Diverging from the binary: Gender nonconformity in Early Modern English plays

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Table of contents

Introduction

The topic of this thesis will be gender nonconformity in Early Modern plays. To examine gender nonconformity in these plays, the following texts have been chosen: *Gallathea* by John Lyly, *The Convent of Pleasure* by Margaret Cavendish, and *The Roaring Girl* by T. Middleton and T. Dekker. These texts are all plays written and performed in Early Modern England between 1580 and 1668, with the exception of *The Convent of Pleasure,* which likely was not performed at all. All of these texts will be examined for instances of gender nonconformity in physical and behavioural aspects. These instances of gender nonconformity will then be examined on the basis of the theory of gender labour and their historical theatrical context, in order to analyse how the gender nonconformity works within the play. This thesis intends to show that not only was gender nonconformity seen as disruptive to society, but gender nonconformity was only accepted in separate spaces, which allowed for it to exist outside of traditional society. When gender nonconformity was allowed to exist in society, the people around the nonconforming individual participated in the labour of making sense, where in order to understand the nonconformity, it is attempted to place it in a heteronormative society.

Background to Early Modern gender roles and gender nonconformity

In order to determine what in the plays is deemed gender nonconformity, the term first needs to be understood. ‘Gender nonconformity’ is derived from the term ‘gender nonconforming’, which is defined as the following: “exhibiting behavioural, cultural, or psychological traits that do not correspond with the traits typically associated with one’s sex: having a gender expression that does not conform to gender norms” (Merriam Webster). For this thesis,

gender nonconformity will be defined similarly: specifically, behaviour or physical traits that do not align with society's expectations of the individual's gender assigned at birth.

When considering gender nonconformity for the Early Modern period, we first need to determine what factors dictated social gender norms. In Early Modern England, the gender roles were divided between the different social classes as well as the genders. The social structure was highly patriarchal, which was reflected in the social roles within and outside the household. Men were expected to be the leader of the household, essentially ruling their own domain, while women were expected to listen to their husbands and remain in their "care" (Gowing, 28). But while the households were divided into these roles for men and women, there was room for ambiguity. While one might expect the women to be homemakers and mothers solely, the expectation was for women to also provide for the family, and they often held occupations as well (Gowing, 40). The areas in which women worked were often those of service, with examples of those jobs being occupations such as sewing, nursing, washing, and cleaning (Gowing, 41). However, the fact that women were able to hold jobs does not mean that they held equal economic status to men. A woman's economic situation was directly tied to her marital status. "The rules of coverture, the common law doctrine that subsumed a woman's legal identity into her husband's, were peculiarly strict in England. A wife could hold neither real (land) nor personal property (moveable goods) in her own right" (Gowing, 43). Single women had more freedom than these married women were provided within the law; single women were able to function almost equally to men. Being single provided freedom for both men and women; however, for men as opposed to women, getting married was seen as a marker of being emotionally stable and secure (Gowing, 48).

Another factor which was highly gendered in Early Modern England was clothing. Men and women had their own essentially predetermined garments they could wear. When one would wear clothing meant for the opposite gender, this would be seen as socially

disruptive. This is why cross-dressing had severe implications when it came to disrupting social norms. An example of this is women dressed in male attire. When women dressed in male attire, not only were they seen as trying to climb the social ladder, but they were also viewed to have sexual licence (Shapiro, 116). This was seen as threatening in the eyes of the community "[b]ecause sexual license is not good for social stability and leads to a weakening of the social fabric" (Shapiro, 116).

While one might think that gender nonconformity is a recent phenomenon, it was also practised in the Early Modern period. There are various examples of men and women not conforming to societal standards or gender norms. An example shown above is nonconformity through clothing, this was seen as a dangerous thing for the fabric of society, and there is evidence that this was not just isolated individuals. An example of such a nonconforming individual is Mary Frith, on whom the play *The Roaring Girl* is based and who is included in this thesis.

Theatrical context

The theatrical setting in which the plays exist and were performed will also be discussed to provide some background to the plays themselves. The three plays all had different theatrical contexts. *Gallathea* was performed by a boys' company, specifically, the Children of Paul's (Folger). While *The Roaring Girl* was performed by a men's company, specifically Prince Henry's men (Folger). Finally, *The Convent of Pleasure* was likely not performed at all, as it was a closet play, and these generally were intended to be read rather than performed. These different contexts allow for a broader insight into how gender nonconformity is portrayed in various plays and contexts. These plays were all written and performed in Early Modern England, which in turn shapes the theatrical context in which the plays existed as well. Boy

actors often played female roles on the professional stage because women were banned from performing on the stage. This adds a layer of ambiguity when it comes to the gender nonconformity which is presented in these plays. The audience would have been aware that the female roles in *Gallathea* and *The Roaring Girl* were played by men portraying women who try to emulate and appear as men. However, *The Convent of Pleasure* does not contain this element of ambiguity, as the character engaging in gender nonconformity is a man. The cross-dressing for the plays, however, indicates that Early Modern society was comfortable, up to a certain point, with cross-dressing.

In the Early Modern period, plays were staged by acting companies. These acting companies were the ones who performed on the commercial stages. It is often believed that women were generally not involved in the business of these acting companies. If they were involved in the day-to-day business of these acting companies, it would only be through marriage or familial relations; furthermore, women did not frequently act on these stages until the seventeenth century (Streitberger, 23). However, not all scholars agree with the complete absence of women in the theatre world. As Natasha Korda states, women were present in the theatre beyond attending as spectators (Korda, 16-18). However, the work which women participated in when it came to commercial theatre was often behind the scenes (Korda, 53). An example of such behind-the-scenes work was the clothes trade; women provided the playing companies with second-hand clothing they needed for their costumes (Korda, 45-46). When considering the theatrical context of the adult companies in relation to *The Roaring Girl,* we need to look at the way the companies functioned between 1603 and 1613. The Prince Henry's Men acting company did not become Prince Henry's Men until February of 1604 when they changed patronage; before 1604, they were known as the servants of the Lord Admiral (Rutter, 73). This change of patronage is explained by a law which prohibited anyone but the Royals from being patrons to theatrical companies, as well as financial

benefits for the companies themselves, as companies under royal patronage generally got paid more for their performances, which resulted in actors and companies themselves actively searching for royal patronage (Rutter, 73). While the companies had royal patronage, this did not secure their future. “Most obviously, while playing companies had royal patrons, their day to-day survival depended on their competing successfully for socially diverse audiences” (Rutter, 87). The repertoire which the adult companies performed, in terms of the overarching plot of the plays, was similar between the different companies. However, this does not mean there was no variation; the repertoires had distinct identities while having similarities for commercial purposes (Rutter, 83). This can be seen in the plays discussed as well. While they all have an overarching plot line of gender nonconformity, how the plays deal with and present gender nonconformity differs from play to play.

Besides adult acting companies, there were companies consisting of children as well. These children were, as the adult companies, all males. The boy companies in the period of 1599 to 1633 dominated the theatre world, often drawing more attention as opposed to their adult counterparts (Bly, 137). The boys’ plays had various differences with regard to the plays the adult companies would perform. The plays often included subjects that the adult plays would not touch on as frequently, such as homoeroticism. The plays these companies would perform often included these five distinct aspects:

> They exhibit a wild, often humorous, fascination with erotic matters, body parts, and cuckoldry; they emphasize the beauty of the boy actor, toying with homoerotic desire; they engage in dangerous satire of the court and government; they often challenge the audience’s suspension of disbelief; and they make abundant use of song and learned languages, reflecting the boys’ skills as students and musicians. (Bly, 138)

The boy companies often played with the concept of metatheatricality: “Boys’ plays persistently challenge the audience by referencing the artificiality of stage practice.” The plays in which the boy actors played often included an aspect of disguise as well, playing with ambiguity (Bly, 184). The plays which are used in this thesis also play with ambiguity, not only through disguise but – just as with the common theme of boy actors’ plays – with metatheatricality through the theme of disguise. When looking to apply this particular theatrical context to the plays of the thesis, it can be seen that *Gallathea* being played by a boys’ company includes many of these common aspects found in the plays that boy companies would perform. In *Gallathea,* there are themes of homosexuality and disguise, an emphasis on beauty, and the play requires the audience to suspend their disbelief in order to understand the characters, knowing that they are watching boys playing women playing boys.

