Shakespeare en devenir

Frederick Richard Pickersgill, *Orsino and Viola* (c. 1850).

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Numéro 17 : « La performance de genre au théâtre élisabéthain et au-delà / Gender Performance on the Elizabethan Stage and Beyond ». Sous la direction d'Oliver Norman et de Louis André.

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Éditorial

Louis André & Oliver Norman
Université de Poitiers

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VIOLA. I am all the daughters of my father's house,
And all the brothers too (*Twelfth Night*, II.4.120-121)

Français

1 Dans la comédie shakespearienne *La Nuit des rois, ou Ce que vous voudrez* (*Twelfth Night, Or What You Will*), représentée pour la première fois en 1602, Viola se travestit et se présente à la cour d'Illyrie sous le nom de Césario. Engagée comme page auprès du duc Orsino (dont elle est secrètement amoureuse), Viola doit aider ce dernier à conquérir le cœur de la duchesse Olivia, qui est, quant à elle, amoureuse du jeune Césario. « Césario » est alors un personnage que Viola interprète : sa masculinité est une performance théâtrale, une construction qu'elle utilise pour interagir avec les autres personnages. Ce jeu de Viola devient mise en abyme où l'acteur qui l'incarne doit, tout en étant un homme, endosser le rôle d'une femme qui endosse à son tour le rôle d'un homme (la première actrice à accéder à la scène des théâtres populaires londoniens étant Margaret Hughes, en 1660).

2 Shakespeare ne s'intéresse pas seulement à la fluidité entre les genres (Viola alterne entre attitudes et traits tantôt féminins tantôt masculins), mais également aux répercussions sociales liées au genre : Viola se voit contrainte d'être un homme, par la place et le pouvoir limité des femmes de son époque. En interrogeant ces normes genrées, Shakespeare associe genre et pouvoir : la transformation de Viola sert avant tout à transgresser les rapports de domination patriarcaux. Ce travestissement est loin d'être le seul dans l'œuvre du Barde : Portia et Jessica dans *The Merchant of Venice*,

Rosalind dans *As You Like It*, Julia dans *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, Imogen dans *Cymbeline* se déguisent en hommes ; Bartholomew, quant à lui, se fait passer pour la femme de Christopher Sly dans *The Taming of the Shrew*.

3 Si l'on peut lire cette performance comme une remise en question du bien-fondé des codes genrés de l'ère élisabéthaine, qu'en est-il lorsque nous nous rappelons que le « boy actor » est loin d'être une figure extraordinaire dans le théâtre élisabéthain et jacobéen ? Pouvons-nous encore parler de subversion, quand bien même le « boy actor » était une réalité quotidienne dans le théâtre jusqu'en 1660 ? Ne doit-on pas concéder, comme le fera bien plus tard Judith Butler, que :

> Les métaphores perdent leur force métaphorique lorsqu'elles se figent en concepts avec le temps. Il en va de même des performances subversives : elles courent toujours le risque de devenir des clichés usés à force d'être répétées, et chose plus importante encore, répétées dans le cadre d'une économie de marché où la « subversion » a une valeur marchande[1].

4 Si la radicalité se perd dans la répétition, ne se perd-elle pas davantage encore lorsque cette répétition n'est pas seulement celle d'un acte individuel mais d'une structure esthétique, voire sociale, qui impose des rôles aux individus : le « boy actor » n'est-il pas dès lors un cliché figé de l'ère élisabéthaine et jacobéenne, ou y a-t-il une subversion à sauver, en-deçà de l'itérabilité ? Shakespeare et ses contemporains étaient-ils alors des innovateurs, des révolutionnaires, rejetant les catégories genrées que leur société leur proposait, ou bien ne faisaient-ils que suivre les us et coutumes de leur époque ?

5 Si cette question de la radicalité de la performance de genre se pose concernant les œuvres de la Renaissance, n'en trouvons-nous pas un

reflet dans les pratiques de performance de genre contemporaines ? Ainsi, nous pouvons étudier le rapport entre théâtre et genre dans le monde actuel en nous intéressant à deux figures particulières : les « drag performers » et les « pantomime dames ». Ces deux instances de performance divergent : la « pantomime dame » apparaît avec l'ère victorienne, incarne un personnage *camp* issu de réécritures de contes (*Aladdin*, *Dick Whittington*, *Cendrillon, Jack et le Haricot Magique*), se produit devant un public majoritairement constitué d'enfants. Davantage qu'une remise en cause des normes de genre, la « dame » est-elle un simple personnage de pièce de théâtre, devenue l'égérie d'une fréquentation théâtrale liée à l'enfance anglaise ? Y a-t-il là subversion ou séparons-nous, dans ce cas, le jeu d'acteur d'un quelconque commentaire politique sur le genre ?

6 Les « drag performers », quant à eux, s'adressent à un public majoritairement adulte, se produisent dans des bars, clubs et boîtes de nuit. Or, cette pratique est inlassablement ramenée par RuPaul, « drag queen » la plus reconnue du XXI^{e} siècle, à Shakespeare. Il consacre même un épisode de son émission *RuPaul's Drag Race* à Shakespeare, produisant des mises en scène parodiques sous les titres de *Romy and Juliet* et *MacBitch*. De plus, il propose une étymologie folklorique pour le « drag » : ce serait un acronyme signifiant « dressed resembling a girl ».

7 Si lors de la parution de *Trouble dans le genre*, Butler pouvait indiquer que le « drag performer » semble toujours remettre en cause les normes genrées, manifestant leur artificialité (ou caractère socialement construit), *Ces corps qui comptent* revient sur cette caractérisation et la nuance : le « drag » peut bien montrer l'artificialité des normes de genre, mais peut aussi servir à les refonder, à les amplifier. Il y a un « drag » subversif, rattaché à la communauté LGBTQ+, et un « drag » de divertissement, montré dans les films, à la télévision, que « la culture hétérosexuelle produit[2] » : Butler donne alors les noms de Julie Andrews dans *Victor, Victoria*,

Dustin Hoffman dans *Tootsie* ou encore Jack Lemmon dans *Certains l'aiment chaud* – nous pourrions sûrement rajouter Wesley Snipes, Patrick Swayze et John Leguizamo dans *Extravagances*.

8 L'ambiguïté de telles formes de performance tient-elle à la nature même d'une performance, de l'artifice d'un théâtre incapable de produire une illusion réelle ? Cette ambiguïté n'est-elle pas source de mécompréhensions à l'égard de ces pratiques elles-mêmes : les détracteurs du « drag » le condamnant pour misogynie (à la fois auprès de personnalités politiques comme Mary Cheney, ou encore de théoriciennes féministes comme bell hooks, Janice Raymond ou Marylin Frye) ?

9 Ce numéro de *Shakespeare en devenir* s'intéressera à la question de la radicalité du théâtre et du monde de la performance de genre au sens large. Il s'agira d'interroger à la fois les pratiques théâtrales de l'époque élisabéthaine et jacobéenne, mais aussi les reprises de ces performances à notre époque. Le théâtre est-il toujours lieu d'une radicalité politique, d'une revendication, voire (pour utiliser les termes de ses détracteurs) d'une perversion ? N'est-il pas plutôt, comme tout *medium* artistique de masse, le lieu d'un lissage, d'une généralisation, d'un divertissement qui prend le dessus sur toute tentative de revendication politique ?

English

10 In the Shakespearean comedy *Twelfth Night*, *Or What You Will*, first performed in 1602, Viola presents herself to the Illyrian court, disguised as Cesario. Hired as a page by Duke Orsino (with whom she is secretly in love), Viola must help him seduce Duchess Olivia, who is in love with the young Cesario. "Cesario" is a character that Viola plays: her masculinity is a theatrical performance, a social

construction through which she interacts with the other characters. This façade put on by Viola transforms the play into a *mise en abyme*, where the actor who played her had to, while being a man, take on the role of a woman who, in turn, takes on the role of a man (the first actress on a mainstream London stage being Margaret Hughes, in 1660).

11 Shakespeare goes beyond a mere depiction of gender fluidity (as Viola alternates between feminine and masculine traits), he also puts forward the social stakes related to gender: Viola is forced to play the part of a man, because of the limited authority and autonomy allotted to the women of her time. In questioning these gender norms, Shakespeare intertwines gender and power: above all things, Viola's transformation allows her to transgress patriarchal domination. This instance of cross-dressing is far from being the only one in the Bard's literary work: we could mention, for example, Portia and Jessica in *The Merchant of Venice*, Rosalind in *As You Like It*, Julia in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, Imogen in *Cymbeline*, all these women characters disguise themselves as men; as for the men, Bartholomew poses as Christopher Sly's wife in *The Taming of the Shrew*.

12 While this performance can be seen as a criticism of Elizabethan gender codes, can we justify this reading of Shakespeare's work even though boy actors (and cross-dressing, by extension) are commonplace in Elizabethan and Jacobean drama? Can we still see a form of subversion in it, despite boy actors being an everyday occurrence on stage, up until 1660? Should we not consider, as Judith Butler would, much later, that:

> Just as metaphors lose their metaphoricity as they congeal through time into concepts, so subversive performances always run the risk of becoming deadening clichés through their repetition and, most importantly, through their repetition within commodity culture where "subversion" carries market value.[3]

13 If radicality is lost through repetition, does it not vanish even more when this repetition is not only that of an individual act but of an entire aesthetic, or even social, structure that imposes roles on individuals: is the boy actor not then a cliché specific to the Elizabethan and Jacobean eras, or is there subversion to be found in it, beyond iterability? Were Shakespeare and his contemporaries innovators, revolutionaries, rejecting the gendered categories that their society offered them, or were they simply following the customs of their time?

14 While this question of the radical and subversive quality of gender performance can be applied to Renaissance drama, we could also hold a similar discussion on contemporary gender performance practices. Therefore, we have decided to study the relationship between theatre and gender in today's world too, by looking at two particular figures: drag performers and pantomime dames. These two instances of gender performance diverge: the pantomime dame appeared during the Victorian era and represents a camp character taken from rewritten popular tales (*Aladdin*, *Dick Whittington*, *Cinderella*, *Jack and the Beanstalk*). The performance is held in front of an audience composed of children, for the most part. Rather than a challenge to gender norms, is the dame a simple character in a play, who has become the symbol of a theatrical event linked to a specifically British childhood? Is this subversion, or, in this case, must we separate acting from any political commentary on gender?

15 Drag performers, on the other hand, cater to a predominantly adult audience, performing mostly in bars and nightclubs. RuPaul, the most recognized drag queen of the XXIst century, constantly links drag to Shakespeare. He even dedicates an episode of his TV reality show *RuPaul's Drag Race* to Shakespeare, producing parodies of the Bard's plays under the titles *Romy and Juliet* and *MacBitch*. Furthermore, he establishes a folk etymology for drag as an acronym standing for "dressed resembling a girl".

16 At the time of *Gender Trouble*'s first publication, Butler stated that drag performers always seemed to question gendered norms, highlighting their artificial (i.e., socially constructed) nature. However, in *Bodies That Matter*, she tackles the subject once again to add nuance to her former statement: drag may well show the artificiality of gender norms, but it can also serve to reinforce them, to amplify them. There is a subversive drag, rooted in the LGBTQ+ community, to be separated from drag as a form of entertainment, shown in films, on television, "that heterosexual culture produces for itself".[4] Butler then lists Julie Andrews in *Victor, Victoria*, Dustin Hoffman in *Tootsie* or Jack Lemmon in *Some Like It Hot* - we could surely add Wesley Snipes, Patrick Swayze and John Leguizamo in *Extravagances*.

17 Is the ambiguity of such performances due to the very nature of dramatic performances, the artifice inherent to drama rendering them unable to produce an illusion of reality? Is this ambiguity not the source of misunderstandings regarding these practices themselves: the detractors of drag condemning it for its underlying misogyny (both from political figures such as Mary Cheney, and from feminist theorists such as bell hooks, Janice Raymond, or Marylin Frye)?

18 This issue of *Shakespeare en devenir* will focus on radicality in theatre performance and the world of gender performance in the broadest sense. We will thus examine both Elizabethan and Jacobean theatrical practices and the revival of these performances in our time. Is the theatre still a place of political radicalism (if it ever was), of advocacy, or even (to use the words of its detractors) of perversion? Is it not rather, like any other mass artistic media, the place of a smoothing out, of a generalisation, of an entertainment that takes over any attempt of political revendications?

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Notes

[1] Judith Butler, *Trouble dans le genre* [1990], Paris, La Découverte, 2006, p. 45.

[2] Judith Butler, *Ces corps qui comptent* [1993], Paris, Ed. Amsterdam, 2018, p. 189.

[3] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* [1990], London, Routledge, 2002, p. xxi.

[4] Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, London, Routledge, 1993, p. 126.

Louis André

Louis André est un professeur agrégé d'anglais, ATER à l'Université de Poitiers. Il est également doctorant à Poitiers, au sein du laboratoire du CESCM où il prépare une thèse sur la représentation paradoxale de femmes dans le théâtre de John Webster à l'aube de l'ère jacobéenne, sous la direction de Pascale Drouet. Il a publié une entrevue avec l'artiste Édouard Lekston « Dante et Shakespeare, croisements graphiques » (in *Dante et Shakespeare : cosmologie, politique, poétique*, dir. I. Battesti et P. Drouet, Classiques Garnier, 2020, p. 288-313).

Oliver Norman

Oliver Norman est professeur agrégé de philosophie ainsi que ATER « Philosophie morale et politique » à l'Université de Poitiers. Il effectue une thèse sous la direction du Pr. Philippe Grosos sur l'éthique du silence chez Kierkegaard et ses reprises françaises de la seconde moitié du XX^{e} siècle. Il a également consacré des travaux à la question de l'intersection entre philosophie kierkegaardienne et problématiques contemporaines autour de l'identité tels « Kierkegaard, Gender Identity, and Bioethics. How to Receive the Other » (in *Kierkegaard and Bioethics*, éd. J. -C. Põder, Routledge, 2023, p. 176-190) et « Despair and Gender Identity. Reading Kierkegaard in a Queer Light » (in *Kierkegaard and Issues in Contemporary Ethics*, éd. M. Fox-Muraton, De Gruyter, 2020, p. 253-272).

“He might well have been a woman”: gender malleability and female homoerotic desire in John Lyly’s *Galatea* (c. 1588)

Johann Paccou
Université Sorbonne-Nouvelle

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Johann Paccou, « “He might well have been a woman”: gender malleability and female homoerotic desire in John Lyly’s *Galatea* (c. 1588) », *Shakespeare en devenir* [En ligne], n°17, 2024, mis à jour le 25/01/2024, URL : https://shakespeare.edel.univ-poitiers.fr/index.php?id=2966.

1 In *Vested Interests*, Marjorie Garber defines the cross-dressed actor as a destabiliser of gender categories, thus underlining the figure's subversive nature.[1] Several critics concur in describing the early modern boy actor as inherently transgressive. Alan Sinfield, for instance, quotes Garber when he states that "the boy actor has a profoundly radical potential."[2] Such potential is made clear in anti-theatricalist discourse by the likes of Philip Stubbes, who notably depict cross-dressing as disorderly and sinful. Drawing his arguments from the Bible in his *Anatomie of Abuses* (1583), Stubbes contends:

> It is written in the 22. of Deuteronomy, that what man so euer weareth womans apparel is accursed, and what woman weareth mans apparell, is accursed also […]. Our apparell was given to us as a signe distinctiue, to discerne betwixt sexe and sexe, and therefore one to weare the apparel of another sex, is to participate with the same, and to adulterate the veritie of his owne kinde.[3]

2 Stubbes vilifies cross-dressing as an abomination that threatens the gender binary by effacing gender difference. In the wider Elizabethan context, however, it appears that the gender binary, or the separation of men and women into two discrete categories, was not as clear-cut as Puritan moralists claimed. As Roberta Barker suggests, "the distinction between male and female, so crucial to modern actors and spectators, was far more porous and unstable in the culture that produced the boy-actress."[4] She illustrates this point by mentioning Galen's single-sex model, which located masculinity in behaviour rather than in human anatomy by conceiving of male genitalia as the merely externalised version of female reproductive organs.[5] Besides, far from being an anomaly in the early modern English cultural landscape, the cross-dressed actor was a familiar sight. As a dramatic convention, boy-acting was

common, and even commonplace. In Elizabethan England, "a world where masculinity was always in question," the boy actor then "holds a mirror up to nature – or more precisely, to culture."[6] Qualifying Garber's assertion, we could therefore suggest that the boy actor does not so much provoke a category crisis as he reveals an already-existing one. The omnipresence of the boy actor further calls into question the radical potential of cross-dressing on the Elizabethan stage if we bear in mind Judith Butler's take on subversive performances. In her view, the transgressive nature and political valence of a performance stem from its originality. Consequently, a subversive performance necessarily loses impetus as it is reiterated.[7] In other words, the radical utterance or act is defined according to both its political and original natures, the first stemming from the latter. Radicality thus defined finds its polar opposite in the banal, the commonplace, or the run-off-the-mill. The notion of radicality, however, needs to be reinterrogated when it is applied to the early modern context mostly because, in the tradition of classical rhetoric, literary invention (or *inventio*) was not understood as pure inventiveness, but rather as inspiration – from ancient sources predominantly. In writing the pastoral and mythological comedy *Galatea* (c. 1588), for instance, John Lyly drew heavily on the Ovidian myth of Iphis and Ianthe, which recounts the love of two virgins for each other. Unbeknownst to Ianthe, her lover is actually a girl disguised as a boy, which makes their union impossible until Iphis's anatomy is changed through godly intervention. The radical potential of early modern cross-dressing thus needs to be reconsidered. More specifically, we need to question the subversive element associated with the destabilisation of gender identity in John Lyly's comedy since it relies on a particularly elaborate interplay of cross-dressing and mistaken identities which is itself redoubled by the use of boy actors. This play was moreover a major source of inspiration for other cross-dressing comedies, such as Shakespeare's *As You Like It* (1599) and *Twelfth Night* (c. 1601). In addition, it is crucial

to bear in mind that *Galatea* was originally written for court performance. As he makes clear in the prologue, Lyly's aim was to please Queen Elizabeth I, which once again begs the question of whether or not the play can carry a transgressive message.

3 This paper aims at moving the focus away from the radical potential of cross-dressing in *Galatea* and onto what the disruption of the gender binary does to the expression of same-gender love in the play. It is my contention that Lyly's treatment of gender malleability, though it is not radical per se, is worth analysing for what it reveals of his handling of desire between virgins, which is characterised by a paradox: while the love of Galatea and Phillida for each other is repeatedly presented as impossible by nature on Lyly's stage, it constitutes the backbone of the comedy's main plot. As we will demonstrate, the gender trouble brought about by cross-dressing opens up a gap in which desire between women can be expressed. In other words, the liminal space the two main characters find themselves in as regards their gender identity is precisely what enables their feelings to blossom. Gender indeterminacy, which is encouraged by the symbolically charged space of the mythical woods, thus appears as a safe space for the expression of queer love. Going back to Garber's argument, we can therefore agree on the fact that cross-dressing should not be underestimated as a mere dramatic device which had next-to no symbolic value in the eyes of theatregoers and the wider public.[8] Conversely, neither should it be overestimated as always-already transgressive.

Questioning the radical potential of cross-dressing in court performance

4 One of the questions underlying our analysis is that of knowing to what extent Lyly can afford being subversive in a play written specifically for Queen Elizabeth I. As G. K. Hunter indicates, if rehearsals at the Blackfriars were open to reduced audiences, the courtier-playwright's dramaturgy was aimed at royal favour, not popular success.[9] In *Galatea*, if a few direct addresses to the courtly audience members testify to such an aim, it is most obvious in the obsequious tones of the prologue:

> Your Majesty's judgement and favour are our sun and shadow, the one coming of your deep wisdom, the other of your wonted grace. We in all humility desire that by the former receiving our first breath we may in the latter take our last rest (The Prologue, II.3-7).[10]

5 Lyly uses what first appears as an antithesis in opposing the nouns "sun" and "shadow." Both terms, however, are connoted positively as the shadow he wants the monarch to provide symbolises her protection. Via an image recalling Plato's representation of knowledge, where the sun is the utmost source of truth, queen Elizabeth I is pictured as the supreme source of wisdom, shining truth on her subjects. Through that image, the playwright expresses the desire to receive both inspiration from the queen's light and the assurance of having the queen's blessing and protection. After running on the metaphor of wisdom as light emanating from the ruler, Lyly goes on to praise Elizabeth I's judgement, all the while precluding any accusation of offence:

> […] so have we endeavoured with all care that what we present Your Highness should neither offend in scene nor syllable, knowing that as in the ground where gold groweth nothing will prosper but gold, so in Your Majesty's mind, where nothing doth harbour but virtue, nothing can enter but virtue (II.13-18).

6 The playwright here asserts that if the ruler finds anything to her disliking in the play, it was not his intention to cause offence. Unsurprisingly asking for his audience's leniency while acknowledging that unsavoury elements in the play might have escaped his judgement, Lyly indirectly praises the queen's unmatched one. Through a simile likening Elizabeth's mind to auriferous grounds, Lyly reassures himself in the certainty that any potential offence would have no consequences on the monarch because she is so virtuous that nothing can sully her. In addition to flattering the Virgin Queen by praising her impenetrable virtue, the playwright thus justifies in advance the lewd jokes that she will hear in the comedy, such as Rafe's description of the Alchemist engaging in sexual intercourse with a woman: "I saw a pretty wench come to his shop, where with puffing, blowing, and sweating, he so plied her that he multiplied her." (V.1.20-22). Exposing once more his first master's charlatanism in a scene that ties up the three brothers' subplot with their reunion, Rafe here implies that this woman is all the Alchemist could multiply thanks to the "philosopher's stone" which "[lies] in a privy cupboard" (V.1.24-26) – a clear reference to the Alchemist's testicles.[11] In addition to giving reason for the bawdy aspects of the play, Lyly might be justifying beforehand the subversive potential of the plot, which he seems to be aware of.[12] However, I do not believe that, in the context of the play, subversion – and potential offence – lie in gender confusion. The cross-dressed boy actor, which was becoming an increasingly common sight on London's commercial stage at the time of performance, was even more familiar to monarchs and their courts. As Hunter reminds us,

the tradition of court entertainment by choirboys – aged between 12 and 17 roughly – dates back to the Middle Ages.[13] It is also worth noting that the queen's expression of her own gender identity has appeared as somewhat pliable and multifaceted. She has famously underlined her masculine traits to establish her authority and gain credibility as the head of the army in the speech she delivered to the troops at Tilbury in August 1588. She is reported to have declared: "I know I have the body but of a weak and feeble woman, but I have the heart and stomach of a king, and of a king of England too."[14] One should nonetheless bear in mind that the queen destabilises the gender binary for reasons that are chiefly political. If this near mythical fact concerning the queen's public image can hardly tell us anything of how she might have reacted to the display of utmost gender confusion at court, it can give us an idea of the extent to which gender identity was considered pliable at the time. As such, it could easily be trifled with in order to shape opinions, bringing emphasis on the fact that appearances may be deceiving.

7 Though it is unlikely that Elizabeth should have taken offence from the cross-dressing element in the play, Lyly's ambiguous praise of virginity may have raised a few eyebrows amongst the courtly audience of *Galatea*. Describing the play as an "oddly constructed paean to virginity," Theodora Jankowski argues: "If this play is meant either to validate virginity or flatter the Virgin Queen, it is a decidedly curious construct."[15] Curious as it may seem, *Galatea* does appear as a celebration of virginity inasmuch as this theme takes centre stage in the play. It is glorified through the tutelary figure of Diana, who appears as a "ruler-like" presence.[16] As Jankowski contends, Diana, her nymphs, and the other virgins in the play – notably the main characters Galatea and Phillida – flatter the queen "merely through their intact bodily condition[.]"[17] The glorification of virginity through the presence of Diana and her train is all the more important since the cult of the Virgin Queen was in full swing at the

time Lyly had *Galatea* performed in court.[18] Elizabeth's virginity was emphasised with connotations of purity and self-sacrifice, as is visible in her portraiture. In *The Sieve Portrait* (c. 1583) by Quentin Mestys the Younger, for instance, the eponymous prop links the monarch to the Roman Vestal Tuccia, who performed a miracle by carrying a sieve full of water without spilling a single drop, thus proving her virtue.[19]

8 The playwright's apparent celebration of virginity is nevertheless two-faced. Galatea and Phillida are sent into hiding because of the barbaric tradition of sacrificing virgins to Neptune, who represents patriarchal violence in the play.[20] At the end of the comedy, they are also reintegrated into the system of patriarchal marriage with the "heterosexual loophole" offered by Venus when she gives them her blessing to marry on the condition that one be magically changed into a man: "Then shall it be seen that I can turn one of them to be a man, and that I will" (V.3.151-152).[21] Parallel to this ambiguous depiction of virgins, Lyly could potentially give offence by extolling the virtues of love in front of the Virgin Queen. Ellen M. Caldwell interprets the play as yet another attempt by a court entertainer to woo Elizabeth to the idea of marriage. In her opinion, Lyly is particularly tactful and manages to put forward a persuasive argument in "[offering] a personal, not public, reason for marriage."[22] The playwright's tact notwithstanding, he might have used the prologue to anticipate the queen's potential irritation in the face of yet another argument for marriage. Not only does the play dramatize the virtues of matrimony but it also articulates a larger praise of love. This is particularly visible in Cupid's direct address to the audience in Act II, scene 1 ("And then, ladies, if you see these dainty dames entrapped in love, say softly to yourselves, 'We may all love'" (15-17)). In the epilogue, Galatea also addresses the "ladies" in the audience: "You ladies" (I.1); "Yield, ladies, yield to love, ladies" (I.5); "Confess [Cupid] a conqueror, whom ye ought to regard, sith it is impossible to resist; for this is infallible, that love conquereth all

things but itself, and ladies all hearts but their own" (I.11-13). Contrary to the stilted prologue, the tongue-in-cheek epilogue, in clear reference to the Virgilian theme of "*Omnia vinquit amor*," carries the playful accents of comedy. It thus appears as an exercise in courtly humour in which the playwright, addressing the audience through the intermediary of a character's voice, can venture on the fine line separating humour and affront. This goes to show that pleasing the queen and her court does not merely involve flattery, but also wit and inventiveness. As Caldwell points out, nothing in the epilogue is as straightforward as it seems. Galatea's urge to "yield to love" is simplistic since she levels the distinction made throughout the play between the excessive and disorderly type of love represented by Cupid and the pure, sincere love embodied by his mother Venus. All love is now defiantly related to the young god, who is supposed to be deemed "a conqueror" – something Lyly knows for a fact Elizabeth will not do.[23]

9 Yet, no virgin is sacrificed in the course of the play as Hebe, the third most beautiful maiden in town, is shunned by the sea-monster Agar. What is more, none will ever be sacrificed to Neptune again because, in the general climate of resolution typical of comedies, he offers to backtrack on his brutal demand of a virgin sacrifice: "Diana, restore Cupid to Venus, and I will for ever release the sacrifice of virgins" (V.3.75-76). This decision amounts to a victory over the patriarchal economy of marriage since, as Jankowski points out, the virgin sacrifice constitutes a metaphor for marriage in that it is also a contract forged between men – more precisely in this case between men and a male god – through the means of a virgin's body.[24] In addition to this, the play has opened a space for a "separate 'society' of virgins" in giving centre stage to the world of Diana and her nymphs, which Jankowski describes as "a woman-only 'corrective' to the early modern sexual economy."[25] If Galatea and Phillida return to the men's world of society in the end and conform to some extent

to its norms, a gap has been opened and something remains of the destabilising potential of this society of women gathered around Diana.[26]

10 In the same way as Lyly's play offers an ambiguous celebration of virginity, it encourages a complex view of the role and place of cross-dressing in early modern drama. Even if, as we will demonstrate later, the function of cross-dressing exceeds that of a mere dramatic instrument, the inner workings of *Galatea*'s plot and subplots still lay emphasis on its utilitarian nature. It is, to start with, what triggers the love plot. Had Galatea and Phillida not been cross-dressed and sent into hiding, they would not have stumbled onto each other in the woods, and they would not have considered each other as boys. Their love story, then, would not have been written. The function of cross-dressing as a plot device is perhaps most obvious in the Cupid subplot. The young god, who feels slighted because he is considered as a minor deity, wants to prove the extent of his power by having Diana's nymphs, who are supposed to remain chaste, fall in love. In order to approach them, he appears onstage dressed as one of them: "[*Enter*] Cupid *alone, in nymph's apparel, and* Neptune *listening*." (II.2.1*SD*). To start off a soliloquy in which he spells out his scheme, Cupid declares: "Now, Cupid, under the shape of a silly girl show the power of a mighty god." (II.2.1-2). His male-to-female cross-dressing device functions as a ploy in the service of chaos in the economy of the play rather than as a transgressive element at the service of gender confusion. When she unmasks him, Diana, blaming the scheme on her rival Venus, also underlines the deceptive quality of the disguise: "Doth she add craft to her malice, and, mistrusting her deity, practise deceit?" (III.4.80-82). In addition to being a plot device, cross-dressing retains a strong comic potential. Though one cannot go as far as to see it merely as such, cross-dressing must still be considered as part of the entertainment offered to the queen and her court. It is particularly engaging as the source of dramatic irony

in *Galatea*. Since the audience is made privy to Melibeus and Tityrus's schemes, they know from the onset that Galatea and Phillida are virgins in male clothing. We spectators therefore have the upper hand and, on top of laughing with the characters, we can laugh at them when we see them experience more confusion than we do. This is the case for instance when the two main characters first meet, leading Phillida to declare in an aside: "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." (II.1.21-23). The irony of her confession, which was already present in the misconception "It is a […] boy," is all the stronger as she thinks Galatea is so beautiful she could have been a woman. The fact that her joy stems precisely from this misreading of Galatea's person has a comic effect at Phillida's own expense and encourages an appropriate response from the part of the audience, to whom this aside is directly addressed. Cross-dressing, then, is both – though not exclusively – a plot device and a source of entertainment. Even though I do not want to go as far as to state that this necessarily precludes any radicality on the part of the playwright, I believe it goes to show that to transgress gender norms was not Lyly's primary aim with *Galatea*.

11 The play's resolution constitutes another instance that helps qualify the idea that Lyly's destabilisation of gender norms is inherently subversive. As suggested earlier, Venus's intervention can be seen as a "heterosexual loophole" whose aim is to bring confusion to an end in the topsy-turvy world which is typical of early modern comedies. Such an end is only possible if the norm is reinstated, which Venus does in metamorphosing one of the virgins. The goddess thus brings upon the comedy's expected happy ending in enabling the love plot to find completion in wedlock. The ending can however be read in a different light when we realise that what Venus offers is the permanent cross-dressing of one of the virgins. In *Galatea*, the return to normal occurs in the form of a gender change, or, in modern

terms, a transition.[27] It thus follows that, in the economy of the play, permanent gender change is deemed more acceptable a solution than a lesbian union. This is especially noteworthy as Phillida and Galatea agree to this even when they do not know which one of them will be turned into a man. Venus's offer is unspecific: "How say ye, are ye agreed, *one* to be a boy presently?" (V.3.156-157, my emphasis). Her only condition is quite clear: "Neither of them shall know whose lot it shall be till they come to the church door. One shall be." (V.3.184-186). As a matter of fact, the audience will never know which one of them is metamorphosed since the whole party, but Galatea exits at the end of the scene, and the wedding takes place outside of the dramatic frame, after the epilogue. Some critics have endeavoured to find clues in the text as to which virgin is the most likely to have been metamorphosed during the wedding.[28] I believe, however, that the ending's effect is to give the audience the impression that both remain men *en puissance* since they have both agreed to this way out of the deadlock, and since we are never told who is eventually turned into a man.[29] Like Schrödinger's cat, they experience two different states at the same time. In the famous thought experiment, the cat is simultaneously dead and alive in a sealed box. Similarly, Galatea and Phillida leave the stage in an undefined state of gender identity. The two girls dressed as boys are both potentially soon-to-be boys and will remain so in our mind since we have no way of knowing which will remain bride and which will become groom in the traditional unfolding of heteropatriarchal marriage. In the same way as we do not know whether Galatea or Phillida will eventually be turned into a man upon reaching the church door, we do not know whether we should read the ending as conventional in its reinstating the patriarchal norm or as the epitome of gender trouble. That is because it is simultaneously neither and both. The destabilisation of gender identity to the extent of putting in jeopardy the existence of a gender binary does subvert patriarchal norms, but such subversion is part and parcel of the entertainment

offered to the Virgin Queen, which puts its radical nature into perspective. If, as we have demonstrated, the malleability of gender identity can be exploited to its full capacity, the final recourse to gender change sets emphasis upon the impossibility for Galatea and Phillida to live out their love in their original gender identities. While gender identity can easily be trifled with in the mythical world of pastoral comedy, the real point of contention seems to lie in the realm of desire.

