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The phenomenon of boy players in Elizabethan theatre

Relatore
Prof.ssa Alessandra Petrina

Laureanda
Hannah Profanter
n° matricola 1232046 / LLM

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“What shall I do with my doublet and hose!”
Rosalind, *As You Like It* (3.2.200-01)

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Foreword

The idea of this thesis was developed over the third year of my bachelor's degree and it comes out of a deep interest in English literature. It explores the phenomenon of boy actors in Elizabethan England and examines the presence of gender roles in William Shakespeare's pastoral comedy *As You Like It*. The thesis is guided by both primary sources of the sixteenth and seventeenth century and recent critical sources concerning the issue of gender performance and the concept of cross-dressing in Elizabethan theatre.

Firstly, a brief introduction of the social conditions of the sixteenth century is given, with the attempt to portray the presence of female characters in theatre and society. Additionally, the issue of cross-dressing is discussed where the focus mainly lies on the downsides of the tradition. In the second chapter, an analysis of the comedy *As You Like It* is carried out and gender-related issues will be further examined. The emphasis is upon the subversive gender-roles and the change of relationships of the characters. It also aims to highlight literary conceptions such as the tradition of courtly love and the idea of the Petrarchan lover.

Lastly, I would like to express my deepest appreciation to the countless people that supported my effort in this bachelor's degree. I could not have undertaken this journey without your unconditional and loving support. Special thanks go to my parents, who have been a constant source of support and encouragement during the challenges of university. They not only offered me the possibility to pursue my degree but never failed in being there for me when I needed them. I would also like to thank my three siblings Julia, Lea and Alex. They were my number one fans when everything seemed impossible. Julia, who never hesitated to proofread my works, Lea who made me feel valuable and

Alex, who related deeply to my struggles. Another special thanks go to my former flat-mate and dear friend Diana. Thanks to your contagious positive energy life seemed less dramatic sometimes. Finally, I would like to thank my boyfriend Tobias, who was and still is my pillar of strength. He never fails to provide powerful and encouraging words and endures my emotional exhaustion in times of unrest.

1. Boy players and the performance of gender

1.1. The role of boy players

It is an established convention that boy actors took over female roles in Elizabethan theatre. Nonetheless, it was only at the end of the twentieth century that a variety of gender and queer studies began to question the concept of cross-gender casting. Much of the seminal work on boy actors happened during the 1980s until the 2000s, and was introduced by a branch of feminist and historicist scholars.[1] Their aim was to highlight both the gender performance in the theatre of the sixteenth century and the impact cross-dressing had on boy players, considering mainly the age range from 8 to 21.[2] The exact age of the boy actors is still disputed.[3] Generally speaking, such discussions quite frequently have shown themselves to be lacking in reliable evidence, that is why we often have to rely on speculation.[4] Despite the fact that we do not have a reliable all-round picture, a firm conclusion regarding the phenomenon of boy actors can be drawn: female roles on English stages were taken over by prepubescent boys until the early 1660s.[5] It is probably not coincidental that the age range of the boy actors corresponds to the average

[1] To name a few: Callaghan, Dympna, *Shakespeare Without Women: Representing Gender and Race on the Renaissance Stage*, London: Routledge, 2000, Kathman, David, "How Old Were Shakespeare's Boy Actors?" *Shakespeare Survey*, 58 (2007), pp. 220-246, Shapiro, Michael, *Gender in Play on the Shakespearean Stage – Boy Heroines and Female Pages*, Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 1994, Traub, Valerie, *Desire and Anxiety – Circulations of Sexuality in Shakespearean Drama*, London: Routledge, 1992.

[2] Mulchay, Sean, "Boy Actors on the Shakespearean Stage – Subliminal or Subversive", *Anglistik*, 28 (2017), p. 87.

[3] James H. Forse as well as Joy L. Gibson assume that there is no definitive evidence regarding the recruitment of the boy actors -- both assume that their state must have been prepubescent. Forse, James H., *Art Imitates Business Commercial and Political Influence in Elizabethan Theatre*, Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1994, p. 78, Gibson, Joy, L., *Squeaking Cleopatras*: *The Elizabethan Boy Player*, Stroud: Sutton, 2000, p. 24.

[4] Kathman, p. 220.

[5] Bentley, Gerald E., *The Profession of Player in Shakespeare's Time, 1590-1642,* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984, p. 113, Kathman, p. 220.

age for apprentices in London during that period.[6] Still, it is not clear whether the lowest age for starting an apprenticeship was at eight or at ten to eleven.[7] It can be assumed that the age would depend on the purpose of the job.[8]

The London commercial companies of adult players usually were made up of hired men, sharers and apprentices or boy actors.[9] As already mentioned before, in theatrical settings boy apprentices played the female roles where the apprenticeship system not only served to educate the apprentices but also could offer a training ground where many apprentices went on to eventually become hired men or sharers of the company.[10] Thus, it can be assumed that the acting troupes used the common apprenticeship system in training the boy players.[11] The historical record *Historia Histrionica* by James Wright provides essential information on the life of actors in the seventeenth century. It is mentioned that boy actors who had received training before 1642 were in fact officially addressed as apprentices.[12] Wright refers to boy players as apprentices and sometimes adds the name of the sharer to whom they were bound.[13] On the other hand, no significant evidence exists of the fact that adults took over the female parts in sixteenth-century theatre. Yet enough evidence exists to claim that those female roles were played by non-sharers who sometimes were explicitly identified as boy

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[6] Gibson, p. 24, Kathman, p. 220.

[7] Baldwin, Thomas W., *The Organization and Personnel of the Shakespearean Company*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1927, pp. 33-35, Davies, Robertson, *Shakespeare's Boy Actors*, London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1993, p. 6, G.E., Bentley, pp. 119-120, Gibson, p. 24, Shapiro, p. 33.

[8] Baldwin, p. 33.

[9] Bentley, p. 13.

[10] Gurr, Andrew, *The Shakespearean Stage 1574-1642*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, p. 113, Kathman, David, "Grocers, Goldsmiths, and Drapers: Freemen and Apprentices in the Elizabethan Theater", *Shakespeare Quarterly,* 55 (2004), p. 4.

[11] Bentley, p. 122, Gibson, p. 26.

[12] Wright, James, *Historia Histrionica: An Historical Account of the English Stage Shewing the Ancient Use, Improvement, and Perfection of Dramatick Representations in this Nation. In a Dialogue of Plays and Players,* London: G. Croom, 1699, p. 3.

[13] Bentley, p. 122.

actors.[14] Often only a few boy actors could be found within the theatre troupes, so that all the existing female roles in the play were assigned to one boy player.[15] A company usually was attached to a single theatre that was owned by a group of landlords or by a single landlord, but no players.[16] Adult players could also be the sharers of the company and if their company was one of the famous ones in London they may have enjoyed a certain degree of admiration and prestige.[17] The tradition of boys appearing with adults in public performances was presumably not seen as disrupting and unfamiliar. Local celebrations, such as royal weddings, religious festivals and suchlike, had contained adolescent performers since the thirteenth century.[18]

As far as we know, a crucial requirement for the role of boy actors was a prepubescent state in which the voice change had not occurred yet and soft features were still present to convey femininity on stage. Therefore, the status of the boy player became rather unstable at the income of puberty, due to the breaking of the voice. As most boys were on the verge of puberty, it was likely that their voices would break anytime soon.[19] A broken voice could cause a decline in profits and could negatively affect the female impersonation.[20] As the breaking of the voice is an event that cannot be foreseen, it may also be interpreted as a loss of control of the bodies of boy actors.[21] Robertson Davies argues,

> the training of the boys in speech and song was of the utmost importance [...] a well-trained voice would give precisely the effect of beauty and careful modulation which is required. The break however, can be

[14] Bentley, p. 113, Kathman, "How Old Were Shakespeare's Boys?", p. 228. Traub, p. 117.
[15] Shapiro, p. 33.
[16] Bentley, p. 14.
[17] Bentley, p. 18.
[18] Bentley, p. 117, Davies, p. 4.
[19] Bloom, Gina, "Thy Voice Squeaks: Listening for Masculinity on the Early Modern Stage", *Renaissance Drama*, 29 (1998), p. 41.
[20] Callaghan, p. 71, Davies, p. 35, Gibson, p. 26, Hamamra, B. Tawfiq, "The Convention of the Boy Actor in Early Modern Tragedies", *Notes and Reviews,* 32 (2019), p. 2.
[21] Hamamra, p. 3.

controlled, and in a trained voice can be deferred and concealed for two or three years. Careful training will preserve almost any boy's voice unbroken for speaking until the age of seventeen.[22]

Davies claims that the voices of the boy actors could be trained, to defer the break of the voice. However, I have found no recent studies that show that the break of the voice can be concealed for a couple of years – it is indeed an event that cannot be foreseen. Also, the strength of the voice played an important role in the performance of the boy actors. In fact, a strong voice was required to reach a certain level of audibility in the Elizabethan theatres, but coarseness had to be avoided at all costs.[23]

