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## Anti-Normative Women and Queer Space in Early Modern Drama

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# **Anti-Normative Women and Queer Space in Early Modern Drama**

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B.A. English, University of Missouri-St. Louis, 2018

Certificate in Creative Writing, University of Missouri-St. Louis, 2018

A Thesis Submitted to The Graduate School at the University of Missouri-St. Louis  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree  
Master of Art in English  
with an emphasis in Literature Studies

May 2020

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## Abstract

The most interesting oddity about the Early Modern English stage is the overwhelming presence of the female form despite the obvious lack of female performers. Male actors performed female characters and sometimes those female characters were subversive and tested the boundaries of their constructed heteronormative society. A common comedic trope followed the crossdressed crossgendered heroine, or the boy actor dressed as women dressed as a man. This trope appears in the plays discussed in this thesis: Thomas Heywood's *Fair Maid of the West, Part 1* and John Lyly's *Gallathea*. By adapting Michel de Certeau's concept of space, wherein space is the practiced action of a place, I inspect both the physical and figurative spaces within plays that represent sites of anti-normativity that produces both queer gender and queer forms of love. Namely, these sites are a female owned and commanded pirate ship and the matriarchal interior of the forest. Within these spaces, queer gender and alternative love are performed and affirmed by their inhabitants. While interrogating the male-determined sexual economy and hierarchal patriarchal orders within each play, I seek to answer these questions: how do crossdressed crossgender characters occupy space within the geographies of the staged world they inhabit and how do these spaces represent cultural sites of queerness? To answer these questions, I explore the philology of gendered language, the one-sex medical theory, and disruptions in social class, social rank, and gender expression to trace the anti-normative behavior exhibited by the characters in question.

Keywords: early modern drama, crossdress, gender expression, social geographies, queer space, anti-normativity, alternative love, one-sex model

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## Introduction

Catalina de Erauso was born in the Spanish town of San Sebastian in the year 1585.<sup>1</sup> As a child, she was taken to live amongst the Dominican nuns at the abbey San Sebastian the Elder. At fifteen years of age, she ran away from the abbey, cut her hair short, fashioned a pair of trousers from her bodice, and committed to living out her life as a man. This decision provided an opportunity for Erauso to remove herself from the traditional expectations of women in early modern Spain: her mother and sister married, birthed children, and continued a tradition of sending their daughters to the abbey for education until they either became nuns or accepted a marriage proposal. Neither of these options were viable to Erauso— she was more interested in the military careers of her father and brothers and their participation in the colonial conquest of Spain in the Caribbean and South America.

Upon leaving the abbey, Erauso served as a page boy for prominent Basque families and eventually as a ship-boy on her uncle's naval vessel during a passage to Spanish colonies in Peru. Once there, Erauso worked as a shop boy and bookkeeper until she engaged in her first act of violence. After killing one man and disfiguring another, Erauso served a stint in jail before leaving for Chile, where she enlisted in the Spanish military.

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<sup>1</sup> Catalina de Erauso, *Lieutenant Nun: Memoir of a Basque Transvestite in the New World*, transl. Michele Stepto and Gabriel Stepto (Beacon Press, Boston, 1996). The account of Erauso's life is summarized from this translation of Erauso's autobiography *La Historia de la Monja Alférez* (trans. the History of the Ensign Nun). Despite the problematic sub-heading of the translated title, the translation is (as far as I can tell) accurate and consistent in preserving gendered nouns and language structure, as Erauso uses different gender pronouns to refer to herself at various points in her life.

While her military exploits were great and garnered much success and infamy, Erauso's penchant for violence continued in battle and into the streets of wherever she happened to be. She sequestered herself to a Franciscan church after killing a man during a gambling dispute, and accidentally killed her brother while he delivered to her a charge of rebellion.

Erauso would find herself in constant trouble yet somehow managed, for about twenty years, to evade any severe punishment, usually by fleeing the locations of her transgressions or by seeking sanctuary in a nearby church. Erauso's life as a military man came to an end when she was finally captured and revealed the details of her birth to the bishop of Guanmanga, Chile. After her story was proven true, the bishop sent her to a nunnery where she lived for three years before returning to Spain and seeking reparations from the King to pay her a military pension. She received permission from the Holy Roman Church to continue living her life as a man and was pardoned by the King for her transgressions during her time as a lieutenant. Eventually, she returned to Peru in 1630 and essentially vanished from record.

*La Historia de la Monja Alférez*, Erauso's autobiography, was published 150 years after it was written, though the story of the ensign nun persisted through word of mouth and preserved in the oral histories of South America and Spain.<sup>2</sup> At its core, Erauso's autobiography chronicles her pursuit of independence and all that she must sacrifice, as an early modern woman, to attain the kind of freedom she desires without

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<sup>2</sup> Michele Stepto, in the introduction to the translated *Lieutenant Nun*, recalls a story a friend told her about the confession of a nun who lived a bandit's life dressed as a man until she confessed her true identity and returned to convent life. During her research, Stepto discovered that this version of Erauso's story reflected the oral history and folklore of the Spanish-speaking world that emerged during the 150 years before the discovery of the autobiography.

social constriction.<sup>3</sup> Elisabeth Howe concludes that women of the time period crossdressed “in order to facilitate movement in the wider world,” and this is certainly true for Erauso.<sup>4</sup> The decision to assume male identities removes her from the Basque society she was born into, for she cannot stay in San Sebastian without being discovered, thus her only option is to leave.

While the act of crossdressing allows Erauso the choice to leave her hometown and pursue the kind of life she wants, one that is styled after the men in her family, crossdressing is not an expression of her sexuality. Rather, Erauso— as a queer woman— uses crossdressing as a tool to achieve independence from the hierarchical patriarchy of Spain. Crossdressing prevents her from participating in society in a normative way and removes the potential for companionship, romantic love, familial relationships, static existence in a singular place, permanent employment, and the ability to be a law-abiding individual. Of course, her male identity and her criminal activity are positioned against the colonial Spanish backdrop that, despite the many failed attempts to detain or imprison her, allows much of her heightened masculinity to go unchecked. It is all of these things in combination— her hypermasculine gender expression, her penchant for violence and crime, her lack of companionship and social or familial relationships— that mark Erauso as a queer, anti-normative body inhabiting a normative space.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> In this context, and early modern women is one that lived during the mid-to-late sixteenth to early-seventeenth centuries.

<sup>4</sup> Elizabeth Teresa Howe, “Soldier in New Spain: Catalina de Erauso,” in *Autobiographical Writing by Early Modern Hispanic Women* (Routledge, 2015) 171.