Virginal love as *amor impossibilis*

12 A recurring motif in *Galatea* is the age-old theme of *amor impossibilis*, or impossible love. When concerning two women, love is impossible because it is forbidden by both social and natural norms. This is made evident by Golding's addition, in his 1567 translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, of moralising verses concerning Iphis and Ianthe:

> A Cow is never fond / Uppon a Cow, nor Mare on Mare. The Ram delyghts the Eawe / . . . . But never man can shewe, / That female yit was tane in love with female kynd. / . . . Beholde the blissful tyme / The day of Mariage is at hand. Ianthe shalbee myne, / And yit I shall not her enjoy. Amid the water we shall thirst.[30]

13 To Caldwell, Ianthe's "outpouring of concern" in Golding's translation strikes a sharp contrast with Galatea's and Phillida's soliloquies in the play, none of which, though they are steeped in frustration, "[raise] the issue of unnatural desire."[31] Caldwell argues that

> Lyly takes pains never to present the love of the two women as anything but genuine, superior to the other infatuations in the

> play's subplot, and completely independent of the often frivolously aimed arrows of Cupid.[32]

14 Though I agree with her depiction of the love the two protagonists share as a counterpoint to the feelings the god of love infuses into the nymphs, I do not subscribe to the idea that the lovers exclude the question of the (un)naturalness of their love from their soliloquies. On the contrary, I believe it is the very source of their frustration. On multiple occasions, they indeed express desperation when they suspect their beloved might also be a woman, as is the case with Phillida at the end of Act IV, scene 4:

> Poor Phillida, what shouldst thou think of thyself, that lovest one that, I fear me, is as thyself? And may it not be that her father practised the same deceit with her that my father hath with me […]? If it be so, Phillida, how desperate is thy case! (IV.4.40-5)

15 It is precisely because Phillida shares the widespread cultural belief that love between women is impossible by nature that she feels such "fear" at Galatea being a maiden. Her desperation, we understand, is caused by the deadlock she would supposedly find herself in. This is not to say, however, that the feelings she has for Galatea cannot be pure and genuine. In Caldwell's view, the virgins' describing their own feelings as potentially unnatural would preclude such feelings from seeming genuine. I think, however, that the contrary happens since the supposed unnaturalness of love between virgins strikes a sharp contrast with its actual purity, which is a way for Lyly to show that, more than anything, it is deeming it unnatural that is most unnatural – a point I will return to later.

16 The trope of impossible love is repeatedly invoked by other characters such as Cupid. The god of love explains his scheme to have Diana's nymphs fall in love: "I will make their pains my pastimes, and

so confound their love in their own sex that they shall dote in their desires, delight in their affections, and practice only impossibilities." (II.2.7-10). He then goes on to describe their newly developed feelings as "their exercise in foolish love" (II.2.12). We realise that, if making the nymphs develop amorous feelings was a trick by and of itself because Diana's followers are supposed to remain chaste, Cupid is taking his ruse one step further by having them fall for none other than Galatea and Phillida – that is to say, other women. Thus, not only would Telusa, Eurota, and Ramia engage in such a behaviour as is unacceptable considering their position, but they would also feel love for someone of their own gender, which is not so much considered unacceptable as squarely impossible. Their love would thus be vain, and the butt of Cupid's practical joke would lie in the fact that the nymphs would jeopardise their position as members of Diana's train for no valid reason.

17 In the final scene, Galatea and Phillida leave the protection of the woods to join the rest of the characters onstage. They are recognised by their parents, which leads them to acknowledge each other's actual gender identity for the first time in the play. The gods' reactions to their relationship status unsurprisingly match the general belief in the impossibility of love between women:

> DIANA. Now, things falling out as they do, you must leave these fond, fond affections. Nature will have it so; necessity must. […]
> NEPTUNE. An idle choice, strange and foolish, for one virgin to dote on another, and to imagine a constant faith where there can be no cause of affection (V.3.132-141).

18 In the end, the goddess of virgins and the devourer of said virgins do agree on one point. Once again, rhetorical insistence is set on the impossibility by nature of love between women, as manifested through the epizeuxis in Diana's line ("fond, fond") and through

Neptune's emphatic use of the near synonyms "idle," "strange," and "foolish." Moreover, this love appears as all the more unnatural as it is deemed so by two gods who represent the natural world itself in their respective positions of woodland and sea deities.

19 The audience of *Galatea* is faced with a constant dramatization of the impossibility of love between women, especially as the lovers themselves express despair in its face. And yet, one cannot deny that the play's main drives consist in the blossoming of the feelings uniting Galatea and Phillida. In that regard, there appears to be a clear discrepancy between the discourse surrounding their love and the events occurring onstage.

Staging "impossible" love

20 Galatea and Phillida's love story constitutes the plot's backbone. This becomes clear right from their first encounter at the start of Act II, when they immediately feel attracted to each other, as shows for instance the aside quoted above ("It is a pretty boy and a fair." [II.1.21]). Soon afterwards, they each lament their love for the other in soliloquies that take up most of scenes 4 and 5, whose mirroring effect functions as one of the many rhetorical and structural parallels in Lyly's play. They meet again in Act III and engage in an amorous dialogue fraught with innuendoes as they question each other with the aim of clarifying the situation:

> PHILLIDA. Have you ever a sister?
> GALATEA. If I had but one, my brother
> must needs have two. But, I pray, have you ever a one?
> PHILLIDA. My father had but one daughter,
> and therefore I could have no sister (III.2.40-44).

21 Phillida asks Galatea a question, to which she answers in riddles before asking Phillida the same question, to which she answers in a similar manner. In addition to being another instance demonstrating Lyly's taste for parallel structures, these lines show how alike the two lovers are, and thus lay bare the budding feelings that animate them.[33] These riddles, however, are easily legible and take their speech away from insinuation to bring it closer to confession, which leads, at quite an early stage in the play, to realisation on both sides. In that regard, I find myself in agreement with Andy Kesson, who points out that "the girls realize one another's genders at the center of the play (3.2)," while the common assumption is that they remain "unaware of each other's gender until the end of the play, continuing their courtship in the mistaken belief that it is heterosexual."[34] This is made obvious by their asides:

> PHILLIDA. [*Aside*] What doubtful speeches be these!
> I fear me he is as I am, a maiden.
> GALATEA. [*Aside*] What dread riseth in my mind!
> I fear the boy to be as I am, a maiden.
> [...]
> GALATEA. [*Aside*] Ay me! He is as I am,
> for his speeches be as mine are.
> PHILLIDA. [*Aside*] What shall I do?
> Either he is subtle or my sex simple (III.2.32-48).

22 The last two lines are characterised by an assertive tone which prevents us from taking seriously any later backtracking of theirs.[35] At the end of the scene, Phillida beckons Galatea to walk deeper into the woods: "Come, let us into the grove, and make much of one another, that cannot tell what to think one of another." (III.2.62-63). The meaning of "make much" being purposefully vague, the verb invites diverse interpretations as regards the action it describes.[36] In the context of Galatea's and Phillida's tentative yet undeniable courting, we are encouraged to give it an erotic reading as a near

synonym of "enjoy," implying that Phillida is offering her beloved a sexual encounter.[37] The reason behind her invitation to have a closer look at each other lies in the fact that words are not proof enough of their actual identities. This is confirmed by their trading in riddles and circumlocutions because of the taboo surrounding love between women. Because of this taboo, they "cannot tell" what they really think of each other, which underlines yet another discrepancy within the play between words and actions. Since a verbal revelation is impossible despite the two characters' best efforts, the recourse to other means of accessing knowledge is necessary, including physical action through potential sexual intercourse. The fact that this encounter happens offstage for obvious reasons of propriety also adds to the ambiguity of its nature, since neither the audience nor the reader is made privy to what it consists in exactly. We are therefore left to wonder what Galatea and Phillida got up to in the idyllic space of the grove, which appears as a *locus amoenus* in the amorous pastoral tradition the play calls to mind. In other words, both Phillida's choice of words and the place she beckons her beloved to indicate the possibility of a sexual encounter.

23 Another argument pointing in that direction is that we do not see the two maidens onstage until Act IV, scene 4, when they engage in yet another amorous exchange that is still fraught with uncertainty. The ambiguity of their exchange could be deemed surprising if they have indeed engaged in sexual activity. For that reason, it has called for diverse interpretations. According to Jankowski, it shows that Lyly is envisaging forms of sexuality that do not involve genitalia, thus giving virgins access to eroticism: "*Gallathea* invites us to speculate on the possibility of a kind of desire and an economy of pleasure that is focused on the lovers' *entire* selves rather than a small portion located between their legs."[38] Kesson and Chess, however, do not take the couple's behaviour later on during the play at face value. According Kesson, their surprise when they discover each other's

real identities at the end "may be a performance for the benefit of those around them," and Chess points out that "the lovers do not allow [the sexual encounter] to disrupt their mutual gender performance."[39] My interpretation is closer to Chess's in that I believe that, though their escape into the grove might have given them a clearer idea of each other's anatomy – assuming a correspondence between their anatomy and gender identity –, they still dwell in ambiguities. Even when the two of them are alone onstage, they do not express their identity freely and carry on performing masculinity as boys, though they would allegedly not need to anymore. The fact that they persist in putting a show to each other indicates that there is more to their gender performance than faking it for the sake of other characters. I would argue that this ongoing performance is due to their adhering to the general opinion that love between women in unnatural. Therefore, the only way for them to live their love at that stage is to retain the veil of opacity that first characterized their love language. In other words, if they face the fact that they are both virgins, then they must also face the deadlock they are supposedly finding themselves in. Refusing stable definition appears as the only viable solution if they are to let their love flourish.

24 Galatea and Phillida still see virtue in settling on terms to describe their relationship, as testified by the latter's proposal: "Seeing we are both boys, and both lovers, that our affection may have some show and seem as it were love, let me call thee mistress." (IV.4.17-19). Strikingly enough, Phillida seems to be accepting the possibility of male homoeroticism when female homoeroticism is excluded. The reason could be that male homoeroticism is deemed more acceptable by the characters, since it was more visible than female homoeroticism in the early modern culture, and especially so in pastoral literature.[40] In that sense, it may have been easier to envisage in the lovers' situation since it does not concern them as

female characters, thus granting them the comfort of fictional distance. It also acts as a metatheatrical reference to the sexed bodies of the boy actors playing these characters. However, one should bear in mind that Phillida's proposal reflexively puts emphasis on its own falsity, since we know for a fact that the assertion "we are both boys" is not true. The cross-dressed maiden is uttering a syllogism whose first tenet is obviously false, which exaggerates the idea that her rhetoric does not hold water. Phillida is lying anyhow because she knows herself to be a girl, but her lie could also extend to include Galatea, since we can surmise from their earlier exchanges that she knows her to also be one. Whether or not Phillida is knowingly uttering lies regarding Galatea's gender identity does not alter the destabilising effect of her lines: if she is in the know, then she is outrightly lying for the sake of cultivating ambiguities, and if she does not know, then her assertion turns out to be a strong instance of dramatic irony underlining the ambiguity of the situation. The terms they settle on are therefore self-reflexively vague, and the solution they find is profoundly destabilising since the two characters are basing them off untruths. This impression is reinforced by Phillida's oscillation between an assertive tone ("Seeing we are both boys") and a tentative one – visible in the use of the modal "may" and of the subjunctive mood with "seem as it were" – as well as by the paradox of Phillida accepting a male homoerotic pattern of relation all the while asserting the desire of folding into the heteroerotic groove by calling her beloved "mistress."[41] Conversely, Phillida's choice of words can be interpreted as a way for her to secretly acknowledge her beloved's actual gender identity, and, thusly, to tacitly accept the fact that she loves another woman. At any rate, while she claims to bring about some sort of order through defining their relationship, Phillida is doing the opposite. At the start of the final scene, the two lovers are alone onstage one last time. They engage in one last coded exchange before other characters enter, and the plot gradually moves towards its unravelling.

25 On top of setting emphasis on the veil of uncertainty Galatea and Phillida are constantly cloaking their love story in, this short summary of their encounters in the woods will have proved that their allegedly impossible love story is well and truly unfolding before our very eyes. In other words, Lyly is setting the focus on the impossibility of their love all the while making it the backbone of his comedy. By doing so, as part of his larger encomium of the Virgin Queen, he dramatizes the most important characteristic of virginal love, which is that it is eternal and unconditional. Once Galatea and Phillida fall in love, their romantic fate is sealed. The irreversibility of their feelings is made clear by the materialisation of their union through Cupid's love knots. In Act IV, scene 2, Cupid, who had been wreaking havoc in Diana's woods, is punished by the goddess and her nymphs for his ruse: his wings are clipped, and he is made to untie the love knots that symbolise the feelings he aroused in the woods' denizens, making them fall out of love. Two love knots remain fast in spite of Cupid's best efforts. The first is described as follows: "It is the true love-knot of a woman's heart, therefore cannot be undone." (IV.2.36-7). The god of love indicates that he did not tie this knot himself, but that it stemmed spontaneously from "a woman's heart," and that it is consequently "true." A woman's love, when it is not spurred by the god's art, is then deemed particularly pure and durable.[42] The adverb "therefore" implies a strong link of causality between the origin of the feelings and the knot being impossible to untie, indicating that, in Cupid's view, a woman's love is naturally everlasting. A second knot stands out because it shares the same characteristics:

> RAMIA. Why do you lay that knot aside?
> CUPID. For death.
> TELUSA. Why?
> CUPID. Because the knot was knit by faith,
> and must only be unknit by death (IV.2.48-52).

26 The feelings materialised by this knot, we hear, originated in "faith," which underlines their purity by conferring them a sacred aura all the while linking virginal love to fidelity. For this reason, the feelings in question can only dissipate when the lovers die, which emphasises their everlasting quality. The plot's focus on Galatea and Phillida's love story inevitably leads us to think that these are their knots, especially as they are contrasted with the nymphs', which, being the fruit of Cupid's machinations, untie easily.

27 This rhetoric of fidelity finds its way into the protagonists' lines at the end of the play, as they exclaim in front of the other characters:

> GALATEA. I will never love any but Phillida;
> her love is engraven in my heart with her eyes.
> PHILLIDA. Nor I any but Galatea; whose faith
> is imprinted in my thoughts by her words (V.3.135-138).

28 In this instance of parallel construction presenting once again the two girls as very much alike and therefore inseparable, the words "engraven" and its near synonym "imprinted" underscore the idea that their love is immutable. Furthermore, Phillida echoes Cupid's description of the second knot that was impossible to untie when she mentions Galatea's "faith." At that stage in the play, after their true identity is revealed, they reiterate their feelings for each other, underlining the fact that under no circumstances can they renege on them.

29 Being virgins, Galatea and Phillida love with an intensity that outshines any other forms of love, including – and especially – the ones inspired by Cupid. Their love being pure and eternal, they cannot simply turn their back on it, even when gods demand they should. Thusly, however "fond" their affections, Galatea and Phillida are destined to carry them through. In the economy of the play, as we have come to understand, the issue is not that the girls are cross-

dressing, or even that they fall in love with each other, since, allegedly, they did not know at the start that they were developing feelings for another woman. The point of contention, rather, is that they should remain in love in spite of the revelation of their gender identity. I argue that this is precisely why they claim to be unsure about each other's identity throughout the play, until the resolution towards the end of the final scene. In other words, as long as the realisation is not complete and that some sort of ambiguity regarding gender identity remains, they can still express love for each other without fear of it being suppressed. This goes to show that, in *Galatea*, depicting two virgins embracing their love for one another is deemed more subversive a gesture than having them highlight the instability of gender identity by disrupting the codes of gender presentation.

Gender indeterminacy as "safe space"

30 In *Galatea*, gender malleability appears as the steppingstone of female homoeroticism in that it lays the ground for its expression and dramatic representation. The liminal space the two protagonists find themselves in as regards gender identity is precisely what enables their feelings to bloom. In this regard, we could argue that the ambiguities surrounding gender open a "safe space" for the expression of queer love. It would be anachronistic to argue that Lyly is following a progressive feminist and antihomophobic agenda in *Galatea*, but he is at least displaying, as Kesson puts it, a desire to "[imagine] non-phallic forms of love and desire," in addition to creating, in Jankowski's words, "a place in which virginity 'rules' and creates its own society."[43] I would take Jankowski's compelling feminist argument one step further in arguing that in *Galatea*, the gender trouble brought about by cross-dressing is, on a par with the "separate 'society' of virgins" Lyly creates,[44] another space opened

by the text. In the same way as Galatea and Phillida find shelter from Neptune's patriarchal dominance in Diana's woods, they can safely express their love for each other thanks to undefinition. The specific forms of love and desire which appear in the play do so within a celebration of virginal sexuality which is materialised as love between virgins, making of Lyly's comedy the literary locus where such love finds its expression. On top of being both a dramatic and a comic device, cross-dressing is also instrumental in enabling Galatea and Phillida to overcome the hurdles of *amor impossibilis* by expressing their feelings to each other in the gaps left open by gender indeterminacy.

31 From a presentist perspective, it is crucial to interrogate the radical potential of Lyly's play. Firstly, such enquiries destabilise the preconceived ideas one might have regarding the construction of gender in the early modern period. If transgressing traditional gender norms was not subversive per se in Elizabethan drama, what might be considered radical is our own effort to show how run-of-the-mill such transgression was at the time. In addition, such interrogations enable a queer reclaiming of the literary canon, as exemplified by Emma Frankland's recent production of *Galatea* in Shoreham-by-Sea as part of the 2023 edition of the Brighton Festival. For this first professional revival of the play since its original performance in 1588, the director chose to work with a largely queer cast and to adapt the play to contemporary issues of LGBTQI+ identity.[45] Building on Lyly, Frankland and her collaborators have, for instance, comically and refreshingly done away with the "heterosexual loophole" at the end of the play to picture queer love as transcending traditional conceptions of gender and to uphold the validity of non-binary identities.

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Notes

[1] "[The boy actor] is a provoker of category crises, a destabilizer of binarisms, a transgressor of boundaries", Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety*, New York, Routledge, 1992, p. 89-90.

[2] Alan Sinfield, *Shakespeare, Authority, Sexuality: Unfinished Business in Cultural Materialism*, London/ New York, Routledge, Accents on Shakespeare, 2006, p. 118.

[3] Phillip Stubbes, *The anatomie of abuses containing, a discouerie, or briefe summarie of such notable vices and imperfections, as now raigne in many countreyes of the world: but (especiallye) in a famous ilande called Ailgna: together, with most fearefull examples of Gods iudgements, executed vppon the wicked for the same, aswel in Ailgna of late, as in other places, elsewhere. Very godly, to be reade of all true Christians: but most needefull to be regarded in Englande. Made dialogue-wise by Phillip Stubbes. Seene and allowed, according to order*, London, by [John Kingston for] Richard Jones, 1583, p. 37-38.

[4] Roberta Barker, "'Not One Thing Exactly': Gender, Performance and Critical Debates over the Early Modern Boy-Actress", *Literature Compass*, vol. 6, n°2, 2009, p. 468. It should be noted that not all boys took on female roles – especially in troupes composed entirely of boys, such as the choirboys of St Paul's Cathedral, who played *Galatea*. That is why Roberta Barker uses the feminised version of the term "boy actor" to describe more specifically those who would. On the porosity of the gender binary in the early modern era, see also Jean E. Howard, "Cross-dressing, The Theatre, and Gender Struggle in Early Modern England", *Shakespeare Quarterly*, vol. 39, n°4, 1988, p. 435.

[5] See especially Bruce R. Smith, *Shakespeare and Masculinity*, Oxford / New York, Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 106. Though the single-sex model was growing out of fashion in XVIth-century England, it still existed alongside other medical theories.

[6] Stephen Orgel, *Impersonations: The Performance of Gender in Shakespeare's England*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 153. See also Bruce R. Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 106.

[7] "[S]ubversive performances always run the risk of becoming deadening clichés through their repetition", Judith Butler, "Preface", *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, New York / London, Routledge, 1999, p. xxi.

[8] Marjorie Garber, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

[9] George K. Hunter, "Introduction", in George K. Hunter & David Bevington (eds.), John Lyly, *Galatea and Midas*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2000, p. 5.

[10] I am using the following edition: John Lyly, *Galatea*, ed. Leah Scragg, Revels Student Editions, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2012. All references to this edition will be made parenthetically.

[11] Leah Scragg rightly points this out in the notes to these lines (*ibid*., n. 22-28, p. 100).

[12] In that regard, the wariness and flattery he displays in the prologue can should be read as authorial conventions. While it remains unclear whether Lyly's prologue is sincere, we can nonetheless analyse the posture he takes and the image he wants to give off as a courtier-playwright.

[13] George K. Hunter, *op. cit*., p. 9.

[14] Quoted in Marjorie Garber, *op. cit.*, n. 12, p. 393. Extant descriptions of the event date from long after Tilbury and cannot entirely be taken for granted.

[15] Theodora A. Jankowski, "'Where There Can Be No Cause of Affection': Redefining Virgins, Their Desires, and Their Pleasures in John Lyly's *Gallathea*", in Valerie Traub, M. Lindsay Kaplan & Dympna Callaghan (eds.), *Feminist Readings of Early Modern Culture: Emerging Subjects*, Cambridge / New York, Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 256; p. 253. See also Theodora A. Jankowski, *Elizabeth I, the Subversion of Flattery, and John Lyly's Court Plays and Entertainments*, Late Tudor and Stuart Drama, Kalamazoo, Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University, 2018, p. 72. Since Jankowski's 2018 publication repeats some of the ideas expressed in her 1996 chapter, I will occasionally cite them simultaneously.

[16] *Ibid.*, p. 71.

[17] *Idem*.

[18] "Portraits of Queen Elizabeth I", Royal Museums Greenwich. URL. Accessed 7 April 2023.

[19] "*Sieve Portrait of Queen Elizabeth I*, c. 1583", The British Library. URL. Accessed 7 April 2023. As critics and historians have pointed out, the queen had only partial control over her image (see for instance Andy Kesson, "'It Is a Pity You Are Not a Woman': John Lyly and the Creation of Woman", *Shakespeare Bulletin*, vol. 33, n°1, 2015, p. 39; Theodora A. Jankowski, *Elizabeth I, the Subversion of Flattery, and John Lyly's Court Plays and Entertainments*, p. 15).

[20] See for instance Theodora A. Jankowski, "'Where There Can Be No Cause of Affection': Redefining Virgins, Their Desires, and Their Pleasures in John Lyly's *Gallathea*", p. 267; *Elizabeth I, the Subversion of Flattery, and John Lyly's Court Plays and Entertainments*, p. 83.

[21] Simone Chess, "'Or Whatever You Be': Cross-dressing, Sex, and Gender Labour in John Lyly's *Gallathea*", *Renaissance and Reformation*, vol. 38, n°4, 2015, p. 165. On the final gender change as triggering a shift to heteroeroticism, see also Theodora A. Jankowski, *Elizabeth I, the Subversion of Flattery, and John Lyly's Court Plays and Entertainments*, p. 82.

[22] Caldwell describes Lyly's argument as "personal" because, instead of dwelling on the political reasons for marriage, it dramatizes a "marriage of true minds" which seeks to reconcile the different parts of the queen's "divided nature" as she is torn between "her competing urges for separateness and union, or for chastity and love", *cf*. Ellen M. Caldwell, "John Lyly's *Gallathea*: A New Rhetoric of Love for the Virgin Queen", *English Literary Renaissance*, vol. 17, n°1, 1987, p. 23.

[23] *Ibid*., p. 39.

[24] In the same way as marriage ensures the transmission of patrimony from father to son necessary for a patriarchal society to function, sacrificing a virgin to Neptune each year is initially considered as the only way to save the country from the god's wrath, which would manifest itself in river Humber overflowing and flooding the land. In both cases, the woman is a mere bargaining chip, and her virginity is an absolute requirement (Theodora A. Jankowski, "'Where There Can Be No Cause of Affection': Redefining Virgins, Their Desires, and Their Pleasures in John Lyly's *Gallathea*", p. 254-257; *Elizabeth I, the Subversion of Flattery, and John Lyly's Court Plays and Entertainments*, p. 72).

[25] Theodora A. Jankowski, "'Where There Can Be No Cause of Affection': Redefining Virgins, Their Desires, and Their Pleasures in John Lyly's *Gallathea*", p. 258; *Elizabeth I, the Subversion of Flattery, and John Lyly's Court Plays and Entertainments*, p. 74.

[26] In this regard, the ending of *Galatea* can be likened to that of cross-dressing comedies by Shakespeare. In *As You Like It*, the return to normal brought about by the resolution scene, where Rosalind notably reveals

her true identity, is equally partial insofar as it cannot efface the destabilisation produced by her actions as Ganymede (see especially Valerie Traub, "The Homoerotics of Shakespearean Comedy", *Desire and Anxiety: Circulations of Sexuality in Shakespearean Drama*, London, Routledge, 1992).

[27] Bearing in mind that one's social transition does not involve any change to one's anatomy. We can infer, however, that Venus's offer involves an anatomical change (on "the necessity of a penis" in the play, see Theodora A. Jankowski, *Elizabeth I, the Subversion of Flattery, and John Lyly's Court Plays and Entertainments*, p. 83). The queer potential of *Galatea* has led critics to offer refreshing analyses putting to use the tools of transgender studies. See especially Simone Chess, *op. cit*.

[28] See for instance Joel B. Altman, *The Tudor Play of Mind: Rhetorical Inquiry and the Development of Elizabethan Drama*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1978, p. 209.

[29] "[The] sex change actually *is* made as soon as the lovers agree to it", Simone Chess, *op. cit*., p. 164.

[30] Ovid, *The. xv. bookes of P. Ouidius Naso, entytuled Metamorphosis, translated oute of Latin into English meeter, by Arthur Golding Gentleman, a worke very pleasaunt and delectable*, trans. Arthur Golding, imprynted at London, by Willyam Seres, 1567, p. 122; quoted in Ellen M. Caldwell, *op. cit*., p. 25.

[31] *Ibid*., p. 25.

[32] *Idem*.

[33] On the constant parallel between the two lovers, see especially Ellen M. Caldwell: "The play makes a point of presenting Gallathea and Phyllida as nearly alike as possible" (*op. cit*., p. 33). The fact that their coded language concerns their siblings is reminiscent of Viola's own

riddle to Orsino in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* ("I am all the daughters of my father's house, / And all the brothers too" [II.4.120-121], Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night, or What You Will*, ed. Keir Elam, The Arden Shakespeare. Third Series, London, Bloomsbury, 2008). This may indicate that Shakespeare drew inspiration from Lyly to write this cross-dressing comedy. I thank Imke Lichterfeld for pointing this out in discussion.

[34] Andy Kesson, *op. cit*., p. 43.

[35] Such backtracking comes in the form of the emphatic surprise they express when their actual identity is revealed: "GALATEA. Unfortunate Galatea, if this be Phillida! / PHILLIDA. Accursed Phillida, if this be Galatea!" (V.3.120-121).

[36] Theodora Jankowski describes it is "inconclusive language" ("'Where There Can Be No Cause of Affection': Redefining Virgins, Their Desires, and Their Pleasures in John Lyly's *Gallathea*", p. 263; *Elizabeth I, the Subversion of Flattery, and John Lyly's Court Plays and Entertainments*, p. 79).

[37] Critics generally concur on this point. See for instance Simone Chess, *op. cit*., p. 147.

[38] Theodora A. Jankowski, "'Where There Can Be No Cause of Affection': Redefining Virgins, Their Desires, and Their Pleasures in John Lyly's *Gallathea*", p. 263. See also *Elizabeth I, the Subversion of Flattery, and John Lyly's Court Plays and Entertainments*, p. 80.

[39] Andy Kesson, *op. cit*., p. 43; Simone Chess, *op. cit*., p. 147.

[40] On the general invisibility of female homoeroticism in the early modern period, see especially Valerie Traub, *The Renaissance of Lesbianism in Early Modern England*, Cambridge Studies in Renaissance Literature and Culture, vol. 42, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002.

[41] The ambiguity surrounding the gender identity of the love-object is reminiscent of the "master-mistress of my passion" in Shakespeare's "Sonnet 20" (see William Shakespeare, *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, ed. Katherine Duncan-Jones, The Arden Shakespeare, London, Bloomsbury, 2010, p. 151).

[42] According to Theodora Jankowski, this testifies to Lyly's "predisposition to consider women's love truer than men's love." (*Elizabeth I, the Subversion of Flattery, and John Lyly's Court Plays and Entertainments*, p. 75).

[43] Andy Kesson, *op. cit*., p. 43; Theodora A. Jankowski, "'Where There Can Be No Cause of Affection': Redefining Virgins, Their Desires, and Their Pleasures in John Lyly's *Gallathea*", p. 261; see also *Elizabeth I, the Subversion of Flattery, and John Lyly's Court Plays and Entertainments*, p. 77.

[44] Theodora A. Jankowski, "'Where There Can Be No Cause of Affection': Redefining Virgins, Their Desires, and Their Pleasures in John Lyly's *Gallathea*", p. 258; see also *Elizabeth I, the Subversion of Flattery, and John Lyly's Court Plays and Entertainments*, p. 74.

[45] *Cf*. Emma Frankland's website: URL. Accessed 8 June 2023.

Johann Paccou

Johann Paccou prépare une thèse intitulée « Rhétorique et désirs homoérotiques dans la poésie et le théâtre de la première modernité britannique », dans le cadre de laquelle il étudie l'expression du désir queer dans des œuvres de Shakespeare, Marlowe, Beaumont et Fletcher, Lyly, ou encore Barnfield. Ses recherches sont dirigées par Anne-Marie Miller-Blaise à l'Université Sorbonne Nouvelle. Il est l'auteur d'un mémoire de Master intitulé « '[T]o love a lovely lad' : Ganymède et le désir queer sur la scène et dans la poésie de la première modernité ».

Moll Cutpurse: a radical performer or a typical cross-dressed woman of the early modern era?

Pauline Durin
Université Clermont-Auvergne

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1 According to Diane Elizabeth Dreher, "androgyny liberates individuals from conventional stereotypes, offering them a wide spectrum of behaviour and expression."[1] Indeed, cross-dressing Shakespearean characters like Portia in *The Merchant of Venice* or Viola in *The Twelfth Night* experience freedom of movement and of speech thanks to masculine clothes before putting on feminine garments again and usually concluding the play by getting married. Yet, among those heroines, one stands out precisely because cross-dressing is not an episode of the play for her but a distinctive trait of her personality: Moll Cutpurse in *The Roaring Girl* by Thomas Dekker and Thomas Middleton (1611).[2] This character was inspired by Mary Frith (1584/85-1659), a well-known figure in early modern London and a thief. She was sued on January 27th, 1612, for appearing on the stage of the Fortune in a man's apparel and for being immodest in her speech. Just like her real-life inspiration, Moll Cutpurse wears masculine clothes, drinks, and smokes, and has a sword she frequently uses throughout the play. She helps two lovers, Sebastian and Mary, to oppose Lord Alexander, Sebastian's father, who forbids their union. Sebastian first has his father believe that he shall marry Moll if he cannot have Mary, before Moll helps the two lovers see each other and get married.