It is to be kept in mind that all roles concerning female impersonations were written by male playwrights and thought to be acted by boy actors.[24] The professional theatre was in fact an all-male activity. Acting was an all-male activity too in ancient Greece and Rome,[25] while it was not so for the Italians in the early modern period.[26] Surprisingly enough, in the early modern period the phenomenon of boy actors was a uniquely English custom.[27] Women did not act in professional plays in Italy until Italian theatre troupes decided to introduce actresses in the 1560s. A decade later the theatre troupes were already travelling outside Italy.[28] There exist records of occasional visits to England by Italian companies.[29] Certainly, Elizabeth's England did see women on professional stages but no English ones.[30] George Sandys, an English traveller and poet

[22] Davies, pp. 34-35.
[23] Davies, p. 34.
[24] Davies, p. 3.
[25] Shapiro, p. 31.
[26] Shapiro, p.32.
[27] Brown, Pamela A., "Why Did the English Stage Take Boys for Actresses?", *Shakespeare Survey*, 70 (2017), p.188, Forks, Charles, R., "Sexuality and Eroticism on the Renaissance Stage", *South Central Review*, 7 (1990), p. 7, Shapiro, p. 32.
[28] Brown, Pamela A., p. 188.
[29] Brown, Pamela A., p. 188, Orgel, p. 11, Shapiro, p. 32.
[30] Orgel, Stephen, *Impersonations: The Performance of Gender in Shakespeare's England*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 11.

of the sixteenth and seventeenth century, responded to an Italian performance in 1610. In his response he stressed the concern that "There have they their play-houses, where the parts of women acted by women, and too naturally passionated".[31] In his response, the early modern population understood that women should not act women's parts because they could not portray passion onstage in an aesthetically pleasing way. On the other hand there is Thomas Coryat, who responded with astonishment to the idea of incorporating female performers in theatre settings. Coryat was an English writer and traveller in the Elizabethan and Jacobean period. He undertook a tour of Europe and published his memoires in the literary work *Coryat's Crudities.* When he saw for the first time a woman acting in Venice he underlined:

> I saw women acte, a thing that I never saw before […] and they performed it with as good a grace, action, gesture, and whatsoever convenient for a Player, as ever I saw any masculine Actor. [32]

As we can see, different points of view regarding the phenomenon were present in the early modern society. However, for Elizabethan playgoers there was nothing odd about boys taking over female roles in performances. The audience apparently accepted boy performers without any signs of incongruity or inappropriateness.[33]

1.2. The conditions of boy actors in the theatre

A fair amount of information can be gleaned regarding the usual conditions under which boy players lived and worked in London in the sixteenth century.[34] In this work I am confining my attention to adult companies. As already explained, boys belonging to the

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[31] Sandys, George, *A Relation of a Journey Begun 1610: Foure Bookes Coutaining a Description of the Turkish Empire, of Aegypt, of the Holy Land, of the Remote Parts of Italt, and Islands Adjoyning,* London: Printed for W. Barrett, 1621, pp. 245-46.

[32] Coryat, Thomas, *Coryat's Crudities*, Glasgow: University of Glasgow, 1905, p. 386.

[33] Davies, p. 34.

[34] See for instance: Bentley, Davies, Gibson, Gurr.

age range of 8-21 were apprenticed to masters to learn a profession. Generally speaking we can assume that the terms of the apprenticeship were regulated by organised guilds, to which the apprentice's master belonged.[35] On the other hand, we are not certain whether the relationship between boy actors and their masters had a similar rigid pattern like the seven-year apprenticeship in the guilds or not.[36] Presumably the relationship between master and boy actor, in terms of being an apprentice, was comparable to that of teacher and pupil.[37]

Since the boy players were minors, they rarely got involved in financial matters.[38] However, there exists an important piece of evidence that allows us to get an insight into financial transactions which were set up in order to buy boy actors. *Henslowe's Diary* functions as one of the primary sources of the period. The theatrical entrepreneur and impresario Philip Henslowe wrote down private affairs and business transactions in the diary. His last entry dates from 1609.[39] Henslowe wrote in his diary about his boy actor James Brystow. The two entries concerning the boy player read:

bowght my boye Jeames brystow of William agusten player the 18 of Desembeʒ 1597 for viij.[40]

the companye dothe owe vnto me for my boye Jemes bristos wages frome the 23 of aprell 1600 vnto the xv of febreary
1600 next after the Ratte of iij[s] weecke some.[41]

Henslowe charged the company three shillings for a weekly use of his boy James Bristow, whom he had bought from William Augustine for eight pounds.[42] From these two entries it may be deduced that the theatre impresario saw his boy actor as some sort of personal

[35] Bentley, p. 118.
[36] Gurr, p. 114.
[37] Bentley, p. 126.
[38] Bentley, p. 117.
[39] Henslowe's *Diary*, p. 9.
[40] Henslowe's *Diary*, p. 203 (F. 232, l. 26.).
[41] Henslowe's *Diary*, p. 134 (F. 85[v] l. 31.).
[42] Gurr, p. 90.

investment. Henslowe allowed James Bristow to serve the company for a wage, paid to Henslowe himself and not the boy actor.[43] Indeed, there is no reliable evidence that proves that boy actors got paid wages. Presumably some masters gave their apprentices some pocket money, but this was certainly not an established custom.[44]

1.2.1. The concept of cross-dressing and its downsides

Since boys did not have the biological features of the female sex, the illusion of femininity had to be created by making use of make-up, wigs and costumes.[45] It is debatable whether boy actors were read as female or male in society. It may be assumed that gender was primarily based on social identification – therefore, when a boy performer followed a female behavioural pattern and dressed like one, he most probably was read as female during theatrical displays.[46] Even though the convention was accepted among the theatregoers and society, it certainly was not without its critics. Concerns regarding the appearance of boy actors on stage were expressed by the Puritan preachers of that period.[47] Puritans had antitheatrical opinions and perceived the cross-dressing from male to female as a sin and something abominable. They had a fear that cross-dressing could blur sexual and social boundaries by making use of costumes that distort the features God gave us.[48] William Prynne emphasised his concerns in his work *Histriomastix: The Player's Scourge, or Actor's Tragedy* as follows:

[43] Davies, p. 4.
[44] Gibson, p. 29.
[45] Gibson, p. 44, Mulcahy, p. 4.
[46] Mulcahy, p. 6.
[47] Gurr, p. 17.
[48] Orgel, p. 26.

The concurrent testimony of sundry Councels, Fathers, & moderne Authors, do absolutely condemne mens putting on of womans apparell, [...] especially to act a part vpon the Stage, as an abomina|ble, unnaturall, effeminate and dishonest thing.[49]

As a consequence, the concept of cross-dressing was seen as sinful and vicious from a religious point of view. Puritans not only expressed their feeling of unease in religious matters but were also worried about the safety of the boy players. Various works by antitheatrical writers, such as William Prynne and Edward Reynolds, emphasised their discomfort in seeing boy players on stage and presumably spread awareness among the theatregoers and made them more conscious of the convention.[50] A concern of the Puritans was that the boy's body covered in women's clothes may arouse homosexual desire in the male audience.[51] Thus, boy players were probably sexually abused by male playgoers. Indeed, in the adult companies the status of the minors was often at high risk of abuse not only from a financial point of view but also from a sexual one.[52] There were certainly various social advantages in the process of becoming a player but the negative aspects of sexual victimization and exploitation probably prevailed.[53] For many adult men who were in positions of mastery over the boys, the minors were perceived as available partners of sexual desire and erotic interest with or without consent.[54] There certainly were debates about the morality of boy actors in England, but introducing women into theatre settings as an alternative has never been mentioned in the early modern period.[55]

[49] Prynne, William, *Histriomastix: The Player's Scourge, or Actor's Tragedy*, London: Printed by E.A. and W.I. for Michael Sparke, 1633, p. 183.
[50] Orgel, p. 29, Shapiro, p. 38.
[51] Brown, Steve, "The Boyhood of Shakespeare's Heroines: Notes on Gender Ambiguity in the Sixteenth Century"*, Studies in English Literature*, 1500-1900, 30 (1990), p. 255, Mulcahy, p. 14, Shapiro, p. 38.
[52] Callaghan, p. 67.
[53] Callaghan, p. 68.
[54] Brown, Steve, p. 246, Gibson, p. 29.
[55] Orgel, p. 3.

1.3. Being a woman in Elizabethan society: the predominance of masculinity

While cross-dressing from male to female was a normative theatrical practice in the sixteenth century, it was not from female to male. The London court labelled female cross-dressers as lascivious and sexually promiscuous and could eventually sentence them guilty of a misdemeanour.[56] It can be presumed that female cross-dressing was not a common practice in the sixteenth century, because it was often linked to prostitution.[57] However, it cannot be assumed that those women who did actually worked as prostitutes.[58] It may be assumed that women were banned from performing professionally for their own sexual protection.[59] English society probably did not want to see women performing in sexually compromising situations.[60]

Orgel argues that

> evidence does not support a blanket claim that women were excluded from the stages of Renaissance England, but it may certainly indicate that the culture, and the history that descends from it, had an interest in rendering them unnoticeable. [61]

As a matter of fact, no official law regulating the gender of the actors has ever been found.[62] Nonetheless, the fact that Shakespeare's theatre consciously excluded women from the professional stage cannot be overlooked. The English society in the sixteenth century was presumably homosocial and the men who operated in theatres probably preferred same-sex affection between males over female sexuality.[63] Early modern

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[56] Howard J.E., "Crossdressing, The Theatre, and Gender Struggle in Early Modern England", *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 39 (1988), p. 424, Shapiro, p. 20.
[57] Shapiro, pp. 16-17.
[58] Shapiro, p. 20.
[59] Forks, p. 7.
[60] Forks, p. 7.
[61] Orgel, pp. 8-9.
[62] Brown, Pamela A., p. 191.
[63] Brown, Pamela A., p. 191.