<sup>5</sup> I do not believe that Spanish-colonized Peru and Chile are normative spaces, that is not what I am suggesting here. In fact, colonial occupation has disrupted queer history to such an extreme that it is still being reclaimed centuries later, as is the history of the countless souls that lost their identities, their homes, their nationalities, families, children, and humanity through violent colonial practices such as chattel slavery and the ethnic cleansing of indigenous peoples throughout Africa, the Caribbean, and the Americas. What I am suggesting, however, is that

Many scholars that interrogate Erauso's autobiography approach their discussions from a position of institutionalized heteronormativity. Arguments about the state of Erauso's body, gender, and sexuality often categorically label her as transvestite, androgyne, or masculine lesbian without considering how her body, as a queer object, exists in the colonial landscape of Spanish occupied Peru and Chile.<sup>6</sup> While it might seem like the act of crossdressing is what marks Erauso as queer, this can only be true if crossdressing is acceptable as something instantiated by homosexuality. In Erauso's case, the argument is often that because she is receptive to the conventional aesthetic beauty of women, she is exhibiting homoerotic desires. Scholars often cite this passage as a display of homoeroticism: "And one day, when she and I were in the front parlor, and I had my head in the folds of her skirt and she was combing my hair while I ran my hands up and down between her legs."<sup>7</sup> The topic of marriage is suggested by the female companion, but before Erauso can respond, the two are discovered by Erauso's boss (her companion's father). She is fired from her job and immediately enlists in the Spanish militia in Chile. The female companion is never mentioned again and the topic of marriage, whether it is approached by a male or female, is staunchly avoided by Erauso. This is the only scene in the autobiography that explicitly hints at the direction Erauso's orientation points toward, yet scholars focus on this scene and her ability to externally pass as male as an indication of both her gender and sexuality. Howe notes that this "fascination" with Erauso's gender and sexuality "overshadows the narrative of the life and adventure spelled out in

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through the lens of a normative Spanish colonial force, how Erauso functions, as queer object, could be considered anti-normative to normative Western standards.

<sup>6</sup> This categorization is not specific to Erauso. Even as recent as 2014, scholarship centered around the act of crossdressing as a trope of early modern comedy uses the outdated term "transvestite" to discuss male-to-female crossdressing on the early modern stage.

<sup>7</sup> Erauso, *Lieutenant Nun*, 17.



the *Historia*.”<sup>8</sup> Additionally, James Pancrazio argues this fixation on Erauso’s gender and sexuality appropriates “Erauso for a homosexual or lesbian agenda, rather than examining the implications of cross-dressing” and encourages her critics to avoid conflating “being gay with being a transvestite” for “they are not synonymous.”<sup>9</sup>

Conflating homosexuality and crossdressing is logic seeped in heteronormativity: if an individual’s gender expression does not match their biological sex, then they are deviating from normative sexual expectations regardless of their partner. The insistence upon categorizing Erauso as hetero- or homosexual, a lesbian, a “transvestite,” an androgyne, removes Erauso from queer history and places her on a linear, normative historical trajectory that allows for the dissection of her narrative through the lens of institutionalized heterosexuality that seeks to delegitimize her lived experience as a queer body.<sup>10</sup>

Scattered throughout Erauso’s narrative are moments that allude to sexual activity, but Erauso never comments directly on her gender expression or sexual preferences. When she confesses her life story to the Bishop of Guanmanga, she reveals that she is still a virgin, which is tested and proven true.<sup>11</sup> Despite the virginal state of Erauso, her refusal to marry, and her blatant avoidance of romantic love, scholars still focus their criticism on Erauso’s sexuality. Gayle Rubin defines the sex-gender system as

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<sup>8</sup> Howe, “Soldiers in New Spain,” 176.

<sup>9</sup> James Pancrazio, “Transvested Autobiography: Apocrypha and the Monja Alferez,” *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies* (2001): 466.

<sup>10</sup> I want to note here that even my own interpretation of Erauso’s autobiography is making a categorical assumption of her identity.

<sup>11</sup> Erauso, *Lieutenant Nun*, 66. To authenticate Erauso’s revelation of her female body, the Bishop ordered a group of older women to examine her body and they discovered she was an “intact virgin.”

“the set of arrangements by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity, and in which these transformed sexual needs are satisfied.”<sup>12</sup>

Interpretations of homoerotic desire in Erauso’s autobiography only work under the assumption that all bodies function in a rigid sex-gender system because they insist that bodies can only perform heteronormative gender and compulsory heterosexuality.

As Pancrazio states, conflating homosexuality and “transvestism” overlooks “how the transvestite occupies an in-between space which confuses arbitrary categories of gender.”<sup>13</sup> Cultural sites of queerness and the cohabitation of non-queer sites by queer bodies is an important line of query that deserves as much attention as discussions of gender, but Pancrazio is positioning “the in-between space” that Erauso’s body inhabits in the realm of institutionalized heteronormativity. He does this by using the word “transvestite.” The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) defines “transvestite” as “a person, typically a man, who derives pleasure from dressing in clothes appropriate to the opposite sex.”<sup>14</sup> This word did not come into use until 1910 and had seemingly fallen out of popular usage during the 1970’s, and yet the word is still being used to discuss crossdressing and gender expression. This singular definition suggests that acts of crossdressing are inherently associated with sexual pleasure and is commonly linked explicitly to homosexual desire.

To distance my line of inquiry from this insistence that crossdressing is inherently linked to homosexuality, I want to look at ways that crossdressing is performed in different spaces, physical structures and natural landscapes, and how crossdressing allows

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<sup>12</sup> Gayle Rubin, “The Traffic in Women: Notes on the “Political Economy” of Sex,” *Toward an Anthology of Women*, ed. Rayna R. Reiter (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975) 159.

<sup>13</sup> Pancrazio, “Transvested Autobiography,” 466.

<sup>14</sup> Oxford English Dictionary Online, “transvestite, n.”

early modern English playwrights the ability to imitate fluctuations of real instances of crossdressing in the streets of London on the space of the stage. Thomas Heywood's *Fair Maid of the West, Part 1* follows the adventures of Bess Bridges on her quest to avenge the death of her lover, while participating in crossdressing to correct disruptions in masculinity and inscripting her male companions to actively participate in her queer, unfixed, gender. With John Lyly's *Gallathea*, I explore the concept of anti-normativity in spaces that exist outside of hierarchical patriarchal structures, and how those spaces allow for inversions of sexual orientations, concepts of modesty, and accommodate alternative forms of love. Discussions of both plays are centered around the crossdressing crossgendered plots apparent in both, and the ways in which characters either maintain the early modern sex-gender system or deviate from it to form their own gender expressions.

Within a rigid sex-gender system, crossdressing is a product of human activity that deviates from compulsory heterosexuality— a condition that assumes biological sex is determinately either male or female and promotes sexual desire between those bodies. Sarah Ahmed explains that the “naturalization of heterosexuality involves the presumption that there is a straight line that leads each sex toward the other sex, *and that this line of desire*” is “*in line*” with *one's sex*.”<sup>15</sup> The insistence of “desire” or “pleasure” to define sexuality is the crux to arguments about crossdressing, because this argument does not factor in the cultural conditions that allow crossdressing to happen or the exclusion from normative culture that crossdressing individuals experience. Lisa Jardine claims that crossdressed adolescent male actors on the English stage instilled homoerotic

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<sup>15</sup> Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006) 71.

desire in their male spectators, whereas Stephen Orgel argues that the English stage sought to contain female sexuality by allowing boy-actors to perform female roles.<sup>16</sup> By disallowing women to perform on the stage, playwrights— through their use of boy actors— sought to define female sexual desire, something more threatening to hierarchical patriarchy than male-male relationships, particularly those between male audiences and boy actors.<sup>17</sup> While these arguments open the conversation to discuss crossdressing, they are still very much mired in heteronormativity, as is any conversation that insists on relational distance between female and male sexual desire.

