind and the rain
> With tosspots still had drunken heads,
> For the rain it raineth every day.
>
> A great while ago the world begun
> With hey, ho, the wind and the rain,
> But that's all one, our play is done,
> And we'll strive to please you every day. (*Twelfth Night* 5.1.379-98)

In this five-versed song, Feste sings about growing up. However, from a sexual point of view, Feste refers to his sexual journey from boy to man. In the first verse, he refers to 'a foolish thing that is but a toy' which could be read as his penis only something to play with as a child but not yet functioning in relation to having sex. In the second verse, Feste speaks of gates being closed to thieves and knaves which could refer to his sexual period as a bachelor when not all 'gates' would open for him. In the third verse, he has found a wife, however, his 'swaggering' of his penis does not always seem to please her. In the fourth verse, his drunkenness cause him to sleep wherever he would fall (came unto my beds, plural) without finding anyone to sleep with either, and in the last verse, the last sentence shows his determination to find someone who he could please every day, i.e. sexually satisfy.

Just like Phoebe, Olivia positions herself in a situation unaware of the fact that she falls in love with a woman disguised as a man. She is a countess who runs her own household without the supervision of a man. When Viola, disguised as Cesario, enters her

house, she is veiled and dressed for mourning. This could be her own disguise since, within the period of mourning for her brother's death, she would be left alone to process her grief. Orsino neglects this tradition by trying to convince her that she should marry him. Similarly to Phoebe, Olivia also finds herself in the position of falling for a woman disguised as a man. Again, the judgement of her falling in love with a woman is absent as even Olivia herself says: "I do I know not want, and fear to find / Mine eye too great a flatterer for my mind. / Fate, show thy force, ourselves we do not owe. / What is decreed must be; and be this so (*Twelfth Night* 1.5.298-301). This passage can be read as a depiction of Olivia's gut feeling. For some reason, she knows that she should not want to love this person and she fears that falling for Cesario/ Viola does not benefit her mentally. However, Olivia recognises the power of nature and fate and believes that "what must be must be" (Warren and Wells 118).

In addition, Malvolio is a noteworthy character one should not neglect when discussing *Twelfth Night* and sexuality. Malvolio is Olivia's steward and at first, he seems insignificant but throughout the play, he becomes more and more present and more pre-eminent. The reason why Malvolio is noteworthy is because of his unapologetic way of crossing boundaries which are clearer to other characters. In contradiction to others, his actions are subject to judgement. This becomes evident when Maria, Sir Toby and Fabian plan to lock him up because they suspect him to be mad:

> FABIAN. If this were played upon a stage now, I could condemn it as an improbable fiction.
>
> SIR TOBY. His very genius hath taken the infection of the device, man.
>
> MARIA. Nay, pursue him now, lest the device take air and taint.
>
> FABIAN. Why, we shall make him mad indeed.
>
> MARIA. The house will be quieter.
>
> SIR TOBY. Come, we'll have him in a dark room and bound. My niece is already in the belief that he's mad. (*Twelfth Night* 3.4.122-31)

Again, the meta-theatricality is present when Fabian hypothetically remarks that if this scene would be performed in a theatre, he would be convinced it to be fake. Funnily, *Twelfth Night* is a fictional play, performed on stage.

Malvolio plays a noteworthy role in Viola/Cesario's love triangle with Olivia and Orsino. In the first half of the play, it becomes clear that Malvolio wants to please Olivia. Whether he truly loves her or only desires her is left for interpretation, but the latter becomes clear when he describes her handwriting to Sir Toby, Fabian and Sir Andrew: "By my life, this is my lady's hand. These be her very c's, her u's, and her t's, and thus makes her great P's. It is in contempt of question her hand" (*Twelfth Night* 2.5.82-85). According to the editor, "The words Malvolio reads from the outside of the letter do not include 'c' or capital P. They are there for an obscene joke. 'Cut' was slang for the female genitals" (Warren and Wells 146). At a later moment in the play, Malvolio is under the illusion that Olivia reciprocates his affection towards her and quotes a bawdy ballad in response to her. The bawdy joke implies "that all women want their own will, in the sense of sexual desire. Malvolio uses this bawdy familiarity in response to what he thinks is Olivia's will" (Warren and Wells 170). Olivia does not catch these sexual innuendos and assumes Malvolio has gone mad. In her attempt to send him off to bed, Malvolio interprets this as an answer to his sexual advances.