England was without any doubts a patriarchal society.[64] When considering women's social positions it is important to understand that they were portrayed differently from men – they had to be subservient to them.[65] It was expected that a woman would show wifely obedience towards the husband who had authority over her.[66] When a woman was married she forfeited her identity, by becoming a property of the husband.[67] If not explicitly appointed as guardians in the husband's will, mothers had no legal rights over the guardianship of their children.[68] From the Middle Ages onwards there have been existing courtesy books that reminded women to act with decorum in society.[69] Baldassare Castiglione, an Italian Renaissance author, wrote *The Book of the Courtier* that provides a fascinating insight into the Renaissance court life. Baldassare was rather explicit in his ideas on the behaviour of women. Castiglione's courtesy book had great influence on Elizabethan society and Elizabethans followed some of the behavioural patterns.[70] Men's business was mainly outside the household while women's duties were located within the household. [71] Men usually had to maintain the family financially, while women focused more on raising the children and household chores.[72] Boy players eventually referred to those books in order to assume female qualities.[73]

[64] Orgel, p. 13, Rose, Mary, B., "Where Are the Women in Shakespeare? Options for Gender Representation in the English Renaissance", *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 42 (1991), p. 304.
[65] Gibson, p. 48.
[66] Gibson, p. 45.
[67] Rose, p. 292.
[68] Rose, p. 293.
[69] Gibson, p. 44.
[70] Gibson, p. 45.
[71] Shepard, Alexandra, "Manhood, Credit and Patriarchy in Early Modern England c. 1580-1640", *Past and Present*, 167 (2000), p. 75.
[72] Shepard, p. 84.
[73] Gibson, p. 45.

Quotations from the Bible were cited to prove female inferiority.[74] Arguments claiming that women derive from Adam's rib or arguments concerning women's physical inferiority influenced the general understanding of gender positions.[75] In addition, early modern society also relied on Aristoteles's theories claiming women's inferiority. Often, his generalisations were taken as natural truth.

[74] Hull, Suzanne, W., *Chaste, Silent & Obedient: English Books for Women, 1475-1640,* San Marino: Huntington Library, 1982, p. 106.
[75] Hull, p. 106.

2. Cross-dressing and the presentation of gender in *As You Like It*

2.1. An outline of the plot

As You Like It is a five-act pastoral comedy by William Shakespeare and it is believed to have been written in the last half of 1599 or the first half of 1600.[1] The play discusses matters of gender, family rivalry and character disguise. While a few scenes are located at court, the bulk of the play is set in the countryside – more precisely in the Forest of Arden. The pastoral comedy presents a world apart in the forest, to which many of the principal characters are exiled. However, the court is never forgotten throughout the plot. The play eventually ends with the main characters returning to court, except for Jaques who embodies melancholy during the play.

As far as the plot is concerned, its central story talks about the love story of Orlando and Rosalind. Rosalind and Orlando experience love at first sight, when she watches him prove his manhood in a fight with the court wrestler Charles. The play also talks about two pairs of brothers. Each pair belongs to a different family and within each pair, brother feuds with brother. The first pair of brothers concerns the ruling Duke Frederick and his older brother Duke Senior. Duke Frederick banishes his older brother from court as soon as he usurps the throne. Duke Senior eventually flees into the Forest of Arden and is accompanied by a group of faithful followers. Duke Senior's daughter, Rosalind, was not exiled because she is very close to Duke Frederick's daughter, Celia. The other pair of brothers are Oliver and Orlando. They are the sons of Sir Roland de Boys, whom they have lost recently.

[1] This is the edition I use throughout my work: Shakespeare, William, *As You Like It*, edited by Michael Hattaway, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 62.

The play starts with Orlando complaining to the family retainer, Adam, that his eldest brother Oliver keeps his inheritance from him. According to the custom of primogeniture, most of Sir Roland's inheritance passes to the elder son, Oliver. Even though Oliver inherits the main estates, he keeps funds that belong to Orlando. The elder brother is also responsible for providing a good education for his younger brother but refuses to do so. He denies training Orlando to become a proper gentleman. A bitter quarrel between the two brothers takes place. Oliver wants Orlando gone and plans to have him seriously injured, if not killed, in a wrestling match with the court wrestler Charles. The next day at the wrestling match Orlando eventually defeats his opponent. When Rosalind gifts Orlando a necklace to celebrate his victory, he falls in love with her. Orlando and Rosalind experience love at first sight.

Given the circumstances at court, Orlando plans on fleeing from the tyrannical dukedom. At the same time, Duke Frederick speaks to Rosalind and wants her to leave the court. He banishes her from his court because she reminds people of her exiled father. He accuses her of being a traitor and threatens her with death, should she be found within the surroundings of the court. Rosalind and Celia do not manage to convince Duke Frederick of Rosalind's innocence. Therefore, the cousins decide to leave the court and look for Rosalind's father in the Forest of Arden. Since such a journey would be dangerous for two beautiful and noble women, the cousins come up with the idea of disguising themselves. "Alas, what danger will it be to us [...] to travel forth so far? Beauty provoketh thieves sooner than gold." (1.3.98-100). Celia decides to take over the role of a common shepherdess and Rosalind disguises herself as a young man. Rosalind changes her name into Ganymede and Celia renames herself Aliena. Escaping with them is the court fool Touchstone.

In the Forest of Arden, they encounter Silvius, a lovesick shepherd who experiences unrequited love for a scornful shepherdess called Phoebe. In need of a place to stay, Ganymede and Aliena manage to buy a rural cottage in the woods. The cottage belongs to the master of Corin, who is another shepherd of the forest. In the meantime, Orlando and Adam arrive at Duke Senior's place and are welcomed as fellow exiles. Rosalind and Orlando think that they might have lost each other forever, not knowing that both escaped into the Forest of Arden. Suffering from lovesickness, Orlando composes poems that are dedicated to Rosalind. He hangs them on trees, desperately hoping that he will find his love Rosalind again. "O Rosalind, these trees shall be my books, and in their barks my thoughts I'll character." (3.2.5-6) Additionally, he also carves her name into tree trunks. Rosalind, still disguised as Ganymede, discovers Orlando's poems and reads them but finds them rather pathetic. Rosalind does not know who wrote the love poems. It is Celia who reveals the secret of Orlando composing and pinning the poems on trees.

Ganymede and Orlando eventually start speaking to each other and Ganymede promises Orlando to help him with his lovesickness. Orlando does not realise that he is speaking to Rosalind in disguise. Ganymede proposes to let Orlando woo her as if she were the real Rosalind. Orlando must visit Ganymede's cottage daily to woo Ganymede. Ganymede's aim is to cure Orlando of his lovesickness and uneasy feelings. Additionally, Ganymede wants to show Orlando how to get over this unrequited love for Rosalind. Orlando agrees to Ganymede's proposal and decides to play along with it. We can observe an interesting dynamic between Rosalind and Orlando. Rosalind is pretending to be a young man named Ganymede but at the same time she is also pretending to be the real Rosalind. In Act 4 Scene 1 Ganymede lures Orlando even into a mock wedding ceremony, only to make fun of him.

Throughout the story we see love entanglements concerning the various couples. The shepherd Silvius loves Phoebe, but Phoebe on the other hand is in love with Ganymede. Rosalind, disguised as Ganymede, loves Orlando and Orlando loves Rosalind but finds comfort in wooing Ganymede. Even the jester Touchstone has fallen in love with Audrey, who is a country girl from the forest. On the other hand, there is William, a country man, who is in love with Audrey. Audrey eventually chooses to marry Touchstone. Oliver falls in love with Aliena, not knowing that she is Celia, the daughter of Duke Frederick. Aliena has already consented to marry Oliver before revealing her real identity. Ironically, many of the characters fall for the wrong person but eventually they manage to get together with the right one.

Since Orlando is nowhere to be found at court, Oliver searches for his brother in the woods. Wanting to protect his brother, Orlando ends up in a dangerous fight with a lioness. Eventually it is Orlando who saves Oliver's life. Oliver finally understands that Orlando has good intentions and gives him back the funds he was entitled to. Orlando, who is severely injured, charges Oliver with delivering a bloodstained handkerchief to Ganymede. The handkerchief should serve as an apology for not arriving at the meeting in time. Orlando is still lovesick over Rosalind and Ganymede assures him that he will fix Orlando's troubles by the following day by making use of magic: "I say I am a magician." (5.2.56-57). Ganymede tries to comfort both Orlando and Phoebe who experience unrequited love. Ganymede emphasises that if Phoebe still wants to marry him the following day, then it will be – if not, Phoebe has to get together with Silvius.