While most of these plays had women played by men, this was not always the case. When we take *The Convent of Pleasure,* for example, this piece is a different type of play, namely a closet play. This means that the play was not intended to be performed on the big stages but rather read or portrayed in one’s home (Britannica Academic). Plays could be intentionally written as closet dramas, or might be one unintentionally if they could not be made to be performable (Raber). These plays often include elements such as “intense character development, high oratory, or politically astute commentary on current events—or it creates an imaginative landscape that is larger and more mobile even than the space of the public stage” (Raber). When examining *The Convent of Pleasure,* seeing as this play is supposed to be read, the play includes elements unable to exist in the others.

An example of this are the plays within a play. While these will be considered, the other plays do not include such plays as staging would not have allowed the scenes to shift from place to place that quickly in commercial theatre, and this thus lends itself better for a closet drama. Furthermore, the stage directions will also be considered, as with the other

plays. However, seeing as *The Convent of Pleasure* is meant to be read, and these directions are often more detailed as opposed to the other two plays.

Methodology

The terminology which will be used will range from modern terms, such as 'gender assigned at birth' to 'one's true gender,' a term which reflects the attitude taken by the texts about gender. Further terms which will be used are: 'gender binary' ("the idea that there are only two genders, and everyone is either male or female" (*Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary*)), 'gender roles' ("A set of behaviour patterns, attitudes, and personality characteristics stereotypically perceived as masculine or feminine within a culture." (*A Dictionary of Psychology*)), 'gender presentation/gender performance' (how one presents their gender identity to the outside world), and 'transgender' ("term self-applied by persons whose gender identity varies from that traditionally associated with their apparent biological sex at birth" (Tauches, "Transgender")).

The methodology for this thesis uses interdisciplinary theories. This thesis will use the theory of 'gender labour,' by Jane Ward, as applied to Early Modern theatrical contexts by Simone Chess. In Ward's version of the gender labour theory, three main labours are described: the labour of being 'the girl,' the labour of forgetting, and the labour of alliance (Chess, 139-141). The labour of being the girl entails a cisgender partner, specifically a cisgender female partner, who exaggerates their own gender performance in order to create space for her partner to be "the boy" (Chess, 141). The labour of forgetting is both an internal and external gender labour: it is choosing not to linger on the trans or, in this case, non-conforming individual's gender history (Chess, 141). The labour of alliance is the gender labour where both partners create the gender and gender dynamics together (Chess, 141). The

theory of gender labour is used in this thesis to examine how characters perform genders other than which they were assigned at birth and how these performances are bolstered by gender labour performed by both the other characters and the audience. In addition to the theory of gender labour, the historical theatrical background of the plays will be used to examine gender nonconformity and how these fits into the play. Furthermore, the combination of the theatrical background and gender labour, allows for the examination of the ambiguity presented in the play when it comes to gender.

Through close reading of the plays, this thesis will take examples of gender nonconformity in these plays and analyse them through the theory of gender labour. Through the analysis on the basis of the theory of gender labour, conclusions pertaining to the nature of gender nonconformity and the social view of gender nonconformity within the play will be made. The chapters will be divided into three sections, in order to examine each aspect thoroughly. The division will be as follows: physical nonconformity, behavioural nonconformity, and gender labour within the play. This structure will allow the plays to be examined in order to determine how the gender labour and theatrical context influence the perceived gender nonconformity and the reflection of Early Modern attitudes towards gender nonconformity. Finally, the texts will be held up to each other to examine the differences between the plays and draw conclusions about the use of nonconformity and the attitude towards the nonconformity present within the plays, which in turn can show us how nonconformity was regarded in society at large.

Chapter one: *Gallathea*

This first chapter will examine the play *Gallathea* by John Lyly. Within this play, two characters are portrayed who cross gender boundaries, and thus present themselves in a gender-nonconforming way. These two characters are the titular character Gallathea and the second main character Phillida. Both these women are disguised as men in the play to avoid being sacrificed to Neptune. The analysis will include three different aspects to examine the gender nonconformity of the two characters. Firstly, physical gender nonconformity will be analysed; this includes descriptions of the characters' clothes, how they perceive themselves physically and how others perceive them. Secondly, the behavioural gender nonconformity will be analysed. And finally, the previous aspects and how they fit into the theory of gender labour will be examined.

Gender nonconformity for this chapter will be defined in the following way: behaviour or physical expression that does not align with gender stereotypes or the gender assigned at birth of a character. Furthermore, the terminology used will range from modern terms, such as gender assigned at birth, to one's true gender, which is how the text portrays the genders assigned at birth, in order to give context to the play and how gender and gender nonconformity was viewed. The theory of gender labour, which will be used for this thesis and chapter, is the theory proposed by Jane Ward and Chess's analysis of the plays on the basis of Ward's theory.

The theatrical framework in which this play exists not only provides background to the play but also adds to the ambiguity in the play. In Early Modern England, men or boys often played female roles. In fact, women did not act in the public theatres up until 1660 when Charles the Second wrote a law allowing women to take to the stage (Ziegler). *Gallathea* focuses on women cross-dressing as men; the fact that boy actors played the

female roles adds another layer of ambiguity: the audience is aware that it is boys playing women, pretending to be women.

Physical nonconformity: Gallathea

Gallathea is the titular and main character of the play. As mentioned above, she presents as male throughout the play. The reason given for this nonconformity by the play is that Gallathea's father has convinced her to disguise herself as a man in order to avoid being sacrificed to Neptune, because the prettiest girl in their hometown would be sacrificed in order to keep the god happy. This disguised version of Gallathea is the only one the reader gets to see, as when Gallathea is introduced she is already in disguise. This can be seen in lines 38 to 42, where Gallathea asks her father why she has been disguised. In this section the audience gets introduced to the situation in which Gallathea finds herself, and are made aware of the fact, that the character they perceive as a boy is in fact a girl in disguise. Even though the play does not describe the exact disguise that Gallathea is wearing, there are references to her physical nonconformity. Specifically, there are 23 references to Gallathea's physical nonconformity throughout the entirety of the play. The nonconformity which surrounds Gallathea takes two forms: the first is her appearance as a boy as opposed to her gender assigned at birth, and the second is Gallathea's surprising beauty even in her disguise as a boy. The fact that characters are often surprised by Gallathea's beauty adds another layer of ambiguity, which is played with throughout the play since the reaction shows that such beauty is uncommon for a man. For example, in act two scene one, this surprised response to Gallathea's beauty is shown when Phillida says, "It is a pretty boy and a fair, he might well have been a woman, but because he is not, I am glad I am, for now under the color of my coat, I shall decipher the follies of their kind" (2.1, 343-346). This quotation indeed shows

that the striking beauty of Gallathea in disguise makes her look feminine, even if the rest of her outward appearance indicates otherwise.

Within the play, there are four references to physical nonconformity made by Gallathea herself. These references she makes to her disguise are made in thought and never expressed out loud to the other characters in the play; but only made clear to the audience, for instance, in lines 340 to 342. “I perceive that boys are in as great disliking of themselves as maids, therefore though I wear the apparel, I am glad I am not the person” (2.1 340-342). In this section, Gallathea does reference her disguise but solely concerning her current situation where Gallathea sees Phillida in her disguise and perceives her to be unsure of herself, as a maid would be. This lack of description from Gallathea herself, might suggest that Gallathea is uncertain or indifferent to her outward appearance initially, but grows more comfortable with her own nonconformity, since three out of the four references are made early on in the play. The references Gallathea herself makes towards her own appearance focus on her performance as a boy and how she feels she should be perceived, rather than describing her appearance outright.

An example of Gallathea focussing on her performance as a boy, can be seen in scene four act two: “How now Gallathea? miserable Gallathea, that having put on the apparel of a boy, thou canst also put on the mind” (4.2 600-602). As with the previous quotation, the reference towards Gallathea is only made in combination with reference to her behaviour or, rather, her performance as a boy. Gallathea laments her performance of herself as a boy, as she is convinced that she does not perform the gender adequately enough to convince the outside world she is, in fact, a boy. This differs from the descriptions that the other characters use for Gallathea, which often reference her beauty, as will be discussed more in the following section.