2 Never in the play does she abide by prescribed feminine behaviour and she alternatively puts on masculine or feminine garments. Moll's performance consequently often puzzles the other characters who do not know how to characterize her, and even more interestingly, she often puzzles critics too. Many words are used to describe her: her nickname is "the roaring girl", to some she is a virago,[3] a hermaphrodite,[4] a woman-in-men's-clothing,[5] a transvestite heroine.[6] Why such a definitional difficulty? Is Moll meant to be defined at all?

3 This article shall explore Moll's performance of gender using Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990) to better understand how her

performance is not carnivalesque but rather an invitation to question gender norms. In a first part I shall explore Moll's gender performance and her questioning an order without ever abiding by it. Then, I will show how gender performance calls sexuality into question. Finally, given that she is not merely a fictive character, I will study her as the embodiment of debates of the early modern period.

Gender performance

4 Moll is first presented as an object of curiosity: she is the reason why spectators come to see the play and the prologue creates suspense around her character, announcing her as "Mad Moll". Even before she is on stage, it is clear that her appearance and habits are the main cause of stir, as she displays masculine habits. She is identified as "She that minces tobacco" (II.1.7).[7] and as soon as she first appears on stage in Act II, scene 1, she uses her sword, a masculine attribute, to fight a man who offended her in a tavern the night before, thereby inducing that she regularly visits taverns although she is not married.[8] The stage direction describes her as following: "*Enter Moll in a frieze jerkin and a black safeguard*." A jerkin is a man's jacket while a safeguard is a skirt women wore when riding in order to protect their clothes from dirt and mud.[9] On that matter, Susan E. Krantz notes:

> Although clearly costumed female from the waist down, Moll is "male" from the waist up, and she further compromises her female identity in the play by equipping herself with traditionally male and symbolically phallic objects – a tobacco pipe and a short sword.[10]

5 We may ponder over this repartition. Given that she is costumed female from the waist down and male from the waist up, must we

understand that she puts forward her female sexual identity while asserting a masculine state of mind? She complicates her gender identity throughout the play by navigating, sometimes within a single scene, between feminine and masculine clothes. In Act V, scene 2 for instance, she begins the scene entirely dressed as a man before coming back on stage wearing a feminine wedding gown. Not only does she change clothes, but she also uses various names. By the end of the play, most of the characters stop using Moll, including with epithets and simply call her Jack. Judith Butler defines gender performance as made of repetitions of patterns,[11] but Moll's performance is not repetitive at all, rather always changing and fluctuant. It cannot even be compared to the repetition of a previous performance since Moll is an unprecedented character on Jacobean stage. Besides, as women were still not acting in plays by the time of the first representation of *The Roaring Girl*, a boy actor first embodied Moll, thereby reinforcing her gender ambiguity.

6 This blurred gender identity is enhanced by the way the other characters designate her, using expressions that underline their trouble with defining her gender identity. What may first appear as oxymoronic expressions are thus numerous throughout the play. Trapdoor, a spy sent by Sir Alexander to kill Moll and who pretends to serve her to better deceive her, says he does so for "The love [he] bear[s] to [her] heroic spirit and masculine womanhood" (II.1.336-337). He then asks: "What says my brave captain, male and female?" (III.3.179). Sir Alexander, as he fears his son Sebastian might marry Moll and as he sees her having masculine clothes made by a tailor, exclaims: "Here's good gear towards! I have brought up my son to marry a Dutch slop and a French doublet – a codpiece daughter" (II.2.92-94). The expression "codpiece daughter"[12] reveals that Moll's clothes are problematic to the other characters. It draws attention to Moll's private parts, thereby clearly enticing interrogations, not to say intrusive comments. Sir Alexander's focus

on her clothes is a way of assimilating them as an embodiment of her gender identity that results in reifying her, as she is reduced to her garments. The confusion she raises among the other characters leads to clear contestation of her very humanity. As she is first mentioned and talked about, the old men in Act I, scene 2 are quite depreciative:

> *'A creature,'* saith he, 'nature brought forth
> To mock the sex of woman.' It is a *thing*
> *One knows not how to name*; her birth began
> Ere she was all made. 'Tis woman more than man,
> Man more than woman, and – which to none can hap –
> The sun gives her two shadows to one shape.
> Nay, more, let *this strange thing* talk, stand, or sit,
> No blazing star draws more eyes after it.
> SIR DAVY. *A monster.* 'Tis *some monster* (I.2.128-136).[13]

7 Moll's reification is to be seen through nouns such as "creature", "thing" and "monster". She is an object more than a subject and her humanity is denied through the use of "'Tis" instead of another pronoun. Since she cannot be identified as masculine or feminine, she is not identified as human either. This is reminiscent of Jennifer Higginbotham's reflection on the cultural representation of infants in early modern British culture. She presents new-born babies as "problematically gendered and, consequently, as problematically human."[14] She then adds: "To be spoken of as human, I argue, was to be spoken of as male or female."[15] Androgynous appearance is thus conceived as monstrous in the sense that it resists definition, as shown in Philip Stubbes's *The Anatomy of Abuses*, which associates androgynous appearance with hermaphrodites and gives the following definition: "*Hermaphroditi*; that is, Monsters of bothe kindes, halfe women, halfe men."[16] Such dehumanisation is to be observed in the names given to Moll to address her directly. In Act V, scene 2, she appears on stage dressed in masculine clothes and the

characters around her call her Jack. As soon as he recognizes her, Sir Alexander chooses to address her not using her name but using the noun of a fault he makes her the epitome of:

> SIR ALEXANDER [*to Moll*]. Impudence, where's my son?
> MOLL. Weakness, go look him (V.1.103).

8 Sir Alexander makes of Moll an allegory, thereby dehumanizing her.

9 Behind this so-called monstrous appearance, and although she is often described as a "mean" subject for a play (prologue, 8), she may also be the embodiment of more lofty references. Her description, including her self-depiction, is quite reminiscent of Plato's description of the androgynous in the *Symposium*.[17] The androgynous are supposed to be a third gender, both masculine and feminine, and Plato describes them as round, with four hands, four legs, two faces, and two genitals.[18] This physical description is similar to Mrs Gallipot's words when she joins men in their fantasies around Moll sexual identity and declares: "Some will not stick to say she's a man, and some, both man and woman" (II.1.196-197). Plato's androgynous are also described as powerful beings, and Moll can easily beat a man when she fights one.[19] In addition, Plato indicates that Zeus decided to punish the androgynous by splitting them and forcing them to search for their significant halves.[20] Moll declares on numerous occasions that she herself feels that she is complete without having to find a mate. She rejects marriage and declares to Sebastian: "I have the head now of myself, and am man enough for a woman" (II.2.42-43). Thereby, Moll also brings to mind the figure of Hermaphroditus who, according to Ovid, became both male and female after a nymph clasped him against her body in the fountain Salmacis.[21] She appears to embody both genders and, in a way, two partners within one body. Such representations may also explain why Moll is said to have two shadows: "The sun gives her two shadows to

one shape" (I.2.133). This is also a feature to be noticed in the biography of Mary Frith, published in 1662, in which she is described as "a perfect ambidexter"[22] for instance. In that, we may say that she is carnivalesque in the Bakhtinian sense of the word as she is in an in-between state, difficult to define and impersonating two seemingly contradictory notions.[23] Her body, similarly to the grotesque body Bakhtine describes, is "not enclosed, not finished nor ready, it surpasses itself, goes beyond its own limits."[24] It echoes her description: "her birth began / Ere she was all made" (I.2.130-131). We may also interpret her character as embodying Northrop Frye's *Eros* character, similarly to Puck or Ariel, that "is in himself sexually self-contained, being in a sense both male and female, and needing no expression of love beyond himself"[25] as indeed the play concludes not with her marriage but with her bravados.

10 The power she gains from being a gender ambiguous figure enables Moll to question gender hierarchy as well. Judith Butler presents patriarchal domination as a construction that becomes social reality:

> Domination occurs through a language which, in its plastic social action, creates a second-order, artificial ontology, an illusion of difference, disparity, and, consequently, hierarchy that *becomes* social reality.[26]

11 Given that masculinity was associated with power and femininity with submissiveness, seeing a masculine woman leads men to fear for their privilege and to envisage an upside-down world in which they would be submissive. In Act II, scene 2, as the tailor is taking measurements to make Moll new clothes, Sir Alexander exclaims while spying on her: "Heyday, breeches! […] What age is this! If the wife go in breeches, the man must wear long coats like a fool" (II.2.78-80). Moll threatens masculinity because she embodies it, suggesting thereby that the authority associated with it is not natural

or bestowed upon birth. The pun in her name – Cutpurse – leaves no doubt about the castrating fears she arouses in male characters. She uncovers the artificiality of gender hierarchy and the fact that social privilege would derive from natural strength and superiority. She is physically powerful, and beats opponents numerous times throughout the play. In Act II, scene 1, as soon as she has beaten the man who offended her in a tavern the night before, she opposes Laxton, a character whose name once again plays on masculine fears, who suggests she might not have been able to do it:

> LAXTON. Base rogue! Had he offered but the least counterbuff, by this hand, I was prepared for him.
> MOLL. You prepared for him? Why should you be prepared for him? Was he any more than a man?

12 Her rebuttal, in the form of a comparative structure, invites us to question gender difference as the foundation of gender hierarchy.

Questioning sexuality

13 Her performance also questions norms in terms of sexuality. First of all, she has no love interest, which tends to set her apart from other Elizabethan and Jacobean protagonists in comedies. Contrary to other cross-dressing heroines, her masculine performance is not part of a heterosexual romantic plot, quite the opposite. Because of her androgynous appearance, some characters assume that she likes men and women alike. Laxton says of her: “She might first cuckhold the husband and then make him do as much for the wife” (II.1.198-199). Moll cuts such assumptions short as she declares to have no love life whatsoever. Although the word is of course anachronistic, we might think of her as asexual,[27] all the more as she confides to Sebastian and Mary to be a virgin in Act VI, scene 1:

> MOLL. […] It shall ne'er be said I came into a gentleman's chamber and let his instrument hang by the walls!
> SEBASTIAN. Why, well said, Moll, i'faith. It had been a shame for that gentleman, then, that would have let it hung still and ne'er offered thee it.
> MOLL. There it should have been still, then, for Moll, for, though the world judge impudently of me, I ne'er came into that chamber yet where I took down the instrument myself (IV.1.86-95).

14 However, Moll's asexuality may result from social constraint rather than a matter of characterization. As she already transgresses all norms, sexual incontinence would represent an unforgivable transgression that would prevent her from gaining the audience's approval and sympathy. Mary Frith herself faced accusations of being promiscuous, and although she claimed never to have resorted to prostitution or to have led anyone on that path, she still was perceived as obscene. In a similar vein to her real-life inspiration, as Susan E. Krantz states, "As a compromised female, Moll is assumed a prostitute."[28] In the eyes of the other characters, Moll is a woman who transgresses her female condition and the restrictions that befell women. Yet Craig Rustici notes that Moll may well feel sexual attraction while suppressing her impulses[29]. Indeed, in Act IV, scene 1, as she sings about promiscuous women, she concludes her song with those words: "Hand up the viol now, sir; all this while I was in a dream. One shall lie rudely then; but being awake, I keep my legs together" (IV.1.128-130). We may deduce from such a sentence that Moll represses her sexual impulses for the sake of respectability.

15 Although gender performance appears as a source of self-fashioning and expression for Moll, sexuality is used to force a feminine identity upon her and to gain power over such an unruly figure. This is to be heard in Laxton's words as soon as the audience meets Moll in Act II,

scene1. Laxton presents Moll as a figure of sexual interest and as having a devouring sexuality:

> Methinks a brave captain might get all his soldiers upon her, and ne'er be beholding to a company of Mile End milksops, if he could come on and come off quick enough. Such a Moll were a marrowbone before an Italian; he would cry '*bona-roba*' till his ribs were nothing but bone. I'll lay hard siege to her. Money is that aqua fortis that eats into many a maidenhead. Where the walls are flesh and blood, I'll ever pierce through with a golden auger (II.2.178-185).

16 Once again, Moll is reified, described as an object, more precisely as food and literally as "good stuff" to be consumed. Her masculinity almost makes her hyper heterosexual, as if she were thereby able to have sex with numerous men, here soldiers, meant to be the epitome of masculinity. Conquering such a character would thus make Laxton more than a man. This echoes sermons of the time that considered cross-dressing as admission of severe lewdness and condemned it because masculine clothes revealed more skin and emphasized curves more than feminine clothes did.[30] Moll's choice to remain single and her being a virgin may thus be a strategy of social survival. Her identity requires the sacrifice of her sexuality. Her celibacy presents her as less threatening than it first appears, as is suggested by Sir Alexander's words when he hears her claiming she prefers to remain single: "The most comfortable answer from a roaring girl that ever mine ears drunk in" (II.2.46-47). By renouncing sexuality, she somewhat lessens her influence over other characters. Yet, Moll's celibacy may actually be interpreted as threatening the patriarchal order Sir Alexander embodies.

17 Protestantism condemned celibacy, because it was too similar to that chosen by Catholic nuns;[31] moreover, heterosexual relations were seen as necessary for a woman's health because of "the womb's

need for moisture, usually in the form of hot moist seed".[32] Above all, as Amy Froide exposes: "Since contemporaries believed women were more likely to be susceptible to sin, it was even more important for them to marry".[33] Moll thus embodies another version of femininity on stage as she does not get married by the end of the play, thereby presenting another model of existence within society. Indeed, even though numerous women were single in early modern society, this status was still absent from drama.[34] At the end of the play, when Lord Noland asks Moll when she shall get married, she answers:

> Who, I, my lord? I'll tell you when, i'faith.
> When you shall hear
> Gallants void from sergeants' fear,
> Honesty and truth unslandered,
> Woman manned but never pandered,
> Cheaters booted but not coached,
> Vessels older ere they're broached.
> If my mind be then not varied,
> Next day following, I'll be married (IV.2.222-230).

18 She refuses to play a prompted role. However, Moll does not put marriage or patriarchal order into question; she simply claims not to abide by it: "I have no humor to marry. I love to lie o'both sides o'th'bed myself; and again, o'th'other side, a wife, you know, ought to be obedient, but I fear I am too headstrong to obey; therefore I'll ne'er go about it" (II.2.37-40).

19 Even if Moll expressed desire for another character, the play makes it clear that she would be refused a relationship because of her gender identity. As Sir Alexander fears she might marry Sebastian, Goshawk reassures him:

> No priest will marry her, sir, for a woman
> Whiles that shape's on; and it was never known
> Two men were married and conjoined in one (V.2.108-110).

20 This draws attention to the representation of homoeroticism as a form of anguish on stage in the wake of Moll's performance. Thomas Dekker and Thomas Middleton bring margins on the centre stage, and thus expose a greater diversity of characters. Moll sheds light on a marginal world and thus offers another glimpse at early modern London life. Given that she socializes with "roaring boys" from whom her nickname derives, she appears on stage with rogues, thieves, and young unruly lewd men, among whom Jack Dapper and Sir Beauteous Ganymede. Ganymede's name recalls clear homoeroticism on stage as it is the name of Zeus' lover.[35] Jack Dapper on the other hand appears as Moll male counterpart as he is an overly feminine man.[36] Though Moll may be the focal point of the play, she does not stand as an exceptional figure; instead, her introduction of other characters on stage leads to further reflections about gender, but also about compulsory heterosexuality. Admittedly, transgressive gender performance is not necessarily linked to questions of sexuality; however, Judith Butler exposes how the two notions are intertwined:

> The institution of a compulsory and naturalized heterosexuality requires and regulates gender as a binary relation in which the masculine term is differentiated from a feminine term, and this differentiation is accomplished through the practices of heterosexual desire.[37]

21 Moll threatens both heterosexuality as an establish order and gender as a binary dogma. This is all the clearer in Act IV, scene 1, as Moll has Mary dressed as a man in order to escape Sir Alexander's rule and so that the two lovers may meet. As Sebastian kisses Mary, Moll

exclaims: “How strange this shows, one man to kiss another!” (IV.1.47). She thus draws attention to homoeroticism behind cross-dressing on stage. Sebastian does not deny such image and does not hide the pleasure he takes in kissing a masculine lover: “I’d kiss such men to choose, Moll. / Methinks a woman’s lip tastes well in a doublet” (IV.1.48-49). He then adds: “So methinks every kiss she gives me now / In this strange form is worth a pair of two” (IV.1.57-58). It may thus seem surprising, not to say contradictory that despite embodying alternative model on stage, Moll often voices societal stereotypes and judgement. In Act II, scene 1, she mocks Jack Dapper because he buys a feather to refine his style, and she often condemns women for being lecherous, thereby drawing on misogynistic stereotypes. It would be a mistake then to say that she opposes societal norms, in a certain way she even voices social order too often not to be noticed. Therefore, is Moll such a transgressive character because of her mere ability to perform both genders and to play around with heterosexual norms?

Early modern debates

22 Moll’s transgressive performance is to be put in perspective with the social context of the XVIth century. Susan Krantz sheds light on androgynous characters in early modern culture and links them to Elizabeth I’s representation of herself as a ruling queen. Characters that can be designated as “fair *Hermaphrodite*” or “Venus armata” actually draw on Elizabeth’s representation at Tilbury.[38] Elizabeth referred to herself using what Theodora Jankowski calls “sexually ambiguous or frankly androgynous phrases”.[39] Moll’s virginity and willingness to defend women against oppressive patriarchal characters (Laxton or Sir Alexander for instance) likens her to Venus Armata, about whom Susan Krantz declares:

> Although the play clearly and forcefully denies any merit to Laxton's reading of Moll as prostitute and posits as fact her chastity, it does not place her among womankind; rather it places her as champion of women and chastity – cross-dressed Diana (or a Venus Armata) who punishes men for their mistreatment of women.[40]

23 This may seem quite contradictory to a contemporary audience, but here again, Moll's masculinity may actually make her hyper feminine. To such extent, her performance may be interpreted as run-of-the-mill as it was not so rare in cultural representation. However, Susan Krantz qualifies her interpretation of Moll as a Venus Armata as she explains:

> I am not suggesting that Dekker and Middleton turned a notorious underworld figure into a goddess or an allegorical queen of England. What I am suggesting is that they used a pervasive intellectual symbol – the hermaphroditic ideal – to avoid socio-sexual issues that could not be resolved positively and without irony in terms of city comedy and had no place in romantic comedy.[41]

24 I suggest that the play does not shy away from socio-sexual issues, and that the question of how and whether they are resolved remains open to interpretation. Socio-sexual issues are at the very core of the play as Moll embodies debates of the time, directly derived from the European controversy called "The Woman's Question", which examined women, their so-called nature, their place in society and their potential rights.[42] Moll embodies an important controversy of Jacobean time as to whether women could wear men's clothes or not. Cross-dressing was deeply condemned in conduct books such as Juan Luis Vives's *Instruction of a Christen Woman* (first published in 1523 and translated in English in 1529):

> […] a woman shall use no mens raiment, els lette her thinke she hath the mans stomack, but take heed to the words of our Lord, saying: A woman shall not put on mans apparrell: for so to doe is abhominable afore God. But I trust no woman will doe it, except shee bee past both honestie and shame.[43]

25 Despite its popularity on stage, cross-dressing was objectionable and part of the charges held against Mary Frith during her trial.[44] In spite of these prescriptions, early XVIIth-century England witnessed a fad for women to wear masculine clothes. John Chamberlain (1553-1628), a Londoner and letter writer of the early modern period, describes this fashion in one of his letters to his friend, Sir Dudley Carleton, living abroad:

> Yesterday the bishop of London called together all his clergy about this town, and told them he had express commandment from the King to will them to inveigh vehemently and bittely in their sermons against the insolency of our women, and their wearing of broad-brimmed hats, pointed doublets, their hair cut short or shorn, and some of them stilettoes and poniards, and other such trinklets of like moments, adding withal that if pulpit admonitions will not reform them he would proceed by another course.[45]

26 King James I even took part in the debate and condemned women wearing male apparels.[46] We may only postulate that drama might have had an influence over this trend, displaying cross-dressed women. Yet, even if Moll embodies these debates on stage, it is less than certain she can be designated as a cross-dressing character in that her clothes reflect her identity instead of hiding it. It may thus be quite interesting to put the play in perspective with a pamphlet written anonymously in 1620, “Hic Mulier” (“This Woman”), in reaction to the cross-dressing fad. The title displays a voluntary grammar mistake, as a masculine deictic is associated with the word

"woman", thereby inducing that the eponymous character has a transgressive gender identity. The subtitle of "Hic Mulier" is a quote from Virgil that reads "Non omnes possumus omnes", that is "we cannot be everybody". The pamphleteer rails against women daring to wear men's clothes and complains about the masculinity of women:

> For since the daies of *Adam* women were neuer so Masculine; Masculine in their genders and whole generations, from the Mother, to the yongest daughter; Masculine in Number, from one to multitudes; Masculine in Case, eyen from the head to the foot; Masculine in Moode, from bold speech, to impudent action; and Masculine in Tense: for (without redresse) they were, are, and will be still most Masculine, most mankinde, and most monstrous.[47]

27 The pamphleteer is one among many to blame women for being somewhat too masculine; however, his arguments present a difference with other pamphlets and sermons in that it presents cross-dressing as unnatural and yet specifies it means "going astray (with ill-fauoured affectation) both in attire, in speech, in manners, and (it is to bee feared) in the whole courses and stories of their actions."[48] Such a definition finds a late echo in Judith Butler's definition of gender performance:

> In other words, acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this *on the surface* of the body, through the play of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organizing principle of identity as a cause. Such acts, gestures, enactments generally constructed, are *performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means.[49]

28 Interestingly enough, according to Randolph Trumbach, early modern science identified "'three biological sexes – man, woman, and hermaphrodite' – but only two genders, male and female."[50] Such discrepancy may be explained through Ambroise Paré's description of hermaphrodites:

> Male and female hermaphrodites are those who have two sexes well formed, can use both of them for reproduction; and unto them, ancient and current laws have imposed and still impose to select which sex they want to use, with decency, and under penalty of death, only to use that they have selected for the inconveniences that may arise.[51]

29 However, never do we know more about Moll's intimacy. Even though her private parts are often mentioned and fantasized about, and even though Mary Frith herself offered to show her vulva to people doubting her being female,[52] fictional Moll remains modest. As Kelly J. Stage notices, although Moll's chamber is often mentioned, never is she represented in this space and never does another character come into her chamber,[53] showing that Moll's intimacy is less important than her representation and her gender performance. Hence the fact that Moll is referred to as hermaphrodite several times despite her saying that she is female. Moll therefore embodies reflections on gender and its performance relevant to both her time and ours. In Act II, scene 1, she fights a man who offended her in a tavern the night before. As he sees her doing so, Laxton exclaims: "Gallantly performed, i'faith, Moll, and manfully!" (II.1.248). "Manfully" here is an adverb, clearly presenting masculinity as an action rather than a state of being. Of course, gender performance had not been theorized and exposed at the time; yet, several texts shed light on similar reflections on the part of early modern writers. The publication of "Hic Mulier" was quickly followed by the publication of "Haec Vir" ("This Man"). Once again, a voluntary

grammar mistake associates a feminine deictic with the word "Man". Presented as a dialogue between a woman in man's clothes and a man in a woman's apparel, the pamphlet is a response criticizing "Hic Mulier" position on women. Here again, a distinction between nature and culture is underlined as the character of Hic Mulier says to Haec Vir:

> Next, you condemne me of *Vnnaturalnesse*, in forsaking my creation, and contemning custome. How doe I forsake my creation, that doe all the rights and offices due to my Creation? I was created free, born free, and liue free: what lets me then so to spinne out my time, that I may dye free?[54]

30 She then mentions customs gone by like those of the Ancient Romans or customs changing depending on countries. She exposes how the expressions and manifestations of mourning or greeting may change across time and space and defends that the expression of gender is part of a cultural practice as well, which means it is arbitrary and ever-changing instead of a fixed and natural datum[55], thus anticipating Judith Butler's observation:

> Originally intended to dispute the biology-is-destiny formulation, the distinction between sex and gender serves the argument that whatever biological intractability sex appears to have, gender is culturally constructed: hence, gender is neither the causal result of sex nor as seemingly fixed as sex.[56]

31 Moll therefore appears as the dramatic embodiment of such debates and reflections of the time.

32 Being a dramatic character enables Moll to present gender as a prop allowing her to play numerous roles on stage. She often dresses up and prompts other characters to do so. In Act II, scene 2, Sebastian and she clearly put up a play to fool Sir Alexander. Yet, while using

gender as an accessory to be worn and seen on the surface of the body, she does not deny its interior dimension and its links with identity as in Act IV, scene 1, when she dresses up as a musician and says:

> He that can take me for a male musician,
> I cannot choose but make him my instrument
> And play upon him (IV.1.222-224).

33 Furthermore, she most often defines what she is not, here a male musician, but she never specifies who she is, remaining an enigma for most of the audience and for the other characters. However, such propensity to put on a costume and play a role may be a feminine trait that Moll displays. She often claims to be a single girl; numerous single women in early modern England dressed up depending on what they needed in order to avoid the restrictions imposed on them by their sex and marital status.[57] Moll's fluidity and capacity for change may rather once again make her the epitome of a certain kind of women rather than questioning masculinity and femininity, all the more as Moll and her real-life counterpart always claim to be women. Yet, they widen the definition of femininity, by not getting married without being prostitutes, by adopting postures, clothes and accessories that were restrictively masculine. Knowing the importance of drama in terms of cultural representations, Moll offers a different model than what Adrienne Eastwood calls "the shrew or whore at one extreme, the devout, obedient virgin on the other."[58]

34 Yet, such assumption does not seem entirely satisfactory. All the more so as, contrary to Shakespeare's characters like Viola or Portia, Moll does not adopt a more conventional position or identity by the end of the play. She reiterates her will not to get married and she even announces the appearance of her real-life counterpart:

> 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
> (ep. 35-38).

35 Mary Frith did indeed appear on the Fortune stage after a representation of *The Roaring Girl*. This was later held as a charge against her. She offered to expose her genitalia in order to prove her being female which complicates again the representation of Moll Cutpurse, both real and fictional. For Susan E. Krantz, fictional Moll has power to threaten patriarchal culture but abides by conventions, while Mary Frith contradicts such position by disrupting social values:

> The actions of the real Moll Cutpurse reject her fictional rehabilitation as either a supporter of conventional societal values or as a non-threatening androgynous ideal. By offering to prove her sex as female, she, like those who call her monster, again essentializes genitalia, but she forces the audience to juxtapose her normal sex organs with her "abnormal," transgressive appearance and behaviour.[59]

36 However, we may underline that instead of a transition from fictional disruptive behaviour to a heteronormative and cisnormative reality, the play rather offers a more complex return to reality that invites spectators to reflection. According to Jane Baston, the end of the play finally rehabilitates Moll because she wears a feminine wedding dress in Act V, scene 1. I offer disagreement; this is rather a moment in the play when Moll's clothes actually are carnivalesque. She puts on the dress to have Sir Alexander believe that she actually married his son Sebastian while the latter actually is marrying Mary. She uses feminine clothes the way Shakespearean heroines use masculine clothes, that is, to fool other characters, to entertain the audience and to hide her identity rather than to express it. It soon becomes

clear that she is not a bride, she is to be compared with Mary who then appears on stage, except Moll does not have a husband, as if she was parodying the traditional wedding that close plays. Furthermore, her identity knows no drastic change or evolution in the course of the play, as Susan Krantz underlines: "Further, the hero Moll undergoes no dramatic change in the play; like Prospero, she choreographs rather than participates in the action."[60] In that, she is not carnivalesque because there is no restoration of an order after her performance, but rather new questions and potentially new visions. She does not embody an upside-down world or theatrical performance, but rather reconciles what first appeared as contradictory identities, making them her own.

Conclusion

37 To conclude, if both characters and critics have difficulty to define Moll, it might be because she is not meant to be defined at all. Instead of presenting gender identity as a fixed essence attributed at birth, she rather explores it as the site for creativity, self-expression, calling to mind several lofty figures like Plato's androgynous, Ovid's Hermphroditus or Elizabeth I while being a very relatable and accessible character, a well-known figure for Londoners and yet an enigma for them all. Moll appears as a queer character on stage, defying gender conventions, norms, and hierarchy, questioning links between clothes, speech, acts and gender. Although she plays with gender as a performance rather than an essence, she is not a post-*Gender Trouble* heroine. Judith Butler's book may be a useful lens to look at her character, but one must not forget that she is a character drawn from a real-life person born in early modern England in a time when gender, though explored through drama, was still conceived as a binary notion. The omnipresence of the number two in *The Roaring Girl* attests a difficulty to go beyond a dual vision of gender.

Therefore, her character remains "a self-fashioned sexual enigma"[61] which both stimulates reflections in a positive and light atmosphere and contradicts non-fictional literature of the time and of ours presenting the absence of dichotomy in gender as threatening and alarming.[62]

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Notes

[1] Diane Elizabeth Dreher, *Domination and Defiance: Fathers and Daughters in Shakespeare*, Lexington, University Press of Kentucky, 2015, p. 116.

[2] This argument is supported by Kelly J. Stage, "*The Roaring Girl's* London Spaces", *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, vol. 49, n°2, 2009, p. 417 and by Mary Beth Rose, "Women in Men's Clothing: Apparel and Social Stability in *The Roaring Girl*", in Jennifer Panek (ed.), *The Roaring Girl: Authoritative Text, Contexts, Criticism*, New York, W. W. Norton & Co, 2011, p. 228.

[3] Craig Rustici, "The Smoking Girl: Tobacco and the Representation of Mary Frith", *Studies in Philology*, University of North Carolina Press, vol. 96, n°2, 1999, p. 164.

[4] Susan E. Krantz, "The Sexual Identities of Moll Cutpurse in Dekker and Middleton's *The Roaring Girl* and in London", *Renaissance and Reformation*, vol. 19, n°1, 1995, p. 5.

[5] Kelly J. Stage, *op. cit.*, p. 417.

[6] Susan E. Krantz, *op. cit.*, p. 8

[7] Thomas Middleton & Thomas Dekker, *The Roaring Girl: Authoritative Text, Contexts, Criticism*, ed. Jennifer Panek, New York, W. W. Norton & Co, 2011.

[8] Authors like Juan Luis Vives yet insisted on fordidding women to go to public places on their own. Juan Luis Vives, *A Very Frvtefvl and Pleasant Booke Called the Instruction of a Christen Woman* [1529], London, Henry Wykes, 1557, p. 133.

[9] Jennifer Panek (ed.), *The Roaring Girl: Authoritative Text, Contexts, Criticism*, New York, W. W. Norton & Co, 2011, p. 26.

[10] Susan E. Krantz, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

[11] Judith Butler, "Preface", *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* [1990], New York, Routledge, 1999, p. xv.

[12] The codpiece was a triangular piece of masculine clothing covering men's genitalia.

[13] My emphasis.

[14] Jennifer Higginbotham, *The Girlhood of Shakespeare's Sisters. Gender, Transgression, Adolescence*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2013, p. 10.

[15] Jennifer Higginbotham, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

[16] Philip Stubbes, *The Anatomy of Abuses*, London, 1583, sig. 38r, quoted in Philippa Berry, *Of Chastity and Power: Elizabethan Literature and the Unmarried Queen*, London, Routledge, 1994, p. 69.

[17] This is also the interpretation of Patrick Cheney, "Moll Cutpurse as Hermaphrodite in Dekker and Middleton's *The Roaring Girl*", *Renaissance and Reformation*, vol. 7, n°2, 1983, p. 120-134.

[18] Plato, *Symposium*, in Benjamin Jowett (ed.), *The Dialogues of Plato in Five Volumes*, 3rd ed., vol. 1, Oxford University, 1892, p. 558-563, 189c-190. URL.

[19] See II.1 and III.1.

[20] Plato, *op. cit.*, 190.

[21] Ovid, *Metamorphoses, Data Perseus,* Book 4, v. 274-388. URL.