At the wedding, the following couples are present: Orlando and Rosalind, who is still disguised as Ganymede, Oliver and Celia, who is still masqueraded as Aliena, Silvius and Phoebe and Audrey and Touchstone. Hymen, the god of marriage, underlines that he

ends the confusion of cross-dressing "Peace, ho: I bar confusion, 'Tis I must make conclusion Of the most strange events" (5.4.109-11). Celia and Rosalind then reappear in their female clothes and they are led by the god Hymen. After discovering that Ganymede is a woman, Phoebe becomes disenchanted and eventually decides to marry Silvius "If sight and shape be true, why then, my love, adieu." (5.4.105). Finally, the second son of Sir Roland de Boys, Jacques de Boys, enters with exciting news. Duke Frederick was planning on executing his brother Duke Senior but eventually left the court to become a religious hermit in the forest. Duke Senior is restored to his old dukedom as we can see in this quote: "And all their lands restored to them again That were with him exiled" (5.4.148-49). The initial romantic and political issues fade into the background and they return happily back to court.

2.2. The subversive gender roles in the play and the tradition of courtly love

In Shakespeare's day, when a female character on stage masqueraded as a man, a boy was playing a woman playing a man. In Shakespeare's pastoral comedy *As You Like It* the concept of gender masquerade is predominant. It seems almost as if Shakespeare was more interested in the characters of the play than the plot. He lets the characters explore different perspectives and nuances towards love, allowing them to break stereotypical gender roles. We can assume that Shakespeare used the concept of cross-dressing to express the androgyny of female characters.[2]

[2] Beckman, Margaret, B., "The Figure of Rosalind in As You Like It", *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 29 (1978), p. 48, Doniger, Wendy, *Chicago Shakespeare Theatre – Gender Blending and Masquerade in As You Like It and Twelfth Night,* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015, p. 250.

To fully understand the complexity of performance and the breaking of gender-roles in *As You Like It*, we have to consider the literary conception of courtly love. Courtly love is a literary conception of love that is overly sentimental and diffident. It appears in Europe already in the High Middle Ages with the troubadours, where it was primarily oral literature and recited in public accompanied with music.[3] The troubadours praised a love that was almost exclusively an extramarital love, highly passionate and freely chosen. In this new poetry motifs and beliefs were used for the first time and heavily influenced the romance in Western society up until the present day.[4] Before courtly love was established, women often were mentioned as side-characters in poetry, while in this literary genre they are defined as individuals. Nonetheless, what is very common in the tradition of courtly love is that women are almost always married or unattainable.[5] Courtly love happened mainly outside marriage – only because someone was married or unavailable, it did not mean that love could not exist.

The central aspect of courtly love is the poet's preoccupation and feeling towards a lady who controls his actions and thoughts. It almost seems as if it was a vision of idealised love. Later, around the 14th century, Petrarch readapted in the *Canzoniere* the tradition of courtly love with a few alterations.[6] It seems safe to assume that Petrarch was influenced by the concept of courtly love from the troubadours. The term "Petrarchan lover" is used to describe the devoted lover that embodies the suffering unrequited love can cause.[7] Shakespeare most probably was referring to the concepts of courtly love and partially mocking them in his comedy.

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[3] Moller, Herbert, "The Meaning of Courtly Love", *The Journal of American Folklore*, 73 (1960), p. 39.
[4] Moller, p. 39.
[5] Moller, p. 40.
[6] Scaglione, Aldo, "Petrarchan Love and the Pleasures of Frustration", *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 58 (1997), p. 558.
[7] Scaglione, p. 557.

The conventional gender roles are already broken at the very beginning of the play. In Act 1 Scene 2 Rosalind and Orlando get to meet each other for the very first time at the wrestling match. Surprisingly enough, it is Rosalind who makes the first move. After gifting Orlando her necklace to celebrate his victory, Rosalind insists "Gentleman, wear this for me: one out of suits with Fortune, That could give more" (1.2.198-199). She initiates the love exchange and anticipates that she could give Orlando much more than this simple necklace. Already at the beginning, it can be assumed that Rosalind did not want to follow the traditional pattern of courtly love. Shakespeare lets Rosalind break out of her normal social role as a former princess at court – she is not bound by conventions and does not requite gender expectations. Orlando is stunned by Rosalind's approach and at a loss for words. With the quote "I cannot speak to her, yet she urged conference" (1.2.210), it can be presumed that Orlando puts himself in the subordinate role of the love match. We can assume that at the beginning, he is the one that has to be wooed.

While in the first Act Orlando is tongue-tied, in Act 3 Scene 2 it almost seems as if he had too many words for Rosalind. In fact, he begins to compose the awkwardly written love poetry for Rosalind. Orlando somehow makes his own life complicated in the love match. It can be argued that he needed some time to learn about courtly love and to grow into the role of a true Petrarchan lover. It is indeed Rosalind as Ganymede, who teaches Orlando about love. Instead of claiming education from his brother at court, he is educated by the dominant Rosalind in the woods. She takes the lead and eventually solves the romantic problems herself.

In Act 3 Scene 3 Rosalind as Ganymede offers to cure Orlando of his lovesickness with the quote "I would cure you if you would but call me Rosalind and come every day to my cot and woo me" (3.3.345). Since she proposes to cure him of his lovesickness, it

can be argued that Rosalind is not convinced of the concept of courtly love and wants to put it to the test. It seems as if Rosalind wanted to see if Orlando is really in love with her, or if he is just in love with the illusion of being in love with her. Indeed, Ganymede questions Orlando's credibility in loving Rosalind, in Act 3 Scene 3: "But are you so much in love as your rhymes speak?" (3.3. 328). So, it seems as if Rosalind had a more realistic approach to the concept of love than Orlando has. Even though women were associated with emotions and men with intellect in the sixteenth century, Rosalind is thinking rather rationally about her and Orlando's love story.[8] Additionally, Rosalind underlines that "men have died from time to time – and worms have eaten them – but not for love." (4.1.84-85) and also expresses her strong opinion about love in the quote "Love is merely a madness" (3.3.331). She probably does not deny the existence of love but certainly criticises the tradition of courtly love. Orlando, on the other hand, plays the more idealistic part of their relationship. It almost seems as if he was in love with the idea of love but does not know what it truly means to be a good lover. As we can see, he is bad at writing poems and does not know how to handle the love story between him and Rosalind – those are traces of a bad lover especially in terms of courtly love.

He still gains access to some of the elements of a true Petrarchan lover throughout the play -- he woos an unapproachable woman and tries to compose love poems. However, in Act 3 Scene 3 Ganymede, pretending to be Rosalind, describes how the ideal Petrarchan lover should look like and the description does not correspond at all with Orlando. In that scene, Shakespeare mentions common Renaissance symptoms of lovesickness: "A lean cheek, which you have not; a blue eye and a sunken which you have not; an unquestionable spirit, which you have not […]" (3.3.312-313). Orlando does

[8] Beckman, p. 47.

not have a sleek face or does not suffer from dark circles under his eyes due to sleep deprivation. Indeed, Orlando does not seem like the melodramatic and self-consciously suffering lover. It can be assumed that in Ganymede's opinion Orlando embodies a lover that loves himself and therefore cannot fit into the expectations of a truly devoted Petrarchan lover: "But you are no such man; you are rather point-device in your accoutrements, as loving yourself than seeming the lover of any other" (3.3.317-320).

Even though it seems that neither Rosalind nor Orlando support the idea of courtly love at its fullest, in Act 4 Scene 1 Orlando assures that if Ganymede as Rosalind rejects him "Then, in my own person, I die" (4.1.74). Later, in Act 5 Scene 2 Orlando says that after the fight his heart is wounded not because of the lioness but because of the eyes of a lady. Surprisingly enough, at the end of the play Orlando inserts strong elements of courtly love – whereas at the beginning it seemed as if he was unable to embody the perfect Petrarchan lover. It can be argued that he wants to prepare himself for the encounter with the real Rosalind at the wedding.

When Rosalind masquerades as Ganymede, she inadvertently attracts the shepherdess Phoebe – that represents the awkward situation of a woman falling in love with a disguised woman. On the other hand, there is Rosalind cross-dressed as Ganymede who is in love with Orlando. From the outside it may seem that a male is in love with another male, but on the inside, we know that the female character Rosalind is in love with the male character Orlando.[9] Nonetheless, it can be presumed that Orlando's and Ganymede's encounters show signs of homoerotic interest. It can be argued that Rosalind wanted to make things work between her and Orlando and decided to disguise as Ganymede, who then becomes a good friend of Orlando. Rosalind is approaching Orlando

[9] Doniger, p. 255.

from a distance, pretending to have no romantic intentions. Indeed, when Rosalind takes over the role of Ganymede she gains access to a gender-fluid behaviour and assumes the role perfectly. The roleplay of Rosalind as Ganymede wanting to seduce Orlando becomes a symbol of the complexity of love.[10] It almost seems as if Ganymede and Orlando were more compatible as a couple when Rosalind is disguised. Indeed, Orlando never lacks a word when talking to Ganymede even though he speaks to the same human being. Orlando indeed seems to feel comfortable around Ganymede. It can be argued that Shakespeare wanted to play with the possible homoerotic passion between them. Nonetheless, the play denies the final encounter from same-sex couples.