The other characters make different references to Gallathea's physical appearances than she herself makes in the play. The main references coming from Phillida and the god Diana. In total, there are 20 references made about Gallathea's outward appearance instead of the meagre four times Gallathea specifically references her appearance. The references to Gallathea by Phillida and Diana differ significantly. Phillida's descriptions tend to describe Gallathea in regard to herself – as she wants to mirror how Gallathea presents in disguise – but also references Gallathea's beauty, even in disguise. Examples of this can be found in lines 343 to 346 and 1231 to 1233. In lines 343 to 346, Phillida first encounters Gallathea and references her physical looks as well as her outward demeanour in reference to herself; she states explicitly, "It is a pretty boy and a fair, he might well have been a woman, but because he is not, I am glad I am, for now under the colour of my coat, I shall decipher the follies of their kind" (4.2. 343-346). The performance of both Gallathea and Phillida is referenced in the quote, which uses the outward appearance of Gallathea in order to situate Phillida's desire to perform her gendered disguise in a similar way as Gallathea. The other example of Phillida referencing Gallathea's beauty, even in disguise, is found in the second description. Here Phillida states that it is good that Gallathea was not a maid, or she would be sacrificed to Neptune for being so fair: "I marvel what virgin the people will present, it is happy you are none, for then it would have fall'n to your lot because you are so fair" (4.4. 1231-1233). These descriptions use quite feminine words to describe Gallathea, such as "fair," which one would connotate with women. This use of feminine-sounding words can suggest that the text wants to indicate that while Gallathea appears as a man, she is not entirely one. The description Diana uses for Gallathea is similar; Diana uses words such as "fair" and "pretty." However, there does not seem to be one bit of doubt from Diana that Gallathea is, in fact, a boy, as opposed to Phillida, who questions this in lines 806 to 807. "Phillida Come let us into the Grove, and make much one of another, that cannot tell what to think one of another.

Exeunt."(3.2. 838-840) While there does seem to be doubt from Phillida in the later acts of the play as seen in the quote above, it is suggested that Gallathea and Phillida have a sexual relationship, in which Phillida would have found out the truth.

The initial reactions of Phillida, as well as Diana and her nymphs, show that the disguise is effective and Gallathea is perceived as a boy, at least physically.

Behavioural nonconformity: Gallathea

Besides physical appearance, the play also features various descriptions of Gallathea's behaviour when she is in disguise. Gallathea, to convince the outside world that she is a man as described, not only dresses in disguise but also carries herself as a man. There are three instances where Gallathea's behaviour is explicitly described, rather than her physical appearance. These descriptions range from how Gallathea carries herself, to how she interacts with the different characters in the play. While the specific descriptions are scarce, some interactions indicate a degree of nonconformity with her gender assigned at birth. Within the play, there are two aspects in which Gallathea uses behavioural nonconformity to complete the disguise. The first is mimicking behaviour she perceives as male, and the second is not as overt. Still, the way Gallathea interacts with the other characters in the play also contributes to her behavioural nonconformity.

Gallathea herself is the first to reference how she copies the behaviour of others in order to fit in as a boy. "But whist, here cometh a lad: I will learn of him how to behave myself."(2.1. 333-334) In this quote from act two, Gallathea first sees Phillida and perceives her as a boy; in order to pass herself as a boy, she decides to copy the behaviour of Phillida and learn how to behave herself. Another example which stems from Gallathea wanting to learn how to behave as a boy happens in the same act. "I would salute him, but I fear I should

make a curtsy instead of a leg" (2.1. 347-348). Here Gallathea wants to greet Phillida, but is afraid of revealing her secret by curtseying as she has been conditioned to do.

Gallathea's interactions with other characters also show a degree of nonconformity in her behaviour. An example of this is that Gallathea never outright denies being a boy; in fact, the only instance when Gallathea rejects the notion of pretending to be anything other than herself and her gender assigned at birth, is at the beginning of the play in lines 115 to 131. In these lines her father tells Gallathea why he has disguised her as a boy.

> Father, I have been attentive to hear, and by your patience am ready to answer. Destiny may be deferred, not prevented: and therefore it were better to offer myself in triumph, than to be drawn to it with dishonor. (1.1. 115-119)

But as can be seen in the quote, Gallathea does not seem to fully reject being a boy, but rather the indignity that comes with avoiding her fate, and pretending to be someone she is not. Another example of Gallathea not outwardly rejecting being perceived as a boy is her interaction with Diana.

> *Diana* God speed fair boy.
>
> *Gallathea* You are deceived Lady.
>
> *Diana* Why, are you no boy?
>
> *Gallathea* No fair boy.
>
> *Diana* But I see an unhappy boy. (2.1 360-364)

As the quotation shows, Gallathea tells Diana she is mistaken in what she perceives when looking at her. However, Gallathea's reply when Diana asks if she is "no boy" leaves room for ambiguity since Gallathea does not outright deny being a boy. Still, it could also signal her denying being a "fair boy," so it is uncertain whether she rejects the adjective of "fair" or being a boy overall. However, when Diana again calls her a boy, Gallathea does not correct Diana but instead accepts it and goes along with Diana's assumptions. Gallathea's

interactions with the other characters in the play, enable the audience to form their own assumptions of Gallathea's gender performance, through the use of ambiguity in the play, both in the language used as well as in the performance of the character.

Gender labour: Gallathea

When considering the combination of Gallathea's physical and behavioural nonconformity, we can place it into the theory of gender labour. Gallathea is engaging in gender labour through the expression of her disguise. She actively participates in gender non-conforming behaviour and dresses as the opposite gender in order to pass as male. This allows the reader to participate in gender labour as well. An example is the labour of forgetting, as Gallathea is introduced presenting as a boy, and they are required to suspend their beliefs in order to view Gallathea as a man as well as a woman since, for the entire play, Gallathea is in disguise. Had the play not explicitly stated that she is a girl in disguise, the audience would be none the wiser. However, in contrast to the labour of forgetting, the audience must at the same time participate in the labour of remembrance, since while they need to suspend their disbelief about Gallathea as a boy, they simultaneously need to remember that the play is about two women who have disguised themselves as men in order to grasp the nuances of their gender performance. Both Gallathea and Phillida separately engage in two forms of gender labour as well. Phillida bolsters Gallathea's gender presentation by suspending her own disbelief about Gallathea, thus participating in the labour of forgetting, as can be seen in lines 806 to 807: "What doubtful speeches be these? I fear me he is as I am, a maiden" (3.2 806-807). Still, because she rejects this notion, the disguise of Gallathea stays effective. Another example of Phillida actively participating in the labour of forgetting for Gallathea, is seen in the scenes after the pair go into the cave. The exit to the

cave suggests Gallathea and Phillida being intimate together. After this scene, however, the dynamic between the two does not change; in fact, they still refer to each other as boys. This intimacy and afterwards ignoring what the 'natural' gender of the other can be, shows that the pair participates in both the labour of forgetting as well as the labour of alliance, with them helping each other construct their male personas. The other characters in the play unknowingly also participate in the gender labour of forgetting, as they choose not to question the gender history of Gallathea. For instance, Diana, after Gallathea tells her she is mistaken, who does not question the gender of Gallathea when told she is mistaken but rather the mood of Gallathea as she states that Gallathea is an "unhappy boy" instead of a "fair boy."

Physical nonconformity: Phillida

As with Gallathea, Phillida also engages in physical and behavioural gender nonconformity. Phillida, much like Gallathea, is given a disguise by her father in order to escape the same possible sacrifice to Neptune. Unlike Gallathea, however, in the audience's first encounter with Phillida, she is not in disguise.

While the play's title identifies Gallathea as the main character, Phillida's disguise is mentioned more specifically, both by herself and other characters. In total, there are nine references to Phillida's disguise. The first reference that occurs in the text is made by Phillida's father, in lines 190 to 199, where he states why Phillida must be disguised:

> *Melebeus* Come Phillida, fair Phillida, and I fear me too fair being my Phillida, thou knowest the custom of this Country, and I the greatness of thy beauty,
> we both the fierceness of the monster *Agar*. Everyone thinketh his own child fair, but I know that which I most desire, and would least have, that thou art fairest. Thou shalt

> therefore disguise thyself in attire, lest I should disguise myself in affection, in suffering thee to perish by a fond desire, whom I may preserve by a sure deceit. (1.3 190-199)

As with Gallathea, there are almost no explicit references to what the disguise consists of, apart from saying it is men's apparel; however, there is one reference within the play that does reference a specific part of Phillida's disguise. In lines 212 to 214, it is said that Phillida wears a coat as a part of her disguise. Later in the play, when Cupid has made Diana's nymphs fall in love with Gallathea and Phillida, the coat is referenced again, although this time, a colour is specified, namely white, in lines 682 to 686.

> *Telusa* To hear thee in reckoning my pains to recite thine own. I saw Eurota how amorously you glanced your eye on the fair boy in the white coat, and how cunningly (now that you would have some talk of love) you hit me in the teeth with love. (3.1 682-686)

This specificity of Phillida's attire in disguise can signal that Phillida is less secure in the presentation as a man. The white may signal her status as a virgin, thus a nod to why she is in disguise in the first place.