Jean Howard does examine cultural conditions, including hierarchical patriarchy, that allowed for crossdressing to emerge in the early modern culture replicated on the stage.<sup>18</sup> Howard's aims to historicize crossdressing during the early modern era by looking at the polemic tracts *Hic Mulier* and *Haec Vir* and legal records from the Bridewell Court Minutes Book and the Repertoires of the Alderman's Court.<sup>19</sup> In the records, Howard found that many women, from varying social backgrounds, participated in the act of crossdressing. Lower-class women receive harsher legal punishments, as their professions often included prostitutes and their dress violated sumptuary laws, whereas merchant-class women were often only chastised in church court and faced little to no legal ramifications. According to Howard, crossdressing is transgressive because it

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<sup>16</sup> Lisa Jardine, "'As boys and women are for the most part cattle of this colour': Female Roles and Elizabethan Eroticism." *Still Harping on Daughters: Women and Drama in the Age of Shakespeare* (New Jersey: Barnes and Noble Books, 1983) 9-36.; Stephen Orgel. "Nobody's Perfect, or Why Did the English Stage Take Boys for Women," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 88 (1989): 7-29.

<sup>17</sup> Orgel, "Nobody's Perfect."

<sup>18</sup> Jean Howard, "Crossdressing, The Theatre, and Gender Struggle in Early Modern England," *Shakespeare Quarterly* (1988): 418-440.

<sup>19</sup> *Hic Mulier* translates to Manlike Woman; *Haec Vir* translates to Effeminate Man.

gives an individual the ability to cross social class and cross sexual kinds, both of which were determined by sumptuary laws that insisted on the external display of both class and male/female gender. In this sex-gender system, external displays of gender would signify the sexual orientation of the individual. While Howard's argument does add complexity to the conversation by interrogating cultural sites of crossdressing, it still follows the binary logic that insists upon the subservience of women in the hierarchy of patriarchal order. Howard's argument is significant because it poses critical questions about the presence of crossdressed women on the early modern stage: "Do they present constructions of women that challenge her subordinate place in the Renaissance sex-gender system, and so, perhaps, lead to transformation of that system? Or do they recuperate, countervail, the threat the figure posed in the streets of London and in the symbolic economy of the period?"<sup>20</sup>

Howard's formative historical interrogation of crossdressed early modern women, both off and on the stage, provide feminist readings of crossdressing as an act of transgression. I am not interested in interrogating crossdressing as an act of transgression, rather I want to explore the social ostracization of crossdressed women: the spaces they inhabit, their relationships, and their disruptive, anti-normative participation in society. Though sexuality and gender are important factors to discuss in regard to anti-normativity, focusing solely on these factors prevents nuanced considerations of the social demands a queer body must adhere to in order to function in a normative society.

There has been a trend in feminist and queer early modern scholarship to equate adolescent male actors acting as women and female characters crossdressing as men,

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<sup>20</sup> Howard, "Crossdressing," 37.

when these two things are wildly different and the conflation of the two is problematic. The distinction here is that male actors are performing roles as a part of their profession, and any gender or sexual kind they portray during that performance is constructed by the playwright. Roles that require male actors to crossdress are contained to the stage and do not necessarily represent the actor's personal gender expressions or their sexuality off the stage. Female characters crossdressing do so because of the conditions of the constructed society in the play; these conditions often imitate the hierarchical patriarchal order of early modern society, and crossdressed women characters are navigating, and subverting, those conditions. For the playwright, crossdressing is a comedic trope that both progresses plot, creates tension between characters, and complicates the hierarchical patriarchal order in the play. Early modern audiences would have been acutely aware of the significance of crossdressing characters on the stage, and they would have been able to distinguish between male actors dressed as women and the trope of crossdressing.

Several anti-theatrical tracts, from the 16th and 17th century, condemned the theatre for instilling homoerotic desire amongst male and female audiences, but these opinions were significantly outweighed by condemnation for crossdressing in society. Robert Lubin keenly points out that during the time period, early modern critics of the stage were infinitely less interested in crossdressing and homoeroticism on the stage than present-day scholars, and cites only four tracts that specifically mention crossdressing.<sup>21</sup> This could indicate that crossdressing on the stage was less of a concern for early modern audiences than it is for current audiences and critics, or it could signify that, for the

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<sup>21</sup> Robert Lubin, "Anxious Audiences and the Early Modern English Transvestite Theatre," *Theatre Symposium* (2012): 66–73.

audience, the stage represented a liminal space that allowed for a more fluid exploration of language, gender, sexuality, and cultural norms.

Early modern feminist scholars Phyllis Rackin and Catherine Belsey focus their attention on the androgyne and how the ‘boy heroine’ disrupts distinctions in gender roles. Rackin argues that adolescent male actors and their representations of the crossdressed female create a transcendent union that both complicates and resolves gender differences.<sup>22</sup> Belsey insists that the androgyne, male actors dressed as women dressed as men, represents a plurality that blurs sexual and gender distinctions.<sup>23</sup> Belsey argues that masculinity and femininity are singular occupations of the body, but the fluidity of gender in male actors turned crossdressed characters represents a body that is not quite masculine or feminine but neither or simultaneously both. While I generally do agree that there is a certain fluidity of gender at play with crossdressing characters on the stage, by collapsing both femininity and masculinity into a singular entity removes the nuanced understanding of the lived experience of the gendered body and its anti-normative presence in the early modern heteronormative world. While Rackin and Belsey do push for alternative readings of early modern plays, specifically those of Shakespeare, they remove the plays from their historical contexts and impose contemporary theoretical ideology onto the texts. A queer reading of crossdressed characters does not involve this kind of removal, but instead interrogates how bodies operate in the confines of the social structures they exhibit within and how their actions promote or inhibit anti-normative behaviors.

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<sup>22</sup> Phyllis Rackin, “Androgyny, Mimesis, and the Marriage of the Boy Heroine on the English Renaissance Stage,” *Modern Language Association* (1987): 29-41.

<sup>23</sup> Catherine Belsey, “Disrupting Sexual Difference: Meaning and Gender in the Comedies,” *Alternative Shakespeares*, ed. John Drakakis (New York: Routledge, 2002) 169-193.

Michael Shapiro, like Howard, seeks to historicize the presence of crossdressed characters on the stage, but broadens his inquiry to include boy heroines and page girls.<sup>24</sup> By focusing on crossdressing as a form of disguise, not entirely related to gender and sexuality, Shapiro is able to give an account of how crossdressing, as a comedic trope, works for both female and male crossdressed characters. Critical to Shapiro's study is his insistence on the construction of comedy, the crossdressing trope, and the importance of the audience's imaginative interpretations of theatrical performances. Shapiro, like Belsey, points out that if male actors could successfully imitate femininity, then the very presence of these bodies on the stage destabilizes the sex-gender system and makes gender distinctions appear arbitrary. Arbitrary may not be the best way to define the instability of gender roles on the stage, when gender distinctions during the era, and presently, are quite important; rather, we might think of the stage as a liminal space that allows for blurring or fluidity that is clearly not in line with the social, institutional insistence on heteronormativity. As Madhavi Menon suggests, the tendency in queer and feminist scholarship, over the last forty years, has been to examine a body's position in a space through its proximity to heteronormative gender and sexuality.<sup>25</sup> This emerges, at its most obvious, in the discussion around crossdressing and gender ambiguity on the early modern stage.

Even within queer theory there are boundaries that demarcate lived experience from the perception of history that benefits a normative way of thinking. This is especially true in regard to scholarship surrounding Catalina de Erauso and also for the

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<sup>24</sup> Michael Shapiro, *Gender in Play on the Shakespearean Stage: Boy Heroines and Female Pages* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994).