[22] Anonymous, "The Life and Death of Mrs. Mary Frith", ed. Jennifer Panek, *The Roaring Girl. Authoritative Text, Contexts, Criticism*, New York, W. W. Norton & Co, 2011, p. 161.

[23] Mikhaïl Bakhtine, *L'œuvre de François Rabelais et la culture populaire au Moyen Âge et sous la Renaissance*, NRF, Gallimard, 1970, p. 35.

[24] *Ibid*., p 35. "[Il] n'est pas enfermé, achevé ni tout prêt, mais il se dépasse lui-même, franchit ses propres limites". We translate.

[25] Northrop Frye, *A Natural Perspective*, New York, 1965, p. 82-83. Quoted by Mary Beth Rose, *op. cit.*, p. 247-248 and by Patrick Cheney, *op. cit.*, p. 131.

[26] Judith Butler, *op. cit.*, p. 161.

[27] This is also the interpretation of Patrick Cheney, *op. cit.*, p. 130.

[28] Susan E. Krantz, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

[29] Craig Rustici, *op. cit.*, p. 176.

[30] Anonymous, *Hic Mulier: Or, the Man-Woman: Being a Medicine to Cure the Coltish Disease [of] the Staggers in the Masculine-Feminines of our Times,* London, 1620, B2.

[31] Ursula A. Potter, *The Unruly Womb in Early Modern Drama: Plotting Women's Biology on the Stage*, Kalamazoo, Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University, 2019, p. 2.

[32] Ursula A. Potter, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

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[37] Judith Butler, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

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[39] Theodora Jankowski, *Women in Power in the Early Modern Drama*, Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1992, p. 65.

[40] Susan E. Krantz, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

[41] *Ibid*., p. 14.

[42] Armel Dubois-Nayt, "Animalizing Women and Men in an Episode of the Querelle Des Femmes: John Lyly vs Jane Anger", *XVII-XVIII*, n°76, 2019, §1.

[43] Juan Luis Vives, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

[44] Susan E. Krantz, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

[45] John Chamberlain, London, January 25, 1620, quoted in Panek, *op. cit.*, p. 120.

[46] *Ibid*., p. 120.

[47] Anonymous, *Hic Mulier*, A3.

[48] *Ibid*., B.

[49] Judith Butler, *op. cit.*, p. 185.

[50] Susan E. Krantz, *op. cit.*, p. 12. See Randolph Trumbach, "London's Sapphists: From Three Sexes to Four Genders in the Making of Modern Culture", in Julia Epstein & Kristina Staub (eds.), *Body Guards: The Cultural Politics of Gender Ambiguity*, New York and London, Routledge, 1991, p. 113.

[51] Ambroise Paré, *Les oeuvres de M. Ambroise Paré conseiller, et premier chirurgien du Roy. : Avec les figures & portraicts tant de l'anatomie que des instruments de chirurgie, & de plusieurs monstres. Le tout divisé en vingt six livres, comme il est contenu en la page suyvante*, BnF, Gallica, 1595, p. 811. "Hermafrodites masles et femelles, ce sont ceux qui ont les deux sexes bien formez, & s'en peuuent aider & seruir à la generation; & à ceux cy les lois anciennes & modernes ont fait, & font encore eslire duquel sexe ils veulent user, auec dessense, sur peine de perdre la vie, de ne se seruir que de celuy duquel ils auront fait election, pour les inconueniens qui en pourroient aduenir." My translation.

[52] "Mary Frith's Appearance at the Consistory Court January 27, 1612", in Jennifer Panek (ed.), *The Roaring Girl: Authoritative Text, Contexts, Criticism*, New York, W. W. Norton & Co, 2011, p. 147.

[53] Kelly J. Stage, *op. cit.*, p. 428.

[54] Anonymous, *Hæc-Vir: Or, the Womanish-Man: Being an Answere to a Late Booke Intituled Hic-Mulier. Exprest in a Briefe Dialogue Betweene Hæc-Vir the Womanish-Man, and Hic-Mulier the Man-Woman*, London, 1620, B2.

[55] *Idem*.

[56] Judith Butler, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

[57] Adrienne L. Eastwood, "Controversy and the Single Woman in *The Maid's Tragedy* and *The Roaring Girl*", *Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature*, vol. 58, n°2, 2004, p. 11.

[58] *Ibid*., p. 10.

[59] Susan E. Krantz, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

[60] *Ibid*., p. 8.

[61] *Idem.*

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Pauline Durin

Pauline Durin is a second-year Ph.D student at Université Clermont Auvergne. Her Ph.D, supervised by Sophie Chiari, explores the representation of unruly women in early modern drama. She is also part of a translation project on *The Tragedy of Mariam* by Elizabeth Cary within the Epistémè seminar, led by Aurélie Griffin at the Sorbonne Nouvelle.

Publics inquiets dans les théâtres de la première modernité : un jeu avec les conventions du genre

Robert I. Lublin
University of Massachusetts Boston

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1 L'attribution des rôles féminins à de jeunes garçons sur la scène anglaise de la première modernité est une pratique ayant fortement attiré l'attention des chercheurs pendant ces quarante dernières années, se situant au croisement des domaines de l'histoire du théâtre, du « New Historicism », du matérialisme culturel et de la critique féministe. Malgré la vaste pluralité d'approches méthodologiques employées pour aborder la question, une facette de ce travestissement des acteurs n'a pas été, jusque-là, suffisamment prise en compte : le rôle du public. Un tel enjeu a toute son importance, dans la mesure où notre compréhension des conventions théâtrales élisabéthaines est intimement liée à l'expérience du spectateur. Dans un premier temps, les témoignages historiques dont nous disposons, issus des publics de l'époque, nous éclairent sur la manière dont le travestissement des acteurs était alors perçu. En outre, d'un point de vue plus théorique, le spectateur, en interagissant avec les normes, participait à la construction du sens de ces conventions. En ce qui concerne les études théâtrales, nul besoin de faire appel à la « mort de l'auteur » de Barthes pour reconnaître l'importance du spectateur dans la fabrique du sens de la performance[1]. Dans cet article, nous chercherons à passer brièvement en revue la réception des travestissements ayant eu lieu au théâtre pendant cette période. Nous nous intéresserons ensuite à la nature des preuves qui nous sont disponibles, afin d'examiner l'éventail des arguments qu'elles soutiennent. Enfin, nous examinerons comment les réactions du public nous ont permis de comprendre l'expérience du travestissement lorsque ce dernier était utilisé sur la scène de la première modernité.

2 En dépit de l'impressionnante quantité d'études contemporaines consacrées à ce sujet, la pratique consistant à faire jouer les rôles féminins par des garçons, propre à l'Angleterre de la Renaissance, ne suscitait que très peu de réactions à l'époque. Dans son livre *Playgoing in Shakespeare's London*, Andrew Gurr tente de recenser

tout ce qu'il nous reste des témoignages significatifs de l'époque, portant sur le théâtre. Etant donné le nombre conséquent de références à l'expérience des spectateurs de théâtre que Gurr déniche, la mention d'une pratique courante consistant à donner les rôles féminins aux garçons brille par son absence[2]. Parmi la grande majorité des témoignages portant sur le théâtre, pratiquement aucun ne trouve nécessaire d'aborder le sujet des acteurs travestis. La convention suscitait pourtant des réactions quelque peu épidermiques chez une catégorie précise, des individus qui considéraient que cette pratique relevait de l'ignominie. Pendant la première modernité, les pamphlétaires anti-théâtre publient un certain nombre de tracts visant le théâtre en tant qu'institution ; parmi eux, certains mentionnent plus précisément le terrible danger du travestissement dans le milieu du théâtre. Les protagonistes de cette attaque sont Stephen Gosson, John Rainoldes et William Prynne[3].

3 Les argumentaires avancés par ces auteurs quant à la pratique du travestissement au théâtre ne sont pas tous analogues, mais ils ont en commun une même vision de cette convention comme contraire à l'orthodoxie religieuse, faisant naître chez le spectateur un désir indécent. Par exemple, dans *Plays Confuted in Five Actions* (1582), Gosson a tout d'abord recours à un argument tiré du Deutéronome (22:5) qui stipule que tout homme amené à se revêtir des vêtements de femmes serait une abomination aux yeux du Seigneur. Il poursuit son raisonnement en affirmant que, si le simple fait de porter les vêtements d'une femme est inacceptable aux yeux de Dieu, l'acteur, quant à lui, commet une bien plus grande offense. Ne porte-t-il pas « not the apparrell onely, but the gate, the gestures, the voyce, the passions of a woman[4]? » Dans *Th' Overthrow of Stage-Playes* (1599), Dr. John Rainoldes, éminent théologien d'Oxford, affirme que les jeunes garçons jouant des rôles de femmes susciteraient l'appétit sexuel de leurs spectateurs.

> The appareil of wemen is a great provocation of men to lust and leacherie… A womans garment beeing put on a man doeth vehemently touch and moue him with the rememberance and imagination of a woman; and the imagination of a thing desirable doth stirr up the desire[5].

4 En se déguisant en femme, l'acteur ferait naître un désir inacceptable en faisant appel à l'imagination et aux souvenirs des spectateurs qu'ils projetteraient ensuite sur lui. De surcroît, Rainoldes soutient que le spectateur éprouve une attirance homoérotique pour le garçon caché sous le costume : « an effeminate stage-player, while he faineth love, imprinteth wounds of love[6] ». Dans *Histriomastix* (1633), William Prynne étaie cette crainte que les garçons travestis puissent engendrer un désir homoérotique, en précisant que

> players and play-haunters in their secret conclaves play the sodomites; together with some modern examples of such, who have been desperately enamored with players' boys thus clad in woman's apparel, so far as to solicit them by words, by letters, even actually to abuse them[7].

5 Considérés ensemble, les textes de Gosson, de Rainoldes et de Prynne soutiennent que le théâtre est érotique et qu'il inspire un désir sexuel incontrôlable, soit destiné aux femmes qui sont suggérées par les costumes, soit aux garçons qui les portent[8]. Il s'ensuit que les spectateurs qui partageaient ces positions antithéâtrales d'une scène travestie considéraient l'excitation sexuelle, en particulier l'excitation homoérotique, comme la pierre angulaire de l'expérience théâtrale. Mais dans quelle mesure les opinions exprimées par ces auteurs étaient-elles répandues ?

6 En examinant le corpus des auteurs antithéâtraux, Lisa Jardine a pu déclarer que « amongst those who opposed [the theatres], transvestism on stage was a main plank in the anti-stage polemic[9] ».

Si cela s'avérait, nous pourrions étudier la popularité des pamphlets antithéâtraux pour déterminer la prévalence de leurs arguments dans la société anglaise[10]. Cependant, tout semble indiquer le contraire. Seuls quatre pamphlets antithéâtraux mentionnent explicitement le travestissement sur scène (nous avons omis, consciemment, un pamphlet ancien et anonyme qui réitère l'interdiction faite dans le Deutéronome). La plupart des pamphlets antithéâtraux, y compris ceux écrits par John Northbrook, Phillip Stubbes, Anthony Munday, et d'autres, attaquent le théâtre mais ne font aucune mention de la pratique consistant à faire jouer aux garçons des rôles féminins. Parmi les tropes que nous retrouvons dans les divers textes de la polémique antithéâtrale se trouvent : un enseignement de l'immoralité ; un attrait des sens plutôt qu'un perfectionnement de l'esprit ; l'encouragement à ne pas respecter les édits somptuaires ; ainsi que sa nature de lieu de rencontre pour les prostituées et leurs clients[11]. Les pamphlets cités ici par Gosson, Rainoldes et Prynne consacrent, en vérité, des centaines de pages à une critique du théâtre, mais bien moins à la pratique du travestissement sur scène. Bien plus fréquemment, l'écriture polémique de l'époque attaque-t-elle la pratique du travestissement dans la société considérée comme plus délétère. Prenons l'exemple des célèbres pamphlets, souvent cités, que sont *Haec Vir* et *Hic Mulier*. Certes, ils s'en prennent directement aux hommes qui s'habillent en femmes et aux femmes qui portent les vêtements des hommes, mais il se trouve qu'ils ne mentionnent jamais le travestissement en ce qui concerne le théâtre. Les universitaires, à bien des reprises, évoquent ces œuvres lorsqu'il s'agit d'étudier le théâtre, mais nous devons nous garder de tirer des conclusions trop hâtives à cet égard en faisant correspondre leurs critiques et la pratique théâtrale. La nature d'espace-limite du théâtre ne lui permet-elle pas, après tout, de montrer des acteurs s'adonnant à des actes qui ne sont, en règle générale, pas permis au sein du cadre normatif de la société quotidienne ?

7 Pis encore, la critique des femmes masculines et des hommes efféminés dans les pamphlets antithéâtraux trouve des échos textuels dans les pièces de théâtre de l'époque. Dans l'*Epicoene* de Ben Jonson, par exemple, un groupe de femmes, les « collegiates », sont la cible des traits d'humour du dramaturge en raison de leur décision de s'habiller et de se comporter d'une manière résolument masculine. Partant, le travestissement méta-théâtral (les garçons jouant les rôles des femmes) semble autorisé, tandis que le travestissement dans le contexte de la narration de la pièce est ridiculisé de manière comique.

8 Ainsi, d'une manière assez contrintuitive, les attaques antithéâtrales critiquant le travestissement au théâtre pendant la première modernité furent d'une grande rareté. Un tel étonnement ne peut que se redoubler lorsque nous considérons la grande attention qu'elles ont reçues de la part des chercheurs. Il s'ensuit que nous ne pouvons pas tenir pour acquis que l'argument de ces mêmes chercheurs concernant la nature sexuelle et homoérotique du théâtre était largement partagé par le public de la première modernité. Il convient tout de même de noter que cette thèse est corroborée par certains éléments tirés de pièces de théâtre de l'époque. Dans le *Poetaster* (1601) de Jonson, un père craint que la décision de son fils de devenir dramaturge ne mène à une homosexualité, à entretenir des relations sexuelles avec des hommes : « What shall I have my sonne a stager now? an enghle for players[12]? ». D'une semblable manière, Middleton suggère que les jeunes garçons acteurs sont à la fois désirables et ouverts à la promiscuité sexuelle dans *Father Hubburd's Tales* (1604), dans lequel un jeune gentleman est encouragé « to call in at the Blackfriars where he should see a nest of boys able to ravish a man[13] ». Comme les propos de Jonson et de Middleton proviennent d'individus qui non seulement côtoient mais travaillent au sein de l'institution théâtrale, nous pourrions être portés à donner une crédibilité accrue

aux conclusions de Rainoldes et de Prynne selon laquelle l'utilisation de garçons travestis pour jouer le rôle de femmes incitait au désir homoérotique dans leur public.

9 Cependant, pour brouiller encore plus le tableau, il existe également des témoignages qui tendent à appuyer la conclusion opposée. Dans la romance en prose de Lady Mary Wroth, *The Countess of Montgomery's Urania* (1621), l'expérience consistant à regarder un garçon jouer le rôle d'une femme est présentée comme une simple appréciation de l'action dramatique, rien de plus. Dans une telle configuration, la pratique du travestissement est totalement dissociée de tout désir sexuel :

> there hee [her first lover] saw her with all passionate ardency, seeke, and sue for the strangers love; yet he [the stranger] unmoveable, was no further wrought, then if he had seene a delicate play-boy acte a loving womans part, and knowing him a boy, lik'd onely his action[14].

10 Si nous adhérons à une telle vision, nous devons alors affirmer que l'institution dramatique du travestissement, bien loin de susciter un désir sexuel à l'égard d'un jeune homme jouant le rôle d'une femme, est justement ce qui rend ce même désir impossible. L'exclusion des femmes de la scène a donc une utilité, à savoir la mise à l'écart du désir sexuel qui n'a plus lieu d'être sur la scène. Dans son *Pierce Penilesse, his Supplication of the Divell* (1592), Thomas Nashe souligne le lien entre travestissement dramatique et protection de la moralité de la scène anglaise, en précisant : « Our Players are not as the players beyond Sea, a sort of squirting baudie Comedians, that haue whores and common Curtizens to playe womens partes, and forbeare no immodest speech, or vnchast action that may procure laughter[15] ». Selon Nashe, le risque de sexualisation de la scène anglaise est mis en échec par la restriction des performances aux

seuls hommes. Le désir non seulement homoérotique, mais aussi hétérosexuel, est maîtrisé par le fait que les rôles féminins soient joués par des garçons.

11 Thomas Heywood, dans son ouvrage *An Apology for Actors* (1612), prend explicitement les arguments des auteurs antithéâtraux pour cible, et les contredit lorsqu'il affirme que la coutume du travestissement est une coutume morale s'incarnant dans une tradition des plus respectables :

> To see our youth attired in the habit of women. [W]ho knows not what their intents be? Who cannot distinguish them by their names, assuredly knowing that they are but to represent such a lady, at such a tyme appointed? Do not the universities, the fountains, and well springs of all good arts, learning and documents, admit the like in their colleges? [A]nd they (I assure myself) are not ignorant of their use. In the time of my residence at Cambridge, I have seen tragedyes, comedyes, historyes pastorals and shows publickly acted, in which the graduates of good place and reputation have bene specially parted[16].

12 Selon Heywood, le travestissement des jeunes garçons en vêtements féminins ne sert qu'à représenter les femmes. Loin de susciter un désir inapproprié, la pratique du travestissement est un exercice moral qui s'inspire des estimables pratiques des universités.

13 Comment, dès lors, jauger les réactions du public au travestissement sur la scène anglaise de la première modernité ? Pour certains, le travestissement des acteurs masculins était une source scandaleuse d'attirance homoérotique. Pour d'autres, il s'agissait d'une alternative à la fois logique et morale à la présence et la performance de femmes sur scène. Ce que nous pouvons affirmer comme certitude est qu'il n'existe pas de réaction unique et unifiée du public ; mais pouvons-nous aller plus loin et dépasser le simple constat de la coexistence d'une position extrême et son contraire ?

14 Un des aspects les plus remarquable des données disponibles à l'heure actuelle, mais qui mérite une plus ample considération tant il éclaire notre problème, est la surprenante pénurie de sources. Si l'on considère les soixante-quinze années qui séparent 1567, date de l'ouverture de la première salle de théâtre professionnelle en Angleterre, et 1642, date de la fermeture des salles de théâtre professionnelles par un acte du parlement, la quantité de témoignages concernant le travestissement sur scène est véritablement infime. Seulement quatre pamphlets antithéâtraux évoquent ce sujet, et des décennies séparent certaines de leurs dates de publication ! Qui plus est, seules deux pièces de théâtre soutiennent des positions semblables. Enfin, trois autres sources abordent la question, mais offrent des points de vue opposés. Si nous considérons la totalité des données, ces éléments présentent un message équivoque concernant les réactions du public par rapport au travestissement sur scène. Mais compte tenu de la rareté avec laquelle la question a été abordée sous quelque forme que ce soit, nous pouvons, en toute logique, conclure que la pratique du travestissement n'a pas inspiré une grande inquiétude aux membres du public qui l'ont régulièrement eu à voir au théâtre.

15 Quand bien même certain spectateurs aient ou non trouvé dans les garçons travestis une source de désir sexuel, il demeure que très, très peu d'entre eux les ont considérés comme une source de préoccupation ou même d'intérêt significatif. Au contraire, le travestissement semble avoir été simplement accepté en Angleterre comme la norme de la représentation théâtrale[17]. Juliet Dusinberre met cette convention en perspective lorsqu'elle pose la question suivante :

> Were [women] there or not? Of course, physically they were not there. But to assert that is, in my view, to say nothing. Because none of the shadows on Shakespeare's stage are there. There

> are no kings, queens, murderers, monsters, fairies, politicians, wise counselors, or even fools. There are only actors. Why should it matter that they are not biologically female, any more than it should matter that they are not royal, Roman, Moors, Egyptian, or Italian[18]?

16 Le théâtre est un art de conventions. Par conséquent, Kathleen McLuskie a certainement raison de conclure que, à un certain niveau, les acteurs masculins jouant des femmes ont dû être simplement acceptés par la grande majorité des spectateurs comme une convention parmi d'autres[19]. Si ce n'était pas le cas, comment le public aurait-il pu s'intéresser aux récits dramatiques fondés sur l'amour hétérosexuel et les différences entre les hommes et les femmes[20] ?

17 Cela ne nie pas, pour autant, la probabilité que, parmi les dix à vingt mille personnes qui allaient au théâtre chaque semaine dans l'Angleterre de la première modernité[21], certains hommes aient été attirés sexuellement par les acteurs travestis, tout comme certains hommes dans le public étaient attirés par les acteurs adultes masculins. En outre, très peu de chercheurs se sont sérieusement penchés sur le désir hétérosexuel éprouvé par les femmes qui fréquentaient le théâtre en grand nombre. Nous cherchons alors à attirer l'attention sur la probabilité écrasante que la convention du travestissement n'ait pas été une source de profonde inquiétude pour la société anglaise de l'époque. Aucune loi n'interdisait aux femmes de se produire sur scène, et aucune nouvelle loi n'a été adoptée au début de la Restauration pour inciter les femmes à s'y produire non plus. Cette absence apparente de préoccupation concernant la portée des conventions théâtrales, ne peut que rendre infructueux tous les efforts visant à trouver une explication satisfaisante à la raison pour laquelle les garçons jouaient les rôles féminins sur la scène anglaise de la première modernité[22].

18 Par conséquent, il nous semble que la volonté, et la nécessité, de trouver une explication à la convention du travestissement est résolument tardive (ne datant que des XX^e^ et XXI^e^ siècles) et que cette convention n'avait pas beaucoup d'importance pour les hommes et les femmes anglais de la première modernité qui fréquentaient le théâtre. En effet, les méthodologies mêmes qui ont été mises en avant ces dernières années ont incité à la prise en compte croissante de cette question. Parmi ses divers objectifs et pratiques, le féminisme cherche à interroger le passé pour comprendre la construction du genre à travers l'histoire. Un tel objectif ne peut qu'inciter quiconque le poursuit à comprendre la place du travestissement sur scène. D'une manière semblable, le « New Historicism » et le matérialisme culturel tentent de considérer les textes au sein de contextes discursifs. Les pamphlets antithéâtraux, dont la circulation a été, de fait, très restreinte et, en fin de compte, dont l'influence sur le théâtre a été très limitée, fournissent des contextes discursifs. Ce faisant, ils ont contribué à surdéterminer notre compréhension de la manière dont le sens était établi et reçu dans l'Angleterre du début des temps modernes. Le tout de manière disproportionnée par rapport à la réalité. Ainsi, tant pour le féminisme que pour le « New Historicism » / matérialisme culturel, l'intérêt pour le travestissement révèle davantage sur les problématiques contemporaines que sur celles de la première modernité. Il s'ensuit que, plus encore qu'ils n'expliquent les préoccupations de l'Angleterre moderne, les nombreux articles et ouvrages qui évoquent le travestissement sur scène, et qui ont été publiés au cours des quarante dernières années, manifestent notre obsession moderne concernant les représentations du sexe et du genre au théâtre.

19 Il semblerait alors raisonnable de suggérer que le travestissement intéresse et inquiète davantage les individus et publics contemporains que ceux de la première modernité. Gardant tout cela

à l'esprit, nous pouvons reconsidérer et réévaluer la production du *Henry V* de Shakespeare qui a été proposée pour l'ouverture du nouveau Globe à Londres en 1997. Cette production était marquée par un souci de fidélité historique : des costumes fidèles à ceux de l'époque ont été fabriqués et teints à la main en utilisant à la fois des matériaux et méthodes de l'époque, et tous les rôles féminins ont été joués par des hommes. L'intention, selon le metteur en scène Richard Olivier, était de « undertake to explore certain authentic production methods or styles[23] ». Cette production du *Henry V* a sûrement dû sembler aussi fidèle que possible à l'histoire. La mise en scène d'un texte de la première modernité se donnait à voir sur une copie conforme d'une scène de cette même époque, utilisant des tenues de l'époque, ainsi que les conventions de la scène élisabéthaine. Pourtant, un aspect fondamental de la mise en scène était sans aucun doute anachronique : le public. Par conséquent, si les études récentes reflètent effectivement une inquiétude accrue concernant la représentation théâtrale du sexe et des rôles de genre, il est probable que la production du *Henry V* de la fin du XX^{e} siècle ait suscité beaucoup plus d'intérêt, de préoccupations et d'anxiété en faisant jouer les rôles féminins par des garçons que la production présentée au Globe en 1599 ne l'ait fait[24].

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Notes

[1] *Cf*. Roland Barthes, « La Mort de l'auteur », *Manteia*, n°5, 1968.

[2] *Cf*. Andrew Gurr, *Playgoing in Shakespeare's London*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1987.

[3] Identifier les pamphlétaires anti-théâtre comme des puritains est désormais monnaie courante, dès lors qu'il s'agissait la plupart du temps de prédicateurs au franc-parler. Toutefois, des études plus récentes ont démontré que ce rapprochement est abusif. Pour parler des écrivains antithéâtraux en tant que groupe, il est préférable de les qualifier de dévots, tant le langage qu'ils invoquent fait plutôt appel à la moralité et à la religion, sans qu'il s'agisse d'une religiosité tout particulièrement puritaine. *Cf*. Tanya Pollard, *Shakespeare's Theatre: A Sourcebook*, Malden, Blackwell, 2004, p. 20; Paul Whitefield White, *Theatre and Reformation: Protestantism, Patronage and Playing in Tudor England*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1993, p. xiii.

[4] Stephen Gosson, *Plays Confuted in Five Actions*, New York, Garland, 1972, sig. C3v.

[5] John Rainoldes, *Th' Overthrow of Stage-Playes*, Middleburgh, 1599, p. 97.

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[7] William Prynne, *Histriomastix*, London, 1633, p. 209.

[8] Stephen Orgel, *Impersonations: The Performance of Gender in Shakespeare's England*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 30.

[9] Lisa Jardine, « Boy Actors, Female Roles, and Elizabethan Eroticism », in David Scott Kastan & Peter Stallybrass (eds.), *Staging the Renaissance: Reinterpretations of Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama*, New York, Routledge, 1991, p. 57.

[10] Thomas Postlewait met son lecteur en garde contre l'idée que les tracts antithéâtraux étaient largement lus et acceptés dans l'Angleterre de la première modernité : « Most pamphlets had a limited distribution, so they probably did not carry much weight with theatre audiences, many of whom were not literate », Thomas Postlewait, « Theatricality and Antitheatricality in Renaissance London », in Tracy C. Davis & Thomas Postlewait (eds.), *Theatricality*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 98.

[11] Jean E. Howard, *The Stage and Social Struggle in Early Modern England*, New York, Routledge, 1994, p. 75.

[12] Ben Jonson, *The Complete Plays of Ben Jonson*, vol. 2, ed. G. A. Wilkes, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1981, I.2.15-16.

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[14] Lady Mary Wroth, *The Countesse of Mountgomeries Urania*, London, 1621, p. 60.

[15] E. K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1923, vol. 4, p. 239.

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[17] Michael Shapiro, *Gender in Play on the Shakespearean Stage*, Ann Arbor, Michigan University Press, 1994, p. 41.

[18] Juliet Dusinberre, « Women and Boys Playing Shakespeare », in Dympna Callaghan (ed.), *A Feminist Companion to Shakespeare*, Malden, Blackwell, 2000, p. 251.

[19] Kathleen McLuskie, « The Act, the Role, and the Actor: Boy Actresses on the Elizabethan Stage », *New Theatre Quarterly*, vol. 3, n°10, 1987, p. 121.

[20] Jean E. Howard, « Crossdressing, the Theatre, and Gender Struggle in Early Modern England », *Shakespeare Quarterly*, vol. 39, n°4, 1988, p. 435.

[21] *Cf*. Thomas Postlewait, *op. cit*., p. 103.

[22] Phyllis Rackin, « Shakespeare's Crossdressing Comedies », in Richard Dutton & Jean E. Howard (eds.), *A Companion to Shakespeare's Works: The Comedies*, Malden, Blackwell, 2003, p. 115.

[23] Pauline Kiernan, « Findings from the Globe Opening Season*: Henry V* », *Research Bulletin*, n°2, 1998, p. 6.

[24] Si nous mentionnons ici la production du *Henry V* de 1997, c'est avant tout pour souligner les attitudes très différentes à l'égard du travestissement qui caractérisaient l'Angleterre de l'époque. Pour une étude plus approfondie des mises en scènes contemporaines de Shakespeare faisant usage du travestissement, nous recommandons l'ouvrage de James C. Bulman, *Shakespeare Re-Dressed : Cross Gender Casting in Contemporary Performance*, Madison, Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2008. L'essai « Constructing Femininity in the New Globe's All-Male *Antony and Cleopatra* » de Robert Conkie aborde directement cette version du *Henry V* et d'autres représentations faisant figurer des acteurs travestis sur la scène du nouveau Globe.

Robert I. Lublin

Robert Lublin holds the position of Professor of Theatre Arts at the University of Massachusetts Boston, USA. He is the author of *Costuming the Shakespearean Stage: Visual Codes of Representation in Early Modern Theatre and Culture* (2016) and has contributed as a co-editor to *Reinventing the Renaissance: Shakespeare and His Contemporaries in Adaptation and Performance* (2013). In addition to numerous published essays, he has co-authored two book chapters on the topic of Frankenstein.

Gender changes – “the bias of the world”?

Imke Lichterfeld
Universität Bonn

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1 Due to professional gender restrictions, casting women was illegal on the early modern stage and boys portrayed female characters. In today’s theatre, roles are mostly cast according to the binary gender of characters, but female actors raise their voice to claim these parts that are often restricted to male actors. If traditional “legitimate” casting – even today – is equal to binary “cis male” actors for male parts, then transformations of these gender constellations allow for fascinating staging opportunities, for example, as Judith Butler would seem to confirm, “a female ‘object’ who inexplicably returns the glance, reverses the gaze, and contests the place and authority of the masculine position”.[1] Changes in conservative casting on the contemporary stage can demonstrate different facets of political, cultural, and gender issues.

2 Casting Philip of Faulconbridge, the illegitimate son of Richard Coeur-de-Lion in *King John* with a female actor questions gender identity and political implications. Simultaneously, it raises awareness towards hierarchies in the acting business and demands readings of female empowerment as it addresses the representation of “legitimacy”. This article will therefore question “male legitimacy” and present its subversion: disruptive casting concepts that are based on traditional, sometimes sexist, preconceptions via gender-conscious casting, concentrating on Faulconbridge as a case study: indeed, the bastard Philip has recently been cast with women, e.g. Pippa Nixon in the RSC’s 2012 production in Stratford-upon-Avon, Kate Eastwood Norris at the Folger Library, Washington D. C., and Lisa Pohlers at Brotfabrik, Bonn, both in 2018. Such revolutionary castings of the illegitimate “Other” via a gender-conscious role swaps on the contemporary stage can demonstrate a certain fluidity in gender representation and target different political and social issues, and it “smacks […] something of the policy” (II.1.396).[2] This chapter will give a very brief introduction on cross-dressing on stage, then target the illegitimacy of Philip illuminated via the above-

mentioned three stage adaptations, and lastly analyse the effect of these casting choices, illuminating how they might refer to a receptive twenty-first century audience.

Cross-dressing

3 "Playing the opposite sex is as old as theatre,"[3] and young male actors apprenticed at theatres by playing female roles on the early modern stage. Gender changes were easily envisioned through the changing into female gear. An emphasis on clothes in creating gender was not only a theatrical phenomenon: in fact, as Will Fisher argues, clothing was seen as essential to a person's identity in early modern culture, and not inferior to corporeal signs that materialise gender.[4] Donning male clothes makes the female characters appear like men: "Clothing is the major symbol [...] to immediately identify the individual's gender role."[5] As Philipp Stubbes in his 1583 *Anatomie of Abuses* asserts:

> Apparel was given us as a sign distinctive to discern betwixt sex and sex, & therefore one to wear the apparel of another sex is to participate with the same, and to adulterate the merits of his own kinde.[6]

4 Jean E. Howard explains that, as such, "cross-dressing, as fact and as idea, threatened a normative social order based upon strict principles of hierarchy and subordination, of which women's subordination to man was a chief instance".[7] Puritanical critics also highlighted the licentiousness of the theatre outside the city bounds as a place of cheap und ungodly entertainment; this would argue for the theatre as a transgressive space against the "divinely sanctioned social order".[8] However, actors – dressing as pretended characters – might be interpreted as confirming status and existing gender

norms. Then, Howard weighs in, “female cross-dressing on the stage is not a strong site of resistance to the period’s patriarchal sex-gender system”.[9] Yet theatre, automatically – because of its professional pretending –, means instinctive subversion of social and gender norms.