Consider the following lines again: "Pray God defend me. A little thing would make me tell them how much I lack of a man" (*Twelfth Night* 3.4.290-1). Here, Viola literally refers to 'a little thing', being a penis that she lacks and another little thing she has instead. The exposure of both facts would tell the word 'how much she lacks of a man', i.e. how much she is a woman. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Viola refers to the disguised self as 'a monster'. Not only could her gender and identity be perceived as monstrous, but her sexuality and affection towards other characters are also double-sided. Throughout the play, Viola finds herself in an impossible situation as a love triangle develops between herself and Orsino, and her alter-ego Cesario with Olivia. As Thomas explains, "[c]onstructed as neither absolutely woman nor absolutely man, and as a desiring subject and desired object of both sexes, Cesario complicates any neat definition of his gender or sexual choices. Rather s/he

operates in the erotized space produced by relationships with Orsino and Olivia." (308). The eroticised space Thomas mentions is yet another space Viola can move within since Cesario is able to be close to Orsino as Viola could never be and Olivia simply falls in love with Cesario because of Viola's charismatic and witty character. In addition, Thomas elucidates, "Orsino and Olivia's automatic transfer of their homoerotic attractions to Viola/Cesario to heteroerotic love objects at the end of the story may register with the audience as a laughable case of mistaken identity and heteronormative reinstatement" (311).

Unlike *As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night*, *Cymbeline* focuses on Innogen's chastity and her loyalty to her husband. As Lander explains, "[c]ontrol of female sexuality determines purity of decent and female respectability both in actual women and in iconography […] Cymbeline's first court scene is overloaded with conventional tropes for the public function of love and sexuality" (Lander 172). Whereas Rosalind and Viola find their sexual freedom throughout their narratives, Innogen has taken her nuptial freedom by marrying Posthumus in secret. As has already been mentioned in chapter 3, Posthumus describes Innogen as a Petrarchan deity more than as his wife or sexual partner. It becomes clear at the beginning of the play that their marriage has not been consummated, as the men around Innogen speak of her chastity and virtue: "and he that hath her – I mean that married her, alack, good man" (*Cymbeline* 1.1.17-8). The First Gentleman corrects himself as he uses 'hath' which could imply 'had sex' instead of married. The chastity and virtue in this passage could refer to the chastity towards one's husband, i.e. only having sex with one's husband. However, it could also suggest that Posthumus has only married her, but has not yet shared a bed with her. In act 4, Posthumus also hints at this as he says: "She holds her virtue still, and I my mind" (*Cymbeline* 1.4.61). It could be read that Innogen still holds her 'virtue', i.e. her virginity. In the same act, Posthumus boasts about his wife to Giacomo, stating that "[Giacomo's] Italy contains none so accomplished a courtier to convince the honour of my mistress, if in the holding or loss of that you term her frail" (*Cymbeline* 1.4.90-2). Italian men had a reputation for being incredibly seductive, but according to Posthumus, Innogen would not succumb. This could suggest that no Italian would succeed to hold her (the holding) or make her lose

her virginity (loss of that you term her frail) since not even him as her husband was able to persuade her to have sex with her. Lastly, Giacomo reacts to the sexual references to Innogen's chastity as he states: "With five times so much conversation I should get ground of your fair mistress, make her go back even to the yielding, had I admittance and opportunity to friend" (*Cymbeline* 1.4.99-101). According to the editor, 'get ground of' literally means "gain advantage of", i.e. make progress with. Here, he suggests that, in comparison to Posthumus, he would be successful in making advances toward Innogen.