<sup>25</sup> Madhavi Menon, Introduction to *Shakespeare*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011) 1-27.



early modern plays I investigate in subsequent chapters. Menon reminds us that even the framework of queer theory is not free from institutionalized normativity by explaining that the institutionalization of heterosexuality and homosexuality is generally accepted as beginning at the dawn of the nineteenth century, supposedly marking this date as the beginning of queer history. As a result of this, the concept of queer as an offset of homosexuality also became institutionalized, along with the notion that nothing before the year 1800 could be queer, only queered through contemporary interpretation.<sup>26</sup> Any acceptance of this arbitrary date as institutional truth removes the potential for conversation about the intersections between race and gender or sexuality, colonial expansion and the suppression of non-Western gender norms, Western fetishization of the non-European ‘other,’ and all lived-experiences that are anti-normative. To accommodate these exclusions, contemporary queer scholars have produced considerable work in critical race theory, postcolonial studies, spatial theory and social geographies, and phenomenology.

I am not suggesting that homoerotic desire is absent from Erauso’s autobiography or from early modern drama. I am, however, suggesting that queer and homosexual/homoerotic desire are terms that do not classify the same embodiment. These two things can be linked, but they are not reliant upon each other to function. For the sake of this thesis, I will adapt Menon’s suggestion about queer and the state of queer theory:

Queerness allows us to encounter violence of specificity itself by being excluded from its ambit. Lest we conclude that queerness can mean anything at any time and in any place, let me hasten to add that queerness cannot “mean” in any final

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<sup>26</sup> Menon, 4-11.

sense of that word. If queerness can be defined, then it is no longer queer- it stands away from its anti-normative stance to become the institutionalized norm.

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In other words, queer does not exist on a binary because binaries instill normative behavior, and this normativity does not only exist within the sphere of heterosexuality, it also exists within homosexuality. Queer is anti-normative not because it exists outside of normativity, but precisely because it inhabits the same space of normativity. Queer is not marginal, it is not displaced, rather it operates within the center. This is what Menon means by encountering “violence of specificity itself by being excluded from its ambit;” heteronormativity can only function in proximity to queer and as long as queer is conforming to other institutionalized normative behaviors: if not heteronormative, then it must be homonormative, if neither then it is expelled from coinhabited spaces. This expulsion is violence, but as Menon suggests, displacement— from the center— as a result of this violence instills anti-normative queerness. Normativity may hold the center, but queer disrupts its surroundings.

The early modern stage is inherently queer because the act of crossdressing is anti-normative: which means that queer history predates the institutionalization of hetero- and homosexuality. If we take crossdressing to be a manifestation of queerness, instead of a manifestation of homosexual/homoerotic desire, then queer has existed since antiquity, for as long as there have been oppressive social structures there have been individuals resistant to those structures. On the early modern stage, the crossdressed woman is an object of comedic value. Crossdressing is often used in comedies that end in

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<sup>27</sup> Menon, 7.

heteronormative marriage plots, but what would a discussion of these female characters look like if we parallel them with the lived experiences of crossdressed women like Erauso or the many women legally persecuted for their transgressions? How does the crossdressed female character disrupt the spaces she occupies within the geographies of the staged world she inhabits? How do these spaces represent cultural sites of queerness or sites inhabited by queer bodies? These are the questions that guide my interrogation of *Fair Maid of the West, Part 1* and *Gallatea*.

In Chapter One, I explore the one-sex model of gender, present in early modern medical theories, and the philology of gender-specific language that perpetuates that model on the stage. By interrogating the one-sex model, I will offer a reading of the stage as a queer space that accommodates divergences from heteronormative gender expressions and actively produces queer gender, queer companionship, and inverts normative gender expectations. By tracing the non-normativity of Bess Bridges in Heywood's *Fair Maid of the West, Part 1*, I will investigate social class, social ranks, and gender in a society that uses language to instantiate the fixity of these social categories.

In Chapter Two, I examine the concept of queer spaces within social landscapes. To do this, I explore the boundaries between a hierarchical patriarchal society structured around the male-regulated sexual economy of women and a matriarchal society of women that is sustained by love and companionship between its members, set in the social and physical landscape of John Lyly's *Gallathea*. In this chapter, I posit that queer spaces within plays allow playwrights the opportunity to explore anti-normative behavior and alternative forms of love that accommodate characters existing outside the realm of heteronormativity.

## Chapter One:

## Stage, Streets, Ships: Unfixed Gender and Queer Spaces

Heteronormativity determines categorical definitions of gender and sex and defines each in relational distance to the other. Many scholars agree that a rigid early modern sex-gender system, regulated by laws, insisted upon heteronormative gender and sex. Though the meaning of gender and sex are understood differently than how a contemporary audience might perceive the words, in early modern terms, sex was a constructed performance, determined by laws that punished immoral behaviors and deviations from outward appearances that signaled social class and gender.<sup>28</sup> In this chapter, I will inspect the early modern sex-gender system to determine the fixity of gender, the relational distance between male and female, and the liminality that fluctuating language instills on the stage. Liminality manifests not only in the categorical representations of gender, its fixed and unfixed status, but also in how gender is displayed through deviations from heteronormativity. In Thomas Heyward's *Fair Maid of the West, Part 1*, Bess Bridges, the main character, tests the fixity of gender by crossdressing as

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<sup>28</sup> Thirteen cases, discovered by R. Mark Benbow and Alasdair D.K. Hawkyard, appeared for the first time in publication in Michael Shapiro's *Gender in Play on the Shakespearean Stage: Boy Heroines and Girl Pages* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994). Shapiro's use of these cases establishes that female-to-male crossdressing was, in fact, not a punishable offense but often these women were arrested while caught performing sexual misdemeanors, such as prostitution. Upon further inspection of these cases, Sara Gorman theorized that "the cross-dressed figure was an object of visual fascination for Elizabethan audiences in precisely the way youthful virginal figures were" (8). Sara Gorman, "The Theatricality of Transformation: cross-dressing, sexual misdemeanor and gender/sexuality spectra on the Elizabethan stage, Bridewell Hospital Court Records, and the Repertories of the Court of the Alderman, 1574-1607," *Early Modern Literary Studies* (2008).

male, enacting violence, and resituating masculinity through challenging the structure of male gentility and friendship.<sup>29</sup>

Contemporary concepts of gender and sexuality did not exist in early modern times, and, as noted in the introduction, were institutionalized during the eighteenth and nineteenth century. Thomas Laqueur explains that biological distinctions of human sexuality between male and female occurred in the eighteenth century; the following demarcation between physical distinctions of male and female instituted a cultural differentiation of man and woman.<sup>30</sup> Before the institutionalization of heteronormativity and compulsory heterosexuality, the one-sex model dominated the early modern era.

Viviana Comensoli and Anne Russel define the one-sex model as predominately male centered and dependent on the “hierarchal representation of sexual difference whereby the human body is defined according to a teleology of perfection, proceeding from imperfect to perfect, female to male.”<sup>31</sup> In this model, male and masculinity are the perfect embodiment of sex and gender, and deviations from this perfection are unnatural. Perfection, according to this model, manifests in the external genitalia of the male body, and imperfections manifest in the inversion of the penis, or internal female genitalia.

Janet Adelman suggests that the one-sex model effectively “does away with women’s bodies altogether,” and yet the “transvestite” stage alludes to gender that is not

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<sup>29</sup> Thomas Heywood, *Fair Maid of the West, Parts I and I*, ed. Robert K. Turner (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1967).

<sup>30</sup> Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990) 6-8.