5 The theatre certainly caused dissension: cross-dressing was considered supposedly transgressive and androgynous dresses were extensively debated, also in the controversial pamphlets *Hic Mulier* and *Haec Vir*.[10] Different “types of transvestism prevailed: that which violated the boundaries of gender demarcation and that which violated class hierarchy”.[11] Both – a confusion of the sexes, and a subversion of class – happened in the theatre; this in turn might become problematic for the stability of society. A provocative freedom of the theatre was not only highly entertaining but also a branch of business, a “commercial venture”.[12] Along these lines, Laura Levine argues that “an all-male acting troupe was the natural and unremarkable product of a culture whose conception of gender was ‘teleologically male’”; she also suggests that contemporary protests against the practise – believing it made young actors “effeminate” – reflected societal fears about an unstable self that needed to be strictly controlled by rules.[13] This early modern conflict highlights a consistent underlying fear of instability. Disruption of rules and norms of apparel thus can mean social disruption: not just a signal of, but of real disorder. To consider an example: If a good woman was to be silent and chaste, a domestic, obedient being, Jean E. Howard ponders the following issue:

> Do [cross-dressed males] present constructions of woman that challenge her subordinate place in the Renaissance sex-gender system and so, perhaps, lead to the transformation of that system? […] They contain, they vitiate, challenges posed to masculine authority and the traditional gender hierarchy by wealthy women, by unmarried women, by women with voices.[14]

6 Against this, treatises like the above-mentioned *Hic Mulier* saw a need for the re-establishment of social norms and boundaries: binaries for men in contrast to women to establish themselves as something higher. Subordination creates hierarchy; it affirms power structures. The question at hand then must be phrased thus: Whose voice is heard, when, in Shakespeare, the female roles cross-dress again and turn into – sometimes vociferous – men like Rosalind's Ganymede in *As you like it*? Who is publicly speaking? Who is given a licence to speak if plays like *Twelfth Night* were written for the Christmas days of celebration, topsy-turviness and carnival?

7 Casting restrictions of the early modern age were soon overcome; female actors have been allowed on the professional stage since 1660 and there is a history of how and when the practice of casting female actors has developed. Cross-casting also appeared the other way around: Women played boys, like Peter Pan, and young men, like the hesitant Hamlet, the "more stereotypically feminine"[15] of Shakespeare's male protagonists, on the nineteenth-century stage. "Female impersonation, which had been declining since women had been allowed to appear as themselves on the legitimate stage in the XVIIth century, made a comeback in the nineteenth century"[16] in the form of transvestite comedians or today's pantomime etc. Yet, Halberstam criticises that "this role reversal actually masks the asymmetry of male and female impersonation. If boys can play girls and women, but women can play only boys, mature masculinity once again remains an authentic property of adult male bodies while all other gender roles are available for interpretation".[17] They highlight that we still have an imbalance as far as opportunities are concerned. What happens then if a role is interpreted as female? Bullough & Bullough also add that

> cross-gender casting [...] provided an opportunity for women vicariously to have the sort of mythic adventures many desired to have but which were denied by the gender conventions of the

> day. It allowed […] to explore sexual boundaries […], but it was never so realistic that it threatened the males in the audience.[18]

8 This would imply that art may suggest anything.

9 Some critics argue that Shakespeare’s characters are “suspended between male and female”,[19] that Shakespeare’s plays are replete with cross-dressing and gender-bending.[20] Virginia Woolf in her ground-breaking feminist work *A Room of One’s Own* calls on Shakespeare’s androgyny; she concludes that he understood what it means to be human – not the one or the other. Shapiro states that “[b]ecause of our own fascination with sexual identity and gender roles, contemporary scholarship has devoted considerable attention to various forms of cross-dressing”[21] and McManus argues that “Shakespearean performance is an arena for exploring desire, sexuality and gender roles and for challenging audience expectations, especially when it comes to the female performer”.[22] This is also acknowledged by the theatre industry when, for example, the director Simon Godwin explains that the “solution […] lies in offering parts that are traditionally played by men to women. By doing that, you, in fact, discover that Shakespeare was really interested in what’s humane, what’s universal.”[23]

10 Cross-casting roles offers new perspectives, including an approach towards gender fluidity on the contemporary stage. This does not signify equality between the sexes, as, mostly, roles are still cast according to the binary genders of characters, and with regard to Shakespeare, that means less than 20% to women. Additionally, most of these female roles are under the age of forty years, which can be further restrictive. Casting choices make the difference: Shakespeare’s plays are intended to be performed; stage adaptations always include the visual. Spectators see whether male actors are playing female roles as they used to on the early modern

stage – or the other way around. In *Ways of Seeing*, John Berger writes "the way we see things is affected by what we know or what we believe. We never look at just one thing; we are always looking at the relation between things and ourselves."[24] As the theatre is always about impersonations,[25] spectators see how characters interact. An audience looks at actors as they speak the verse; they look at the stage and how the characters move and create dynamics.

11 In the more recent past, some acting companies have professed gender-blind casting, choosing the best actor for a role notwithstanding their sex. However, there is criticism against this practice by those who argue that gender-blind casting is neither truly possible nor really desirable as it negates the visibility aspect of the audience and therefore could lead to more marginalisation. So even when a director professes to being 'blind' to gender, the audience will not be. Castings can underline the fluidity of gender and highlight the strength of character – and acting talent. Anti-conservative, non-male casting choices are new interpretations themselves, and Maxine Peake's Hamlet at Manchester Corn Exchange in 2015 discovered relevance in a different way of telling the story. At this stage, it therefore matters to allow a woman in a male role. Prolific acting companies now swap gender: An increasing amount of minor, male roles are often played by women. Yet, there are a few lighthouses that aim for equality. In the recent *Troilus and Cressida* performed by the RSC, there was a 50-50 gender split. Director Erica Whyman explains: "It is about two things needing to come together. I do care very much about representation of women on stage. I don't want our audiences to feel like all our greatest plays are about men, because that genuinely is alienating."[26] *Doctor Who*'s thirteenth Doctor Jodie Whittaker told *Radio Times* of her hopes that, in the future, a female actor "in a traditionally male role won't be so exciting – […] [or] to have this sort of parity. […] Stories shouldn't always be told from the same perspective".[27] Hamlet has often been

played by women, but the matter centres on other major roles. The audience does notice a disproportion and director Simon Godwin idealises that re-gendering at some point in time might not have “additional significance”[28] but this is not the case yet.

12 In fact, important, major roles have been given to women since the end of the twentieth century. Seana McKenna played Julius Caesar at the Canadian Stratford Festival. Seeing women in positions of power on stage, in roles traditionally given to men, sends an important message, she said.[29] The late Martha Henry, Prospero, accounted that playing a male lead role would “never have entered her head” when she was young.[30] Now, there are Helen Mirren as Prospero; Harriet Walter as Brutus; Marianne Hoppe and Glenda Jackson as King Lear; Tamsin Greig as Malvolio. The biggest roles in Shakespeare’s canon – Hamlet, Lear, Prospero, Richard III – are all male but over the years leading female actors have been cast in these parts and have thus rebelled against convention. Fiona Shaw describes playing Richard II as a chance to measure herself against some of the greatest poetry in drama, not against men, but with words: “The pleasure of being allowed to speak these wonderfully empowering speeches is something many female actors never get near,”[31] she says.

13 New acting opportunities have opened, and other ways of interrogating gender has been experimented on: Bridge Theatre changed the texts of Oberon and Titania so *she* dominates the magic and *he* falls in love with a donkey. This does not always meet positive reactions only: “When Janet McTeer, playing a macho Petruchio in an all-female *Taming of the Shrew* at Shakespeare’s Globe in 2003, adopted bullish mannerisms (sitting legs apart, peeing against a column), the very incongruity of it was both funny and shocking.”[32] This was by some critics charged as incongruous. Was there, in the audience, a fear of homosexual undercurrents?[33] Does female

casting go against heteronormativity? Is a woman in a man's role a sexual subversion? When casting women in male roles, the question arises whether these women are portraying female or male, diverse, androgynous, or otherwise gender non-conforming people on stage. Clothes might manifest a leaning towards one of the binary sexes, "but there are other symbols as well, including mannerisms, gait, occupational choice, and sexual orientation."[34] These further indications can direct the interpretation of an otherwise gender-fluid character. Gender-conscious casting offers perspectives.

Philip, the Bastard in *King John*

14 An *illegitimate* child in the early modern era was considered an *Other* due to their hybridity,[35] expressed through a non-normative, transgressive sexuality; the disruptive energy they embody was believed to originate in the sexual drive that led to their conception. The bastard personifies the subversive circumstances of his conception in "the monstrous unkindness of his nature".[36] These attributes qualify them as villains: they are figures of chaos and anarchy. Illegitimate children went against the accepted convention, "inimical to traditional Elizabethan order",[37] and their existence was surrounded by superstitious fears and denial. They represented the danger of sexual indiscretion and thus social transgression, a challenge to order.[38] They were described as undermining the system, separate from cultural norms and civilisation, natural children, lusty and rebellious. Bastards play a crucial role in the politics of Shakespeare's dramas. Their contributions to diplomacy are often decisive for the development of the plot and Shakespeare certainly addresses their status with questions of upward social mobility. As a personification of irregularity in society, the bastard can be a possible vehicle to express social criticism; bastards often figure as commentators on law or religion. This places them in a

position where they can evaluate the society they are excluded from.[39] It is this function of vehicle for an author’s opinion that might also affect new interpretations of Philipp in *King John*.

15 Bastard children like Philip in *King John* are anarchical, “dangerous social outsider[s]”,[40] and they constitute a marginal group; yet they nevertheless influence staged politics. The “deviant”, “mysterious”[41] bastard offers wide opportunities: the bastard can be an attractive, charismatic character, active, and intelligent. If illegitimacy today is not the main factor of social belonging and wedlock not a path to legitimacy anymore, then how can bastardy be something of the *Other* on stage which an audience will recognise when watching a play performed? Casting choices can be affected by social assumptions and gender presuppositions and the illegitimate character on the playhouse stage addresses the performative aspect of bastardy. If legitimate, conservative casting is equal to *male*, then the transformation of the illegitimate bastard into something represented through the physical body of the female actor on stage becomes alluring.

16 *King John* is a play about politics, diplomatic arrangement, and questions of legitimate rule. Late King Richard the Lionheart’s bastard son Philip of Faulconbridge shows strategic tactical competence in diplomatic negotiations; he will be promoted and dubbed a knight called Richard Plantagenet like his royal, lusty father. Philip is not a bastard in the legal sense. He was legitimately born in marriage but is not fathered by his mother’s husband. As the declared bastard son of the Lionheart, he rises in status. Philip is introduced as a bastard very early in *King John*. There seems to be no more of a character explanation; does the status of illegitimacy define him? He is a prominent figure: from the first appearance, he also seems a little different from other bastards in Shakespearean drama. Denying the title of legitimate Faulconbridge heir and

accepting the illegitimate status, he proves to be an upstart crow. He seizes offered opportunities, but his ascent and behaviour in the royal family is also admirable. Acknowledged as a royal bastard, he aspires to rise higher in society and gain reputation: "[r]oyal bastards claim illegitimacy in the pursuit of glory rather than wealth".[42] His recognition of royal kinship at first seems honourable and not materialist.

17 Philip is branded as a bastard but accepted in this role: he wants to succeed in a society that does not accept him as the son of Faulconbridge as his younger brother tries to acquire their family's inheritance according to their own normative dynastic system claiming Philip's status as unworthy. Philip proves to be a rather quick-witted, "blunt fellow" (I.1.71), a "madcap" (I.1.84), but also a loyal, dynastically aware "common, robust, patriotic Englishman".[43] He does not shy away from martial struggle: in fact, he seems to thrive in it as the Angiers conflict proves. Philip has some traits that denote him as a heroic bastard, according to Findlay: he seems "virtuous rather than vicious",[44] and challenges the common concept that bastards are considered inferior and evil by nature. The underdog here appears as a positive force who unveils the evils of a corrupted society. As the political factions in *King John* are clearly presented as self-indulgent and egotistical, Philip mocks nobility.[45] The acquired detachment through the outsider role enables him to criticise the strategies and players in the political system. He figures as a commentator on law, religion, and society. In the famous "commodity speech" (II.1.561-598), the bastard comments ironically on diplomacy, materialism, and the false truces of politicians: "Mad world, mad kings, mad composition!" (II.1.561). This underlines the bastard's rather ambiguous role: he despises royalty for breaking bonds and abusing loyalties. But he decides to go with this materialist flow, following the "smooth-fac'd gentleman, tickling commodity" (II.1.573) and declaring "Gain, be my Lord, for I will

worship thee!” (II.1.598). The bastard’s decision-making seems purposeful, and stronger than King John’s, to whom he proves a loyal servant. Philip’s speech amends in register and seems more eloquent. He fares from being entertaining to being determined as he controls interior politics and influences foreign affairs. This inconsistent behaviour and the changes, however, show the ambivalent, flawed and subversive tendencies that Philip does incorporate: there are “two distinct characters under the name of the Bastard”,[46] one a typical vice figure, and the other Findlay’s type of the likeable bastard. As he becomes a trusted adviser, the audience can easily identify with Philip and cheer for his fight for acceptance and social mobility when being offered the status of illegitimate son to the former king; he plays a part, he becomes a trusted adviser. But he is an upstart crow, who, when understanding the machinations of court, decides to cherish its machinations to achieve material compensation. Philip is a fascinating role that demands further attention and is very attractive to young actors – of all genders. Because the idea of social discrimination due to illegitimacy is evident with regards to Philip, a comparison of sexist discrimination can highlight mutual aspects of injustice. Casting the illegitimate with the non-normative female actor allows for compelling interpretations.

The Productions

18 Directing *King John* for the RSC in 2012, Maria Åberg made a lot of changes to her version of the history play. The bastard Philip was merged with the character of Hubert who is commanded to kill Arthur but then tries to save the boy. The role was played by Pippa Nixon, which, Åberg recognises, “changed the dynamic between the characters quite profoundly”[47] and there was a comforting reassurance between young and insecure John and bragging

bastard. Her relationship with King John – their age seemed similar – was full of today's quick intensity, one that spurs on and then creates doubt as well as trust. At the same time, this re-imagination not only allowed for close bond but also a more obvious sexual tension between John and the Bastard, which did reach aspects of uncomfortable violence and yet heart-breaking clasps between these two.

19 Åberg states that "The Bastard is a classic independent warrior: irreverent, funny, aggressive. Our world contains women who are rude and strong and loyal, who are capable leaders and powerful in their own right. It's interesting to explore how men relate to them."[48] Pippa Nixon played the bastard exactly in this irreverent way – this character is transgressive, annoyed, funny, and relentless, or as Van de Water once interpreted, "a veritable whirlwind of activity and eloquence"[49] – but has a warm heart, which the merging with the character of Hubert added to the role. Merging the bastard with Hubert certainly makes the part bigger and more important. At the same time, showing mercy towards Arthur (as Hubert does) could contradict the explosiveness of the casting as it confirms warm, motherly, traditionally feminine feelings towards a child. Jami Rogers criticises that this was the "least successful conceptual use" of restructuring the plot despite "Pippa Nixon's vibrant, accomplished and engaging performance".[50] However, read the other way, this scene adds to the rounder character of Philip who plays the part at court and rises ruthlessly while at the same time still displaying real humanity, a conflict often encountered in the supposed dichotomy of the contemporary work-life-balance. Read this way, Pippa Nixon's portrayal demanded empathy from the audience.

20 Indeed, this version allowed for different facets of gender to be explored. This strengthens the core female characters of the play, Eleanor and Constance, and allows for the women to dominate this adaptation as it, as Pippa Nixon highlights, "backs up Elinor and

Constance, following their thought into action, and making the women the heart and strength of the play”.[51] Åberg also cast Pandulph as a woman, which makes feminine power even more influential in her version. In the play, female influences decline with the death and disappearance of Eleanor and Constance, and the brief scenes of Blanche and Lady Faulconbridge. Here, Eleanor and Constance, and then Pandulph and the bastard, dominate this production, while Alex Waldman portrays John as a young and naïve king. This production highlighted that women matter.

21 Lisa Pohlers, starring as the bastard in 2018 in the Bonn University Shakespeare Company’s production certainly was the most villainous bastard in *King John* as far as these three productions are concerned. They, renamed Jamie in the BUSC adaptation, readily seized each opportunity of power. Alongside, their younger and legitimate brother was also played by a woman which made this conflict appear on par. Though – only – the illegitimate child of Richard Lionheart, she would pose a threat to John’s throne: As if taking Edmund from *King Lear* as an example, this bastard vibrated with subversive energy and could aim to succeed to his father’s title: towards the end of the production, the audience was inclined to ponder what would happen, should the legitimate heir(s) be eliminated. Jamie was less gender-defined with long blond hair but dressed in a suit.

22 In the BUSC’s version, Jamie was grateful to their grandmother Eleanor as well as their king, John. But it was them who killed Prince Arthur – not chance. Marc Erlhöfer’s adaptation thus went further than the character in the text: Jamie showed their desire for upward mobility in a ruthless way. Accordingly, Erlhöfer changed the commodity speech and incorporated among other self-authored lines the following words from *Game of Thrones*’ Littlefinger Peter Baelish: “Chaos is a ladder”. This charismatic bastard uses strife to rise: “Sugar and spice and all things nice? Not in Jamie’s […]

childhood. […] Having felt like an outsider for most of her life, Jamie soon realizes that her outsider-status may benefit her for once: Manipulative, clever and ruthless […] Being underestimated can be an advantage",[52] the BUSC announced their casting for the Bastard.

23 At the end of the play, Jamie was standing next to the crowned Prince Henry and there was an eerie feeling of where this character might go next. Lisa Pohlers' version of the bastard certainly displayed the calculated, Machiavellian features of a power politician that is breath-taking to see in a woman in Shakespeare. This production reinvented the Bastard.

24 Simultaneously, in the winter of 2018, the Folger Theatre produced their *King John* with Kate Eastwood Norris as the bastard. Kristin Francoon calls the bastard the protagonist in this production: "She is deftly able to switch from the funny moments to high drama with ease; her monologue where she decries humans' obsession with Commodity was highly affecting."[53] Norris shows in how far the bastard really surfs the wave of material culture because that is how society in this production rolls – dressed in an old trench coat, with a proper suit underneath, this Bastard seemed somewhat detached from society which highlighted a liminal aspect of this sometimes marginalised character. Thal claims that Norris is "self-aware" and "self-conscious,"[54] charming the audience in her pretence of belonging to royalty. Galbraith calls her "super-smart, querulous," and "self-assured": "Eastwood Norris is a hurricane, a force of nature that sweeps in and causes major damage".[55]

25 The bastard in this version looks negligent but seems to know exactly where she is going. In an interview, Eastwood Norris stresses the bastard's "sense of humor, and lust for life". This character is seizing opportunities that life offers to her. She has a playfulness to act according to the framework of a situation. While Eastwood Norris calls her "a complete bad-a*s," she is also keen to recognise the

potential of playing this role as a female actor: “Women don’t get to experience these things in Shakespeare and it feels incredible.”[56] It is this recognition that creates chances and allows female actors to shine and portray different facets of their art. *King John’s* bastard character Philip remakes himself and therefore allows and even prompts identity remaking – he thus lends himself to a fluid state of human exploration and can appropriately be assumed through her or their empowering agency.

Conclusion

26 King John’s bastard is special in that he is also given two names – the legitimate Philip of Faulconbridge and the illegitimate Richard Plantagenet. This doppelganger identity could also be addressed via the dichotomy between public and private: a stereotypical bossy woman and a warm family type. How much is a female in this role a provocation? How much is this a reflection upon society that modernises the aspect of dynastic illegitimacy into male privilege’s discrimination? How much is this appropriate stereotyping to dismantle injustice? The Bastard, too, like commodity, seems a “smooth-fac’d gentleman” (II.1.573) – cast with a woman, he will seem well shaved and smooth – if not feminine.

27 To mention one further instance of gender-conscious casting in *King John*: in 2019, in the run cut short by Covid, Rosie Sheehy plays the title role. She describes her creation of the part as not “effeminate”.[57] Sutherland but rather ruthless yet full of “a tremendous amount of grief”, accidentally causing havoc when disappointed. In that same 2019 production, the bastard was played by a person of colour – both these castings provide material for different papers. Clearly, there is a subversive potential through casting choices with regard to the bastard. Agency is lent by voicing

injustice: empowering representative marginalised groups can provide a good deal of material for discussion. As far as women are concerned, this still holds true. We need to discover and evaluate the potential of casting choices to address imbalances in society and to enable gender literacy. In the future, this might be further explored via actors and characters on different points of the gender spectrum, e.g. with the casting of transgender actors.

28 If a bastard continues the structural function as an outsider who observes and comments on society, then casting Philip with a female actor raises the awareness of cultural and political implications of female power not only on stage, but in the acting business in general, and in the world, including queer readings that can highlight innovative female empowerment. Gender changes demand the attention of an audience to reflect on theatrical conventions and changes in societal codes, and they illuminate other interpersonal and political aspects in the machinations of *King John*. Shakespeare's play allows for these different readings. Experimental casting of this kind can challenge audience expectations. If used cleverly, the "radical dependency of the masculine subject on the female Other suddenly exposes his autonomy as illusory."[58] If directors and producers dare to challenge and explore, perspectives will shift. Indeed, "[s]tories shouldn't always be told from the same perspective," as Whittaker mentioned. This creation of new narratives can be radical.

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Imke Lichterfeld

Dr. Imke Lichterfeld teaches English Literature at the University of Bonn in Germany, where she currently holds a position as Studies Coordinator at the Department of English, American and Celtic Studies. She has contributed to publications on the English Renaissance (e.g. in *Arrêt sur Scene* or *Comparative Drama*), Modernism (*Literatur in Wissenschaft und Unterricht*), and contemporary literature (*Inklings Jahrbuch*), and she has published a monograph called *When the Bad Bleeds – Mantic Elements in English Renaissance Revenge Tragedy*. Her research predominantly focuses on early modern drama, Shakespeare, and his contemporaries.

Paris is Burning for Shakespeare

Margaret Owens
Nipissing University

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1 Cross-dressed performance in the early modern professional theatre has remained a lively topic of research for literary scholars and theatre historians since the 1980s. Over the decades, theatre historians have made some progress in locating archival evidence relating to issues such as the age of the boy actors who played female roles and the professional structures in which they were trained.[1] Nonetheless, many of the material and practical details of cross-dressed performance remain unclear, such as the types of prosthetics, cosmetics, and body movements used by boys and young men when playing female characters. Precisely how did boys convincingly impersonate complex characters like Cleopatra, the Duchess of Malfi, or Hermione? Beyond the aspects of performance that fall within the purview of theatre history, what has attracted even more attention from scholars are the theoretical, cultural, and interpretive issues raised by cross-dressing, those questions that deal with reconstructing Elizabethan assumptions and fantasies about gender difference and sexuality. When literary scholars turned their attention to the topic of cross-dressing in the 1980s, their inquiries were inspired by the emergence and consolidation of feminist and queer theory. Several decades later, this research is now fueled by the advent of Trans studies, a field which explores "gender diversity in the broadest sense."[2] As Ardel Haefele-Thomas explains, "Trans is an overarching term that includes transgender, transsexual, nonbinary, and multiple gender identities," such as "genderqueer, nonbinary, gender-variant, gender-expansive, or agender."[3]

2 In the world beyond academia, the popularization of drag performance has made the topic of early modern cross-dressing more relevant than ever, especially to the current generation of undergraduate students. As indicated by sociological surveys, not to mention the graphic evidence of social media, mass media, and celebrity culture, the demographic now known as Generation Z is marked by an unprecedented receptiveness to the fluidity of gender

and sexuality.[4] However, in the past few years, as drag has been embraced by the mainstream entertainment industry, implying its depoliticization, we have also witnessed a reactionary politicization of drag by the religious and political right. Issues connected with drag performance and, far more seriously, the rights of transgender and nonbinary individuals, lie at the centre of a renewed outbreak of the culture wars. In this social climate, the topic of early modern cross-dressing is one which resonates with students and warrants a place in undergraduate English literary studies.

3 In what follows, I outline the development of an undergraduate course on cross-dressing in early modern drama in which students are encouraged to relate current discourse and debates about gender identity and expression to the performance of gender in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century drama. More specifically, I will be focussing on the inclusion of the documentary *Paris is Burning* (1990) in the course as a work that opens up avenues for exploring cross-dressing on the early modern stage.

4 I first developed an undergraduate course on the topic of cross-dressing in 2013. Entitled "Early Modern Cross-dressing," the course was first offered as a seminar for students in their final year of study in English Studies. In 2021, I redesigned this course, opening it up to a broader range of students. Now cross-listed with the Gender Studies department, the course is entitled **"**Performing Gender: Cross-dressing on Stage and on Screen." It is this version of the course that is the focus of this paper.

5 The course explores the history of cross-dressing as a theatrical practice, plot device, literary topic, cultural fantasy, and historical phenomenon, with a focus not only on Shakespearean drama, but also on film, including adaptations of the plays and films set in the playhouses of early modern London. Alongside *Twelfth Night*, *The Merchant of Venice*, and *The Roaring Girl*, we study cinematic

reconstructions of early modern theatrical cross-dressing, such as, *Shakespeare in Love* (dir. John Madden, 1998) and *Stage Beauty* (dir. Richard Eyre, 2004). We also consider films that bring the cross-dressing theme into modern contexts, such as *She's the Man* (dir. Andy Fickman, 2006). The central goal of this course is to explore the connections between the past and the present, as we investigate the ways in which theatre and film participate in the cultural construction of gender difference.

6 At the centre of our inquiry lie some key questions: why is the performance practice of cross-dressing, which is supposedly invisible to audiences, so often highlighted in early modern plays through the inclusion of cross-dressing as a plot device? Does cross-dressing in Elizabethan drama tend to stabilize or destabilize dominant assumptions about gender difference? How does erotic desire figure in narratives of cross-dressing? How do literary treatments of cross-dressing relate to transgender issues in today's culture? What is the relationship between modern drag performance and early modern cross-dressed performance?

7 Oddly enough, the connections between XXIst-century drag performance and Elizabethan theatrical cross-dressing have become more visible with the emergence of an anti-drag political discourse by the religious and conservative right in the US and the UK. In some jurisdictions in the US, new laws are being crafted to supress drag performance. In a recent class I covered Elizabethan antitheatricalist polemic by highlighting its resemblance to current anti-drag discourse. Alongside William Prynne's labelling of stage plays as "the very pompes of the divell"[5] in 1632, we looked at an item published in 2019 in a fundamentalist Christian journal, in which the author inveighs against drag queen story hours in public libraries: "The body language and dress of the drag queens teach children things. Namely, that the abnormal is normal, the immoral is moral, and vice

is virtue."[6] This writer accuses drag queens of promoting "The bad philosophy of rebellion against God. That's what drag queens are foisting on our children in our public libraries. And it's monstrous." To denounce cross-dressing as monstrosity is a familiar move, dating back not only to antitheatrical polemic but to *Twelfth Night*, where Viola labels herself a "poor monster" (II.2.33) and her disguise as Cesario a "wickedness" (II.2.33).

8 Viola's moment of self-recrimination for engaging in the "wickedness" of gender impersonation is brief in a play that otherwise happily entertains cross-dressing as an excusable ploy, one which ultimately yields two heteronormative marriages. Likewise, by all accounts, the custom of cross-dressed young men performing the roles of Viola and Olivia was broadly accepted by Shakespeare's London audiences. The antitheatricalists, at least up until the outbreak of the Civil Wars, seem to have represented a minority view.[7] On the issue of drag performance, Western cultures today seem to be poised on a similar moment: widespread acceptance of drag as mainstream entertainment, shadowed by a clamorous minority voice of opposition.

9 The cultural shift toward acceptance of drag, its transition from fringe to mainstream entertainment, may be credited in large part to the success of *RuPaul's Drag Race* franchise, which premiered on cable television in 2009. Today's undergraduate students have grown up with RuPaul's franchise. It is reality television's version of drag that frames the current generation's awareness of the tradition. In an episode of *RuPaul's Drag Race* which features a "ShakesQueer" challenge (Season 7, Episode 3), RuPaul asserts that the term "drag" was originated by Shakespeare as an acronym for "dressed as a girl." The etymology is patently false.[8] However, it reflects a desire to legitimize modern drag performance by situating it in relation to Shakespearean drama. While there are many valuable parallels to be traced between modern drag and Elizabethan cross-dressed

performance, there are, of course, significant differences. Rather than drawing upon *RuPaul's Drag Race* franchise for models of Elizabethan cross-dressing, I turn to *Paris is Burning*, the 1990 documentary directed by Jennie Livingston. This film showcases the Latino and African American Drag Ball scene in late 1980s Harlem, New York City, while also chronicling the lives of its gay and trans participants. At first glance, this film may seem embedded in a social and cultural context that is remote from Shakespeare's London. What can a drag tradition that belongs to a specifically American subculture tell us about cross-dressing on the Elizabethan stage?

10 I screen *Paris is Burning* in its entirety early in my course on cross-dressing, for a variety of reasons. Foremost among these is the sheer expertise of the drag ball community in performing specific gendered and class identities. The Harlem Drag Balls of the 1980s are highly competitive events, with participants vying for trophies in narrowly defined categories, some of which resemble theatrical characters, such as Schoolgirl/Schoolboy, Executive, High Fashion Parisian, and Butch Queen First Time in Drags at a Ball, the latter being a self-reflexive category. Some of the categories do not involve cross-dressing in terms of gender but entail crossing in the sense of performing a role that does not align with the performer's ordinary life. Typically, this means projecting wealth, status, and privilege, the very qualities that lie out of reach for disadvantaged queer, racialized youth in 1980s America.

11 In the context of these Balls, drag is defined broadly. Nonetheless, the traditional definition of drag, namely, performing a gender identity that one was not assigned a birth, appears to dominate the proceedings. Above all, the participants' skill and sincere commitment to their performance stand out, offering a possible glimpse into the expertise of the young men and boys who enacted female roles in Shakespeare's theatre. *Paris is Burning* provides an

opportunity for students to witness impressive drag performances that are designed to pass for *realness*, to adopt a term that is central to the documentary and to which I will return shortly. As such, this documentary may come closer to replicating the effects of Elizabethan cross-dressed performance than do some of the so-called "original practices" productions which feature all-male casts.[9]

12 While drag is traditionally understood to involve costumes, makeup, and movement that serve to exaggerate stereotypes of femininity, this is not the dominant aesthetic among the performers in *Paris is Burning*. Emulating fashion models and recreating images from luxury advertising figure prominently in the drag competitions recorded by Livingston. A drag performance in this setting might involve dressing in yachting or riding outfits and exuding the relaxed air of entitlement of a model in a Ralph Lauren advertisement. What we witness in this film is an expansion of drag into a wide array of performance styles and identities. Drag is truly diverse in this community, on many registers. As two of the reigning veteran drag queens, Pepper LaBeija and Dorian Corey, explain, the introduction of a virtual smorgasbord of highly specific drag categories in the 1980s had opened up the ballroom floor to participants of all shapes, sizes, interests, and talents. Dorian Corey recalls entering drag as a professional dancer in cabarets, decades earlier, during the Showgirl phase of drag. This phase, she explains, was followed by the trend of celebrity impersonations, especially of gay icons, such as Elizabeth Taylor. By the late 1980s, the dominant trend was to wear luxury fashion brands, and emulate the style of wealthy white America.