Behavioural nonconformity: Phillida

Behaviour wise, a lot more doubt is seen in Phillida's performance of the opposite gender. There are seven mentions in various sections about her behavioural nonconformity; Phillida is repeatedly shown to be unsure of how to behave, and uncomfortable with having to portray herself as the opposite of her nature. An example of her both being unsure and uncomfortable can be found in lines 617 to 630.

> *Phillida* Poor Phillida, curse the time of thy birth and rareness of thy beauty, the unaptness of thy apparel, and the untamedness of thy affections. Art thou no sooner in the habit of a boy, but thou must be enamored of a boy, what shalt thou do when what best liketh thee, most discontenteth thee? Go into the Woods, watch the good times, his best moods, and transgress in love a little of thy modesty, I will, I dare not, thou must, I cannot. Then pine in thine own peevishness. I will not, I will. Ah Phillida do something, nay any thing rather than live thus. Well, what I will do, myself knows not, but what I ought I know too well, and so I go resolute, either to bewray my love, or suffer shame. (2.5 617-630)

In this section, Phillida is trying to decide how to act, but at the same time, she feels like she is betraying her natural sex by being in love with Gallathea while being dressed as a man. This indicates that Phillida is not comfortable with her nonconformity, and it is seen as a means to an end for her. When examining Phillida's behaviour in relation to other characters, there is not a big emphasis on her portrayal as a boy by others besides Gallathea. Only three mentions of Phillida by characters other than Gallathea refer to Phillida as a boy, as opposed to Gallathea, who gets referred to as such five times. The lack of interaction with other characters like Diana suggests that while Phillida passes, since she is perceived as male by the other characters, there is a degree of unfamiliarity with the character as a man.

Gender labour: Phillida

In terms of gender labour, when it comes to Phillida's presentation, there seems to be a more significant focus on the labour of forgetting, rather than the labour of alliance. As with Gallathea, there is suspicion from Gallathea that Phillida is, in fact, a woman and not a man. This can be seen throughout the play. An example can be found in lines 808 to 813:

Gallathea What dread riseth in my mind, I fear the boy to be as I am a maiden.

Phillida Tush it cannot be, his voice shows the contrary.

Gallathea Yet I do not think it; for he would then have blushed (3.2 808-813)

This section shows that while Gallathea suspects Phillida to be a woman, she chooses to ignore this suspicion, on the basis that she thinks Phillida would have blushed if she was a woman. Phillida herself does, however, participate in the gender labour of alliance. The attraction to Gallathea encourages her to go deeper into her disguise, and learn how to behave as a boy (Chess, 150). This, according to Chess, demonstrates that Phillida recognises that she herself can support someone else's gender identity by her own gender performance, and she is able better to perform her assumed gender identity in proximity to another (Chess, 150).

When comparing the two characters, it is clear that Gallathea is presented to the audience as more of a male-passing character. Phillida, however, is presented as less masculine. This is done by introducing Phillida as a woman, and her having has less interaction with other characters in the play. Gallathea, from the beginning, presents in a male disguise; thus, the audience would not know her any differently either if the play did not outright tell them, suggesting that Gallathea is intended to be the more masculine of the two. This also supports a possible theory with of Gallathea being a transgender man, and the play acting as a story of transitioning. This, however, is an ahistorical reading and would lend itself to be explored in modern renditions of the play, as the concept of transgender did not exist as it is currently understood. At the end of the play, it is proposed that as soon as Phillida and Gallathea walk into the church, one of the women is turned into a man. When looking at how the two characters are portrayed within the play, an assumption can be made that Gallathea is the one of the two who will transform or in a transgender reading transition into a man; since Gallathea is the one who presents more securely in the disguise.

When examining how both of the characters engage with gender labour, it can be seen that both of them are required to participate in two forms of gender labour; the labour of passing and the labour of forgetting, in order to help each other pass in their male identities (Chess, 150). Both of the characters have similar methods of gender nonconformity, as they both cross-dress as men. However, throughout the play, it is clear that this nonconformity is opportunistic rather than an inherent trait of the character itself. Both Phillida and Gallathea wear their male disguises as a means to an end initially, which is to escape being sacrificed to Neptune for being the fairest maiden. At the end of the play, however, both Gallathea and Phillida seem to have accepted and grown comfortable with an identity as a man. So much so, that they accept one of them will be changed into a man physically, in order to be with each other.

The play *Gallathea* displays two characters who engage in gender nonconformity. Both of the characters' nonconformity focuses heavily on the aspect of their cross-dressing as men. While there is behavioural nonconformity within the play, it is not focused on as heavily as the plot of cross-dressing. Furthermore, the cross-dressing, and thus, the nonconformity starts as a means to an end. While the play's ending allows one to read either of the characters as transgender, since it is not stated which of the characters gets transformed, the essence of the nonconformity within the play is cross-dressing as a tool. The gender labour that is presented in the play focuses on the labour of forgetting as well as the labour of alliance in order to facilitate the disguises of the main characters further.

Chapter two: *The Convent of Pleasure*

The play which will be discussed in this chapter is *The Convent of Pleasure* by Lady Margaret Cavendish. Within this play, there are several references to cross-dressing and gender nonconformity. While there are multiple references to nonconformity, there is only one character that, both physically and behaviourally, falls into the gender non-conforming category, namely the princess or, rather, the prince. The reason the prince disguises himself as a princess is to enter the Convent of Pleasure, which Lady Happy has forbidden men from entering. To understand the play, the theatrical background needs to be discussed first. *The Convent of Pleasure* is what one would call a closet drama, a play written to be read rather than be performed (Digital Cavendish). It is likely that the play, therefore, was never performed in the early modern period, and if it was performed that it was not performed on a public stage like *Gallathea,* but rather in the privacy of one's home (Digital Cavendish). Therefore, the stage directions add to the play in a significant way; since it was not meant to be acted out but instead be read, the directions add to the context and ambiguity of the play, rather than being simple stage instructions. In order to analyse the play, gender nonconformity is defined as one presenting themselves opposite of their gender assigned at birth. Within this play, gender nonconformity will be applied to the portrayal of gender by the main character, the Princess (or Prince). It will also be applied to the way Lady Happy bolsters the gender performance of the prince. This chapter will mainly follow the same structure as the previous chapter for the analysis, but unlike the chapter on *Gallathea,* each section will occur once. Focusing firstly on the physical nonconformity, secondly on the behavioural nonconformity, thirdly references to other characters and gender nonconformity, and finally, how the nonconformity fits into the theory of gender labour. This chapter will argue that, like in *Gallathea*, the gender nonconformity is used as a means to an end. But

unlike *Gallathea,* the way in which the gender nonconformity is resolved in the play reinforces the existing heteronormative ideas of society.

Physical nonconformity

Within this play, there are a few references to the prince as a princess concerning physical nonconformity. The descriptions of the princess are kept relatively vague. The only actual descriptions of the physical appearance of the prince or rather princess in the play, are a part of the plays within a play and the stage directions. In total, there are seven references to the princess regarding physical nonconformity. What is striking, is that the physical nonconformity of the princess or prince within the plays within a play, manifests as the prince dressing as a man rather than as a woman. Out of all of the references to appearance, seven of them portray the princess as being dressed in a masculine way, thus indicating that the princess – as the other characters believe her to be – is engaging in gender nonconformity. The reader/audience member might also believe this to be the case, as the play does not specify that the princess is, in fact, a prince in disguise from the start, but rather hints toward it through the princess being dressed as a man. This ambiguity allows the nonconformity in the play from one character to be regarded as two separate ways of nonconforming, when it comes to physical gender presentation. The two different ways of nonconforming are, the prince pretending to be a princess in order to gain access to the convent, as well as the nonconformity, which is perceived by the characters, of the princess behaving and dressing in a masculine manner. The play being a closet play, is another factor which enables the gender nonconforming readings, as the stage directions directly inform the reader that the princess is dressed in male attire. Without these stage directions present in the text, it would not be possible to determine how the princess presents, as none of the other characters directly

mention the clothes they are wearing. In act two scene three, there is a hint of the princess not truly being a woman when Madame Mediator says, "She is a princely brave woman truly, of a masculine presence" (2.1). This announcement of masculinity allows the reader to see the princess as being nonconforming, but not because 'she' is really male, but because the assumed-to-be-female character presents as masculine. The gender nonconforming reading is further reiterated in one of the plays within a play, where the princess plays the role of Neptune, thus again presenting in a masculine way.