<sup>31</sup> Viviana Comensoli and Anne Russell, *Enacting Gender on the English Renaissance Stage* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999) 4-5.

so fixed in form or reliant on the model to determine perfection.<sup>32</sup> Adelman cites medical and vernacular texts to disprove the insistence of the one-sex model in the early modern era and questions why scholars are so fixated on this model to interrogate gender power dynamics when historical evidence suggests that this model, much like the polemic tracts damning theatrical cross-dressing, were few and far between. Adelman sees the model as “doing away” with anatomical gender, and gender “fixidity,” at the expense of erasing women.<sup>33</sup> The oversight in Adelman’s argument, which I find to be generally true of scholars resistant to this model, is that they still insist upon heteronormative binaries that function on the basis that biological male and female bodies are natural. However, this argument excludes all other bodies, so I will slightly augment Adelman’s claim here and insist that the one-sex model, despite not imposing gender fixidity, does so through the erasure of all bodies that are not categorized as male.

Stephen Greenblatt addresses the unfixed nature of gender in the one-sex model by explaining that all early modern bodies were at birth, and throughout childhood, both male and female.<sup>34</sup> The one-sex model accommodates transitions from both male and female to strictly male or female: “Virtually all males experienced a transition during childhood from a state close to that of females— indeed often called “effeminate”—to one befitting an adult man. Conversely, if less frequently, the predominance of the appropriate female characteristics could take some time to establish itself.”<sup>35</sup> Given the

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<sup>32</sup> Janet Adelman, “Making Defect Perfection: Shakespeare and the One-Sex Model,” *Enacting Gender on the English Renaissance Stage*, ed. Viviana Comensoli and Anne Russell (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999) 25-26.

<sup>33</sup> Adelman, 39-40.

<sup>34</sup> Stephen Greenblatt, “Friction and Fraction,” *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988) 66-93.

<sup>35</sup> Greenblatt, 78.

earlier definition of the one-sex model, the transition from both male and female to the perfect form of man suggests that all bodies that do not undergo this exact transition are imperfect. According to this model, there can never be a transition from female to male, but men will always have transitioned from a body that was doubly to singularly inhabited.<sup>36</sup> What does this mean for the state of women's body's? If the female body never transitions, like this model suggests, does it still always inhabit both male and female? Is the female body fluid? It would seem as if the body that never transitions to perfect man defies the one-sex model just on the basis of existence, for even if the body never transitions it still inhabits male. But of course, like Adelman suggests and Greenblatt confirms, the imperfect state of the female body—one that can never be singular—reinforces the relational distance between men and women and enforces the notion that women are the weaker, or less perfect, sex and they must submit to the patriarchal order.<sup>37</sup>

According to Michel Foucault, there was a shift in defining categories during the early modern period.<sup>38</sup> In the sixteenth century, categories were defined by the similitude of their objects. During the seventeenth century, the concept of categories changed and the similitude between objects within categories became less important while the relational distance between different categories became the defining element of each category. In the one-sex model, childhood is a category with unfixed gender, as all bodies in this category are doubly inhabited by both male and female. At some point, these bodies either transition into men or become categorized as 'girl.' For men, there are

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<sup>36</sup> Greenblatt, 83.

<sup>37</sup> Adelman, "Making Defect Perfection," 25-40; Greenblatt, "Friction and Fraction," 79.

<sup>38</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Science* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989).

no sub-categories, their bodies are not categorized by their relational distance to girls and women. Jennifer Higgenbotham traces the changing definition of ‘girl’ in early modern English and explores the trifold occupation of women during the era: maid, wife, widow.<sup>39</sup> Girlhood became a category only in its relationship to maidenhood, maidenhood to wife, wife to widow—all three in relational distance to perfect man. Higgenbotham states:

Distinctions based on age between “girls” and “women,” as well as between “girls” and “wenches,” “damsels,” and “maids,” are clearly relational and intertwined with other contextual factors, including social status, sexuality, familial ties, occupation, and historical conditions. When “girl” emerges as a gender-specific term, “girls” could be associated equally and contradictorily with dependence and independence, sexual innocence and experience, and obedience and disobedience.<sup>40</sup>

In Samuel Johnson’s *Dictionary of English Language*, ‘boy’ has three definitions: “a male child, not a girl,” a pre-pubescent adolescent, or an immature young man.<sup>41</sup>

Higgenbotham notes ‘boy’ is defined by what it is not: “a young woman, a female child”—the very definition he gives ‘girl.’ Here, ‘boy’ is defined by what it is not, yet “girls are the standard against which other categories of children are defined.”<sup>42</sup>

Around the age of seven, boys underwent the breeching ceremony, a process by which they transitioned from the gender-neutral (unfixed) clothing of childhood and were

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<sup>39</sup> Jennifer Higgenbotham, “Fair Maids and Golden Girls: the Vocabulary of Female Youth in Early Modern English,” *Modern Philology*, vol. 109, no.2 (2011): 171-196.

<sup>40</sup> Higgenbotham, 176.

<sup>41</sup> Higginbotham, 183.

<sup>42</sup> Higgenbotham, 183.



inducted into male culture. For boys, the breeching ceremony marks the literal transition from childhood and “suggests that childhood was feminine and that boys were being differentiated from the generic category of “child.”<sup>43</sup> There was no such ceremony that marked the transition from childhood into female culture, rather female children simply progressed in roles from girls, to maids, to wives, and finally to widows. The hierarchy of patriarchal order is formulated as a differentiation that situates the perfect man at the head of the order, with boys following, then women and girls at the bottom. Deviations from this order—gender presentations not contained within these categories or the sub-categories of girl/woman—threatened this perceived natural order. If we are to take the one-sex model as the early modern sex-gender system, how do we categorize women that crossdressed as men?

It seems to me that scholars tend to adapt the one-sex model precisely because it operates within a hierarchical patriarchy, but the reality is that this model functions on a binary assuming that male and female are “natural” and men are just closer to perfect than women. Children either transition into men or they do not and the only category in opposition to man is woman. There are two distinctions here: children that assume a female gender expression and live as women are categorically opposed to perfect man, and children that never transition to perfect man and do not assume a female gender expression maintain their unfixed gender throughout their lives. While the one-sex model suggests two genders possess one body that undergoes transitions to one specific gender, bodies that have an unfixed gender cannot possibly function within the one-sex model simply because their gender does not align to the state of their body. Rather, the very

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<sup>43</sup> Higgenbotham, 186.

presence of the unfixed body dismantles the assumption that early moderns prescribed to the one-sex model, for if the one-sex model was the status-quo, we would not see historical evidence of crossdressing or people living their lives as genders that do not align with their biological sex.

Many queer and feminist early modern scholars of the 1980's and 90's position their conversations about gender and sexuality on a linear binary that seems to accept the one-sex model as the definitive sex-gender system of the era. Adelman and Greenblatt both demonstrate the possibility that the one-sex system was created to explain deviations in gender outside of the male/female binary and subsequent emergences of alternative sexualities, though it appears that the model simply served to establish a hierarchy that instituted heteronormativity. What I propose is that gender, in early modern societies, was not fixed at all—historical accounts and legal and medical records demonstrate that intersex, transgender, and genderfluid or non-conforming bodies all existed in the early modern era—and those gender expressions did not instantiate sexual orientations. An anti-normative reading of the body still insists upon a hierarchical patriarchy, though it seeks to determine how bodies within a space disrupt order and cause chaos. The one-sex model, sex-gender systems, and binaries all seek to control chaos by creating categories, but categories cannot contain unnamed objects: bodies that are not 'perfect man' or some variation of 'girl' are unnamed. My readings of *Fair Maid of the West, Part 1* and *Gallathea* do not deviate from this norm: I will also insist upon categories, but my categories—queer, non-oriented, unsexed—serve as the antithesis to normative readings of gender and sexuality.