13 Although drag is often defined as inherently parodic, most of the participants in *Paris is Burning* do not see the Ball culture as radical or as a critique of mainstream culture. They claim that they are not satirizing the privileged elite. Dorian Corey emphasizes: "It's not a take off or a satire. No. It's actually being able to be this" (00:20:08-00:21:00). The performances are aspirational rather than satirical.

Nonetheless, in their interviews with Livingston, some of the performers offer incisive critiques of the injustice and hypocrisy that they recognize as rife within American culture. They speak movingly of the barriers they face as racialized, queer, marginalized individuals. This is the heart of the documentary, its purpose. When I screen the film in class, an important discussion ensues about the film's socio-political content. As well, we cover some of the controversies and critiques that Jennie Livingston's work has incurred over the years, such as claims that the documentary is voyeuristic and exploitative, and that its commercial and artistic success failed to translate into significant material benefits for its participants.[10]

14 Returning to the larger project of the course, what might this representation of drag ball culture tell us about Elizabethan cross-dressed performance? What stands out from *Paris is Burning* is the sincerity of the drag participants, the seriousness and commitment that they devote to crafting their performances. I suggest that the boys and young men who worked in the Elizabethan theatre likely applied a similar commitment to their own impersonations of female characters. In other words, the dedication and expertise of the film's drag performers may resemble that of Elizabethan actors. Drag, as depicted in *Paris is Burning*, may be taken as a corrective to the longstanding tradition in mainstream film and television of treating cross-dressing as inherently comic and ridiculous.

15 Even *Shakespeare in Love*, a film which focuses on Elizabethan cross-dressed performance, overwhelmingly frames cross-dressing as ridiculous, a perversion of both theatre and sexuality. In the cross-dressing course, I encourage students to analyze *Shakespeare in Love* in light of *Paris is Burning*. The Hollywood film has a deeply conservative view of acting and theatre, one that is wedded to literalism. The message may be summed up in Viola's statement

early in the plot: "Stage love will never be true love while the law of the land has our heroines played by pip-squeak boys in petticoats." Viola's position is later linked to the Queen's wager: "Can a play show us the very truth and nature of love?" The wager is decided when the Queen witnesses the performance of *Romeo and Juliet*, with the couple who inspired the play performing as the star-crossed lovers. The success of the play endorses a literalist view of literary creation: the assumption that real-life experience is required as the foundation and inspiration for compelling literary creation. Shakespeare has to fall in love in order to write both *Romeo and Juliet* and *Twelfth Night*. The other literalist message is the confirmation of Viola's claim: the only true love is heterosexual love, and it can only be convincingly depicted with women playing the female roles.[11]

16 Overall, *Shakespeare in Love* positions the early modern theatre as in need of correction – it is too queer. Eventually, the law against women on the stage will be rescinded and the theatre establishment will enjoy the freedom to be more literalist and more heteronormative. Heteronormativity and biological sex will triumph, yielding more truthful performances: that seems to be the message of *Shakespeare in Love*.

17 Like *Shakespeare in Love*, *Paris is Burning* foregrounds the theme of realness. But on this issue, the two films diverge drastically. Where the Hollywood feature narrows the concept, the documentary opens it up, expanding the definition of what counts as real. Members of the drag ball community voice a range of perspectives on what it means to be *real*. For some, especially the young trans participants, achieving realness involves surgical intervention. Realness can mean passing for a cis woman. For others, it is a matter of acquiring or creating fashionable attire and projecting an air of confidence, the impression that one deserves to wear the outfit. Above all, the documentary suggests that realness is not restricted by the gender that one was assigned at birth.

18 *Paris is Burning* can be a helpful vehicle for thinking through the vexed issue of performance as it relates not only to theatre but also to gender identity and expression. When I introduce Judith Butler's theory of the performativity of gender to the class, I am careful to explain that Butler did not intend to equate gender with theatricality. Instead, Butler arrived at the concept of the "performative" through the word's linguistic sense, where it means an utterance that performs an action by virtue of its very utterance. For instance, "I swear to tell the truth" is performative; saying the words performs the action.

19 Butler uses the concept of gender as performance to contest the assumption that gender pre-exists its expression. She proposes that gender comes into existence only through being repeatedly performed: "gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed."[12] In *Bodies That Matter*, Butler distinguishes between performativity and theatricality: "Performativity is neither free play nor theatrical self-presentation; nor can it be simply equated with performance."[13]

20 Through the 1990s, Butler's perspective on drag underwent some shifts, qualifications, and adjustments. In a brief discussion of drag in *Gender Trouble*, Butler allowed that "in imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself — as well as its contingency."[14] Butler writes approvingly of the drag queen Divine, star of the John Waters canon of films: "Her/his performance destabilizes the very distinctions between the natural and the artificial, depth and surface, inner and outer through which discourse about genders almost always operates."[15] However, upon returning to the topic of drag several years later in *Bodies That Matter*, Butler seemed determined to qualify its radical potential:

> Although many readers understood *Gender Trouble* to be arguing for the proliferation of drag performances as a way of subverting

> dominant gender norms, I want to underscore that there is no necessary relation between drag and subversion, and that drag may well be used in the service of both the denaturalization and reidealization of hyperbolic heterosexual gender norms. At best, it seems, drag is a site of a certain ambivalence.[16]

21 Butler reassesses drag within an extended discussion of *Paris is Burning* and offers a largely unsympathetic analysis of the film. Butler's critique rests heavily on the tendency of some of the younger drag queens to harbour escapist fantasies of transcending the racist, heterosexist, and socioeconomic barriers they face, either by achieving stardom or by securing the role of a traditional housewife. Butler terms this a "tragic misreading of the social map of power."[17] This seems a heartless perspective, to fault queer and trans individuals for drawing sustenance from the same dreams and aspirations, however unrealistic, that motivate so many American youth.

22 In an interview published in 1996, Butler expressed regret for having invoked drag in *Gender Trouble*: "The problem with drag is that I offered it as an example of performativity, but it has been taken up as the paradigm for performativity. One ought to be wary of one's examples."[18] Butler asserts that performance should be distinguished from performativity in that "the former presumes a subject, but the latter contests the very notion of the subject."[19] However, this distinction breaks down in the case of Butler's critique of the young queens in *Paris is Burning*. On the one hand, these queens are held up by Butler as victims of gender performativity for their apparent interpellation of hegemonic ideas about gender roles; on the other hand, as the film amply demonstrates, the queens are consciously and deliberately performing gender, albeit not the genders that they were assigned at birth, both on the ballroom floor and on the streets of New York City.[20] Thus, the young queens

exemplify both unconscious performativity and conscious performance.

23 *Paris is Burning* reveals that the supposedly distinct meanings of performance, on the one hand, as the constitution of gender and, on the other hand, as theatrical enactment, are not as separable as Butler often assumes. These meanings blur into each other. While some members of the drag ball community separate their ballroom identities from their ordinary lives, for others, especially the trans participants, performance is something that they do not have the luxury of leaving behind on the ballroom floor. As Dorian Corey explains, "realness" for these queens means *passing*, that is, going undetected as queer or trans in the mainstream world: "When they're undetectable, when they can walk out of that ballroom into the sunlight and onto the subway and get home and still have all their clothes and no blood running off their bodies, those are the femme realness queens" (00:22:30-00:22:45). For these individuals, gender presentation is not unconscious, but a highly conscious, ongoing action as they struggle to survive in a hostile world.

24 In an important article, Jennifer Drouin encourages Shakespeare scholars to borrow vocabulary and frameworks from "contemporary queer and transgendered practices,"[21] including drag, in order to develop a more nuanced vocabulary for analyzing cross-dressing and gender performance in early modern drama. Drouin presents a new taxonomy, using the terms *cross-dressing, passing, slipping*, and *drag*. The term *theatrical cross-dressing*, according to Drouin, should be used exclusively to refer to boy actors performing female roles, whereas the many instances in plots in which characters disguise themselves with clothing of the opposite sex are better described with the terms *drag, passing*, and *slipping*. For instance, when Viola adopts the disguise of Cesario in *Twelfth Night*, she is attempting to

pass. In those moments when Viola's risks exposure, her performance enters the realm of slipping. Drouin explains:

> While drag highlights that all gender is an illusion, the aim of passing is for the illusion to signify as real in the public sphere. Through its investment in realness, passing is the quotidian street equivalent of theatrical cross-dressing. When the illusion of passing fails, however, the performance can easily slip into drag, becoming a parody of the performer just as much as of the performance.[22]

25 Drouin emphasizes that not all drag is parodic, a point that I suggest is powerfully exemplified in *Paris is Burning*. In Drouin's taxonomy, the term *slipping* is applied to Shakespearean characters engaging in a "second type of non-parodic quotidian drag. It remains drag nonetheless, because Shakespeare's non-parodic drag shares an important trait with parodic drag — self-referentiality, that is, drag's tendency to draw attention to its own artificiality, in contrast to passing's need to disguise it."[23] Moments of *slipping* and drag in the playhouse evoke humour, whereas the real-life equivalent, a trans, queer, or cross-dressed individual's failure to pass, within either a public or private setting, risks violent repercussions.[24]

26 As we explore how performing gender in a theatrical setting may relate to performing gender offstage, in ordinary life, we return to the question of whether cross-dressed performance had a radical or emancipatory potential in Elizabethan culture. To what extent did cross-dressed performance raise an awareness of gender in ordinary life as a version of performance? Did this practice serve to denaturalize gender? Or was cross-dressing so entrenched as a theatrical norm that it went virtually unremarked and unnoticed? The fact that Shakespeare and his colleagues repeatedly include cross-dressing as a plot point in their plays implies that they did not regard this practice as entirely routine. Instead, it appears that dramatists

were fascinated by cross-dressing and by the non-normative erotic possibilities that the practice might elicit.

27 Debates over whether drag is subversive, whether its tendency is radical or recuperative in relation to traditional gender and sexual norms, echo the long running debates within Shakespearean scholarship over the implications of cross-dressed performance practices and cross-dressed characters. The only consensus that has emerged is that specific context matters above all and that neither modern drag performance nor early modern cross-dressing should be assumed to be inherently subversive or recuperative. Katye Stoke has recently argued that it is time to set aside the debates over the question and acknowledge the diversity of drag practices.[25] Likewise, I suggest that we imagine a diversity both of responses on the part of spectators and of performance styles on the part of actors when it comes to cross-dressed performance on the Elizabethan stage.

28 One thing that is clear is that the very existence of an antitheatrical discourse targeting cross-dressed performance in early modern London implies a sense of its potential to challenge hegemonic ideas about gender and sexuality. Even when in the service of presenting a traditional marriage plot, there were bound to be moments in the playhouse when cross-dressed performance alerted audiences to the instability of gender presentation, its fluidity and unmooring from a supposedly fixed corporeal foundation. In an essay that focuses on scenes featuring undressing by cross-dressed male actors on the Elizabethan stage, Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass suggest that such scenes fostered "a radical oscillation between a sense of the absolute difference of the boy from his role and the total absorption of the boy into the role."[26] Jones and Stallybrass explain: "If the Renaissance stage demands that we 'see' particular body parts (the breast, the penis, the naked body), it also reveals that such

fixations are inevitably unstable. The actor is both boy and woman."[27] Jones and Stallybrass compare the spectator's oscillation between seeing and not seeing, knowing and not-knowing, to that of the Freudian fetish, a prop which simultaneously occludes and acknowledges an absence. Jones and Stallybrass suggest that the theatre cultivated an openness to viewing gender as prosthetic, but that this perspective would later be suppressed: "In its place, post-Renaissance culture would put a fantasized biology of the 'real'".[28]

29 The film *Stage Beauty* (2004) traces a transition of the kind that Jones and Stallybrass describe, the displacement of a theatrical practice that treats gender as a site of instability, a site of speculation and fantasy, to one that imposes "a fantasized biology of the 'real,'" an insistence on fixing and stabilizing gender. However, rather than critiquing and interrogating this transition, as we might expect, or at least hope for, in a XXIst-century treatment of the topic, *Stage Beauty* endorses a conservative view of sexual difference. The film dramatizes the shift to casting women in female roles at the beginning of the Restoration period. The protagonist is a fictionalized version of the real-life actor Edward (or Ned) Kynaston, who specialized in playing women at the beginning of the Restoration. Jeffrey Hatcher, who wrote the screenplay, adapting it from his stage play *Compleat Female Stage Beauty*, represents Kynaston as traumatized, utterly broken, once he is replaced by actresses. Historically, Kynaston's stage career survived this transition, and he went on to perform male roles for decades.[29] According to the customs of the pre-Restoration playing companies, the real-life Kynaston, who was about 17 years old at the start of the Restoration, would have expected to age out of female roles within the next few years. In 1660 to 1661, Kynaston played both female and male roles with notable success. Although Hatcher strives for some measure of fidelity to the historical record concerning the advent of the actresses to the commercial theatres, he nonetheless imagines a Kynaston

who has been profoundly damaged by his career as an impersonator of women. So engrained is Kynaston's feminine theatrical identity, that he cannot perform as a man on the Restoration stage.

30 I screen *Stage Beauty* later in my course, at a point where students ideally have developed analytical frameworks for assessing its representation of early modern cross-dressed performance practices. In many ways the film echoes the attitudes of *Shakespeare in Love*, in that cross-dressed performance is depicted as an antiquated, artificial, even perverted theatrical practice in need of correction. However, *Stage Beauty* goes further than *Shakespeare in Love* in its denigration of cross-dressed theatricality, by implying not simply that it has unfairly limited women's opportunities but that playing female roles has psychologically damaged actors like Kynaston. I ask students to consider what the film's approach might imply about the practice of drag today. Have the filmmakers thought through the implications for queer, non-binary, and trans viewers?

31 The issue of identity looms large in this film. Once Kynaston loses his female roles, especially Desdemona with whom he heavily identifies, he loses himself. In a backstage discussion with Maria, his dresser and later rival, Kynaston recalls his tutor telling him: "A part doesn't belong to an actor, an actor belongs to a part." He then adds, quoting his tutor again: "Never forget you a man in a woman's form." He pauses, then wonders: "Or was it the other way around?" (00:22:24-00:22:44). This moment of uncertainty about the relationship between actor and role foreshadows trouble ahead when it becomes evident that Kynaston has internalized his theatrical role as Desdemona to such an extent that he is lost without it. The film implies that Kynaston's sense of identity is on shaky ground precisely because he has built a career on something unnatural, performing female roles, which is framed as a personal and theatrical perversion. He needs to undergo a stripping away of that false identity in order

to rebuild a stronger, more natural identity, a process which is solidified through his rehearsal and performance as Othello at the end of the film. It is by directing Maria, his replacement in the role of Desdemona, and by performing the role of Othello himself, that he recovers a sense of identity. This new self is supposedly more fully masculine than the cross-dressed self.[30]

32 Maria diagnoses Kynaston's feminine identity, indeed his entire professional speciality, as wrong. She critiques his performance as Desdemona as a superficial travesty of femininity: "Your old tutor did you a great disservice, Mr Kynaston. He taught you how to speak and swoon and toss your head, but he never taught you to suffer like a woman or love like a woman. He trapped a man in woman's form and left you there to die" (1:25:00-1:25:29). We gather from this exchange and from Kynaston's recollections of his boyhood training "crammed in a cellar" (00:41:07) alongside fourteen "pretty boys like me" plucked from the "gutter" (00:21:55-00:22:04), that it is his tutor who is to blame for the actor's loss of his masculine self. Kynaston recalls: "Do you know when I was in training for this profession, I was not permitted to wear a woman's dress for three long years? I was not permitted to wear a wig for four. Not until I had proved that I had eliminated every masculine gesture, every masculine intonation, from my very being" (00:41:08-00:41:20). It is this training, and by extension a perverted theatrical practice, that has damaged Kynaston. In Maria's diagnosis, Kynaston's training has "trapped" him in a false exterior.

33 Hatcher's departure from the historical record when it comes to Kynaston's boyhood is worth examining. The historical Kynaston was apprenticed to John Rhodes, a theatre manager, in the years leading up to the Restoration. It had been the practice, among the pre-Restoration commercial playing companies, for boy actors to be bound as apprentices to adult actors and theatre professionals who held status as freemen of the London livery companies. As with any

apprenticeship, the master was responsible for feeding, housing, and training his apprentices. Kynaston was among the last of the boy apprentices in the theatrical system.[31] However, Hatcher invents a scenario for Kynaston's boyhood that carries disturbing suggestions of secrecy, seclusion, and psychological and sexual abuse. The implication is that Kynaston's sexuality and gender identity were grievously deformed during his formative years by his initiation into performing feminine roles. Hatcher's vision of Kynaston's training in cross-dressed performance, as inherently demoralizing, exploitative, and damaging, represents a marked contrast to the nurturing of youth by a House Mother in the Drag Ball community as depicted in *Paris is Burning*.

34 Paradoxically, while Maria seems to be confident in diagnosing the flaws in Kynaston's performance as Desdemona, she is unable to translate her critique into her own successful rendition of that role. When Maria attempts to play Desdemona, she is herself trapped in a false identity: she mimics Kynaston's performance, even though she feels it is inauthentic. Maria's dilemma seems to contradict her insistence, a position which the film echoes, that only a biological woman can understand what it means to be a woman and thus authentically play a woman on the stage. If that were true, then why does Maria have so much trouble tapping into her own sense of femininity to perform the role of Desdemona?

35 In yet another of the film's baffling ironies and inconsistencies, Maria needs a male tutor to help her access her innate femininity. As Kynaston assumes the role of tutor to Maria, he abandons what he was taught and works from an entirely new concept of acting, one which closely resembles the modern technique of method acting. Kynaston coaches Maria to experience Desdemona at a deeply personal level. He strips away her elaborate costume, makeup, and hairstyle, a process emblematic of the stripping away of artifice. The

implication is that her superficial, false exterior must be removed to allow a direct and natural access to the feminine role. Likewise, Kynaston has been stripped of his feminine artifice and is learning to access an authentic masculine self. The narrative thus deploys the traditional Western metaphysics of depth versus surface, of nature versus artifice, as it reinforces the traditional gender binary.

36 Like *Shakespeare in Love*, *Stage Beauty* celebrates artistic principles and aesthetic codes that modern audiences recognize as naturalism or realism. These films imply that any performance practice that deviates from today's mainstream cinema is wrong, unnatural, and even perverted. Modern film demands that women be cast in women's roles; the notion that men once played female roles on the stage is depicted as laughable at best and perverted at worst. These aesthetic codes correspond to dominant notions about gender identity, ideas rooted in a deep investment in the gender binary and in assumptions about what is natural, healthy, and socially acceptable in gender expression and sexuality. *Stage Beauty* elides bad acting with bad gender performance while endorsing a retrograde (for 2004) gender essentialism.

37 In describing *Stage Beauty*'s implicit treatment of cross-dressed performance as "perversion," I draw upon Natasha Distiller's adaptation of the Freudian concept of the *pervert*, a category which she distinguishes from the *queer*. She explains:

> Unlike perverts, who invert, or deviate from, the accepted order, queers challenge the terms by which the order is structured. The psychoanalytic notion of the pervert, especially in the form of the invert (the homosexual), relies on the rules of gender… Perversion does not threaten the order of gender.[32]

38 Applying Distiller's terminology, we may identify Kynaston as a figure of perversion who is compelled, by the logic of the plot, to become

straight. Within the world of the film and in terms of the film's thematic framing, Kynaston may be perverted, but he is not allowed to be queer. The only route out of perversion is to conform, to go straight, theatrically, and personally. A queer or non-binary identity is beyond the film's comprehension.

39 In my course on cross-dressing, *Paris is Burning* serves as a powerful counter example to the Hollywood fantasies of early modern cross-dressing. Where *Stage Beauty*'s Kynaston is traumatized and damaged by cross-dressed performance, the drag queens in Livingston's documentary are empowered and validated. What we discover in *Paris is Burning* is a concept of realness that is far more diverse and expansive than anything *Stage Beauty* and *Shakespeare in Love* can imagine. In its practice of cross-dressed performance, the Elizabethan theatre may have likewise expanded its definition of realness. While the practice of cross-dressed performance in Shakespeare's time had its roots in misogynistic attitudes, some of its effects may have been positive, opening up a space where gender was imagined as malleable and unfixed and where non-normative sexualities were, at least briefly, made visible.

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Notes

[1] In “How Old Were Shakespeare’s Boy Actors?”, David Kathman concludes, after an extensive sifting through archival evidence, that the boy actors playing female roles ranged in age from a minimum of 12 years to a maximum of 21-22, with the average age being 16-17. He notes that this was the same age as London apprentices. On the training of boy actors within the apprenticeship system of the London livery companies, see David Kathman, “Grocers, Goldsmiths, and Drapers: Freemen and Apprentices in the Elizabethan Theater”, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, vol. 55, n°4, 2004, p. 1-49.

[2] Ardel Haefele-Thomas, *Introduction to Transgender Studies*, New York, Harington Park Press, 2019, p. 20.

[3] *Ibid*., p. 24. Simone Chess’s *Male-to-Female Cross-dressing in Early Modern English Literature* (2016) exemplifies the application of Trans studies to the topic of cross-dressed performance. Chess writes: “The ways in which we talk about gender have become more complex and interesting since scholars made the turn to trans* studies; now is the time, then, to come back to early modern crossdressers using language and ideas from trans* studies to complicate and clarify their genders individually and in relation to other characters and readers/audiences”, Simone Chess, *Male-to-Female Cross-dressing in Early Modern English Literature*, London, Routledge, 2016, p. 14.

[4] For a recent survey indicating a shift in attitudes in the US, see URL. Similar results for the UK are reported by Stonewall; see URL.

[5] William Prynne, *Histrio-mastix: The Players Scourge, or Actors Tragedie*, 1633, titlepage.

[6] Robert Reilly, “What a Drag: Corrupting the Innocent at Children’s Libraries”, *The Stream*, 12 June 2019. URL.

[7] Robert Lublin arrives at this conclusion in his investigation of early modern theatrical discourse. See “Anxious Audiences and Gender Play on the Early Modern English Stage” in this issue.

[8] The *Oxford English Dictionary*’s earliest example of the use of “drag” in the sense of cross-dressing dates from 1870. The entry for “drag” is labelled as in need of updating.

[9] The most familiar of recent so-called “original practices” productions is the all-male *Twelfth Night*, directed by Tim Carroll at the London Globe. The production came to Broadway in 2013 and was released on DVD in 2014. Cast in the role of Olivia, a 52-year-old Mark Rylance was about three decades older than the youth who would have performed the role on the Elizabethan stage.

[10] For an influential critique of *Paris is Burning*, see bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, “Between the Lines”, Boston, South End Press, 1992, p. 145-156. Lucas Hilderbrand responds to this critique and points out some of its limitations in: Lucas Hilderbrand, *Paris is Burning: A Queer Film Classic*, Vancouver, Arsenal Pulp Press, 2013, p. 125-129.

[11] For an incisive critique of *Shakespeare in Love* for its promotion of heteronormativity, see Sujata Iyengar, “Shakespeare in HeteroLove”, *Literature Film Quarterly*, vol. 29, n°2, 2001, p. 122-127.

[12] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* [1990], London, Routledge, 2006, p. 34.

[13] Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*, London, Routledge, 1993, p. 59-60.

[14] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, *op. cit.*, p. 187.

[15] *Ibid*., p. xxxi.

[16] Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, *op. cit*., p. 85.

[17] *Ibid*., p. 90.

[18] Judith Butler, "Gender as Performance", in Peter Osborne (ed.), *A Critical Sense: Interviews with Intellectuals*, London, Routledge, 1996, p. 111.

[19] *Ibid*., p. 112.

[20] In "The Trouble with "Queerness": Drag and the Making of Two Cultures", Katie R. Horowitz challenges Butler's distinction between performativity and performance in relation to drag. Horowitz advocates "a theory of performance that does not limit itself to the realm of mere metaphor, one that actually, unapologetically, and without qualification breaks down the boundary between stage performance and the performance of everyday life", Katie R. Horowitz, "The Trouble with 'Queerness': Drag and the Making of Two Cultures", *Signs*, vol. 38, n°2, 2013, p. 314.

[21] Jennifer Drouin, "Cross-Dressing, Drag and Passing: Slippages in Shakespearean Comedy", in James C. Bulman (ed.), *Shakespeare Re-Dressed: Cross-Gender Casting in Contemporary Performance*, Madison, Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2008, p. 51.

[22] *Ibid*., p. 30.

[23] *Idem*.

[24] Sawyer Kemp makes a similar point about the ease with which Shakespearean characters pass in their cross-gendered clothing versus the difficulties experienced by real-life trans individuals. Kemp warns against assuming that the experience of trans individuals can be readily mapped onto Shakespearean characters who cross-dress.

[25] For this argument, see, as well, Mark Edward & Stephen Farrier, “Drag: Applying Foundation and Setting the Scene”, in Mark Edward & Stephen Farrier (eds.), *Contemporary Drag Practices and Performers*, Methuen, Bloomsbury, 2020, p. 1-17.

[26] Ann Rosalind Jones & Peter Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 215.

[27] *Ibid*., p. 217.

[28] *Idem*.

[29] On the historical Kynaston, see George E. Haggerty, “‘The Queen Was Not *Shav'd* yet’: Edward Kynaston and the Re-gendering of the Restoration Stage”, *The Eighteenth Century*, vol. 50, n°4, 2009, p. 309-326; and David Kathman, *art. cit*., p. 43-46. For a fascinating, partly speculative, framing of the historical Kynaston through the frameworks of drag and queer practices, see Simone Chess, “Queer Residue: Boy Actors’ Adult Careers in Early Modern England”, *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies*, vol. 19, n°4, 2019, p. 242-264.

[30] For extensive analyses of the film’s handling of gender issues and theatricality, see Cameron McFarlane, “‘What’s the Trick in That?’ Performing Gender and History in Stage Beauty”, *Journal of Popular Culture*, vol. 44, n°4, 2011, p. 796-814; and Anna Kamaralli, “Rehearsal in Films of the Early Modern Theatre: The Erotic Art of Making Shakespeare”, *Shakespeare Bulletin*, vol. 29, n°1, 2011, p. 27-41.

[31] *Cf*. David Kathman, *art. cit*., p. 43.

[32] Natasha Distiller, “Shakespeare’s Perversion: A Reading of *Sonnet 20*”, *Shakespeare,* vol. 8, n°2, 2012, p. 139.

Margaret Owens

Margaret Owens is an associate professor in the department of English studies at Nipissing University, in North Bay, Ontario, Canada, where she teaches courses in early modern literature and Shakespeare. Her research focuses on the construction and destruction of bodies in literary and visual culture, and combines an historicist focus with psychoanalytic and gender theory. Among her publications are studies of the waxworks in *The Duchess of Malf*i, the relevance of Walter Benjamin's theory of allegory to *The Revenger's Tragedy*, and the staging of dismemberment in early modern drama.

« Dressed Resembling A Girl ». Des « boy actors » au drag : parenté ou illusion rétrospective ?

Oliver Norman
Université de Poitiers

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La nature théâtrale du drag : une évidence ?

1 Une étymologie folklorique attribue au drag une origine shakespearienne. Le drag proviendrait alors d'un acronyme employé par Shakespeare pour renvoyer à ses « boy actors » habillés en femmes sur scène : « Dressed Resembling A Girl ». Une telle étymologie est souvent reprise, mais peu discutée, que ce soit quant à la véracité historique de son origine ou à la pertinence théorique de son application. Par exemple :

> Cristiano Rosa (2019) points out, the term drag evolved from an acronym [...]. In this case, the term comes from the expression 'Dressed Resembling a Girl' that was found in a footnote from one of William Shakespeare's scripts, at the end of the XVIth century[1].

2 Sans aucun appui textuel précis dans le corpus shakespearien, l'acronyme est pris comme doté d'une existence indubitable. Tout se fait comme si le drag et les « boy actors » de la période élisabéthaine participaient d'une même essence qui trouverait ses racines dans l'absence de femmes sur la scène du théâtre urbain. En ce sens, la performance drag ne serait alors que la reconduction, sur la scène du monde contemporain, d'un geste théâtral bien plus ancien. Skeldon et Lashua, quant à eux, se montrent davantage nuancés lorsqu'ils évoquent l'étymologie en précisant « Other word origins have been suggested such 'DRessed As Girl' or 'Dressed Resembling A Girl;' however, there is little consensus on when the term was first used to describe female/male impersonation[2] ». Les auteurs mettent alors en avant un problème fondamental de toute recherche sur le drag : sa nature historique incertaine, et son étymologie vague. En effet, quiconque souhaite s'y intéresser se heurte à la difficulté de

connaître l'origine du phénomène et, partant, de proposer une investigation généalogique de ses fondements sociaux, philosophiques, dramaturgiques etc. Il demeure que, si l'incertitude règne, nous ne pouvons prendre pour acquis le récit folklorique : ne pourrait-on pas être face à une forme de réécriture de l'histoire d'une forme artistique, voire de plusieurs car l'équivalence placée entre le drag et les « boy actors » ne rend-il pas possible une mécompréhension du rôle de ces mêmes jeunes acteurs ? Penser les « boy actors » à l'aune du drag risque de faire penser que le travestissement au théâtre élisabéthain et jacobéen était une affaire de performance de genre, de revendication politique, en somme d'une radicalité dont ces rôles n'étaient pas dotés pour les dramaturges et publics de leur propre époque.

3 Le problème resurgit lorsque nous ne souhaitons pas analyser les « boy actors » mais les performances drag contemporaines : à faire du drag la continuité d'un geste historique, ne risque-t-on pas de banaliser ce qui se donne comme radicalité dans le monde contemporain ? Le drag ne serait dès lors qu'une forme parmi d'autres d'expression artistique sans lien nécessaire à une quelconque communauté ou à des problèmes sociaux particuliers de notre monde occidental contemporain.

4 Or, si l'étymologie du terme « drag » semble nébuleuse, son inscription dans les arts dramatiques l'est bien moins pour les chercheurs. Skeldon et Lashua, quand bien même leur position sur l'étymologie est nuancée, peuvent présenter la nature proprement théâtrale du drag comme une nouvelle évidence qui n'a pas à être remise en cause tant elle ferait consensus au sein de la communauté intellectuelle :

> Drag has deep roots in theatre. Romaya (2012) argues that drag, in distant Western history, originated in ancient Greece where young men would play women's roles when performing

> theatrical tragedies. Schacht and Underwood (2004) argue that prohibitions against women performing in theatre in the XVIIth century paved the way for drag as a profession. In Elizabethan England, women were barred from playing female roles and therefore, men or boys would act as women in plays (i.e., in Shakespearean theatre). Female impersonation became an institutionalized part of English theatre. […] While there is ambiguity around the term drag and what it means to be a drag performer, there is consensus that drag is centred on the illusions of theatrical performance[3].

5 Le drag serait alors, unanimement conçu comme une continuité historique de pratiques théâtrales et un jeu d'illusion. Au-delà de la simple question de savoir si les « boy actors » faisaient du drag, ce qui nous intéresse alors est de comprendre la logique des performances drag et théâtrales. En effet, si l'origine historique et historiographique semble douteuse, peut-on souscrire à une parenté de fondement ? En d'autres termes, est-il possible que sur la scène du théâtre et la scène des performances drag se joue la même pièce ? Pour soutenir cela, il nous semble que le premier lieu à interroger doit être à cheval entre la pratique et le thématique : il faut interroger la présence dans le théâtre élisabéthain et dans le drag d'une réflexion sur l'illusion ou une mise en scène de l'illusion – si nous tenons à ne pas prêter d'emblée aux propos d'un dramaturge, aux jeux d'acteurs et aux performances drag une rationalité consciente, comme si ces praticiens fussent philosophes. Or, l'illusion est indéniablement présente sur la scène des XVI^{e} et XVII^{e} siècles. Le baroque marque de son sceau le théâtre en insistant sur ce que Yves Bonnefoy peut appeler un « réalisme passionnel[4] », cette forme si particulière de réalisme qui entend montrer les passions, les parts d'ombre, tout en manifestant les illusions du réel lui-même. Le baroque insiste sur le paradoxe propre du réel : illusion et vérité, conscience de soi et aveuglement se côtoient dans un bal où l'un ne cesse d'échanger avec l'autre[5]. Ainsi l'illusion présuppose un réel

avec lequel il joue et dont il démasque la réalité illusoire. Une dialectique s'opère dans laquelle tantôt le réel bascule dans le rêve et le rêve s'impose comme réalité.