When examining the nonconformity of the prince and his performance as a woman, there are very few actual references to him being a man pretending to be a woman. This is, because it is not revealed that the princess is actually the prince, until the end of the play. As a result of this, the references to his nonconformity are made indirectly. An example of this is in act five scene one, when Madame Mediator says, "O ladies, ladies! You're all betrayed, undone, undone; for there is a man disguised in the Convent, search, and you'll find it" (5.1). As can be seen from this quote, there is no direct reference to the princess, but there is a reference to a man being disguised. As a matter of fact, a couple of lines later, it is revealed that the man who is disguised, is the prince who disguised himself as a princess. In act five scene one, this is also shown by the prince himself, expressing to one of his advisors that his real identity was discovered.

The physical nonconformity of the prince and the prince, as presented in his disguise as a woman, shows two different gender presentations. The gender presentation the text focusses on is that of the princess, or the prince in his disguise. In the play, the princess is viewed as a woman who does not conform to societal standards. This nonconformity of the princess becomes one of the main focusses of the play, and it is presented to the audience as an inherent trait of the character. Furthermore, there is no suggestion in the play that this nonconformity, is the prince wanting to dress as close to his true gender as possible, even in

disguise. When it becomes clear that the princess is, in fact, the prince in disguise, this gender nonconformity shifts. Rather than an inherent trait and expression of the character, the gender nonconformity becomes a means to an end, and is thus presented in this way: the prince cross-dresses for a specific purpose, entering the convent. This adds to the ambiguity of the play, where not only do the characters present in non-conforming ways, but the nonconformity can be seen in multiple ways as well.

Behavioural nonconformity

When examining the behavioural nonconformity in the text, there are even fewer direct references to be found than when it comes to physical nonconformity. Most of these refer to the princess behaving masculinely, rather than the prince behaving femininely, in accordance with his disguise. The text presents the princess as a woman of masculine behaviour and dress, which is further confirmed by how the princess interacts with Lady Happy. When looking into the princess's behaviour throughout the play, she plays the role of a man and is also dressed as a man. This informs the reader that, within the relationship between the princess and Lady Happy, the princess takes on the role of the man. Which gives the relationship between the two a heteronormative structure, with one taking on a masculine role and the other taking on a more feminine position. Even though the Convent was founded in order for Lady Happy, and the other women not to conform to societal standards and get married; the relationship between Lady Happy and the princess because of this heteronormative structure, does mimic one between men and women outside the walls of the Convent. Within the convent, it is shown that the women both take up roles viewed as traditionally female and traditionally male, which is immediately noted by the princess as well. The flirtation between Lady Happy and the princess takes on the same heteronormative

form. And as a result, this enables the relationship which further develops, to have a heteronormative quality as well, even though Lady Happy feels she is breaking boundaries, as she states herself:

> *Lady Happy* No, servant! Your presence is more acceptable to me than the presence of our Goddess Nature, for which she, I fear, will punish me, for loving you more than I ought to love you.
>
> *Princess* Can lovers love too much?
>
> *Lady Happy* Yes, if they love not well. (5.1)

An example of Lady Happy and the princess actively engaging in a heteronormative relationship can be found within one of the plays within a play. Within the play about Neptune, the princess occupies the role of Neptune, thus occupying the masculine role. In contrast, Lady Happy plays the role of a sea goddess, thus occupying the traditionally feminine role.

However, when considering that the princess is actually a prince, the relationship between Lady Happy and thus the prince as the princess, gets more complicated; this is because by being allowed to act masculine while in disguise, the prince is, in fact, conforming to his natural-born gender. In the play, the prince is not seen to behave particularly femininely. In fact, in the first scene, where the prince appears as the princess, he asks Lady Happy, if he is allowed to take on the role of a servant in a more masculine way, which is granted to him by Lady Happy.

> *Princess* Why then, I observing in your several recreations, some of your ladies do accoutre themselves in masculine habits, and act lovers parts; I desire you will give me leave to be sometimes so accoutred and act the part of your loving servant.
>
> *Lady Happy* I shall never desire to have any other loving servant than yourself. (3.1)

Within the text, the princess and Madame Mediator are not the only ones that reference gender nonconformity. Within the subplot of cross-dressing in the play, a group of four men also reference gender nonconformity, specifically cross-dressing. Early in the play, Monsieur Take-Pleasure, Monsieur Adviser, Monsieur Courtly, and Monsieur Facil are seen deliberating on how to enter the Convent, to convince Lady Happy to marry to get her back into the status quo of society. This idea resembles the prince's; however, the men choose not to enact their plan to infiltrate the Convent. This because they lack the resources, social status, and wit in order to successfully pull off the performance of a woman, something that the prince does effectively. Another contrast is that the men ultimately decide against pretending to be women, for the reasons of not being able to fit women's clothing, as well as not being able to pretend to be women behaviourally. But as can be seen in the text, when it comes to behaviour within the Convent, there is not much of a difference from behaviour in the outside world. As the prince also notes in act three, scene one, the women take on two roles, either the feminine role or the masculine traditional male role, as can be seen in the quotation provided above from act three scene one. The prince, as discussed already, is granted to dress masculinely in his disguise as a princess, by Lady Happy. This then allows the prince to dress as his desired gender presentation, which in turn is the presentation of his natural gender.

Gender labour

When thinking of gender labour within *The Convent of Pleasure*, the main act of gender labour is not performed by the prince, the character specifically being presented as gender non-conforming, but rather by Lady Happy. The prince, as the princess, is presented as a masculine woman, and Lady Happy, allows the princess to dress as a man. In the relationship

throughout the play, it is seen that the princess takes on the traditionally male role, while Lady Happy takes on the female role, for example, in the play within a play about Neptune, as mentioned in the previous section. Lady Happy thus engages in the labour of being a girl. Lady Happy allows the princess to present masculinely, while voluntarily taking on a female role within the relationship. However, Lady Happy does not engage in the labour of forgetting in combination with the labour of being a girl. As Chess also states, Lady Happy, while performing the labour of being a girl, does not forget the presumed sex of the princess, thus not performing the gender labour of forgetting (Chess, 145). By practising the labour of being a girl, Lady Happy also performs the labour of alliance, by allowing the princess, and thus the prince, to present in their desired gender presentation. The prince(ss) does not actively participate in any gender labour themselves, with regard to his performance as a woman; but rather in his disguise, he actively chooses to present as gender assigned at birth, which in turn, is interpreted as the princess portraying themselves in a masculine way. Within the play, there are no instances where the prince is actively shown to engage in feminine behaviour, and not conforming to his true gender. Thus, he neither actively nonconforms nor actively participates in any gender labour, when it comes to his performance as a woman. However, he indirectly performs gender labour, specifically the labour of alliance. The way the prince engages in this gender labour, diverges from the previous examples shown of the labour of alliance, where the other actively supports a non-conforming gender identity: take, for example, Phillida and Gallathea in the previous chapter, who both actively help bolster each other's chosen identities. Rather the prince passively supports the gender performance of Lady Happy. By continuing to act masculinely, he allows Lady Happy to present in a feminine way. He enables their relationship to unfold in a heteronormative manner, which in turn, allows Lady Happy to both non-conform and conform to societal standards expected of women.

The nonconformity and gender labour occur within the convent's confines. The convent allows for a safe space where the gender nonconformity can take place, away from regular society. This separation adds to the gender nonconformity, as the space itself is nonconforming to the standards of society. As in the play, the convent is solely inhabited and run by women, and all men are prohibited from entering. This relates back to *Gallathea,* in which the space facilitated the gender nonconformity, by allowing the characters to be away from societal standards.

The play *The Convent of Pleasure* does contain gender nonconformity: however, the nonconformity is solely used as a means to an end within the play. In addition to the nonconformity being used as a tool, the audience/reader is presented with a woman who chooses not to conform, and dresses as well as behaves masculinely. This later turns around, when the true identity of the princess is revealed to be the prince. The gender nonconformity the audience was presented with, turns into a clever trick of the prince: he deceives Lady Happy as well as the rest of the convent, by having them think he is a woman, while staying true to his masculine ways. This further reiterates the use of gender nonconformity in the play, as a tool. The gender labour present in the play is scarce. The only active gender labour present is done by Lady Happy, specifically the labour of being a girl and the labour of alliance; since Lady Happy willingly takes on the feminine role, in order to further support the chosen gender expression of the princess. The overarching conclusion regarding this play and its gender nonconformity, is that it is largely used as a tool; it is viewed as a means to an end and specifically is used in that way. The nonconformity being used in this way, also leads to a heteronormative conclusion in which the prince marries Lady Happy, and the nonconformity in the convent is resolved in a way society deems desirable. This directly opposes the way nonconformity was resolves in *Gallathea*. While both plays end with a man and a woman getting married at the end of the play, the way *Gallathea* resolves the

nonconformity allows for a queer reading of the ending. However, within *The Convent of Pleasure* the only way the ending can be read is as a return to society and reintegrating to heteronormative standards.