In Act 5 Scene 2, the various lovers declare their love to each other. Silvius begins with the love declaration: "It is to be all made of sighs and tears, And so am I for Phoebe." Phoebe adds "And I for Ganymede." Finally, there is Rosalind pretending to be Ganymede who underlines that "And I for no woman." (5.2.69-72). The figure of Rosalind/Ganymede denies the love exchange up front. It can be argued that she did not want to be emotionally involved with a same-sex partner at all. Phoebe expressing her love for Ganymede presumably makes Rosalind feel uncomfortable since she experiences homosexual attraction. Nonetheless, it can also be argued that the heterosexual desire celebrated in the play is in real life homosexual desire, if we consider the all-male cast.[11]

In *As You Like It* both men and women are permitted to expand their sexual identities that go beyond restrictive gender roles.[12] Rosalind, for instance, gains typical male attributes through her costume, as we can see in the quote

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[10] Talbot van den Berg, Kent, "Theatrical Fiction and the Reality of Love in As You Like It", *PMLA*, 90 (1975), p. 891.
[11] Kerrigan, William, *Desire in the Renaissance – Female Friends and Fraternal Enemies in As You Like It,* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994, p. 199.
[12] Erickson, Peter B., "Sexual Politics and the Social Structure in *As You Like It"*, *The Massachusetts Review*, 23 (1982), p. 77.

I could find in my heart to disgrace my man's apparel and to cry like a woman; but I must comfort the weaker vessel, as doublet and hose ought to show itself courageous to petticoat (2.4.2-4).

She also mentions that her physical appearance makes it easier for her to be more convincing in her costume: "I am more than common tall, That I did suit me all points like a man" (1.3.105-106). Orlando on the other hand gains access to traditional feminine traits of compassion and emotional support. It can be argued that Orlando combines the feminine and masculine features perfectly in the scene of saving his brother Oliver from the lioness. Even though he hesitates in rescuing his brother, his nobility and emotional drive push him to save Oliver: "Twice he did turn his back, [...] but kindness [....], And nature made him give battle to the lioness" (4.3.122-125). He is intrinsically a good person with emotions that let him strive for the good and not the evil. The term "nature" presumably refers also to their sibling-bond that was established long time ago at their births. And indeed, it would go against Orlando's nature letting Oliver die. Orlando possesses natural graciousness and is liked by everybody due to his kind personality. It can be argued that by showing emotions and by trying to help others Orlando assumes traditional female characteristics.

Even if we perceive a gender asymmetry in both characters, it can be presumed that the access to male attributes in Rosalind is only a temporary matter. Indeed, some scholars argue that as soon as Rosalind marries, she readapts to her social role. As soon as she takes off the costume and joins the wedding-ceremony, she takes over the subordinate position of a female in society and has a submissive role.[13] If we consider on the other hand the passage in Act 4 Scene 1, we see Ganymede/Rosalind, who explains to Orlando how Rosalind might change as soon as they get married

I will be more jealous of thee than a Barbary cock-pigeon over his hen, more clamorous than a parrot against rain, […] more giddy in my desires as a monkey. (4.1.119-121).

[13] Kerrigan, p. 192.

We can see that Rosalind, presumably consciously, makes comparisons with animals that are known for making rather high-pitched sounds. It can be argued that Rosalind anticipates Orlando that she is going to speak up for herself and that he is not going to be in full control over her when they are married. P.B. Erickson, on the other hand, argues that as soon as they get married, Rosalind is willingly submitting to the ideal patriarchal order and she becomes the "powerless woman – an image fostered by practical patriarchal politics".[14] Some scholars indeed perceive the marriage of Orlando and Rosalind as a realm of male supremacy – especially when we consider the fact of Duke Senior making Orlando his primary heir and not Rosalind.[15] Additionally, it can be argued that Rosalind slips into a more submissive role at the end of the play as she barely speaks at the wedding-scene in Act 5 Scene 4. Nonetheless, the theory of Rosalind taking over the submissive part is presumably implausible if we consider the plot as a whole. After all, it is easy to determine who is going to have the more dominant role in their marriage. Rosalind is evidently wittier and more manipulative than Orlando could ever be. Even though it was common for men to play the more dominant part in marriage in early modern England, Shakespeare put Rosalind in the position of a revolutionary female character, showing an unshakable will and determination.

Rosalind's attitude throughout the play helps us to understand that she is commanding Orlando. If we consider for instance their meetings, it is always Rosalind who proposes both setting and timetable. It can be argued that Orlando, by arriving late at the meetings, breaks the vow made during courtship to Celia: "If you do keep your promises in love [...] Your mistress shall be happy." (1.2.195-197). However, it is not

[14] Erickson, p. 69, Ko, p. 78.
[15] Erickson, p. 69, Kerrigan, p. 192.

clear if Orlando is willingly breaking the vow made at courtship or if it happens only by mistake. Indeed, it can be presumed that Orlando simply loses any sense of time-management in the Forest of Arden, as we can see in Act 3 Scene 3. Rosalind asks Orlando: "I pray you, what is't o'clock?" (3.3.253), Orlando then answers that there are no clocks in the forest, and that it is impossible to track the time. He emphasises that: "You should ask me what time o'day: there's no clock in the forest." (3.3.254). And indeed, Orlando never shows up on time. Later, in Act 4 Scene 1 Ganymede complains that Orlando comes too late at the meeting and compares him to a snail. It can be argued that she is degrading him by comparing him to an animal and not classifying him as a human being. By making this comparison, Ganymede also reveals that Orlando is somewhat homeless: "a snail; for though he comes slowly, he carries his house on his head" (4.1.44-45). Then, Ganymede as Rosalind stresses again that punctuality is very important to her. She underlines that

> If you break one jot of your promise or come one minute behind your hour, I will think you the most pathetical break-promise […] that may be chosen out of the gross band of the unfaithful. (4.1.152-156).

Since Rosalind insists that Orlando respects her time management, it can be argued that she test how compatible he is. If this is true, it is truly a revolutionary thought of Shakespeare that Rosalind wants Orlando to measure up her expectations by showing up on time.

It is also worth mentioning that the name Ganymede was probably not chosen coincidentally by Shakespeare.[16] Ganymede was the name of the boy lover of Zeus who got abducted because of his great beauty. He then was brought to Mount Olympus to

[16] Ko, Yu, Jin, "Rosalind-as-Ganymede: Charactor [sic] of Contingency", *Shakespearean Criticism,* 100 (2006), p. 82.

serve as cupbearer.[17] Eventually, the figure of Ganymede was associated with homoerotic passion and same-sex love. The myth tells of Zeus falling in love with him and taking him as his lover. The figure of Ganymede still functions as an emblem of same-sex relationships in the world of myths and arts. In ancient Greece, same-sex relationships were seen as another expression of sexual attraction. It is to be presumed that most of the times homosexual behaviour in ancient Greece concerned relationships between men and adolescent boys.[18] Indeed, the most common form of homosexual relationships were the ones between an older lover called erastes and a younger partner called eromenos. The relationship between the older lover and the younger beloved was mainly based on friendship with a sexual component.[19] Thus, Shakespeare probably chose the name Ganymede to highlight the homosexual attraction between Orlando and Ganymede.

2.3. The female roles in the play

Shakespeare introduces four female characters in *As You Like It:* Audrey, Celia, Phoebe and Rosalind. The female characters establish positions of power over their lovers. Audrey does it by being chaste, Phoebe by not liking Silvius, Rosalind by role-playing and Celia as the legal heir to Duke Frederick.[20] In this work, I am confining my attention to three female characters of the play: Rosalind, Celia and Phoebe.

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[17] Doniger, p. 255, Mark, Joshua J., "Ganymede", https://www.worldhistory.org/Ganymede/, (29 December 2022).
[18] Brown, p. 247.
[19] Doniger, p. 255, Mark, Joshua J., "Ganymede", https://www.worldhistory.org/Ganymede/, (29 December 2022).
[20] Neely, Carol T., *Destabilizing Lovesickness, Gender, and Sexuality – Twelfth Night and As You Like It*, Ithaca: Cornell University, Press, 2019, p. 126.

Rosalind and Celia are seen as the inseparable couple of the play. They almost share identical backgrounds: both are princesses living at court and were raised together. Their deep relationship began in the cradle and survived the hostility between their fathers. The cousins' connection is presented as mysteriously exceptional, almost sisterlike. In the first act of *As You Like It* with the quote "never two ladies loved as they do" (1.1.89-90) their affectionate relationship is portrayed. We can understand quickly that Rosalind preferred staying at court with her cousin instead of following her father into exile. Rosalind is being described as the wittiest character of the play with her verbal humour.[21] Shakespeare inserted another witty character, Celia. While some scholars argue that Rosalind and Celia follow conventional gender clichés, such as women speaking what is on their minds and talking a lot, it can be argued that Shakespeare plays intentionally with the stereotypes. We can see it clearly in Act 3 Scene 3, where Rosalind as Ganymede emphasises:" Do you not know I am a woman? When I think, I must speak." (3.3.209-2010). Shakespeare most probably wanted to play with the fact that Rosalind embodies the gender cliché but at the same time is standing disguised as a male on the stage.