6 Pour bien cerner toute l'étendue de ces illusions théâtrales nous allons les interroger à partir d'un lieu exemplaire : *Hamlet.* En nous installant à même le texte shakespearien nous pourrons alors mettre en avant la présence du thème de l'illusion et du réel tout en l'inscrivant à même la matrice supposée du drag.

I. L'illusion sociale : le théâtre du monde et la scène drag

« Seems, madam? Nay, it is. I know not 'seems'» (I.2.79) : l'illusion sur scène dans *Hamlet*

7 Il semblerait alors que nous nous tiendrions dans le monde de l'artifice, du non-vrai, du faire-semblant qui serait le propre du milieu théâtral. Le drag ne serait-ce pas simplement le fait de se mettre en maquillage afin de jouer un personnage qui se donne sur une scène contemporaine, de la même manière que le « boy actor » devait se travestir pour jouer un personnage féminin dans les pièces avant l'accès des femmes à la scène ? Le drag comme le « boy acting » seraient alors une affaire de masque, de porter un artifice qui, bien loin de nous conduire vers une quelconque expérience du vrai, doivent nous présenter une verisimilitude capable de nous faire croire que le personnage sur scène *est* une femme, que le drag performer *est* une femme et non un homme sous son maquillage (dans le cas d'une drag queen AMAB[6]). Lieu propre du paraître et de l'ostentation, le théâtre comme le drag serait alors le monde du faux-semblant, du se-faire-passer-pour qui s'opposerait à une identité

réelle, innée. Ne faudrait-il pas alors chercher dans les discours sur les apparences dans le théâtre élisabéthain et jacobéen une grille de lecture pour appréhender la nature de toute performance drag ?

8 Nous pensons alors à la réponse incisive de Hamlet à sa mère lorsqu'il énonce à l'acte I, scène 2 de la pièce éponyme :

> GERTRUDE. Thou know'st 'tis common: all that lives must die,
> Passing through nature to eternity.
> HAMLET. Ay, madam, it is common.
> GERTRUDE. If it be,
> Why seems it so particular with thee?
> HAMLET. Seems, madam? nay, it is, I know not 'seems.'
> 'Tis not alone my inky cloak, good mother,
> Nor customary suits of solemn black,
> Nor windy suspiration of forc'd breath,
> No, nor the fruitful river in the eye,
> Nor the dejected havior of the visage,
> Together with all forms, moods, shapes of grief,
> That can denote me truly. These indeed seem,
> For they are actions that a man might play;
> But I have that within which passes show,
> These but the trappings and the suits of woe (I.2.74-89).

9 L'apparence de deuil est toujours possible à travers une mise en scène de soi, nous pouvons paraître *comme* affectés par le décès d'un proche en adoptant un rictus triste, en modulant sa voix pour qu'elle casse, en portant des tenues socialement appropriées pour l'occasion d'un enterrement. Le costume noir, accoutrement culturellement associé au deuil, suffirait pour signifier qu'en dessous d'une manifestation extérieure se trouve logée une peine véritable. Mais tout code culturel peut se voir subvertir. Si la condition suffisante du deuil est le port de certaines tenues, alors l'endeuillé n'est-il pas tel un acteur dans un théâtre social ? Ne peut-on pas douter de sa sincérité, mettre en avant le hiatus entre ce qu'il

présente et ce qu'il ressent ? Il y aurait alors deux modes ontologiques qui se disputent dans le discours de Hamlet : l'apparence ou l'illusion, monde du faire-voir, et l'être qui lui est si cher qu'il revient dans le célèbre soliloque « Être ou n'être pas ». L'épanadiplose conférant sa structure circulaire du vers « [s]eems, madam? nay, it is, I know not 'seems' » semble appuyer une telle distinction ontologique, l'apparence est ce qui borde le monde social, comme ce qui borde le vers ; mais l'être est le noyau autour duquel cette apparence gravite. Ce qui est véritablement peut se passer de l'apparence, n'a pas besoin de se vêtir en noir pour être.

10 Non seulement le deuil de Hamlet, mais aussi sa folie sont des objets de la dichotomie paraître/être. Il tente de paraître fou, il joue le fou selon l'analyse de Jeffrey Wilson, pour influencer le comportement des autres personnages. Il se fait *passer pour* sans pourtant *être* : « what is it that brings about Hamlet's change in behaviour, his shift from a man who is to one who *seems*[7]? ». La folie de Halmet est feinte, est un faire-semblant qui introduit une rupture au sein d'une œuvre qui ouvre sur ce qui semble être une répudiation de l'apparence séductrice et politiquement motivée. La pièce de *Hamlet* elle-même serait-elle donc, à l'image de ce vers du premier acte, un drame qui met en scène la tension entre deux pôles métaphysiquement distincts, à savoir entre l'apparence et l'être ? Ou bien plutôt ne doit-on pas voir dans *Hamlet* le passage de l'apparence à l'apparat, du paraître au faire-semblant, de l'être à l'*acting* ? Or, Wilson nous propose aussi une analyse de ce passage du paraître rejeté au paraître accueilli en distinguant entre le mode d'être de la philosophie et de la pièce de théâtre : le théâtre porte sur le faire, la philosophie sur le savoir[8]. Qu'Hamlet abandonne sa quête contre les apparences relève donc non pas tant d'un rejet de la dichotomie philosophique mais d'un changement de perspective. Il commence à tenir un discours méta-théâtral en acte II, scène 2 : « after his crack at philosophy, the very next line is "There are the players" (II.2.370),

and it is here that Shakespeare revealed that Hamlet is a playgoer, a playwright, an actor, a director, and a literary theorist[9] ». De philosophe, attentif à la nature du réel, Hamlet est devenu (ou s'est révélé comme) maître acteur et maître de subterfuge, vivant dans le monde de l'illusion qui est attendu par la cour d'Elseneur. Il s'inscrit de fait au sein d'une vaste scène du monde et, non seulement se plie à ses exigences (à savoir vivre selon l'apparence), mais les retourne contre ce même monde de l'apparence pour faire éclater le réel au cœur du drame : la faute de Claudius. Hamlet est un être subversif[10] qui vise à jouer avec les normes de la société dans laquelle il se trouve pour mieux en manifester l'artificialité. Il passe d'une considération de la nature du réel à la mise en scène de soi-même au retour du réel lui-même. La circularité du vers que nous nous donnons à penser se confirme alors au niveau du structure dramatique de la pièce : nous passons de la semblance au réel pour revenir à l'apparence sous une nouvelle modalité. Aiguisons cette affirmation : l'apparence sous sa nouvelle modalité, le jeu de fou de Hamlet, est-ce véritablement une nouvelle modalité ? Folie avec méthode, acteur à la méthode, Hamlet ne s'inspire-t-il pas du faux-semblant qu'il constate à la cour pour le reproduire avec une technique infaillible. Le passage des « suits of solemn black » à « to be or not to be » (III.1.64) n'est pas une nouvelle forme d'apparence, une feinte qui aurait quelque chose de novateur. Il n'y a pas de différence de nature mais une différence de degré dans le jeu proposé : Hamlet joue mieux que les courtisans. Et dans ce meilleur jeu se constitue une nouvelle conséquence qui ne paraissait pas avec l'apparat des courtisans. Bien loin de simplement séduire le pouvoir, de veiller à obtenir des honneurs, Hamlet, par son jeu et par la lucidité par rapport à son propre jeu arrive à faire éclater le vrai, à rompre la société d'apparence, retirant de Claudius son aveu :

> O, my offence is rank it smells to heaven;
> It hath the primal eldest curse upon't,
> A brother's murder (III.3.40-43).

11 Mais, cet aveu, ne l'oublions pas, n'est pas manifesté au dehors, dans la société elle-même, il est prononcé dans un moment de recueillement intime devant Dieu, moment interrompu certes par Hamlet, mais qui n'est pas destiné à se savoir. Au fond, l'apparence reprend avec le savoir du réel qui s'y cache. Encore une fois notre vers revient puisque nous passons d'un Hamlet qui pense l'être à celui qui joue de l'apparence pour faire éclater l'être à celui qui sait l'être et pourtant qui doit observer le jeu des apparences au sein de la cour.

12 Il y a alors une dialectique de l'être et du paraître qui se manifeste à travers le drame. L'apparence qui niait l'être vient être nié à son tour. Mais bien loin d'une relève de type hégélienne où nous aurions ici la fin de la dialectique, nous nous trouvons davantage dans la vision dialectique d'un Jean Wahl pour qui le troisième terme n'advient jamais. La dialectique devient oscillation constante des contraires passant l'un dans l'autre, coexistant au sein d'une paradoxologie du réel[11]. L'apparence vit aux côtés de l'être.

13 Le premier point est ainsi posé : si le drag participe d'une compréhension proprement théâtrale de l'illusion, et non seulement d'une reprise d'une pratique de travestissement ou de « cross-dressing », ne faut-il pas que ce drag ait, comme le théâtre de Shakespeare, quelque chose à nous dire sur l'artifice du monde social dans lequel il se donne à voir ?

De la performance à la performativité : la dialectique vérité-illusion dans l'art drag jusqu'aux années 1990

14 Si la pièce de Shakespeare nous permet de mettre en doute la sincérité de la cour d'Elsineur, manifestant le faux au cœur d'une

situation de deuil, force est de constater que les approches théoriques du drag mettent aussi l'accent sur la question de l'artifice social. Or, si nous interrogeons l'artifice social dans le drag, ce n'est plus la question de la cour et des enjeux de pouvoir qui peuvent s'y nouer mais bien plutôt des normes de genre et de leur supposée naturalité. Le couple qui s'interroge n'est donc plus simplement l'apparaître par rapport à l'être mais la naturalité ou l'artificialité de nos conceptions sociales du genre. Cette insistance sur le jeu qui fait apparaître jouant sur la lisière entre être, faire et paraître n'est-ce pas justement ce que Judith Butler développe dans sa conception de la performativité du genre ? Du moins dans *Gender Trouble*, Butler se tient-elle à cette frontière en insistant sur l'heureuse proximité entre la performativité et la performance :

> In what senses, then, is gender an act? As in other ritual social dramas, the action of gender requires a performance that is repeated. This repetition is at once a reenactment and reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; and it is the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimation[12].

15 Le genre se présente alors comme la répétition d'un certain nombre de discours, et d'actes de discours, portant sur le féminin ou le masculin, le devoir-être de la femme ou de l'homme. En d'autres termes, le genre ci-présenté, viendrait à dire une normativité sociale qui s'exprime à travers un certain nombre de comportements attendus de la part de celles et ceux que nous reconnaissons comme femme ou comme homme. Nous serions alors face à un genre compris comme ensemble de rôles, de performances qui obéissent à un script, à des règles qui encadrent le paraître. Nous ne serions alors pas loin de penser le genre comme Erving Goffman décrit le monde social dans *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, parlant de « front » que l'« acteur » social aurait à endosser, à jouer (« enactment[13] ») au sein d'une vaste entreprise de contrôle (ou

tentative de contrôle) de son apparence au sein de la société, de sa conformité avec les normes sociales[14]. Le drag ne serait-il alors que la performance d'un rôle social déterminé ? Ne serait-il que l'apparence manifestant sa propre artificialité, sa propre fausseté par rapport à un être plus profond ? Le drag serait-il un apparat, une apparence se montrant comme telle et témoignant de son inadéquation par rapport à une essence ?

16 Or, si tel est le cas, le drag ne serait-il pas conforme à la définition du jeu des « boy actors » sur la scène elisabéthaine que met en avant Rachele Svetlana Bassan, à savoir que « The artifice is pointed out as such, but this further reinforces the regulative frame of comedy. In other words, the theatrical performance disrupts the ordinary relationship between appearance and reality[15] » ?

Le drag comme esthétique « camp » ? Artificialité des normes dans une approche théâtrale

Fig. 1 : Susan Walsh (gauche), Divine (centre), et Cookie Mueller (droite) dans *Female Trouble* de John Waters (1974).

Crédits : Dreamland.

17 Cette nature visible de l'artifice drag, ou la nature d'apparat du drag, n'est-ce pas ce que nous pourrions tirer d'une lecture hâtive des textes de Butler ? Butler, puisant dans la culture cinématographique américaine plutôt que le théâtre anglais, peut ainsi se demander dans la préface à l'édition de 1990 de *Gender Trouble* :

> Without a doubt, feminism continues to require its own forms of serious play. Female Trouble is also the title of the John Waters film that features Divine, the hero/heroine of Hairspray as well, whose impersonation of women implicitly suggests that gender

> is a kind of persistent impersonation that passes as the real. Her/his performance destabilizes the very distinctions between the natural and the artificial, depth and surface, inner and outer through which discourse about genders almost always operates. Is drag the imitation of gender, or does it dramatize the signifying gestures through which gender itself is established? Does being female constitute a "natural fact" or a cultural performance, or is "naturalness" constituted through discursively constrained performative acts that produce the body through and within the categories of sex? Divine notwithstanding, gender practices within gay and lesbian cultures often thematize "the natural" in parodic contexts that bring into relief the performative construction of an original and true sex. What other foundational categories of identity — the binary of sex, gender, and the body — can be shown as productions that create the effect of the natural, the original, and the inevitable[16]?

18 Bien loin de constituer simplement un spectacle présent pour une consommation culturelle, le drag, lorsqu'il appartient au monde LGBTQIA+ constitue une mise en question des normes. Le drag LGBTQIA+ « disrupts the ordinary relationship between appearance and reality[17] » comme le « boy acting » le faisait pour Bassan. Mais ici, force est de constater que la restriction est de mise dans la mesure où Butler distingue entre deux formes de drag, formes que nous nous devons de mettre en lien avec les pratiques théâtrales. Le drag n'est pas seulement une forme d'art LGBTQIA+ mais se trouve d'emblée pris dans une matrice hétérosexuelle, se présente, dans le XX^{e} siècle comme sommet de l'art hétérosexuel : « Thus, there are forms of drag that heterosexual culture produces for itself-we might think of Julie Andrews in *Victor, Victoria* or Dustin Hoffmann in *Tootsie* or Jack Lemmon in *Some Like It Hot* where the anxiety over a possible homosexual consequence is both produced and deflected within the narrative trajectory of the films[18] ». De la même manière que sur la scène élisabéthaine et jacobéenne, le « cross-dressing » n'était pas

réservé à un public LGBTQIA+ mais s'adressait à l'ensemble des spectateurs et des acteurs, de même dans les films cités par Butler, le drag ne parait pas inscrit au sein d'une communauté minoritaire mais comme le divertissement de la majorité. Ce divertissement sape la mise en question propre au drag LGBTQIA+. Plus qu'un « gimmick » pour produire un effet comique ou dramatique, le travestissement des personnages sert à renfoncer l'ironie dramatique d'un cinéma où le spectateur sait à l'avance que les relations entre les personnages sont possibles ou non. *Victor, Victoria* en est un exemple paradigmatique. Le « cross-dressing » à l'œuvre dans le film, digne des personnages du théâtre élisabéthain, est double. Julie Andrews joue une femme (Victoria) qui se travesti en homme (Victor) afin de se présenter sur scène en tant que « female impersonator » (Victoria à nouveau). Le réalisateur, Blake Edwards met en scène un jeu d'illusion et de réalité qui pourrait interroger sur la nature même du genre, mais finit par imaginer le « cross-dressing » comme stratagème pour trouver un emploi. Si tout drag n'est que l'itération de la mise en scène d'Edwards, alors nous pourrions nous accorder avec Bassan, dire que l'ordre normal (et donc normatif) est questionné au sein d'une pratique théâtrale. Mais il nous semble, qu'avec le drag il faille aller plus loin. La radicalité propre du drag ne porterait-elle pas plus loin qu'une mise en scène hétérosexuelle des normes de genre ? Pourquoi Butler tient-elle tant à distinguer la mise en scène de soi dans une performance de genre hétérosexuelle et le drag ? Serait-ce pour éviter de sombrer dans une vision du drag comme pure farce, comme mise en scène ridicule d'une féminité socialement construite ?

Fig. 2 : Julie Andrews dans le rôle de Victoria Grant qui joue le rôle de Victor Grazinski jouant le rôle d'une femme dans *Victor/Victoria* de Blake Edwards (1982).

Crédits : Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.

19 Ne serions-nous pas alors davantage auprès d'une esthétique « camp » plutôt que dans le drag entendu comme forme artistique spécifique ? Dans une étude qui précède Butler et porte déjà quelques marques de sa théorie à venir, Esther Newton peut-elle insister sur cette dialectique de l'apparence et de la réalité à son tour, la tirant sans cesse vers le comique :

> Ultimately, all drag symbolism opposes the "inner" or "real" self (subjective self) to the "outer" self (social self). For the great majority of homosexuals, the social self is oft en a calculated

> respectability and the subjective or real self is stigmatized. Th e "inner" = "outer" opposition is almost parallel to "back" = "front." In fact, the social self is usually described as "front" and social relationships (especially with women) designed to support the veracity of the "front" are called "cover." The "front" = "back" opposition also has a direct tie-in with the body: "front" = "face"; "back" = "ass[19]".

20 La performativité du genre se manifeste (parfois) à travers une performance qui met en scène l'artificialité des normes, qui nous introduit au sein d'un monde carnavalesque où tout est « topsy turvy », sens dessus-dessous, où l'extérieur n'est plus à sa place et où l'intérieur jouit de son expression libérée. N'est-ce pas justement ce que préconise Newton lorsqu'elle affirme que « The effect of the drag system is to wrench the sex roles loose from that which supposedly determines them, that is, genital sex[20] ». Le drag se donnerait alors comme un déracinement, comme un déplacement, comme une subversion. S'installant à même une différence sexuelle supposée, le drag que voit Newton s'en joue, s'en moque, s'en empare au sein d'un art qui focalise sur l'inadéquation : « at the simplest level, drag signifies that the person wearing it is a homosexual, that he is a male who is behaving in a specifically inappropriate way, that he is a male who places himself as a woman in relation to other men[21] ». Le drag devient alors une expression du style « camp », comme l'indique le titre de l'œuvre de Newton. Ce style si particulier défini par Susan Sontag peu de temps avant l'essai de Newton comme l'insistance sur le style plutôt que sur le contenu, la mise entre guillemets des choses qui se présentent dans leur artificialité et leur exubérance : « Camp sees everything in quotation marks. It's not a lamp, but a "lamp"; not a woman, but a "woman." To perceive Camp in objects and persons is to understand Being-as-Playing-a-Role. It is the farthest extension, in sensibility, of the metaphor of life as theatre[22] ». Nous retrouvons sans cesse autour de la pratique drag le champ lexical et conceptuel du théâtre, comme

si nous ne pouvions l'extirper de son lieu propre que serait la scène. Le drag conçu comme summum de la sensibilité « camp » se donnerait alors comme la mise en avant *via* une performance d'une norme conçue comme artificialité, comme *diktat* social proposé aux femmes et qui ne se cache pas. La norme se montre dans la performance en tant que norme. Une drag queen qui performe, pour Newton comme pour Butler, met en avant une exigence socialement constituée qui pèse sur les femmes et en le manifestant peut (mais de manière contingente, non nécessaire) la remettre en cause. Les guillemets apparaissent ici non pas tant comme une remise en cause mais une exposition, une citation du discours social dont la pertinence n'est pas nécessairement questionnée à même la performance qui l'expose.

21 Compris ainsi, le drag n'est-il rien d'autre que la reconduction au sein d'une communauté minoritaire contemporaine du jeu des « boy actors » : « though complex and emblematic, Rosalind's disguised sexual identity subverts the cultural and social norms of convention and establishes a new sexual identity for the Elizabethan female[23] ». Considérer le drag ainsi le reconduirait à une analyse de type hamletienne, comme insistance sur l'opposition entre l'être et le paraître, entre l'ornement et le fond, entre le style et le contenu. Le drag, comme tout jeu d'acteur, serait la mise en avant de cette dualité si intensément exprimée dans la réplique du Prince d'Elsineur. Le paraitre se donnerait alors comme mise en scène de soi, comme manifestation de l'artificialité de la norme sociale par une mise en scène de soi. La seule différence entre les drags et les courtisans d'Elsineur serait une conscience de cette mise en scène partagée avec les acteurs jouant les courtisans. De la même manière que les acteurs savent qu'ils jouent au moment où ils jouent, les performer drag sauraient eux aussi qu'ils mettent en scène le genre[24].

22 Mais face à une telle interprétation, au moins deux réticences apparaissent. D'une part la subversion de l'identité féminine dans le personnage de Rosalind relève-t-il du jeu des « boy actors » ou du texte shakespearien ; si nous jouons cette pièce sans « boy actors », la subversion ne perdure-t-elle pas, distinguant ainsi le subversif de la performance ? D'autre part, une telle lecture qui entend ancrer le drag dans une historicité théâtrale hétérocentrée, peut-elle rendre raison de son historicité et sociologie propres, à savoir que le drag en tant que drag apparait au sein d'une culture LGBTQIA+ ?

Au-delà des oppositions : l'ambivalence baroque de la dialectique drag

23 Trois ans après *Gender Trouble*, Butler revient sur sa conception du drag, au sein de son ouvrage *Bodies that Matter*. Il s'agit pour elle de remettre en cause la vision du drag comme art absolument subversif qui est apparu suite à la parution de son ouvrage, se fondant sur le passage concernant Divine et les films de John Waters. Nous entrons alors dans une nouvelle vision du drag comme relevant d'une dialectique intranchable, d'une approche qui ne laisse pas si facilement voir la parodie (si elle existe). Or, cette dialectique ne peut-elle pas, elle aussi, nous rappeler la position des « boy actors », résolvant le problème que nous avons soulevé suite aux propos de Bassan ? En effet, si le drag comme le « boy acting » n'est pas subversif *per se* mais accepte la possibilité de subversion dans certaines circonstances, ne peut-on pas maintenir la parenté entre les deux phénomènes ? Faire jouer un acteur qui « cross-dress » à la Renaissance était peut-être monnaie courante sur la scène élisabéthaine, mais si nous faisons le même geste aujourd'hui, ne doit-on pas reconnaître une volonté de subversion plus prononcée – de même pour toute forme de « cross-gender casting » ?

24 En effet, Butler ne dit pas, à la manière de Newton, que le drag est un phénomène absolument comique qui vise à subvertir le lien entre l'apparence et l'essence. Tel peut être le cas (comme dans *Victor, Victoria*), mais ce n'est pas l'essence du phénomène. Cela signifie deux choses pour notre analyse : d'abord les drag queens n'entendent pas plus se moquer de la féminité que n'importe quel acteur sur la scène shakespearienne ; mais aussi que la référence théâtrale se redouble, non seulement affaire de pantomimes ou comédies, le drag serait une simple répétition du jeu théâtral :

> Although many readers understood *Gender Trouble* to be arguing for the proliferation of drag performances as a way of subverting dominant gender norms, I want to underscore that there is no necessary relation between drag and subversion, and that drag may well be used in the service of both the de-naturalization and re-idealization of hyperbolic heterosexual gender norms. At best, it seems, drag is a site of a certain ambivalence, one which reflects the more general situation of being implicated in the regimes of power by which one is constituted and, hence, of being implicated in the very regimes of power that one opposes[25].

25 Nous ne revenons pas sur la mise en avant de la fragilité des normes qui se manifestent dans leur nature construite. Mais cela ne signifie pas, comme l'a très bien vu Butler, que nous devions présupposer un rejet de ces mêmes normes. Refusant la position de Newton qui donne trop de détermination à un art qui ne se théorise pas, du moins dans les années 1990, comme relevant d'une perspective unique. La polyphonie des approches drag ne nous autorise-t-elle pas alors à interroger une autre caractéristique du baroque, à savoir manifester l'entremêlement du rêve et de la veille, du réel et de l'illusion, sans pour autant nous dire explicitement de rejeter l'un ou l'autre des branches de l'alternative ? Bonnefoy évoquant le baroque tardif nous dit alors « En lui les deux contraires, sans se renier, ont

consenti l'un à l'autre, dans un repos désillusionné mais joyeux que l'on peut dire une grâce[26] ». De la même manière que le baroque ne tranche pas, ne faut-il pas reconnaître dans le discours de Butler une approche similaire ? Le drag n'est-il pas alors la coexistence des contraires, la possibilité de la parodie comme du pastiche reposant en une seule et même pratique ? Que les normes soient rejetées explicitement ou simplement indiquées par la performance, il reste que ces normes se manifestent dans leur nature artificielle, dans leur caractère de fétiche[27]. En d'autres termes, peu importe, ici que les normes soient explicitement critiquées, le simple fait de manifester leur origine non-naturelle qui s'est oubliée à travers les itérations sociales discursives (le fétichisme) suffit à en montrer l'artificialité. Que la performance accepte ou non de remettre en cause ces discours sociaux, relève d'une autre interrogation.

26 Le drag se reposant dans une dialectique qui n'est jamais tranchée à même la performance (il faudrait un discours sur la performance pour espérer figer ce dynamisme inhérent à toute manifestation de l'artificialité des normes), n'est-il pas alors, par excellence, un art du baroque même si ce n'est pas nécessairement un art baroque ? Ou encore, est-on dans une réitération du baroque qui se dédouble, portant tantôt sur les normes sociales mais aussi sur la performance elle-même ? En d'autres termes, le baroque du drag ne serait-il pas de mettre en avant l'intranchable dialectique dans la performance (quant à son contenu) mais aussi auprès du performer (quant à sa forme ou son style) ? Sans discours sur la performance elle-même, nous ne saurions trancher entre ce qui relève de l'artifice et ce qui relève de l'acceptation de normes de féminité hétérocentrées et androcentrées…

27 Mais, la différence majeure maintenue entre drag et performance théâtrale demeure celle du public cible – du moins le public cible originel. En effet, la présence sur scène d'artistes pratiquant le « cross-dressing » relevait d'une habitude sociale et culturelle, d'une

majorité et non d'une inscription à même une minorité. Au sein d'une telle configuration peut-on envisager le théâtre baroque, dans sa performance, comme une exposition de l'artificialité des discours sociaux ? Peut-être peut-on envisager que les paroles du dramaturge puissent produire un discours sur les discours sociaux, un métadiscours capable de remettre en cause les apparences, mais la performance elle-même, divorcée des propos des acteurs, a-t-elle une force subversive à elle seule ? Il ne nous semble pas. Alors que la participation, si nous nous en tenons à l'analyse de Newton et Butler ici, d'un public minoritaire au sein d'une forme artistique qui s'adresse à une minorité, donne une forme à la performance qui est la forme du questionnement des normes, sans même qu'aucun discours n'ait à être explicité ou proféré. La performance elle-même est subversive en ce sens qu'elle porte un sens, une mise en doute. S'adressant, en premier lieu, à un public non hétérosexuel, le drag s'inscrit à l'écart de la performance théâtrale. S'inscrivant dans une minorité, même le pastiche devient le lieu d'un questionnement.

28 Le drag est shakespearien dans la mesure où il donne à voir une illusion constitutive de notre réalité sociale comme *Hamlet* le fait pour la cour danoise ; mais, le drag ne vient pas de Shakespeare, constituant une modalité de performance qui n'avait pas cours à son époque. Cette assignation historique de l'origine du drag à Shakespeare se trouve alors tantôt confortée et mise à mal dans la mesure où tout théâtre baroque semble propice à la réflexion sur la réalité et l'illusion que le drag nous donne à voir. Théâtral, le drag l'est à être une performance. Baroque, le drag l'est par son interrogation inhérente sur l'artifice et le naturel. Mais, nous ne pouvons pas en conclure de là que le drag trouve son origine dans ces formes de performance. Si nous cherchons à inscrire le drag au sein d'un héritage shakespearien n'est-ce pas pour lui donner une dignité et une normalité, faire comme si sa radicalité était moindre ? Si le drag n'est que la réitération de Shakespeare alors il a une valeur

artistique intrinsèque. Si le drag est une nouveauté qui apparaît avec la communauté LGBTQIA+ contemporaine alors nous devons lutter pour la reconnaissance de cette forme de performance qui n'est liée à rien historiquement[28].

II. Au-delà du drag baroque ? La diversité du drag contemporain

Affranchir le drag de l'historicité théâtrale

29 Insister sur le rôle de l'apparence et de l'illusion chez Hamlet est nécessaire dès lors que nous tentons de penser que la parenté entre le drag et la scène élisabéthaine n'est pas une parenté de simple pratique. Ce n'est pas que le fait établi de voir des personnes AMAB performer sur une scène dans des habits féminins, comme si le « cross-dressing » de l'époque pouvait se lire comme l'analogon de la performance drag. Plutôt, tentons-nous de mettre en avant ici une parenté de pensée entre l'approche de dramaturges et de théoriciens du drag. Dans la mesure où Skeldon et Lashua insistent sur la nature illusoire du drag et de la performance théâtrale, nous nous devions de montrer que l'illusion elle-même était méditée par le dramaturge et pas seulement prise comme une évidence.

30 Cependant, Romaya, auteur cité par Skeldon et Lashua, ne dit pas exactement les termes que lui prêtent les commentateurs. Skeldon et Lashua tentent d'inscrire le drag à même l'histoire du théâtre, Romaya cherche à l'en extirper :

> It is commonly believed that the distant history of Western drag surfaced in Ancient Greece in the plays of Euripides and Sophocles as young boys played women's roles in Greek

> tragedies. With this simple theatrical transformation of visual gender identity, a traditional idea or concept of drag was born. Departing from its antiquated beginning, drag has come to take on an entirely redefined meaning and purpose in present times. Contemporary drag opens up a world of aesthetic appropriation that history has never before seen or been fully prepared for. To analyze the meaning of contemporary drag art proper, it is imperative that we go beyond the limits of traditional theater, film, and drag bar settings[29].

31 L'origine historique du drag ne peut pas et ne doit pas venir masquer sa réalité propre. Bien que nous pensions communément que le drag paraît en Grèce antique ou dans le théâtre de Shakespeare, nous ne devons l'inscrire au sein d'une continuité pratique que dans la mesure où nous en manifestons à la fois les relèves et les ruptures. Que le drag fasse retentir une dialectique aux allures baroques, nous pouvons l'accepter, que le drag sout identique au théâtre baroque, nous ne le pouvons.

32 Dans l'horizon analytique de Romaya, un concept n'a pas une définition unique donnée une fois pour toutes lors de son apparition dans le monde, plutôt devons-nous cerner à chaque époque les évolutions, déformations, mécompréhensions, voire perversions du concept au contact de la réalité temporelle. En d'autres termes, il serait vain de simplement rattacher drag et « boy acting », car les deux appartiennent à des histoires qui ont rompues l'une avec l'autre. Le « boy acting » a cessé d'être omniprésente dans le théâtre, mais le drag perdure. Quand bien même les origines des deux seraient liées à l'absence de femmes sur la scène, nous nous devons de mettre en avant les ruptures du drag d'avec son origine prétendument théâtrale.