Chapter three: *The Roaring Girl*

The play *The Roaring Girl* or *Moll Cutpurse* follows the character Moll, a fictionalised version of Mary Frith, who in the play is known as Moll Cutpurse. In the play, Sebastian's father does not allow him to marry his love Mary Fitzallard, because her dowry is too small. Sebastian then, with the help of Moll, sets out to convince his father that he is, in fact, in love with Moll and intends to marry her, instead of Mary Fitzallard. The marriage with Moll would be frowned upon, because of her reputation and her not behaving nor presenting as a woman was expected to at the time. This results in Sebastian's father trying to cause Moll's downfall, by hiring Trapdoor to spy on Moll. At the end of the play, Sir Wengrave is relieved to find out Sebastian is marrying his original fiancée, Mary, and thus gives him his blessing, as Moll's plan intended. After this discovery, however, Sir Wengrave realises he was wrong to judge a book by its cover and apologises to Moll.

When taking the theatrical background of the play into account, it also adds to the layers of nonconformity. As known in Early Modern England, women's roles were played by young men or boys. However, it is suggested that Moll herself, otherwise known as Mary Frith, played in at least one performance of the play, which is even alluded to in the play itself.

> The Roaring Girl herself some few days hence
> Shall on this Stage, give larger recompense.
> Which Mirth that you may share in, herself does woo you
> And craves this sign, your hands to beckon her to you. (Epilogue, 3133-3136)

Mary Frith was known to frequently act in theatres, specifically at the Fortune Playhouse. She often bantered with the audience on the stage, played the lute, and sang obscene songs (Royal Shakespeare Company). This would layer the play with additional gender nonconformity, as it was unusual for women to perform in the theatre, especially a commercial theatre. In

addition to the layer of Mary Frith, herself, being on stage during the play as suggested in the epilogue. The audience would likely have knowledge of Mary's reputation, which is then transferred onto the character of Moll, adding to the performance, and enhancing the gender performance of Moll as a character.

Physical nonconformity

As with the previous chapters, the first aspect of nonconformity which will be discussed, is the physical gender nonconformity of Moll. Throughout the play, there are various mentions of Moll's physical appearance. These come in the form of stage directions, remarks made by the other characters, and, on occasion, a comment from Moll herself. What is made clear in the play, is that how Moll dresses is an integral part of her character, as well as her reputation. Moll is seen as outside of the norm and looked down upon by the other women in the play, except for Mary, both for how she dresses and behaves. For example, Mistress Gallipot, in scene one, act one, states that Moll is more regarded as a man, or even both man and woman rather than a proper woman.

> *Goshawk* 'Tis the maddest fantastical'st girl: — I never knew so much flesh and so much nimbleness put together.
>
> *Laxton* She slips from one company to another, like a fat
>
> Eel between a Dutchman's fingers: — I'll watch my time for her.
>
> *Mistress Gallipot* Some will not stick to say she's a man
>
> And some both man and woman. (682-687; formatting as in Folger edition)

Throughout the play, we see Moll dressed in men's clothing; in fact, only one mention suggests Moll wears traditionally feminine clothing. In line 2909, Sir Alex asks Moll, "Is this your wedding gown?" Which indicates that Moll in the play, could be wearing a gown of

some sort; however, this could also be sarcasm on the part of Sir Alex, describing Molls' typical male attire as her wedding gown. While Moll does occasionally combine feminine and male clothing, the other descriptions of Moll's outfits mostly describe typical masculine garments. For example, in lines 964 to 995, the tailor specifies that Moll's new breeches are almost ready, and he just needs some measurements. This shows, that not only is it known that Moll wears masculine clothing, but she is supported in this by others as well, up to a certain point; even if this support only exists because it is beneficial to the other character. Moll does not get ridiculed for her garments, by those characters who seemingly support Moll and her masculine gender presentation.

Other descriptions of Moll's physical nonconformity can be found in the play's stage directions. In the stage directions, the outfits get more detailed descriptions, than the characters in the play give when referring to Moll's physical appearance. The stage directions, for example, specify what colour, what specific clothing item or what job her clothing is supposed to represent. An example of such a stage direction is the following: "*Enter Moll in a frieze Jerkin and a black safeguard*" (654). This stage direction not only specifies which items Moll is wearing, but also the colour of the 'safeguard' she is wearing. This opposes the descriptions from the other characters and Moll herself, who do not use as much specificity about the clothing. For example, Moll only references a suit in lines 1292 to 1299, and the tailor mentions breeches, but neither reference gives any additional detail. These stage directions, add to the layered identity of Moll when reading the play. While spectators would visibly see the clothing, Moll wears on stage, without these stage directions, a lot of contexts to Moll's appearance would be lost when reading the play: for example, the combination of the frieze jerkin and black safeguard. Without the description of these clothing articles, the presumption would be that Moll wears male clothing solely. However, from this stage direction, the reader is privy to the fact that Moll combines feminine and

masculine clothing. The jerkin is a specific jacket traditionally worn by men, while the safeguard is a type of skirt. Moll here, adds to her own ambiguity by playing with male and female clothing, alluding to her identity, which floats between female and male to the outside world. Moll exists in a space outside of the gender binary (Choate, 17).

The reaction to the physical nonconformity of Moll, from the women in the play is different from the reactions displayed in the previous plays. In both *Gallathea* and *The Convent of Pleasure*, the female characters support the physical gender nonconformity of the character showing this nonconformity. For example, Lady Happy allows the princess to dress masculinely in the convent, even supporting this. In *The Roaring Girl*, however, the women in the play do not seem supportive of Moll's gender nonconformity. In fact, the women seem to dislike Moll for it and even criticise her.

> *Mistress Openwork* How now, greetings, love terms with a pox
> between you, have I found out one of your haunts, I send you
> for hollands, and you're i' th' the low countries with a mischief,
> I'm served with good ware by th' shift, that makes it lie dead so
> long upon my hands, I were as good shut up shop, for when I
> open it I take nothing.
> *Master Openwork* Nay and you fall a-ringing once the devil cannot
> stop you, I'll out of the Belfry as fast as I can — Moll.
> *Mistress Openwork* Get you from my shop.
> *Moll* I come to buy.
> *Mistress Openwork* I'll sell ye nothing, I warn ye my house and shop(702-710)

As can be seen in the quotation, Mistress Openwork here suggests through a pun that her husband has been in "Moll's low countries", suggesting they had a sexual relationship.

Because of this assumption by Mistress Openwork, she judges Moll and refuses to interact with her any further nor will she sell anything to Moll.

The reason for rejection of Moll, can be because clothing in the Early Modern period was highly gendered, and Moll wearing men's clothing, or combining men's clothing with traditionally feminine clothing posed a threat to society (Choate, 20). Moll defies the expectations set by society; thus, any rumour or perceived transgression from Moll, is met with harsh judgement and rejection.

Moll herself, also refers to her physical appearance within the play. However, unlike the other characters around her, who react to her either positively or negatively, she is indifferent to how society reacts to her looks. Trapdoor references her appearance; and to Moll no moral stance is tied to it. For example, in lines 1292 to 1299, Moll presents her old clothes as a reward to Trapdoor and his performance as her servant; however, she does not tie any moral value to the clothes other than gifting them to her servant.

> *Moll* How many suits have you.
>
> *Trapdoor* No more suits than backs Mistress.
>
> *Moll* Well if you deserve, I cast off this, next week,
>
> And you may creep into 't. (1292-1295)

To Moll herself, the clothes are viewed as simply clothes; the way she expresses herself is not intended to be considered solely male or female. Moll is simply Moll.

Behavioural nonconformity

Behaviourally, Moll stands out from the other characters as well. Moll is seemingly regarded as one of the men in the play. She is referenced as 'captain;' for example, other men refer to Moll with masculine formalities: "Greenwit Prithee come hither sirrah" (664). However, this

does not mean that the men fully support Moll either. The men appear to accept Moll, but do not hesitate to judge her based on her nonconformity either. Examples include her servant Trapdoor and Sir Alexander, both of whom shame Moll for her being herself.

Trapdoor Shall we set upon the infantry, these troops of foot?

Zounds yonder comes *Moll* my whorish Master and Mistress,

would I had her kidneys between my teeth.

Tear-Cat I had rather have a cow-heel.