By creating two funny and witty characters, Shakespeare presumably wants to convey to the audience that the women are well-educated and very articulate. Especially at the beginning of the play, the cousins create a series of puns and show great intimacy while talking. In Act 1 Scene 2, Celia tries to cheer Rosalind up after her father was banished from court. Celia uses very warm and calm words: "my sweet Rose, my dear Rose, be merry" (1.2.18). In that scene it is almost as if Celia took over the position of a lover, when talking to Rosalind. Celia's love for Rosalind is also clearly visible after her

[21] Kerrigan, p. 186.

father, Duke Frederick, decides to banish Rosalind from court: “Pronounce that sentence then on me, my liege, I cannot live out of her company” (1.3.75-76). It can be assumed that Shakespeare wanted to insert the scenes of Rosalind and Celia being very intimate together, so that they seemed homoerotic in performance.

While at the beginning of the plot it seems like the two cousins have similar opinions, at the end of the comedy they change completely. In the first scenes it seems that Celia is the one who takes decisions but as soon as they leave the court Rosalind takes the lead. If we consider the scene of Rosalind’s and Celia’s departure, Rosalind depends on Celia in leaving the court: “Therefore devise me with how we may fly [...]” (1.3.90). Rosalind on the other hand, protects her cousin when she decides to disguise as Ganymede. Indeed, Ganymede should imitate Aliena’s brother and protector.[22]

Even though the cousins seem very similar, Celia becomes increasingly subordinate during the play. A reason might be that Rosalind is the genuine princess, while Celia on the other hand is only the daughter of the usurper, Duke Frederick.[23] We can also see that Celia probably loves her cousin more than Rosalind does: “Herein I see thou lov’st me not with the full weight that I love thee” (1.2.6-7). By noting that Celia loves Rosalind more than Rosalind loves Celia, we can assume that Celia puts herself in a submissive, more vulnerable position. And since Rosalind impersonates a male character when in disguise, Celia most probably is subordinated to her. It is almost as if Celia was reduced only to mocking, observing and eventually mimicking Rosalind.[24]

[22] Beckman, p. 48, Neely, p. 123.
[23] Belsey, Catherine, “Gender in a Different Dispensation: The Case of Shakespeare”, *DiGeSt. Journal of Diversity and Gender Studies*, 1 (2014), p. 9.
[24] Neely, p. 123.

Throughout the play the dynamics between the female characters and male characters change. Initially, we perceive the two cousins as inseparable, while at the end of the play it seems that they are separated.[25] Indeed, in the final scene of the wedding ceremony Celia and Rosalind do not even talk to each other. It seems strange that the two close cousins do not share their excitement of the wedding. Carol T. Neely argues that Celia and Rosalind give up their affection for each other to function as lovers for men.[26] And indeed, the lack of affection between the two cousins at the end of the play reminds us that love and closeness can fade with time. Female bonding vanishes throughout the play, while Orlando and Oliver who originally were divided are reunited at the end.

2.3.1. Phoebe and Silvius – an example of courtly love

Another interesting dynamics can be found in the couple of the scornful shepherdess Phoebe and her lover. We understand quickly that she is not willing to get together with Silvius, who adores her deeply. Phoebe is explicitly telling Silvius that she does not love him and tries to avoid him not to hurt him further. We can clearly see the rejection in the quote: "I would not be thy executioner; I fly thee, for I would not injure thee" (3.6.8-9). Her response not only shows her determination but also lets us assume that she is aware of the negative outcome one-sided love can bring. One of Phoebe's main reasons to reject Silvius is probably the presence of Ganymede – she prefers to wait for Ganymede to give her attention than to return Silvius' love. It can be argued that Phoebe fancies Ganymede because he appears to be more exotic than Silvius. Indeed, both Phoebe and Silvius are

[25] Erickson, p. 81.
[26] Neely, p. 122.

home in the Forest of Arden and live the lives of simple shepherds. Ganymede on the other hand seems to be a sophisticated man from outside the forest and presumably sparks Phoebe's interest. Shakespeare makes the characters seek out what they cannot have.

When Silvius declares his love to Phoebe, Rosalind as Ganymede is present too. With the quote: "Sweet Phoebe, do not scorn me, do not, Phoebe." (3.6.1) it can be presumed that Silvius is desperately begging Phoebe not to break his heart. As Silvius experiences rejection from Phoebe, Ganymede takes Silvius' side and supports the idea of them getting together. Ganymede then asks Silvius why he runs after her: "You, foolish shepherd, wherefore do you follow her […] You are a thousand times a proper man Than she a woman" (3.6.49-52). After that, Ganymede realises that Phoebe is eyeing him and asks: "Why do you look on me? I see no more in you than in the ordinary" (3.6.41-42). Ganymede also adds that "You have no beauty [...], 'Tis not your inky brows, your black silk hair, your bugle eyeballs, nor your cheek of cream" (3.6.37, 46-47). Ganymede emphasises that Phoebe is not as desirable as she may think. Ganymede then demands that Phoebe and Silvius switch roles – instead of Silvius getting down on his knees begging for love, Phoebe should do so: "Down on your knees, and thank heaven [...]" (3.6.56-57). Ganymede underlines that Phoebe shouldn't be hard-hearted and tells her that she should take whatever she can get: "For I must tell you friendly in your ear, Sell when you can; you are not for all markets." (3.6.59-60). Ganymede insists that Phoebe should "take his offer" and that she should marry Silvius (3.6.61). This approach may suggest that Ganymede is about to perform a subtle sexism on Phoebe as she should obey his commands.

Phoebe is not convinced she should be starting a relationship with Silvius at all and she possibly cannot get over Ganymede. Ganymede on the other hand is strictly

against the love between Phoebe and himself: “I pray you do not fall in love with me For I am falser than vows made in wine” (3.6.71-72). Here, it can be assumed that Ganymede reveals openly that he is disguised and that he fully rejects the homoerotic feelings between Rosalind and Phoebe. It seems like Ganymede wants Phoebe to learn her lesson – since she rejects Silvius, Ganymede rejects her. In Act 5 Scene 2 Ganymede tries to convince Phoebe one last time to marry Silvius by emphasising that Silvius “worships you.” (5.2.66).

Finally, in the last scene Phoebe decides to get together with Silvius after discovering that Ganymede is a woman. The god of marriage, Hymen, underlines again that if Phoebe does not want to enter a same-sex marriage with Rosalind she should get together with Silvius: “You to his love must accord, Or have a woman to your lord.” (5.4.117-118). It can be argued that Phoebe changed her mind in marrying Silvius, not only because Ganymede is not available anymore but also because she most likely experienced a personal growth with the lesson Ganymede gave her. Nonetheless, the fact that Silvius is only the second choice cannot be overlooked. Since Phoebe chooses Silvius mainly out of convenience, she puts him into an inferior position, and she represents the dominant mistress in the love match. Silvius, by accepting her love-offer without any signs of incongruity puts himself in a submissive position.

It can also be argued that she finally comes over the fact that Silvius is just a simple shepherd and appreciates the value of having a man who is fully devoted to her. Silvius indeed sounds like the perfect Petrarchan lover throughout the whole play: “But if thy love were ever like mine – As sure I think did never man love so” (2.4.19-20). It seems as if Silvius was experiencing an exclusive feeling in loving Phoebe, as if nobody had ever loved as he did, and nobody had ever experienced love as he had. With this quote

Silvius conveys the traditional concept of courtly love. Another scene that underlines Silvius as the perfect Petrarchan lover is found in Act 3 Scene 6. “Say that you love me not, but say not so In bitterness” (3.6.2-3). In this scene, Silvius is literally asking Phoebe to reject him.

Nonetheless, it is unclear where Silvius’ ideas of courtly love come from. Silvius, as well as Phoebe most probably grew up in the Forest of Arden. So they presumably had no access to literature thematising courtly love and the idea of a Petrarchan lover. Indeed, it is rather irrational to think that shepherds read love poetry in the woods. Silvius’ and Phoebe’s love represent a comic contrast that highlights the main characters’ situation.

2.4. Sibling rivalry and male bonding

Sibling rivalry is a common theme in Shakespeare. Before Shakespeare published *As You Like It* the topic was already discussed in earlier plays such as *The Taming of the Shrew* or *Richard III*. Later, in the early seventeenth century *King Lear* followed, presenting the same issue. As already mentioned above, *As You Like It* opens indeed with a dukedom torn by fraternal strife. The beginning of the play is characterised by male contentiousness that divides kingdoms, lovers and families.