33 Que le drag soit un art de la performance, nul ne peut le remettre en cause. Mais cela ne signifie pas, conclusion tirée trop hâtivement nous semble-t-il, qu'il soit un art théâtral et encore moins un art shakespearien. Sinon ne devrions-nous pas appeler shakespearien tout

performance art dans la mesure où il relève d'une performance ? Dans le monde contemporain, où le drag se donne à voir dans des bars, des boîtes de nuit, à la télévision, dans des films ou encore lors de défilés de mode, pouvons-nous encore parler de cette pratique comme l'équivalent du théâtre de Shakespeare ? Poser cette question remet aussitôt en cause l'apparent consensus autour de la nature du drag que souhaitaient montrer Skeldon et Lashua. Bien loin d'être une forme artistique fixe dans ses usages, le drag serait protéiforme, instable, évoluant avec le temps mais aussi avec les lieux de son implantation. Si le drag se donne à voir dans des performances, force est de constater qu'aujourd'hui elle se donne aussi dans des cadres autres : des shooting photo postés sur les réseaux sociaux, des défilés, des déambulations, des tables rondes…

La performance king et *RuPaul's Drag Race*

Fig. 3 : Gizell Timpani as Valentino King in Sackville Gardens, Manchester, UK.

Crédits : Creative Commons.

34 Or, ce qui vient mettre à mal la définition shakespearienne du drag n'est pas seulement qu'il se donne dans des lieux autres que le théâtre mais que ses formes se déclinent dans une diversité que ne connaît pas la scène élisabéthaine et que ne prennent pas en compte les commentateurs. Nous pourrions évoquer, dans un sens qui inverse la performance shakespearienne, les drag kings qui performent la masculinité : « When asked 'what is a drag king' I reply: 'anyone, (regardless of gender) who consciously makes a performance out of masculinity[30] ». La performance drag, qu'elle

soit queen ou king, semble alors être consciente, souhaitée, volontaire. Alors que le « boy acting », s'il correspond à une habitude sociale, une convention théâtrale, n'est nullement une intention expresse de l'acteur qui joue. Presque malgré lui (sans que nous entendions là une quelconque contrainte qui viendrait mettre mal l'acteur), le « boy actor » doit performer en tant que femme puisque « cela se fait ». Le performer drag, quant à lui, choisirait de performer le genre qu'il souhaite. D'ailleurs la définition de Torr nous montre bien que la question du genre assigné à la naissance importe peu à la communauté drag, la forme artistique est ouverte à tous. Cela vient faire vaciller un deuxième point de comparaison avec le monde shakespearien : dans la communauté LGBTQIA+ il n'y a pas de fait d'exclusion de fait des femmes sur la scène, ni des performances qui soient autres que des hommes cisgenres performant la féminité. Si nous doutions de la parenté entre kings et queens, Rupp, Taylor et Shapiro affirment dans leur article « Drag Queens and Drag Kings. The Difference Gender Makes » qu'il n'y a pas de distinction intrinsèque entre ce que font les queens et les kings : dans les deux cas nous assistons à « a similar critique of hegemonic gender and heteronormativity[31] ». Il y a, a minima, une évolution par rapport à Shakespeare, la place des femmes, des performances de la masculinité par des personnes AFAB, mais aussi des identités trans, déplace le sens même des performances de genre. Ne naissant plus sur une scène essentiellement hétérosexuelle, il y a une différence substantielle, n'excluant de fait aucun individu sur la base de son genre, la scène LGBTQIA+ ne peut pas se reposer sur l'absence de femmes sur scène pour justifier la performance. Est-ce que cela signifie qu'aucune exclusion n'a lieu ? Il n'en est rien. Il ne faut pas là considérer qu'il y a une représentation égale des kings et des queens, la popularité de *RuPaul's Drag Race* a conduit notamment à un effacement relatif des performances de kings dans la mesure où ils ne sont pas représentés dans cette émission. Dans un article acerbe, critiquant (parfois) à juste titre l'émission, Fenton Litwiller

peut ainsi dire : « The show has also further perpetuated Queens as natural leaders and spokespeople within and for the queer community, in part by explicitly excluding drag King performers from participating[32] ». Si l'inscription au sein du théâtre shakespearien est de mise dans l'émission, du moins dans ses première saisons, culminant dans un épisode de la saison 7 initulée « ShakesQueer » où les queens jouaient dans des parodies de *Roméo et Juliette* et de *Macbeth*[33], serait-ce possiblement pour justifier de l'exclusion de certains types de drag ? Si nous suivons l'analyse de Litwiller nous pourrions dire que la référence shakespearienne est un moyen d'exclure les représentations trans ainsi que les performances autres que drag queen au sein d'une émission se donnant comme seule représentation drag populaire (du moins à l'époque). Il y aurait ainsi une violence symbolique à se réclamer de Shakespeare dans ce cadre[34]. Mais au-delà de questions de représentation, il y aurait dans la performance king quelque chose d'une inversion des instances performatives par rapport à Shakespeare, un échange entre le fond et la forme. Nous pourrions cependant, simplement considérer qu'il s'agit là d'une inversion répondant à un nouveau cadre social. Il demeure que la performance king, si nous suivons la définition de Torr, est une performance de genre, est une forme de « cross-dressing » si nous souhaitons pousser la référence à Shakespeare. Faisant état d'une libération, notamment féminine, la performance king, serait une retranscription d'un même geste dans un nouveau lieu de pouvoir, en donnant une voix à des personnes que le théâtre de Shakespeare ne pouvait représenter. Il y a une inversion du lieu de pouvoir mais une parenté de geste.

Fig. 4 : Katya Zamalodchikova (gauche), Violet Chachki (centre) et Jasmine Masters (droite) dans *MacBitch*, parodie de *Macbeth*, *RuPaul's Drag Race*, saison 7, épisode 3 (2015).

Crédits : World of Wonder Productions.

Au-delà des performances de genre : des club-kids aux monstres

> Alternative drag tends to sample from the visual, sonic, and affective elements of multiple genders simultaneously, or rejects the performance of gender entirely. I use the term here as a catch-all for drag looks and performances that either de-prioritize or purposefully distort normative gender; common substyles include horror, monster, genderfuck, activessle, tranimal, club kid, fetish wear, and trash, to name only a few. Horror drag and monster drag typically seek to portray frightening, monstrous, and alien characters. Similarly, tranimal drag pushes the conventions of gender and humanity to extreme limits. Genderfuck is a term denoting a look or performance style that blends obvious gender markers in incongruent ways, such as bearded drag queens. Activessle drag is tied to political activism and typically describes the Sisters of Perpetual

> Indulgence, a queer order of dragged-out nuns formed in San Francisco in response to the HIV/AIDS crisis in the 1980s[35].

35 Au-delà des queens et kings se dresse un monde de performances insoupçonnées mais qui contribuent d'autant plus à brouiller l'origine shakespearienne du drag. Dans les bars et boîtes se côtoient des visages de couleurs unies, des formes extraterrestres, des animaux fantastiques, des œuvres d'art ambulantes… autant de formes de performance drag que nous ne trouvons que rarement représentées dans l'émission *RuPaul's Drag Race* et encore moins dans les travaux universitaires. Comment rendre raison de ces formes de performance au sein d'une réflexion qui réduirait le drag à être une forme de performance de genre, une mise en avant de la performativité du genre entendue comme construction du genre dans et par des discours sociaux ? Pouvons-nous imaginer que le drag monster veuille questionner des normes sociales portant sur le monstre qui serait exclu de la société contemporaine ? Celui ou celle qui performe en tant qu'alien peut-il porter un discours politique d'inclusion des aliens au sein de la société ? A moins de tenir des discours conspirationnistes de la présence d'alien sur Terre, cela semble difficile à croire. Que le monstre ou l'alien soit un outil heuristique pour mettre au dehors une honte socialement forgée par un cadre hétéronormée, cela nous pouvons l'entendre. Que la culture drag cherche à s'approprier des images négatives portant sur les personnes LGBTQIA+, de la même manière que Paul Preciado a pu se réapproprier le terme de « monstre » dans ses travaux, nous pouvons l'envisager[36]. Mais alors, si toutes ces formes artistiques relèvent toujours du drag, s'ils sont inclus de fait au sein de la culture drag, ou bien ce fait est contraire au droit et donc nous devrions exclure ces pratiques de l'aura des versions genrées du drag, ou bien la définition du drag doit être revue pour éviter que nous parlions de performances de genre, coupant ainsi court à la référence à une définition de type shakespearienne.

Fig. 5 : Drag alien Juno Birch.
Crédits : Juno Birch @junobirch.

36 Le monstre, l'alien, la créature, tant de figures de l'altérité au sein du drag qui joue de cette altérité. Ce qui est montré est un autre que soi, un soi comme un autre, un espace de création possible de soi qui n'est pas lié par des normes sociales. S'il y a une critique des normes socialement construites dans les formes monstrueuses de drag est-ce peut-être un rejet non seulement d'une binarité de genre comme définissant l'identité de l'individu mais aussi d'une vision du drag comme expression de cette binarité ? En performant un Autre, une chose ou créature absolument autre, le performer ne cherche pas à devenir cet autre mais à exprimer sa propre altérité par rapport à la société et à la forme artistique du drag lui-même. S'immisçant dans les espaces entre ce qui est normalement convenu, le monstre drag n'est-il pas celui qui refuse de s'intégrer dans une nouvelle

normativité ? Car, si la performance drag met en avant l'artificialité des normes sociales, elle crée aussi, au sein des communautés qui la pratiquent une nouvelle structure normative. Il y a des manières de « bien » faire. Il y a des recettes pour être « bonne » queen ou « bon » king, d'autant plus lorsque ces formes artistiques deviennent des produits de consommation de masse, imposant à leur tour une économie des représentations. Il y a des manières de faire du drag qui permettent de passer à la télévision, de performer dans des bars ou boîtes de nuit, d'autres encore qui ne sont pas reconnues et qui doivent lutter pour prétendre aux mêmes privilèges que les formes plus traditionnelles. Face (surtout) aux queens, le choix d'une créature se révèle comme un refus fondamental de se plier à cette normativité. Cela ne signifie pas qu'il n'y a pas de réseaux d'emprunts, d'inspirations mutuelles ou encore de similarités. Mais, cette proximité n'est pensable que par rapport à un écart premier, l'identité n'est pensable que par la différence. Or, penser cette place de l'altérité au sein du drag, nous oblige à nous retourner vers les pratiques queen et king pour voir si une telle conception ne permet pas de mieux cerner l'écart avec le théâtre, ou au contraire, de rapprocher à nouveau le drag de cet art. Car si le monstre performe l'altérité ne pourrait-on pas à nouveau convoquer l'idée de jouer un rôle ? Ne pourrait-on pas là retrouver le sens d'une performance ? Le « boy actor » jouant un rôle féminin, n'épouse-t-il pas temporairement la forme de l'autre genre, d'une altérité ? Plus encore, l'acteur jouant Bottom dont la tête est transformée en âne dans *Midsummer Night's Dream* ne participerait-il pas de cette même logique ? Les esprits et autres créatures du monde shakespearien allant des sorcières de *Macbeth* à Ariel dans *The Tempest*, en passant par Titania et Oberon dans *Midsummer Night's Dream* ou encore les « fiends » accompagnant Jeanne d'Arc dans *Henry VI. Part One*, ne sont-ils pas là encore l'occasion d'un jeu de l'altérité, un jeu d'acteur qui épouse, le temps d'une performance un rôle qui n'a, parfois, rien de genré ? Le drag monster n'est-il pas que la reproduction sur une

scène différente de ces personnages de théâtre ? Si l'argument peut paraître persuasif par son énumération, il nous semble que ce serait encore une fois se leurrer, agissant à la manière des créateurs du logique chez Nietzsche prenant pour identité ce qui ne relève que de similitudes[37]. Car l'altérité performée par les drags alternatifs n'est pas une altérité simplement de jeu, mais une expérience vécue d'altérité qui structure leur monde partagé. Le jeu de l'altérité dans le drag naît non pas dans une volonté de ressemblance mais dans une logique d'exclusion vécue. Or, la scène élisabéthaine, est lieu d'exclusion, pas le patient de cette même exclusion. Nous pourrions poser la question de femmes endossant des rôles masculins à une époque où la scène (ou du moins les grandes scènes urbaines) leur était refusée, mais ce serait au-delà de la prétention de ce travail[38].

Fig. 6 : Le performer drag, Hungry, en coulisses lors de la soirée « Be Cute », Littlefield, Brooklyn (2017).

Crédits : Zak Krevitt & Thomas McCarty, *The New York Times*.

37 Plutôt, proposons nous que l'altérité qui est en jeu dans les performances drag se réfléchisse sur les performances queen et king pour permettre de les comprendre à l'aune d'une conceptualité non shakespearienne. Ce faisant, nous rejoignons l'analyse de Kathryn Rosenfeld lorsqu'elle affirme que :

> By performing maleness, drag kings expand and redraw the definitional boundaries of the male, interfere with the cultural power of mainstream maleness, and simultaneously transfer some of this power to themselves as queer women. At the same time, drag king existence forces a renegotiation of queergirl desire to encompass a range of masculinities. By performing / becoming the Other, drag kings engage in a practice of magic which transforms both margin and center[39].

38 L'altérité performée par le drag n'est théâtrale que si nous élargissons ce terme de manière abusive à toute performance. Pour autant, peut-on totalement divorcer la performance de l'altérité d'un script, ou doit-on reconnaître qu'il faille endosser un rôle qui, comme le rappelait Goffman se trouve toujours déjà pris dans un ensemble d'attentes précises[40] ? En d'autres termes, sommes-nous devant une liberté absolue de création dans le drag qui met à mal toute tentative de le penser ? Ou plutôt ne doit-on pas refuser la naissance spécifiquement shakespearienne pour conserver une vision normative selon laquelle l'altérité performée est toujours une altérité normée, obéissant à des règles, et contenant des conduites préconisées ? Ainsi le drag clown n'a-t-il pas tendance à peindre son visage d'une teinte unie, accentuant une émotion en tirant ses traits, jouant sur des couleurs vives[41] ? L'alien a-t-il tendance à se maquiller de couleurs non humaines, de bleus, de verts, de violets… parfois empruntant les traits d'aliens trouvés dans le cinéma contemporain[42]. La créature peut-elle se servir de prothèses pour modifier ses traits au point de devenir impossible à reconnaître… Les

monstres peuvent avoir une prédilection pour des dents acérés rendues possibles par de l'émail noir qui vient recouvrir la blancheur humaine… Semblent demeurer des règles, ou au moins des directives, permettant à la créativité de se donner, de se manifester à travers l'altérité. Cette altérité vécue se manifeste dans une diversité pléthorique, mais certains gestes semblent résister, comme pour séparer les catégories. Là où le « cross-dressing » ne représentait que des performances de genre cependant, le drag permet d'explorer toutes les facettes de l'altérité, dans un processus de mimétisme qui semble se rapprocher de la pensée de Luce Irigaray, tout en en déplaçant le locus :

> Il s'agit d'assumer, délibérément, ce rôle (du féminin). Ce qui est déjà retourner en affirmation une subordination, et, de fait, commencer à la déjouer. […] Jouer de la mimesis, c'est donc, pour une femme, tenter de retrouver le lieu de son exploitation par le discours, sans s'y laisser simplement réduire. C'est se resoumettre – en tant que du côté du « sensible », de la « matière » … – à des « idées », notamment d'elle, élaborées par/dans une logique masculine, mais pour faire « apparaître », par un effet de répétition ludique, ce qui devait rester occulté : le recouvrement d'une possible opération du féminin dans le langage. C'est aussi « dévoiler » le fait que, si les femmes miment si bien, c'est qu'elles ne se résorbent pas simplement dans cette fonction. Elles restent aussi ailleurs[43]…

39 Sans négliger les structures de pouvoir à l'œuvre qui nécessitent que la femme se réapproprie le « rôle » féminin, il nous semble que nous pouvons rendre raison de la nature en apparence théâtrale du drag, et de l'écart avec Shakespeare à partir d'une lecture du mimétisme chez Irigaray. Bien que le mimétisme, dans son rapport au rôle féminin semble relever exclusivement de la parodie chez Irigaray, ce qui nous intéresse ici est le rapport qui se dit entre deux performances. En effet, le mimétisme n'est pas une simple

performance de genre mais une performance d'un rôle, soit une performance dédoublée, avec exposant – une performance de performance. Et ce à partir d'une situation dominée, une situation d'altérité par rapport à la « logique masculine ». N'est-il pas possible que le jeu de l'altérité que nous trouvions dans le drag soit lui aussi un tel mimétisme ? *Id est*, le drag ne peut-il pas être lu selon une heuristique de la performance avec exposant ? Le drag monstre est un jeu avec les normes du monstrueux, du choquant, de l'inconfortable, un jeu avec les représentations culturelles du monstre. Le drag alien joue et se joue des représentations des extra-terrestres dans la culture populaire, s'inspirant ou bien du teint, ou bien de la forme, ou bien de la marche, ou encore de la manière de parler ou de mécomprendre le monde pour produire une persona qui ne semble pas à sa place sur Terre. Le drag clown n'est pas une performance de clown mais la performance des normes du clown, une reprise (et non une répétition) qui inscrit de la nouveauté au sein d'une norme. La différence entre le drag et la performance théâtrale serait alors non pas une incompatibilité foncière mais un écart de degré. Le théâtre est le lieu de performances, le drag celui de performances de performances. Ainsi, nous pourrions tout à fait voir des drags performer des personnages de cinéma ou jeux vidéo tout en ne les confondant pas avec des acteurs[44]. Mais au-delà de ce redoublement de la performance, il faut maintenir, comme le fait Irigaray, l'origine minoritaire, opprimée du mimétisme qui doit s'affranchir de la logique dominante. *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un* ne cherche pas à proposer aux dominants une manière de jouer les dominés tout en s'en moquant, il s'agit pour les femmes de reprendre le pouvoir sur elles-mêmes et leurs représentations. De même, si nous assumons une telle lecture, il faut que le drag s'exprime à même le lieu d'une altérité vécue qui permet d'en jouer. Compris ainsi, le drag ne peut séparer son jeu d'une portée politique : le jeu est toujours sérieux, fût-ce inconsciemment.

40 Enfin, le mimétisme chez Irigaray a un aspect parodique et exagéré, un aspect ludique mais qui n'accepte pas de rire de tout[45]. Le mimétisme accepte que l'on exagère des traits sans pour autant que cette exagération soit un acte irrespectueux envers les femmes (que ce soit dans le cas qui la concerne ou le nôtre). Le drag se produit tantôt dans un mimétisme proche d'une représentation dite réaliste (on peut alors entendre le terme de « realness »), tantôt dans une exagération qui joue sur les formes féminines ou masculines, accentuant les hanches par du « padding », les seins par du silicone, les cheveux par des perruques, creusant les joues avec du contouring etc.

Fig. 7 : Drag alien L'Adam se maquille.

Crédits : Amélie Abraham.

La question des limites

41 Si le drag se donne comme autant de performances de performances, son lien avec Shakespeare est à la fois maintenu et en même temps dépassé. La dialectique baroque se redouble à son tour, oscillant entre l'origine folklorique et l'inédit, le drag se joue dans cet espace du ni-ni qui est en même temps et-et. Mimétique et parodique sans toutefois se rire de la situation des minorités, le drag se donne comme un espace de créativité qui est à la fois affranchi des repères et soumis à elles. En prises avec la culture populaire et l'histoire littéraire et artistique, la pensée peine à saisir l'être du drag dans la mesure où il se dérobe sans cesse dans une ouverture propre à toute œuvre d'art. Penser le drag ce n'est pas tenter de le reconduire à des débats de société sur la moralité ou non d'une performance qui se donne comme fondamentale dans l'histoire LGBTQIA+ en même temps que transgressive voire inacceptable pour des positions conservatrices. Plutôt penser le drag comme art revient à « prendre le temps d'entrer dans l'espace singulier de présence et d'ouverture que l'œuvre elle-même ouvre[46] », s'exposer à lui, se laisser toucher par l'altérité qui l'habite et le laisser ébranler les catégories de l'art traditionnellement conçu. Comme toute œuvre, le drag ouvre son histoire en même temps qu'il habite d'une tradition de laquelle il s'extirpe.

42 Mais cette ouverture de l'œuvre d'art et du drag en particulier doit se faire en toute conscience. Le drag relevant d'une performance consciente de normes, il faut reconnaître qu'il y a peut-être des limites à cette performance, qu'il y a peut-être un seuil que l'on ne peut outrepasser. Le drag autoriserait-il de jouer avec l'identité raciale au nom d'une ouverture artistique et d'un mimétisme fondamental ? Une telle problématique se pose à même la représentation du drag dans *RuPaul's Drag Race* où, du moins dans ses premières saisons la représentation de la race semble être le lieu

d'une exagération, d'une accentuation, qui est bien accueillie par les juges[47]. Mais, il demeure que les personnes se jouant de l'identité ethnique et/ou raciale ne peuvent être que des personnes concernées, que le mimétisme du drag n'autorise aucunement un jeu raciste, un « blackface » ou autre comportement insensible au nom du divertissement. Proposer une pensée précise de ces limites est au-delà de notre présent travail, mais indique un horizon auquel une telle pensée du drag comme performance de performance doit se confronter tôt ou tard. Car si la performance peut être le lieu d'une exploration de soi, d'une communauté réunie autour d'une altérité vécue, il ne faut pas qu'elle devienne le lieu d'une exclusion nouvelle, d'une répétition parmi les opprimés des structures d'oppression.

43 Le drag en tant que mimétisme ludique peut basculer en insulte lorsque les règles du jeu sont mécomprises. Mais en écoutant Irigaray, en conservant le ludisme qui ne se permet pas tout, le drag peut demeurer une exploration de soi, de sa différence, de son identité et une célébration sous forme d'art.

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Notes

[1] Cristiano Eduardo da Rosa & Jane Felipe, « Gender Performativity Seen Through the Eyes of Children », *Revista Brasiliera de Estudos da Presença*, vol. 11, n°1, 2011, p. 6. Nous retrouvons la même référence dans les études suivantes : Dorothy Price, « Art History at the Barricades », *Art History*, vol. 42, n°1, 2019, p. 8-15 ; Fabiana Poças Biondo & Bruno Cuter Albanese, « "Glamazon, sissy that walk": performances de drag queen dicionarizadas », *Cadernos de Estudos Culturais*, vol. 8, n°16, 2016, p. 107-126 ; Agata Szuba, « Fe/Male Performance », *DYSKURS Pismo Naukowo-Artystyczne ASP we Wrocławiu*, n° 27, p. 164-179.

[2] Gabby Skeldon & Brett Lashua, « Somewhere under the rainbow: Drag at the Showbar », in Diana C. Parry & Corey W. Johnson & Luc S. Cousineau (eds.), *Sex and Leisure. Promiscuous Perspectives*, London, Routledge, 2020, p. 146.

[3] *Ibid*., p. 149.

[4] Yves Bonnefoy, *L'improbable et autres essais*, Paris, Folio, 1992, p. 187.

[5] Une telle définition du baroque se rapproche de celles proposées par Blair Hoxby et Mary Ann Frese Witt. *Cf*. Mary Ann Frese Witt, *Metatheater and modernity: Baroque and Neobaroque*, Madison, Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2012 ; Blair Hoxby, « Dryden's Baroque Dramaturgy: The Case of Aureng-Zebe », in Jayne Lewis & Maximillian E. Novak, *Enchanted Ground: Reimagining John Dryden*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2004, p. 244-272.

[6] « Assigned male at birth ».

[7] Jeffrey R. Wilson, « "To be, or not to be": Shakespeare Against Philosophy », *Shakespeare*, vol. 14, n°4, 2017, p. 345.

[8] *Ibid*., p. 346.

[9] *Idem*.

[10] Pour une analyse de la subversion à l'œuvre dans *Hamlet*, voir Michèle Rouget, « Paradoxe et subversion dans Hamlet », in Gisèle Venet (ed.), *Le Mal et ses masques. Théâtre, imaginaire, société*, Lyon, ENS Éditions, 1998.

[11] Cette pratique dialectique de la philosophie est à l'œuvre dans tous les ouvrages de Wahl mais théorisé uniquement dans le *Traité de métaphysique*. *Cf*. Jean Wahl, *Traité de métaphysique*, Paris, Payot, 1957, p. 680-708. Elle sera ensuite plus succinctement étudiée par Vladimir Jankélévitch lors de la mort de Wahl : Vladimir Jankélévitch, *Sources*, Paris, Le Seuil, 1984, p. 142-154.

[12] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, New York, Routledge, 1999, p. 178.

[13] Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, London, Penguin, 1990, p. 27.

[14] *Ibid*., p. 37.

[15] Rachele Svetlana Bassan, « "You have a better needle, I know." Boy Actors on the Early Modern Stage », *Annali di Ca' Foscari. Serie occidentale*, vol. 56, 2022, p. 35.

[16] Judith Butler, *op. cit.*, p. xxviii-xxix.

[17] Rachele Svetlana Bassan, *art. cit*., p. 35.

[18] Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, New York, Routledge, 1993, p. 126.

[19] Ester Newton, *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1979, p. 100.

[20] *Ibid*., p. 103.

[21] *Idem*.

[22] Susan Sontag, « Notes on “Camp” », *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*, New York, Octagon, 1982, p. 275.

[23] Mourad Romdhani & Zied Ben Amor, « Cross-Dressing and Border Crossing in William Shakespeare’s *As You Like It*: The Paradox of Female Identity », *International Journal of Education and Philology*, vol. 3, n°2, 2022, p. 12.

[24] Un problème historique de la philosophie se poserait ici à nouveau quant à savoir si les performers sont conscients de leur performance. Nous ne pouvons sonder les intentions de l’autre et donc savoir à quel point cette conscience est aigue, mais il demeure qu’il serait difficile d’admettre que nous faisons du drag sans le savoir et sans savoir ce que cela représente dans une époque où sa popularité télévisuelle est forte.

[25] Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, *op. cit.*, p. 126.

[26] Yves Bonnefoy, *op. cit.*, p. 189.

[27] Le fétiche ici renvoie à la théorie marxienne du fétichisme de la marchandise que nous trouvons dans *Le Capital*. *Cf*. Karl Marx, *Le Capital*, trad. Lefebvre, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1993, p. 81 *sq*.

[28] Si nous identifions drag et « cross-dressing », pourquoi s’arrêter à Shakespeare ? Pourquoi rattacher nécessairement au théâtre élisabéthain et pas au théâtre antique, donnant une historicité encore plus conséquente ? Nous retrouvons ces tentatives dans les livres « grand public » autour de l’histoire du drag. *Cf*. Simon Doonan, *Drag? The Complete Story*, London, Laurence King Publishing, 2020, p. 102-135. Doonan remonte même jusqu’au mascara égyptien !

[29] Bassam Romaya, « The Coalescence of Dichotomy in Drag Aesthetics », in Raja Halwami, Carol V. A. Quinn & Andy Wible (eds.),

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[30] Diane Torr & Stephen Bottoms, *Sex, Drag, and Male Roles: Investigating Gender As Performance*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 2010, p. 1.

[31] Leila J. Rupp, Verta Taylor & Eve Ilana Shapiro, « Drag Queens and Drag Kings: The Difference Gender Makes », *Sexualities*, vol. 13, n°3, 2010, p. 275.

[32] Fenton Litwiller, « Normative drag culture and the making of precarity », *Leisure Studies*, vol. 39, n°4, p. 609.

[33] Respectivement *Romy & Juliet* et *MacBitch*.

[34] Cette violence est d'autant plus accentuée avec une interview de 2018 de RuPaul dans *The Guardian* qui opposait militantisme trans et drag. *Cf*. Decca Aitkenhead, « RuPaul: "Drag is a big f-you to male-dominated culture" », *The Guardian*, 3 mars 2018. URL. Consulté le 20 octobre 2023.

[35] John M. Kohfeld, « "Who's here for local drag?": Community, Identity, and Remix in Seattle's Drag Scene », Thèse de doctorat non publiée, 2021, p. 28. En règle générale, remarquons la relative absence des études sur le drag dit alternatif dans les études publiées. Nous trouvons majoritairement des travaux de mémoire ou de thèse sur ces questions qui ne donnent pas (encore) lieu à des publications. Il paraît alors important d'insister ici sur la relative absence de sources académiques sur ces questions.

[36] Paul B. Preciado, *Je suis un monstre qui vous parle*, Paris, Grasset, 2020.

[37] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Le Gai Savoir*, trad. Patrick Wotling, Paris, Flammarion, 2007, p. 166.

[38] Sur les performances de femmes dans l'Angleterre du XVI^e siècle, voir James Stokes, « The Ongoing Exploration of Women and Performance in Early Modern England. Evidences, Issues, and Questions », *Shakespeare Bulletin*, vol. 33, n°1, 2015, p. 9-31.

[39] Kathryn Rosenfeld, « Drag king magic », *Journal of Homosexuality*, vol. 43, n° 3-4, p. 201.

[40] Erving Goffman, *op. cit.*, p. 28-82, en particulier p. 32-40.

[41] En cela nous retrouvons des éléments de l'analyse du clown proposés dans Maxim Leonid Weintraub, « Clowning Around at the Limits of Representation », in David Robb (éd.), *Clowns, Fools and Picaros Popular Forms in Theatre, Fiction and Film*, New York, Rodopi, 2007, p. 76 : « Indeed, the very "essence" of the clown hinges on a clichéd idiom of signs embalmed in its cosmetics and woven into its costume that signal different stock character types (a happy or sad clown) and traits (clumsiness or naiveté). As ultimately nothing but a surface of signs, the clown is a figure inscribed in and prescribed by representation, one whose effect hinges on an acknowledgement from its audience of its own status as a sign. In short, a clown is only what its excessive makeup and costume signifies – there is nothing behind the mask ».

[42] Pensons alors à Juno Birch qui se maquille sans cesse en bleu, s'inspirant d'une « housewife » des années 1960, semblable à l'alien de *Mars Attacks!* (1996) de Tim Burton.

[43] Luce Irigaray, *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un*, Paris, Minuit, 1977, p. 34.

[44] Pensons par exemple à la soirée SlayStation ayant lieu à Londres où les drags peuvent tantôt ressembler à Team Rocket de *Pokémon*, tantôt à Bayonetta du jeu éponyme, ou encore Sephiroth des jeux *Final Fantasy*...

[45] « Irigaray emphasizes the parodic and playful character of the mimetic role », Susan Kozel, « The Diabolical Strategy of Mimesis: Luce Irigaray's Reading of Maurice Merleau-Ponty », *Hypatia*, vol. 11, n°3, 1996, p. 116. Sur la nature ludique du mimétisme d'Irigaray, voir Naomi Schor, « This essentialism which is not one: Coming to grips with Irigaray », in Carolyn Burke, Naomi Schor & Margaret Whitford (éds.), *Engaging with Irigaray: Feminist philosophy and modem European thought*, 1995, p. 67.

[46] Hadrien France-Lanord, « La pensée de Heidegger à l'épreuve des œuvres d'art », *Cahiers de philosophie de l'Université de Caen*, vol. 55, 2018, p. 24.

[47] Sabrina Strings & Long T. Bui, « She Is Not Acting, She Is », *Feminist Media Studies*, 2013, p. 822-836.

Oliver Norman

Oliver Norman est professeur agrégé de philosophie ainsi que ATER « Philosophie morale et politique » à l'Université de Poitiers. Il effectue une thèse sous la direction du Pr. Philippe Grosos sur l'éthique du silence chez Kierkegaard et ses reprises françaises de la seconde moitié du XX^{e} siècle. Il a également consacré des travaux à la question de l'intersection entre philosophie kierkegaardienne et problématiques contemporaines autour de l'identité tels « Kierkegaard, Gender Identity, and Bioethics. How to Receive the Other » (in *Kierkegaard and Bioethics*, éd. J. -C. Põder, Routledge, 2023, p. 176-190) et « Despair and Gender Identity. Reading Kierkegaard in a Queer Light » (in *Kierkegaard and Issues in Contemporary Ethics*, éd. M. Fox-Muraton, De Gruyter, 2020, p. 253-272).

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Editeur

Université de Poitiers
15, rue de l'Hôtel Dieu
TSA 71117
86073 POITIERS Cedex 9

Tél : (33) (0)5 49 45 30 00
Fax : (33) (0)5 49 45 30 50
Courriel : webmaster@univ-poitiers.fr

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TSA 81109
86073 POITIERS Cedex 9
Tél : 05 49 45 39 82
Courriel : imedias@univ-poitiers.fr

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