A discussion of the early modern stage will always be a discussion about space, though not in an abstract sense. That is, a discussion about the early modern stage has been predominantly a discussion of heteronormative space, even when the stage is being queered, simply because heteronormativity has been central to contemporary interpretations of the stage. This is not a controversial claim by any means, rather an observation on the state of the stage as a space. I want to suggest that the early modern stage has never been straight simply because of deviations of heterosexuality and heteroerotic desire present on the stage.

Jon Binnie argues that, just like people, spaces do not have pre-determined sexual identities, therefore “space is not naturally authentically “straight” but rather actively produced and (hetero)sexualized.”<sup>44</sup> If we follow the logic of the one-sex model, the stage is a place for perfect men to perform, or construct, sexuality that aligns with the patriarchal view that women are imperfect, for their bodies are doubly inhabited by gender (male and female) and lack the right genitalia. Though we may argue that female characters on the stage are categorically contained and subject to the hierarchical patriarchy built into the structure of many plays, there are plenty of characters constructed to deviate from that categorization. Michael Shapiro’s *Gender in Play on the Shakespearean Stage* reads as a case-study of Shakespeare’s plays that feature crossdressing, in addition to a discussion of crossgender disguise and crossgender casting, double crossdressing disguise plots, and an appendix that lists seventy-six early modern plays that featured crossdressing heroines, which does not include crossdressing

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<sup>44</sup> Jon Binnie, “Coming out of Geography: towards a queer epistemology?” *Society and Space* (1997): 223-37.

in plays within plays.<sup>45</sup> Shapiro attributes the abundance of crossdressed characters to “spectators and playwrights sharing a common but complex and diversified culture [that] agreed on forms of collective fantasy, one of which featured heroines in male disguise.”<sup>46</sup> Though the plays do require their audiences to rely on their imaginations, the use of the word “fantasy” seems to suggest that audiences only ever encountered crossdressing as a function of the stage, however crossdressing had a very tangible presence off the stage. What I want to suggest is that perhaps the audience's easy acceptance of crossdressing on the stage signifies that there was really nothing fantastical about it, that the practice was something encountered in their ordinary lives and accepted readily. It may be possible that the audience was comfortable with genderfluidity and they recognized the stage as a place to test the boundaries of hierarchical patriarchy.

Instead of thinking of the stage as a space that has been sexualized, perhaps we can think of it as a space reflecting the unfixed, temporal, and sometimes anti-normative gender expressions of the lived experiences of real crossdressing individuals, though in an elaborate and dramatized way. Michel de Certeau defines a space as such:

[S]pace is a practiced place. Thus the street geometrically defined by urban planning is transformed into a space by walkers. In the same way, an act of reading is the space produced by the practice of a particular place: a written text, i.e., a place constituted by a system of signs.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Michael Shapiro, *Gender in Play on the Shakespearean Stage: Boy Heroines and Page Girls* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994).

<sup>46</sup> Shapiro, 61.

<sup>47</sup> Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Randell (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984) 117.

People in public places “trace "indeterminate trajectories" that are apparently meaningless, since they do not cohere with the constructed, written, and prefabricated space through which they move.”<sup>48</sup> Here de Certeau is speaking of reading, of the connection between space and linguistics and places that inhabit both—structures that allow for interpretation—but I think the concept can be adapted to the stage. The performance of gender, and its many expressions, is produced by practices of the stage. The place of the stage becomes a queer space; hence the stage is queer.

A queer stage does not displace normativity, rather it seeks to illuminate deviations from normative. It seems to me that contemporary scholars want to insist that the early modern stage is a sexualized space, whereas I suggest that sexuality is simply a function of normativity (both hetero- and homo-) that serves as another constructed way for bodies to perform, but that performance is not dependent on gender expression. Therefore, the stage cannot be sexualized because it is not a body with functions, rather it is a space produced by bodies that practice different functions.

To acknowledge the stage as a queer space, we must also accept that the audience (a separate space of the stage) was willing to accept male actors as female, or at least displace their assumptions of gender and its supposedly fixed nature. Kath Browne, a social geographer of queer spaces, insists that queer geographies transgress boundaries, between man and woman and hetero- and homonormative, and insist upon a non-linear trajectory that explores fluid spaces.<sup>49</sup> To read the stage this way, for a contemporary audience, is to accept that the stage is a queer space, a notion that dispels the one-sex

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<sup>48</sup> De Certeau, 34.

<sup>49</sup> Kath Browne, “Challenging Queer Geographies,” *Antipode* 38 (2006): 885-93.

model or the strange consensus by many queer and feminist scholars that sexuality is a manifestation of gender and crossdressing instantiates homosexuality.

### Streets and Ships

Thomas Heywood's *Fair Maid of the West or A Girl Worth Gold, Part 1* was entered into the Stationer's Register in 1631, though it is generally accepted that the play was written and performed much earlier. Robert Turner suspects the play was written between 1596 and 1603 and first performed in the final years of Elizabeth I's life, before 1603.<sup>50</sup> Allusions between Bess and Elizabeth indicate that the play was written while Elizabeth was still alive, as she was a known patron of the theatre and Heywood was very prolific and gaining popularity in public theaters in the 1590's.<sup>51</sup> Heywood's inclusion of non-European characters leads some scholars to attribute the 'Moroccan episodes' in the play to be influenced by the residency of a Moroccan ambassador in England, sometime between 1600-1, or the crowning of Mulai Sheik in 1604.<sup>52</sup> Both events sparked curiosity in English audiences and characters of non-European origin were featured in other plays produced during the time, most famously Shakespeare's *Othello*, published in 1603.

Though these events are important in dating the play and might reveal some of the play's influences, Heywood had a personal connection to the English Royal Navy that also served as a source of inspiration. Sue Jones explains Heywood's connection to the Earl of Nottingham, the Lord High Admiral of the Royal Navy, through his friend Garret

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<sup>50</sup> Robert Turner, Introduction to *Fair Maid of the West, Part 1* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1967) ix-xx.

<sup>51</sup> Turner, x.

<sup>52</sup> Readings of the "Moroccan episode" can be found in Warner G. Rice, "the Moroccan Episode in Thomas Heywood's *The Fair Maid of the West*," *Philological Quarterly* IX (1930) and Bernard Harris, "A Portrait of a Moor," *Shakespeare Survey* XI (1958). Notice that the dates of these essays are more than seventy years old, which indicates a severe lack of contemporary scholarship around Heywood's *Fair Maid* sequence.