According to Lander, "[i]t is no coincidence that Shakespearean [plays], with their focus on the pure and unified family structure, also explore masculine sexual anxieties surrounding cuckoldry and female chastity" (172). The cross-dressing main character chooses a remarkable name for their alter-ego. Innogen chooses the name Fidele which explains the editor means "the faithful one (from Latin *fidelis* or Italian *fidele*). Innogen chooses a symbolic name." (Warren 188). Ironically, Innogen chooses a name which refers to someone who is faithful even though she is accused of having had sex with Giacomo. In addition, Cloten even prepares to steal her virtue by planning on raping her. Fortunately for Innogen, he is unsuccessful.

As You Like It and *Twelfth Night* both have characters that find themselves having homosexual affections towards the disguised characters without knowing their true gendered identity. *Cymbeline* features Guiderius who has incomprehensible romantic feelings for the male character Fidele rather than falling in love with the disguised Innogen. When they first meet, Guiderius already expresses his affections in a rather direct way: "Were you a woman, youth, I should woo hard but be your groom in honesty" (*Cymbeline* 3.6.65-6). Later, when Innogen falls ill, he truly confesses his love. His brother Arviragus shares his affection for Innogen and again, the lack of judgement becomes evident: "If it be sin to say so, sir, I yoke me / In my good brother's fault. I know no why I love this youth, and I have heard you say / Love's reason's without reason" (*Cymbeline* 4.2.19-22). Similarly to Phoebe and Olivia in the previously mentioned plays, Guiderius and Arviragus are seemingly accepted by the people around them for falling, knowingly or unknowingly, for characters of the same sex.

Lastly, Giacomo cannot be neglected when discussing sexuality in *Cymbeline*. Giacomo is a peculiar character who seems to be overly confident. He is an arrogant Italian gentleman who believes that whatever rules and boundaries are applied to everyone else but him. His use of language is far beyond bawdy, rather vulgar and almost aggressive. In the first scene of the play, the audience becomes acquainted with him when he speaks to Innogen in a sexual, seductive way even though he is aware that she is married to Posthumus:

> Hath nature given them eyes
> To see this vaulted arch and the rich crop
> Of sea and land, which can distinguish 'twixt
> The fiery orbs above and the twinned stones
> Upon th'unnumbered beach, can we not
> Partition make with spectacles so precious
> 'Twixt fair and foul? (*Cymbeline* 1.6.32-8)

This passage is riddled with sexual innuendos: 'the vaulted arch' could be the venus mount with 'the rich crop' which refers to pubic hair growing on it. 'Of sea and land' could refer to the fact that a female sexual organ is a combination of dry and wet textures. 'The fiery orbs above' and 'the twinned stones upon the beach' allude to breasts and with the last two lines, Giacomo implies that when Innogen would agree to have sex with him, their love-making would be 'so precious' and 'fair' even though she would commit adultery which is a crime 'foul'.

Once more, *The Merry Wives of Windsor* proves to be the exact opposite of the issues displayed in the other three plays. Even though this play is also full of sexual innuendos, they all seem used in a completely different way. Consider the following lines: "When then, the world's mine oyster, / Which I with sword will open." (*The Merry Wives of Windsor* 2.2.2-3). The double entendre obviously refers to the female sexual organ. Pistol, in this case, needs a sword to open and reach the pearl. Unlike the previous plays, the use of language is cruder and straightforward.

In *As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night*, the bawdiest language comes from the 'fools' that function as a gateway between the narrative on stage and the spectators in the audience. In *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, most of the unapologetic, vulgar language comes from Falstaff,

who is a complete fool but does not serve the same dramatic role as 'the fool'. As becomes clear rather quickly, Falstaff has a narrow-minded and superficial character. He values money over anything and prefers excessive food and drink over a good conversation. His language towards others is crude and sexually explicit. As Jonathan Goldberg explains, "there is unkindness in Falstaff's predatory advances on the wives, and certainly, it resounds in the prevailing assumption of Shakespeare's world, one that the play indulges, that women are by nature oversexed and likely to be persuaded easily by anyone who expresses desire for them" (371). The explanation by Goldberg is shown in a clever interaction between Mistress Quickly and Falstaff:

> MISTRESS QUICKLY. Alas the day, good heart, that was not her fault. She does so take on with her men; they mistook her erection.
>
> FALSTAFF. So did I mine, to build upon a foolish woman's promise. (*The Merry Wives of Windsor* 3.5.36-40)

Here, Falstaff assumes the remark by Mistress Quickly to be sexual, however, this is not how it was intended.