Trapdoor Zounds I am so patched up, she cannot discover me: we'll on. (2503-2508)

Sir Alexander says, "My son marry a thief, that impudent girl, Whom all the world stick their worst eyes upon?" (2791-2792). The men's alliance seems to be situational. Men who are familiar with Moll, besides her reputation seem to accept her more, even if they place her in a gendered space. While the men who only know Moll by reputation, initially outright refuse to acknowledge anything else about her, even if they spend time with her. This unwavering opinion, indeed, does not change for most of the play.

Opposed to the men, the women in the play do not regard Moll positively regarding her behaviour either. As with Moll's appearance, the other women in the play look down upon Moll for her behaviour, which is viewed as more masculine and not up to the standard for women at the time. Moll herself recognises her gender nonconformity, and how it is perceived in society:

Moll And here,

Being come from Venice, to a friend most dear

That were to travel thither, you would proclaim

Your knowledge in those villainies, to save

Your friend from their quick danger: must you have

A black ill name, because ill things you know,

Good troth my Lord, I am made Moll cutpurse so.
How many are whores, in small ruffs and still looks?
How many chaste, whose names fill slander's books?
were all men cuckolds, whom gallants in their scorns
Call so, we should not walk for goring horns,
Perhaps for my mad going some reprove me,
I please myself, and care not else who loves me. (2766-2778)

In this quotation, Moll explains how she got the name Moll Cutpurse, by describing that she got the name, through acknowledging her knowledge of thieves cant and how thieves operate. But this is not the most interesting part of the section. Moll addresses how people can be written off as one thing but, in reality, are very different people than society perceives them. An example of this given by Moll, is that of chaste women whose names get dragged through the mud by people slandering their names. Moll recognises that society has a certain view of her: that of Moll Cutpurse. Moll is also aware that this reputation causes people to dislike her as she says in the penultimate line, "[p]erhaps for my mad going some reprove me". While Moll does recognise her nonconformity, and is aware of how society reacts to it, she does not seem fazed by it; in fact, she embraces it as she herself states, "I please myself, and care not else who loves me." Moll actively shows she is not some helpless woman, but takes charge of her own life and, through that, is not afraid to stray from the gender norms set by society. Take, for example, marriage. Moll refuses to get married, and even if she were to be asked to marry, she would outright reject it; this is stated by Moll herself as well in lines 928 to 937.

Moll Sir I am so poor to requite you, you must look for
nothing but thanks of me, I have no humor to marry, I love
to lie a' both sides a' th' bed myself; and again a' th' other side,
a wife you know ought to be obedient, but I fear me I am too

> headstrong to obey, therefore I'll ne'er go about it, I love you
> so well sir for your good will I'd be loath you should repent
> your bargain after, and therefore we'll ne'er come together
> at first, I have the head now of myself, and am man enough
> for a woman, marriage is but a chopping and changing, where
> a maiden loses one head, and has a worse i' th' place (928-937)

Not only does Moll reject marriage in this section, but she also recognises her behavioural gender nonconformity. As would be expected for a married woman, Moll says she would have to be obedient to a husband; but shows herself to be knowledgeable enough of her own nonconformity and personality, to know that she would not be able to fall in line and be obedient to a husband. Thus, because she recognises societal standards and her place within society, Moll is able to explain why she refuses to get married clearly.

Another way in which Moll stands out from society behaviourally, is her speech patterns. Moll, within the play, occasionally uses thieves cant, which is a form of speech often used by the lower class, vagrants, prostitutes, and other illicit people (Michalaki, 119-120). The use of thieves' cant lets Moll migrate between the upper class and the lower class of London (Michalaki, 119). An example of Moll using thieves can is seen when Trapdoor pretends to be a thief, and Moll puts this to the test in lines 2605 to 2619:

> *Moll* He says his wench stays for him in an alehouse:
> you are no pure rogues.
> *Tear-Cat* Pure rogues? no, we scorn to be pure rogues, but
> if you come to our lib ken, or our stalling ken, you shall find
> neither him nor me, a queer cuffin.
> *Moll* So sir, no churl of you.
> *Tear-Cat* No, but a ben cave, a brave cave, a gentry cuffin.

Lord Noland Call you this canting?
Jack Dapper Zounds, I'll give a schoolmaster half a crown
a week, and teach me this pedlar's French.
Trapdoor Do but stroll sir, half a harvest with us sir, and you
shall gabble your bellyful.
Moll Come you rogue cant with me.
Thomas Long Well said Moll, cant with her sirrah, and you shall
have money, else not a penny. (2605-2619)

Moll here, clearly demonstrates knowledge of this particular form of slang language. Later in the play, Moll recounts her encounters with a cutpurse and how she learned thieves cant, and also recounts the story, which gave her the reputation of being 'Moll Cutpurse'. This use of a language which is commonly used by the outcasts of society, also adds to Moll's nonconformity. Moll's physique is already seen as socially disruptive; her language use adds to the view of Moll as a disruptive figure in society, which in turn adds to her refusal to conform, both to any particular gender as well as social norms.

Gender labour

When it comes to gender labour, within the play, the labour of alliance is the most prevalent labour. The labour of alliance is mainly engaged in by the men around Moll. The men around Moll accept her presentation, and, in fact, help uphold the masculine gender presentation that Moll participates in. The men engage in this in several ways: they approach Moll with male pronouns and formalities, while the tailor makes clothes for Moll, allowing her to present masculinely. Male characters also allow Moll in their inner circle; an example of this can be found in lines 645 to 664.

Enter Moll in a frieze Jerkin and

a black safeguard.

Goshawk Life yonder's Moll.

Laxton Moll which Moll. Goshawk honest Moll.

Laxton Prithee let's call her — Moll.

All. Moll, Moll, pist Moll.

Moll How now, what's the matter.

Goshawk A pipe of good tobacco Moll.

Moll I cannot stay.

Goshawk Nay Moll puh, prithee hark, but one word i' faith.

Moll Well what is 't.

Greenwit Prithee come hither sirrah. (645-664)

While the men seemingly engage in the labour of alliance, this labour works against Moll. The men actively try to put Moll into a gendered box, for example, by talking about Moll in a male-gendered way. On the other side of the coin, when they cannot successfully put Moll in a male-gendered space, through the labour of alliance, they try to put Moll in a female space. This is done by calling her, for example, a whore. Calling Moll, a whore does not have the same connotation as it would have in modern English. By calling Moll a whore, they situate Moll in a female space, which common women occupy. To be called a whore in medieval England meant that the woman was publicly and sexually available (Karras, 138). As Karras states:

> 'Public woman,' a term used of prostitutes in France at this time, evokes the way women's independence and their movement outside the control of the head of the household became sexualized; 'common woman' in England expressed the same idea of a woman who moved into the communal realm, becoming sexually available. A

> whore was one who brought her sexuality out of the private and into the public arena. (Karras, 138)

While Karras writes about late medieval England, her work is applicable to Early Modern England, as this idea of a woman being called a whore, because she was viewed as sexually available and publicly available, also permeated the understanding of the term in Early Modern England (Digangi, 148-150). The men in the play put Moll in this space, since Moll actively defies social standards; thus, by calling her a whore they acknowledge her as a social disturbance, while at the same time putting her in a female box. The gender labour present in this play, does not correlate to any of the gender labour terms used previously in this research; if a label needs to be attached, it could be called the labour of making sense. The men put Moll in these boxes, in order to make sense of Moll's gender and gender presentation. When the men in the play do practice the labour of alliance, as it presented itself in the previous plays, by bolstering Moll's gender performance; it is largely transactional, or depends on how the characters around them see Moll. This transactional alliance is seen practised by the tailor, as well as Trapdoor. The latter only bolsters the gender performance of Moll because he is ordered to investigate her, and by doing so, he is able to get close to Moll.

Moll herself, actively nonconforms to her gender assigned at birth and societal standards presented to her gender. However, unlike the other characters in *Gallathea* and *The Convent of Pleasure*, Moll is not actively trying to pass as the opposite gender. Moll inhabits a different space: she considers herself a woman, and her gender nonconformity is simply an expression of her identity. When connecting this to the theory of gender labour, Moll's nonconformity, again does not fit in one of the predetermined boxes. Moll's gender labour exists in the context of her presenting as masculine, while retaining her female identity. Moll's nonconformity falls between the labour of forgetting and the labour of remembrance;

Moll's identity could be forgotten by her dressing in men's clothing, and acting more masculinely, even if this is not its intended purpose. The gender labour that the characters around Moll participate in, is best classified as the labour of making sense, one that is not described in the theory presented by Jane Ward. The characters around Moll try to put her in a gendered box, in order to make sense of Moll's identity. Because Moll's identity is so layered and includes a lot of ambiguity, the gender labour of both Moll and the other characters cannot fit into the predetermined boxes. The gender labour in *The Roaring Girl* revolves around ambiguity, and trying to make sense of one's gender identity, even when the gender identity presented might not be the complete picture.