Christmas, a carver that sculpted decorations for naval vessels.<sup>53</sup> Heywood did have some interest in maritime practices as they feature in three of his plays: *Fair Maid of the West, Part 1* and *Part 2* and *Fortune by Land and Sea*—the publication timeline of these plays span across three monarchs and features elements of piracy, privateering, and naval expedition.<sup>54</sup>

*Fair Maid* is a maritime adventure: the settings are the port towns of Plymouth and Foy, sea-faring ships, and later the Moroccan city of Fez. The characters are captains and sailors in the English navy and Bess Bridges, the main character, eventually owns and commands her own ship. The play is set during an ongoing war between Spain and England that features heavily in later scenes when Bess is actively testing gender boundaries. As much as the play is about maritime adventures, it also explores the displacement of normative social practices and class structures while undermining the hierarchal order of the one-sex model through Bess's transition between social classes, rank, financial means and her insistence to remain unmarried and chaste. At the heart of Bess' independence is the insistence that she be a "pattern to all maids hereafter/ of constancy in love" (3.2.92-3): a vow that she makes in the middle of the play, once she discovers Spencer's supposed death, but one that really guides her character throughout the entirety of the play.

For Bess, love, honesty, and courage are defining qualities of character that hold moral significance, so much so that her judgement of others is determined solely by these qualities— her judgement often changes but only if those on the receiving end vow their

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<sup>53</sup> Sue Jones, "'English Bess' abroad: piracy, politics, and gender in the plays of Thomas Heywood," *Journal of Maritime Research* (2016): 82.

<sup>54</sup> Turner, Introduction, x-xiv; Jones, "English Bess," 81-2.

allegiance to her. The most apparent display of value judgement happens at the beginning of the play, when Spencer kills Carrol for insulting Bess. The fact that her love interest has killed another man is essentially overlooked for the simple fact that the act proves Spencer's loyalty to Bess despite their difference in social classes: she is from a working lower class while he is part of the gentry. All other injustices performed by other male characters are judged against Spencer actions. For instance, Bess actively seeks to correct Roughman's abusive and outrageous behavior by dressing as a man and challenging him to a duel, but later accepts his allegiance upon seeing his changed behavior. Similarly, Goodlack actively tries to trick Bess into confessing she is untrue to Spencer so that he can claim Spencer's inheritance, but once he is moved by Bess' loyalty, he too vows to serve Bess, which changes Bess' opinion of him. Before Bess can accept these men as companions, she must change or correct their behavior so that they align to her ideas of moral superiority, which does not necessarily align with normative ideas of morality and virtue. She needs to do this so that these men will remain loyal to her when her gender expressions deviate from normative expectations. In this way, Bess is anti-normative, and once her companions are aligned with her ideological practices, they are actively inhabiting queer spaces with her.

In the first act, it is established that Bess is the daughter of a bankrupt tanner that has enlisted in military service. Bess is independent, part of the working class, and sustains herself by working at the tavern—this independence marks her as uncontrollable by men, especially those of different social classes, but makes her an easy target for men to question her character. Jean Howard notes that the “discursive construction of woman in the Renaissance involved seeing her as a creature of strong sexual appetites needing



strict regulations” and that “her sexual desire was both a mark of her inferiority and a justification for control by men.”<sup>55</sup> Upon hearing of Bess’ beauty from other captains, Carrol is immediately skeptical of Bess’ chastity: “Honest, and live there?/ What, in a public tavern, where’s such confluence/ Of lusty and brave gallants? Honest, said you?” (1.1.24-6). ‘Honest’ here means chaste, and signifies Carrol’s disbelief that a chaste maid could possibly remain that way working in a port town regularly visited by sailors and “lusty and brave gallants.”<sup>56</sup> Though ‘lusty’ could refer to the sexual desires of the sailors, it could also indicate that the sailors are “insolent, arrogant” and “self confident” (OED, 6).<sup>57</sup> That the sailors are ‘gallants’ establishes a class distinction that implies women of lower social classes easily yield to the desires of men of higher social rank, which aligns with the order of patriarchal hierarchy and doubly oppresses women: they are not only imperfect according to the one-sex model, but their rank and sexuality mark them as inferior.

Carrol’s commentary of Bess insists that promiscuity is directly tied to social class: because she is a woman working at a tavern, he refers derogatorily to her as “housewife:” a hussy or a disreputable woman, frivolous and impertinent (OED, n: 2;3).<sup>58</sup> Carrol’s insults are at distinct odds with all of the other male opinions of Bess around him: his companions call her a “flower” and “wonderous modest” (1.1.19;29). Later, those same companions call her a “whore” and blame her for Carrol’s death (1.2.138-9). Though Bess did not kill Carrol, she is quick to correct this accusation and confirm that it

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<sup>55</sup> Jean Howard, “Crossdressing, The Theatre, and Gender Struggle in Early Modern England,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* (1988): 424.

<sup>56</sup> Heywood, *Fair Maid*, 8; footnote 24.

<sup>57</sup> Oxford English Dictionary Online, lusty, adj. 6.

<sup>58</sup> Oxford English Dictionary Online, housewife, n. 2; 3.

was Carrol's "incivility" that caused his death (1.2.140). This incident raises one significant question: why does Bess overlook the fact that Spencer killed another gentleman, when it is clear that she cannot forgive incivility? Immediately after Spencer kills Carrol, he and Goodlack flee, and Bess says this:

Oh sad misfortune, I shall lose him ever, —  
 What, are you men or milksops? Stand you still  
 Senseless as stones, and see your friend in danger  
 To expire his last? (1.2.135-8).

This passage reveals Bess' moral ideologies in two ways: first, justice must be served for all actions that obstruct love; second, if men do not perform masculinity in the way that Bess expects them too, with bravery, courage, and loyalty, then she sees them as disruptive forces that need to be resituated. This passage illustrates both points. Carrol's insults caused Spencer to fight and kill him, therefore it is Carrol's "incivility" that forced Spencer to action, subsequently causing him to flee, and potentially taking Spencer away from Bess. Additionally, Carrol's behavior and the lack of interference by his companions to stop the fight earn them the label of 'milksops:' "a feeble, timid, or ineffectual person, esp. a man or boy who is indecisive, effeminate, or lacking in courage" (OED, 1.a).<sup>59</sup> Insulting a woman because of her class and profession, blaming her for the actions committed by men, and failing to take action make Carrol and his companions "feeble, timid" and "ineffectual," and so Spencer's justice is excused. It also may be that because Spencer and Carrol are of the same social class, both gentlemen, that

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<sup>59</sup> Oxford English Dictionary Online, milksop, n, 1.a.

Bess is able to overlook Spencer's actions, as she does not view them as deviating from social norms or her own ideas of how masculinity should be performed.

In this instance, Bess needs Spencer to enact justice because she is not socially capable of doing so, and yet Carrol's murder is the very thing that propels her into a higher social rank. Before Spencer flees, he passes ownership of his tavern in Foy to Bess, as it is likely that he may die while at sea, but in exchange he requests that Bess remain chaste and wait for his return. This request is easy for Bess to maintain, as she loves Spencer and does not want to participate in any form of romantic relationship with anyone else, nor does she ever enter into financial partnerships with any other man for any reason. When Spencer bids her farewell, Bess declares the sound of the word "shrills" an "immediate death" and that she "shall not live to lose" him (1.3.75). Spencer is as loyal to Bess as she is to him, and when he believes himself to be dying, he leaves his entire inheritance to Bess, further elevating her in social rank and solidifying her independence. Although, the way in which Bess and Spencer's loyalty is demonstrated takes on different forms: Bess remains chaste, fends off gentleman that are after her wealth, and buys a ship to get revenge on those that killed Spencer and retrieve his body; Spencer actively tries to elevate Bess' social status. However, social barriers, such as the difference in their social classes and ranks, prevent them from being in a socially acceptable relationship, so they either have to defy social expectations or change in order to adapt. Bess remains independent throughout the play: she stays true to herself, defends herself when able, and actively pursues her own goals once she has the financial means to do so; on the other hand, Spencer, because he benefits from the hierarchical order, tries to change Bess' social rank. Both of their actions are anti-normative because they actively

defy normative social practices. Though they are both participating in a heterosexual relationship, they are still practicing a type of queer love because their romantic relationship endures even though Bess is committed to remaining chaste and it defies expectations in regard to social class.