Mistress Quickly is described as Doctor Caius' housekeeper. She does not conform to the traditional gender roles as Falstaff finds out upon meeting her:

> QUICKLY. Give your worship good morrow.
>
> FALSTAFF. Good morrow, goodwife.
>
> QUICKLY. Not so, an't please your worship.
>
> FALSTAFF. Good maid then. (*The Merry Wives of Windsor* 2.2.31-4)

As this passage proves, Mistress Quickly "cannot readily occupy either the position of wife or of maid" (Goldberg 368) and this goes against the status-quo of being a woman. One was supposed to be a maid until they got married and then they would refer to themselves as a married woman. She runs the Doctor's household as she is described to do everything around the house: "And there dwells one Mistress Quickly, which is in the manner of his nurse, or his dry nurse, or his cook, or his laundry, his washer, and his wringer" (*The Merry Wives of Windsor* 1.2.1-5). According to the editor, T. W. Craik, the joke of using the words

'nurse' or 'dry nurse' is "to make the audience smile at his unintended suggestion that Caius needs a wet-nurse, i.e. is a baby" (94). The infantilisation of the Caius character explains why the sexual relationship between Mistress Quickly and Caius is absent, even though she manages his household and Caius does not have any other woman in his life. At the end of the first scene, Caius shows his disinterest in Mistress Quickly by stating that he desires Anne Page: "I have appointed mine host of the Jarteer to measure our weapon. By gar, I will myself have Anne Page" (*The Merry Wives of Windsor* 1.4.111-3). Unaware of the sexual innuendo, Caius combines 'the measuring of his weapon' with the phrase 'to have Anne Page'. The audience could pick this up as 'getting sexually aroused' so that he can 'have sex with Anne Page'.

In comparison to the other plays, the conversations in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* take place in a more confined space like the ale-house and Mistress Ford and Mistress Page's houses. Also, the threat that the main characters in the other plays experience is absent in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. This safety of confined domestic spheres calls for more comical and bawdy language, rather than, say, the forest of Arden, the court of Illyria or the wild scenery of Wales. A prime example of behaviour behind closed doors is that of the Mistresses Page and Ford. Throughout the play, it is evident that Mistress Page and Mistress Ford have a special friendship. One where they share their lives with each other. Even Master Page remarks on this: "I think if your husbands were dead you two would marry" (*The Merry Wives of Windsor* 3.2.12-3). The wives' special relationship can be interpreted in two different ways: either their platonic close friendship or, and maybe even more interesting, their romantic relationship which Master Page subtly refers to.

When the wives are surrounded by other characters, their thoughts and language seem rather 'sexless'. However, whenever they find themselves alone in the confined, safe space of their houses, the wives feel free to express themselves sexually or make bawdy comments toward each other. It is then that the wives develop bawdy conversations, for example, when they figure out a way to pull a prank on Falstaff. Mistress Page expresses herself in a very sexual way: "It makes me almost ready to wrangle mine own honesty. I'll

entertain myself like one that I am not acquainted withal; for, sure, unless he know some strain in me that I know not myself, he would never have boarded me in his fury" (*The Merry Wives of Windsor* 2.1.78-82). Here, Mistress Page explains that she would rather masturbate than let Falstaff 'board' her. 'Wrangle mine own honesty' could refer to the notion of committing adultery by having sex with one's self instead of their husband. This ties in with the comment on 'entertaining herself like someone she does not know'. The act of satisfaction makes one question her relationship with Master Page.

In a conversation with Falstaff, Mistress Quickly comments on Mistress Page's luxurious lifestyle. She does whatever she wants and caters to her husband: "But Mistress Page would desire you to send her your little page, of all loves. Her husband has a marvellous infection to the little page" (*The Merry Wives of Windsor* 2.2.108-10). Goldberg noticed the 'little page' remark in regard to the relationship between Master Page and Mistress Page: "[i]f we put Quickly's claim that Mrs. Page has all she wants with her desire to have the page boy for her husband Page, it suggests that for Mrs. Page to have what she wants it is convenient to supply her husband with what he wants. It appears, that is, that her honest husband prefers boys" (373). Here, the modern idea of 'the beard' appears when it is safe to assume that Master Page does not like women in the first place and prefers 'page boys' or men. This would make Mistress Page his beard: "[a] person who pretends publicly to be involved in a heterosexual relationship with a homosexual person in order to help to conceal that person's homosexuality" (*Oxford English Dictionary*).