In the first scene, Orlando and Adam discuss the terms of Sir Roland de Boys’ will. The scene quickly transforms into fraternal resentment, envy and hatred. The youngest brother Oliver finds himself victimised by a “tyrant brother” (1.2.241). Oliver not only denies Orlando education and refuses to give him money, but he also makes him eat with the servants. Oliver ignores Orlando’s entitlements and mistreats his younger brother. These scenes of hostility threaten to destroy their fraternal bond. Due to their

father's death, Oliver gains the family title and estates. The concept of primogeniture had a hefty role in Elizabethan society and it is extremely present in *As You Like It*. The oldest brother Oliver assumes some kind of paternal relationship with his younger brothers Jacques and Orlando.[27] By creating this new relationship the potential for brotherly conflicts increases.

Orlando desperately tries to assert that all brothers are equally Sir Roland de Boys' sons saying "I have as much of my father in me as you [...]" (1.1.38-39). However, it is not true that the three brothers are treated the same. If we consider Jacques, we can tell that he goes to school and profits from it: "My brother Jacques he keeps at school, and report speaks goldenly of his profit." (1.1.4-5). Orlando on the other hand complains that he is "not taught to make anything" (1.1.24). Oliver indeed shows a peculiar nastiness in refusing to educate his youngest brother. Afterwards, Oliver and Charles eventually plan on preparing Orlando's downfall, where we can find signs of villainy in Oliver: "I had as lief thou didst break his neck as his finger." (1.1.114-115). Also in Act 3 Scene 1, Oliver emphasises that he never liked Orlando after all: "I never loved my brother in my life." (3.1.13). Duke Frederick, seems rather flabbergasted about Oliver's statement and responds: "More villain thou." (3.1.14). It can be presumed that Duke Frederick did love his brother Duke Senior at a time, but as he usurped the throne they lost the connection to each other; Oliver on the other hand claims that he never did so.

Even though Oliver is the new head of the family, Orlando shows the strongest connection and similarities with their deceased father. Indeed, in the first scene, Orlando emphasises that lately he felt the presence of his father's spirit telling him to rebel against

[27] Montrose, Louis, Adrian, "The Place of a Brother in *As You Like It*: Social Process and Comic Form", S*hakespeare Quarterly,* 32 (1981), p. 29.

his brother's servitude: "the spirit of my father, which I think is within me begs to mutiny against servitude" (1.1.16-17). It can be assumed that the spirit of Sir Roland de Boys was not trying to create a disharmony between the brothers but rather to motivate Orlando to stand up for what is right or wrong. It can be argued that with the quote "I will no longer endure it" (1.1.18), Orlando already mentions the process of personal growth he is about to experience. By consciously rebelling against his brother's decisions, he strives to become a proper man and eventually also a husband. Again, in Act 1 Scene 1 Orlando clearly underlines that "The spirit of my father grows strong in me" (1.1. 56) – he presumably wants to make sure that everybody understands that he is the very image of his father. Additionally, it can be presumed that Rosalind, in being in love with Orlando, reflects the homoerotic love her father Duke Senior felt for Sir Roland de Boys. Indeed, at the wrestling match Rosalind expresses her father's love towards Orlando's father: "My father loved Sir Roland as his soul" (1.2.187). She not only expresses her father's respect towards Sir Roland de Boys but also emphasises that she appreciates and values both Orland and his family. Later, Adam describes Orlando as gentle and valiant, such as Sir Roland de Boys was. Orlando is described as his father's gracious incarnation in Act 2 Scene 3: "O you memory Of old Sir Roland [...]" (2.3.3-4).

Throughout the play we realise that Orlando is the youngest brother and is still considered an adolescent. We can see in Act 1 Scene 1 that he is perceived as weak and inexperienced: "Your brother is but young and tender" (1.1.101-102). Even though Orlando is physically mature and valiant, socially he remains weak and childlike.[28] He is perceived as a troublemaker by the courtiers. In fact, his conflicts go mainly against men who hold power in the dukedom, such as Oliver and Duke Frederick. The hazardous

[28] Montrose, p. 38.

conditions at court and the conflicts between him and the powerful male characters drive Orlando to leave. As soon as Orlando and his loyal servant Adam leave, a strong connection between them can be perceived. Adam expresses his great loyalty towards Orlando: “All this I give you; let me be your servant [...] Let me go with you” (2.3.46-53). It can be argued that Adam serves temporarily as a father figure for Orlando – he faithfully supports Orlando’s ideas and follows him wherever he goes.

When they arrive in the Forest of Arden Orlando intends to attack the followers of Duke Senior in the forest, because Adam is dying from hunger: “Forbear, and eat no more!” (2.7.88). Again, the deep trust between Orlando and Adam is emphasised because he wants to get him food. However, within this quote signs of immature and imprudent behaviour can be found – he approaches Duke Senior and his followers in too aggressive a manner. It can be argued that Orlando is influenced by the precarious environment of Duke Frederick’s dukedom, where everything is very violent. Duke Senior responds with hospitality and invites him to join the feast. Orlando then realises that his approach is mistaken and apologises: “Speak you so gently? Pardon me, I pray you: I thought that all things had been savage here” (2.7.106-107). With his excuse, Orlando expresses feelings of remorse that presumably indicate his growth of personality. It can also be argued that Orlando responded like this because he believed that the Forest of Arden was a place with no established rules that lacked any government and that only savages lived there. Additionally, Orlando mentions the term “desert” when speaking about the woods that gives us the idea of a remote and lawless place (2.7.110). Surprisingly enough, Orlando finds a well-mannered group that enjoys eating together. Indeed, Duke Senior successfully brought human society to the woods. Orlando then selflessly gives Adam food before he eats some: “I go find my fawn, And give it food [...] Till he be first

sufficed, [...] I will not eat a bit" (2.7.128-133). By doing so, he shows signs of nobility and helpfulness. Additionally, he reveals his true noble character in Act 3 Scene 3, where he claims that he will "chide no breather in the world but myself." (3.3.237). He emphasises that he is a good person and does not correspond to the image of a troublemaker. Indeed, we can observe that by the end of the play Orlando is moving from boyhood to manhood. Orlando eventually proves himself a noble gentleman, without making use of the required education.

Since male representation is a crucial element of the plot, Peter B. Erickson distinguishes between two existing forms of patriarchy in *As You Like It.* The first form concerns a rather harsh version of patriarchy, embodied by Duke Frederick and by the oldest brother Oliver. Both characters are driven by suspicion, avarice and greed for power. They are both powerful males, independently taking decisions over the other characters. The second form of patriarchy concerns the political structure headed by the old Duke Senior. This version of patriarchy may be described as benevolent, but at the same time still requires women to be subordinate.[29] It may be true that Duke Senior is a peaceful and calm character with good intentions, but he still prefers to make Orlando the primary heir and does not bother to think about his daughter Rosalind. Eventually, it is Duke Senior who assumes the role of Orlando's social father, by giving him his estates and welcoming him in the forest. On the other hand, there is the ruling Duke Frederick, who makes the reunion of the two brothers possible by expelling Orlando from court and charging Oliver to search Orlando in the woods. Without his decision, the union of the brothers would probably not have been possible.

[29] Erickson, p. 78.

The fight with the lioness is a key moment that tightens the bond between the brothers and ends the sibling rivalry. By charging Oliver with the delivery of the handkerchief we see Orlando's renewed commitment to his brother – it represents a gesture of trust. We may also consider Oliver's transformation after Orlando's fight with the lioness. Oliver speaks of his personal conversion in Act 4 Scene 3, where he underlines that Orlando led him to the "gentle Duke", Duke Senior, who gave him "fresh array" (4.2.137-138). Oliver gets new clothes that presumably embody his new and fresh start. We can also see in Act 5 Scene 2 that the two brothers are bonding. Orlando explains with excitement that he found Rosalind and Oliver reveals that he is in love with Celia – they share intimate details that would have seemed impossible at the beginning of the play. Oliver is also contemplating moving into the forest and to give Orlando the estates he is entitled to: "It shall be to your good, for my father's house [...] I will estate upon you, and here I live and die as a shepherd" (5.2.7-9).

Finally, the play not only establishes brotherhood as an ideal relationship and reaffirms a positive image of fatherhood but also displays the possibility of change and personal growth.

2.5. The triple cross-dressing of Rosalind

We have seen that Rosalind takes up different roles throughout the play. At first, she is the heiress to the title she then passes to the lower status of being only the cousin of the new heiress, later she cross-dresses as humble shepherd and finally she re-establishes her real identity in the last scene of the wedding. Rosalind has by far the most complex role in the play. What seems to be awkward too, is the fact of Rosalind being a boy in real

life. Her role was presumably rather challenging for a boy actor. He had to deal with the complexity of impersonating more than one character and to perform a strong gender ambiguity on stage. It is not the first nor the last time that Shakespeare has a boy actor that impersonates a woman that performs as a man on stage. What makes *As You Like It* so unique is the fact of the triple cross-dressing of one single character.