Opposed to the other two plays discussed, *The Roaring Girl* does not have surroundings which specifically facilitates the gender nonconformity and gender labour, the characters perform. *The Roaring Girl* is specifically a city comedy; the entirety of the play takes place within London. Opposed to the other plays, the gender nonconformity presented does not happen away from public scrutiny. Moll presents herself in a gender-nonconforming way in the eye of society; however, while the characters in the play dislike Moll because of this, the play itself does not condemn Moll for her nonconformity. In fact, at the end of the play, Sir Wengrave has a change of heart when it comes to Moll; because Moll helped him realise that his son's marriage to the woman he loved, was not necessarily as bad as he envisioned. The play celebrates Moll for her unwavering authenticity and nonconformity in the end, by rectifying the unjust assumptions the characters in the play make about her.

In conclusion, the gender nonconformity presented by Moll in *The Roaring Girl,* unlike the gender nonconformity in *Gallathea* and *The Convent of Pleasure*, is inherent to the character of Moll. The play shows Moll actively diverging from society's standards, both in behaviour as well as in her appearance. However, Moll never actively intends to present as another gender; in fact, Moll is quite comfortable with being a woman and her gender

assigned at birth. This shows that the gender nonconformity in *The Roaring Girl,* is not a means to an end like in *Gallathea* and *The Convent of Pleasure,* but rather an inherent aspect of the character Moll. The nonconformity performed by Moll is intended to show, that gender nonconformity is not a thing which should be feared, as the play sets up Moll's conformity to be a good thing; and the characters that criticise and ostracise Moll, are portrayed to be wrong in their ideas and should not have been judging Moll. When putting this attitude of the ending of the play, in perspective with the other two plays, it can be seen that *The Roaring Girl* is the only one, which does not require a heteronormative ending, in order to resolve any issues surrounding Moll's nonconformity.

Conclusion

When comparing the three plays, there are a number of similarities between them. A common theme which they all explore is ambiguity. Throughout the play, the non-conforming characters play with gender stereotypes, in terms of both of their genders assigned at birth, as well as the gender they portray to the outside world. Examples of the characters playing with the gender stereotypes, can be found in all of the plays. *In The Convent of Pleasure*, the prince, disguised as the princess, plays with the gender he assumed to infiltrate the convent. The princess portrays "herself" in a masculine way, which in turn is the prince presenting his "true" gender. This leaves room for ambiguity in the gender nonconformity shown; it is up for interpretation if one should see it as the princess not conforming to her gender, since the audience does not know that the princess is the prince in disguise, or if it is the prince simply using the opportunity to present as his true gender.

Within *Gallathea*, ambiguity with regard to gender presentation, is present throughout the play as well. In scene one act two, Gallathea plays with ambiguity when questioned if she isn't a "fair boy" and answers that she is, in fact, not a fair boy. However, this answer is presented in such a manner, that it can be questioned which Gallathea rejects the adjective "fair" or her being a "boy." Finally, *The Roaring Girl* is riddled with examples of ambiguity. The character of Moll uses ambiguity in every aspect of her gender representation. Moll presents in both a feminine and masculine way; this is further emphasised by how other characters interact with Moll. The other characters try to make sense of Moll, by placing her in a gendered category, whether this is by calling her male formalities like "Sirrah", or placing Moll in the space of an ordinary woman by calling Moll a "whore." These characters are thus engaging in the labour of making sense. These instances of ambiguity, show that the understanding of gender at the time relied on strict gender roles and spaces. When one

diverges from the preconceived notion of what a woman or a man is, it threatens the status quo.

Another common thread which presented itself in two out of three of the plays, is gender nonconformity as a means to an end. In both *The Convent of Pleasure,* as well as *Gallathea*, there is a common theme in which, the main characters use their gender nonconformity as a means to an end. In *Gallathea*, Phillida, as well as Gallathea, initially cross-dress as boys, in order to escape the fate of being sacrificed to Neptune. This, throughout the play, is the main motivation behind the pair presenting as men. Equally, in *The Convent of Pleasure*, gender nonconformity is born out of necessity. The prince dresses as a princess in order to get access to the convent.

In both of the plays, the nonconformity serves a purpose to the character; however, the reactions that the nonconformity draws out of the other characters, differ in both cases. In comparison, the prince is praised for his ingenuity, in cross-dressing as a princess in order to enter the convent. The initial reaction to the women in *Gallathea,* when their cross-dressing is discovered, is confusion and disgust, when it turns out they have fallen in love. When *Gallathea* gets a heterosexual conclusion, however, the cross-dressing is seen as acceptable. This shows that the cross-dressing, is acceptable when it serves a purpose. However, it is only deemed acceptable, when the cross-dressing plot is resolved in such a way, that the characters return to their respective gender roles. When this is impossible, the solution needs to be able to fit traditional gender roles for men and women.

The gender labour presented in the plays, resembles each other as well. The one labour which was found in all of the texts, was the labour of alliance. This suggests that, while there was judgement for gender non-conforming individuals, there was support for them as well. This support was needed for gender nonconformity to come to fruition. Another frequently used labour in the plays, is the labour of forgetting; in which the person

participating in this labour, essentially acts as if they have forgotten the gender assigned at birth, of the person presenting in a non-conforming way, in order to bolster their chosen gender identity. This labour is mainly present in the play *Gallathea,* in which both Phillida and Gallathea participate in the labour of forgetting, and putting away any doubts that the other might be as they are a girl under their disguise, in order to bolster each other's gender identity.

The gender labour, as well as the gender nonconformity, all seem to be facilitated by the surroundings the characters find themselves in. An example is in *The Convent of Pleasure*; the prince is able to perform his disguise as a princess, in a masculine way since the convent creates a space for female gender nonconformity, both behaviourally as well as physically. The same goes for *Gallathea,* because the play's main setting is outside of the town and civilisation, and intertwined with the world of the gods; Gallathea and Phillida are allowed to be gender non-conforming, without being perceived as a threat to society. In fact, the pair does not meet criticism until they are discovered by their family; and pose a threat to the society, if they returned as two women in love, who had fallen for each other by pretending to be men. *The Roaring Girl*, however, has an entirely different approach to space and the facilitation of gender nonconformity, through the use of a space. Moll claims the city as her own non-conforming space. Within the play, Moll does not tiptoe around different settings and choose moments when to present in a non-conforming way, but rather she presents the same, no matter what setting she finds herself in. This can also be the reason the characters in the play dislike Moll; she threatens their perceived notion of femininity and thus threatens society. The surroundings play a big role in whether or not the character's gender nonconformity is seen as socially acceptable, and this also influences the way the characters engage with the gender-nonconforming individual.

When considering how gender nonconformity and gender labour are presented within the plays, the following conclusion can be drawn. Gender nonconformity in Early Modern society was seen as a disruptive factor. However, in these plays, a nonconformity is shown, which is considered acceptable, when examining how the characters react to the nonconformity. Cross-dressing as a means to an and was seen as acceptable, as long as the person participating in gender nonconformity, falls back in line with the gender roles perceived as correct within society. Another aspect in which cross-dressing is accepted besides it serving a purpose, is when a man cross-dresses as a woman, but it is looked down upon when a woman assumes a male gender identity. This is because the woman is seen as trying to assume a higher societal status, whereas men cannot possibly want to be a woman, so the cross-dressing must be solely for functional purposes. At the same time, female nonconformity is seen as a desire for more power, perhaps innate to the characters. Another situation, in which nonconformity is deemed acceptable or unacceptable, as stated above, is the environment, in which the gender-nonconforming individual finds themselves. Characters around the gender nonconforming individuals, are more likely to engage positively when in a setting away from the day-to-day public, and engage more in positive gender labour. However, as can be seen in *The Roaring Girl*, gender nonconformity is less easily accepted in public spaces; in these spaces, any positive gender labour performed by the other characters, is shown to be transactional and not to inherently meant to boost Moll's gender performance.

In conclusion, gender nonconformity in the plays and, subsequently, in Early Modern society, gender nonconformity is seen as disruptive. However, it is accepted when it serves a purpose, and the nonconforming person, does not intend to divert from society's predetermined gender roles permanently and returns to a heteronormative place in society. This acceptance, when relating it to the theory of gender labour, can be linked to the labour of

making sense, as introduced in chapter three. Because the labour of making sense intends to place the gender nonconformity of a person, into societies preconceived notions of gender, which is achieved by resolving the nonconformity, by giving it a conclusion that returns the character to a heteronormative society.

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