Similar to Mistress Page, Mistress Ford is also not the woman who she seems to be at first. Scene 2 starts with Mistress Page and Mistress Ford finding out Falstaff has tried to seduce them simultaneously. In chapter 3 of this thesis, this passage has already been analysed considering gender and identity. However, the double entendre proves the free space the women move in when they are alone. When Mistress Ford states: "If I would but go to hell for an eternal moment or so, I could be knighted" (*The Merry Wives of Windsor* 2.1.44-5), she bawdily expresses that if she would go to hell anyway, she could also have sex with a knight, i.e. Falstaff. In scene 4, Falstaff's language towards Mistress Ford is very

forward. He does not mince matters as he implies: “I see you are obsequious in your love, and I profess requital to hair’s breadth, not only, Mistress Ford, in the simple office of love, but in all the accoutrement, complement, and ceremony of it” (*The Merry Wives of Windsor* 4.2.2-5). She does not seem to be put off by his crudeness and even invites him in. One could conclude that Mistress Ford is succumbing to Falstaff's seduction. In the last scene of the play, she even confesses her attraction:

MISTRESS FORD. Sir John! Art thou there, my deer, my male deer?

The use of the word ‘deer’ could easily be interpreted as ‘dear’.

It is safe to conclude that the characters discussed in this chapter felt free to express themselves sexually. The interaction between the ‘clown’ characters, the main characters and the remaining characters that surround them are not condemned and any contingent homosexual feelings are accepted since the concerning characters would find themselves in a heterosexual resolution at the end of each play. The expression of sexuality without prejudice becomes prominent when the characters are located in safe, confined space surrounded by people with whom they have a close relationship with or that they feel safe around.

Conclusion

This thesis has examined the issue of whether female characters that cross-dress in William Shakespeare's comedies are more successful in achieving their goals than male characters cross-dressing as women and to what extent the characters experience altering consequences. The plays *As You Like It*, *Twelfth Night*, *Cymbeline* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor* display these cross-dressing female characters and therefore, these plays were discussed in this thesis thematically, examining motives, the disguises and performances, the appearances, gender roles and identities, and the sexuality of key characters.

Rosalind, Viola and Innogen all share a similar motive and way of cross-dressing. The threat and therefore reason to use a disguise is eminent: all these female characters fear for their lives in one way or another. The female characters have proven to be verbally and physically skilful and their male alter-egos provide safety and freedom to move through spaces that would otherwise be inaccessible. As the main characters disguise themselves, they also alter their identities to match their outer appearance. In the plays discussed in this thesis, identity has been valued by multiple scales, such as appearance, wealth, personality traits, or clothing. The main female characters shaped their new identity taking these factors into account. Furthermore, gender roles are also a key aspect regarding to the identity of the alter-egos. When it comes to sexuality, the disguises allow the characters to speak freely and express their sexuality openly.

The Merry Wives of Windsor functions as a counterweight for the other three plays. Its main character, Falstaff, proves to be the antithesis of the other main characters. When it comes to motive, Falstaff was never truly in danger. He is not as skilful as either of the other female main characters and often his big mouth gets him into trouble. As for his identity, contrarily to the female main characters, it is superficial and foolish. Falstaff acts out of greed and (sexual) desire and he does not change throughout the play. Finally, the coarse and

bawdy language Falstaff uses does not compare to the sincere expression of sexuality the other main characters portray.

This thesis has examined the gendered issues of successful cross-dressing and has argued that the female cross-dressing characters are more successful as their motives are deemed more sincere and come from actual danger or threat, whereas the male main character, who only moves out of personal desire, is not successful and therefore Falstaff's resolution has the opposite outcome.

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