Rosalind and Orlando finally get married in the last act, but Shakespeare did not want to end the play there. Rosalind appears one last time on stage when performing the epilogue. Even though we may assume that Rosalind is played by a boy, Shakespeare is still trying to maintain the illusion of Rosalind being a woman: "It is not the fashion to see the lady in the Epilogue" (Epilogue 1). Since Rosalind breaks countless conventions throughout the play, it does not seem outlandish that Shakespeare decided to insert a woman performing the epilogue. It can be argued that Rosalind, by performing the epilogue, destroys the imaginary fourth wall that separates the real world from the world on stage. Shakespeare presumably forces the audience to step outside the imagined world of the Forest of Arden and encourages them to return to the playhouse. It can be assumed that the epilogue underlines one last time the possibility of alterations in the performance and appearance of the characters. Shakespeare presumably also wanted to add further elements that make the play somewhat humorous, since the boy actor encourages the audience to think what they want about the play:" I charge you, [...] to like as much of this play as please you" (Epilogue 9-10). It can be argued that with this quote, Shakespeare is trying to make a pun out of the title of his work. Indeed, the title *As You Like It* and "like as much" seem to be put together intentionally.

It can also be argued that by claiming that Rosalind is "not furnished like a beggar therefore to beg will not become" Shakespeare highlights one last time her commanding

character. Rosalind presumably wants to avoid the audience's pity for her if the play was bad. However, it is Rosalind herself who underlines that she is unsure if this play is a good one or a bad one: "What a case am I in, that am neither a good Epilogue nor cannot insinuate with you in the behalf of a good play?" (Epilogue 5-6). Rosalind then says that instead of begging for a good reaction she rather puts a spell on the audience. She then addresses the women in the playhouse and asks them to like the play, for the sake of the love of their husbands. Finally with the quote: "If I were a woman, I would kiss as many of you as had beards that pleased me, complexions that liked me, and breaths that I defied not" (Epilogue 13-15), we clearly understand that Rosalind is played by a boy actor. It is only at the end of the play, that the boy actor explicitly says that he is indeed no woman. However, this scene still seems to be part of the acting after all – the boy actor reveals his sex but is still dressed as a woman.

The play ends with the final line: "when I make curtsey, bid me farewell" (Epilogue 17). It can be argued that with this final quote, Rosalind wanted to control the audience's reaction before leaving the stage. She is somewhat inviting the audience to applaud as soon as she takes a bow.

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Summary in Italian

La presente tesi tratta il fenomeno dei cosiddetti “boy players”, ovvero attori bambini nel teatro elisabettiano. Nel primo capitolo si fa riferimento al concetto dei “boy players” la loro storia e le condizioni in cui si trovavano. Grazie a diversi studi, si può dedurre che era un fenomeno che aveva preso piede quasi esclusivamente in Inghilterra nel sedicesimo e diciassettesimo secolo. Si può supporre con sicurezza, che i ruoli femminili sul palco inglese venissero recitati da attori bambini fino al 1660. La tesi si basa su diverse opere di fonte primaria, che evidenziano l’esistenza del fenomeno soprattutto nel periodo elisabettiano, come per esempio le seguenti: il diario di Philip Henslowe, *A Relation of a Journey Begun 1610 […]* di George Sandys e l’opera di James Wright, *Historia Histrionica: […]*.

Non è chiaro il motivo per cui i boy players venivano inseriti nel teatro nel XVI e XVII secolo. Comunque esistono alcune fonti che propongono di considerare un divieto alle donne di recitare sui palcoscenici inglesi. Tuttavia, non è stata trovata una fonte che assicura che questa legge fosse stata promulgata per escludere le donne dallo spettacolo teatrale. In ogni modo, sappiamo che non era prassi inserire le donne. Dobbiamo anche considerare il fatto che durante il periodo elisabettiano il ruolo della donna era decisamente diverso da quello di oggi. Le donne erano private di diversi diritti civili ed erano perlopiù viste come proprietà del marito una volta sposati. Difatti, non era considerato bizzarro non vederle sul palco, visto che il loro compito si svolgeva principalmente a casa nell’educare e badare ai figli. Anche se è noto che alcune compagnie teatrali europee inserivano donne nel cast del teatro, l’Inghilterra non ne

prendeva spunto. Considerando per esempio il teatro italiano, possiamo vedere che le donne potevano recitare anche in modo professionale.

Gli attori bambini dovevano affrontare un percorso formativo che era simile e a quello dei tirocinanti del periodo elisabettiano. Non è chiaro che relazione i "boy players" avevano con i loro padroni. Spesso i ragazzi iniziavano questo percorso all'età di otto anni e si fermavano all'età di 21 anni. Nella maggior parte dei casi i "boy actors" non venivano pagati. Si può dedurre che in casi rari ricevessero una paghetta ma non è un dato di fatto. Alcuni "boy players" affrontavano questo percorso formativo per qualche anno per poi diventare eventualmente soci del teatro.

Un altro elemento fondamentale nell'assunzione dei "boy players" riguardava la rottura della voce. Infatti, per impersonare un ruolo femminile, i ragazzi dovevano avere una voce chiara e femminile. Se non avevano le voci limpide, l'apparenza creata sul palco si distruggeva immediatamente. L'età di assunzione è soltanto un'età presunta. Infatti, non esistono fonti che supportano un'età precisa.

Se consideriamo il punto di vista etico della tradizione, dobbiamo tenere conto che gli attori bambini si trovavano in un ambiente gestito da uomini adulti. Spesso, i critici esprimevano diverse preoccupazioni che riguardavano sia l'ambiente dei "boy players" che la loro sicurezza personale. Se consideriamo per esempio il movimento religioso dei Puritani che fioriva proprio nel sedicesimo e diciassettesimo secolo, notiamo diverse voci che si esprimevano in modo critico. Infatti, alcuni critici erano proprio contro la tradizione dei "boy players". Un puritano famoso di nome William Prynne sottolineava la sua preoccupazione nella sua opera *Histriomastix: The Player's Scourge, or Actor's Tragedy*. Non si preoccupava soltanto del fatto che il travestimento di genere era visto come una cosa blasfema, ma anche del fatto che gli attori bambini potevano subire aggressioni

sessuali da parte dei compagni di teatro o del pubblico maschile. Infatti, si può dedurre che i ragazzi erano vittime non solo di sfruttamento finanziario ma anche di violenza sessuale all'interno delle proprie compagnie teatrali.

Nella seconda parte della tesi un'opera di William Shakespeare viene presentata con l'obiettivo di fornire un'analisi generale del tema. *As You Like It*, in italiano *Come vi piace*, è una commedia pastorale che discute questioni di identità e ruoli di genere e comportamenti non conformi al genere. L'argomento principale dell'opera è la storia d'amore e la difficoltà di accoppiamento di Rosalind e di Orlando. Anche il travestimento triplo del personaggio Rosalind gioca un ruolo fondamentale. Nella trama Rosalind, per proteggersi dal mondo al di fuori della corte, si traveste da uomo e si rinomina Ganymede dopo essere stata bandita da Duke Frederick. Orlando, che è disperatamente innamorato di Rosalind, prova disagio nel non trovarla più e si accontenta del fatto che Ganymede gli presti attenzioni nella foresta di Arden. L'analisi dell'opera si ferma ampiamente sull'acquisizione di caratteristiche femminili e maschili dei personaggi principali.

La trama contiene una vasta gamma di argomenti che riguarda sia l'idea che il concetto di amore cortese. L'amore cortese è un'esperienza che venne stabilita già nell'Alto Medioevo e che riguardava un amore che era quasi sempre adulterino. Shakespeare probabilmente ha preso spunto da questa esperienza letteraria e la inserisce con un approccio abbastanza critico e ironico nell'opera. Tramite quest'opera Shakespeare probabilmente voleva fermarsi su concetti che riguardano l'amore cortese, l'ambiguità di genere ed era intenzionato a giocare con il cosiddetto cross-dressing, ovvero il travestimento di genere. Inoltre inserisce un altro argomento popolare che riguarda la rivalità fraterna fra i personaggi Orlando e Oliver e Duke Senior e Duke Frederick. Anche se è un tema ricorrente durante tutta la trama, le polemiche fraterne si

spostano in secondo piano e si naviga più verso una storia d'amore. Infatti, il focus principale verrà messo sulla coppia Rosalind e Orlando, che alla fine dopo aver superato diversi ostacoli si sposano.

Il personaggio Rosalind e le sue sfumature di genere vengono enfatizzati con l'obiettivo di fornire una maggior comprensione della complessità del suo ruolo. Il suo ruolo è giocato da un "boy player" che sul palco assume il ruolo di una donna che allo stesso tempo finge di essere un uomo. Alla fine dell'opera, Orlando incarna l'ideale di un uomo di amore cortese e lo trasmette completamente su Rosalind. Shakespeare probabilmente voleva giocare con il fatto di inserire una donna come personaggio principale che comanda e guida l'opera e Orlando, che si sottomette in un certo senso e lascia a Rosalind lo spazio. Ovviamente sono presenti anche altri personaggi nell'opera, e sembra quasi come se tutti condividessero un'esperienza romantica fin troppo complicata. Infine anche il prologo offre uno spazio vasto per interpretazioni varie e distrugge la convenzione delle aspettative di genere per un'ultima volta.