Unlike Spencer, both Goodlack and Roughman question Bess' character throughout the first half of the play. For instance, Goodlack encourages Spencer repeatedly to 'test' Bess: he calls her "the best bawd" and implies that if she really loves Spencer she will "deny" him "nothing" (1.2.56-57). 'Bawd' here refers to one that "panders to sexual debauchery" (OED, a.), implying that if she loved Spencer, she would willingly engage in sexual activity with him.<sup>60</sup> Though Spencer repeatedly confirms that Bess is chaste and virtuous, Goodlack still believes that she cannot be those things because of her social class and the place of her employment. To Goodlack's implication of Bess' immodesty, Spencer replies "I have proved her/ unto the utmost test, examin'd her/ even to a modest force, but all in vain/...She in no way can be drawn" (1.2.58-61). Still disbelieving, Goodlack responds "'Tis' a virtue/But seldom found in taverns" (1.2.62-3). This exchange, again, demonstrates that most men believed women were sexually deviant and morally ambiguous. Howard remarks that "gender difference and hierarchy had to be produced and secured— through ideological interpellation when possible, through force when necessary—on other grounds:" in order to differentiate between social classes and gender distinctions, hierarchical order demands that lower class women, those in a social position in direct opposition to the male aristocrats, must be sexually promiscuous.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Oxford English Dictionary Online, bawd, n, a.

<sup>61</sup> Howard, "Crossdressing," 423.

Roughman, like Carrol and Goodlack, displays behavior that deviates from socially accepted masculine behavior. For example, he exhibits extreme violent tendencies, by seizing Bess, hitting her drawer Clem, and mistreating other employees at the tavern.<sup>62</sup> Bess, like she did with Carrol, seeks to reprimand and correct Goodlack's behavior throughout the course of the play. When two guests check in at the tavern, Roughman insists on knowing who they are, yet when Bess refuses him this information, his behavior becomes violent and he seizes her. Consider this exchange between the two:

B: Pray, hands off.

R: I tell thee, maid, wife, or whate'er thou beest,

No man shall enter here but by my leave.

Come, let's be more familiar. (2.1.71-74)

Here, Roughman tries to insist his dominance over Bess's business and her life, by insisting that he will determine who the tavern will service. By identifying Bess as a maid, Roughman delegitimizes any financial capital she has earned as an independent woman, as his patrilinear society uses women as currency in their sexual economy. If she is not a maid, then a wife, that needs to be more "familiar" with him, in a sexual capacity, as he has decided to be the master of her house. In response, Bess threatens to "complain...before the magistrate," (2.1.91-2) if Roughman's behavior does not desist. In insisting that she will take legal measures against Roughman, her hope is that he will stop being a disruptive presence in the space of her business.

Because he refuses to comply with Bess' request, she develops a "trick to try what mettle's in him" (2.1.110). This plan involves Bess dressing as a man, and challenging

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<sup>62</sup> A drawer refers to a tavern worker that provides liquor to customers.

Roughman to a gentlemen's duel. When Bess first crossdresses as a man, she comments "Methinks I have a manly spirit in me/ in this man's habit" (2.3.5-6), that she could be "valiant" and meet any "man i'th' field" (2.3.10-11). It is clear here that Bess not only believes outward gender appearance creates a sense of gender identity but also that valiancy, courage, fighting for justice are masculine traits associated with an outward masculine gender expression. While she has defended herself against insults and considers pursuing legal action to correct Roughman's behavior, it is not until she dons men's clothing that she feels able to fight, in a physical sense, for herself. Wearing men's clothing allows her to demonstrate that she is valiant, courageous, and just. To prove this, she confronts Roughman while dressed as a man, she calls him out on his disruptive social behavior and violent tendencies and demands that he stop pursuing the female Bess. Though his behavior does not end immediately, when Bess eventually reveals herself as the young gentleman that challenged Roughman to the duel, Roughman's behavior changes miraculously. He declares:

She hath waken'd me

And kindled that dead fire of courage in me

Which all this while hath slept. To spare my flesh

And wound by fame, what is't? I will not rest

Till by some valiant deed I have made good

All my disgraces past. (3.2.132-36).

This exchange between the two characters awakens masculine traits within Bess, traits that she always valued in men, but never knew she could possess until she dressed in male attire. The act of crossdressing unfixes Bess' gender: while she primarily assumes

a female gender expression, she wears male attire when she needs to be courageous or participate in male-centered violence. A prime example of this happens when Bess and company are about to board her newly acquired ship: she explains “for mine own wearing I have rich apparel,/ For man or woman as occasion serves” (4.2.87-8). The occasions she refers to here are later revealed to be a sea battle between her crew and a Spanish naval vessel and the invitation she receives, as Bess, to dine with Mullisheg, the King of Fez. Bess’ statement here indicates her ability to present externally as either male or female, depending on the situation. This suggests that Bess’ internalized gender may be an amalgamation of both female and male, or in moderns terms, we might identify her as genderfluid, as the way she performs gender is very much dependent on heteronormative gender binaries, though her dedication to chastity, without any obvious religious affiliation, marks her as non-normative. Bess’ genderfluidity and dedication to chastity mark her as a queer individual.

Though she is not formally considered the Captain of her ship, the men on board do follow her orders and actively accommodate Bess’ queer identity. When Bess discovers that the Spaniards are responsible for the death of Spencer and that the Catholic Church has authorized the desecration of his grave, she commands her crew to “bestow upon the church some few cast pieces” (4.4.63). Bess uses the queer space produced on her ship to literally demolish the structure that represents the institution of the hierarchal religious order of her adversaries: the same adversaries that insist upon female chastity, modesty, and virtue. It is also here that the audience discovers that Bess has made her crew swear “not to reveal” her “sex” (4.4.80) regardless of the circumstance. In this way,

the crew actively becomes queer themselves by participating in and enabling Bess' queerness.

Ships, in almost all capacities and function, are masculine structures that produce masculine behaviors. During the early modern era, English and European naval vessels, privateer and pirate ships dominated the sea, essentially making the sea a masculine place, therefore a ship that is owned and commended by an unmarried, financially independent woman, and not an institutional power or pirate crew, is inherently queer. A woman that owns a ship that fights against institutional forces, like Spanish naval vessels and the Catholic church, is queer. And finally, the space that allows a woman to match her external appearance to her internal feelings, whether those feelings be traditionally associated with femininity or masculinity, makes room for fluid transitions between gender expressions, is a queer space.

More often than not, queer spaces are not solely inhabited by queer individuals, rather a queer space is marked by the actions or behaviors produced by the individuals inhabiting that space. Bess' queerness emerges in the streets, when she is correcting disruptive male behaviors, and on the ship, when she fights against institutional powers to avenge Spencer's death. If we reflect on de Certeau's definition: a space is the practice of actions produce by a place, reading is the space of a text, anti-normativity is the queer space of any place it inhabits, whether that be the stage, ships, streets, or physical or social landscapes.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> de Certeau, *The Practice*, 117.



## Chapter Two:

## Testing Spatial Boundaries:

Anti-Normativity and Alternative Love in John Lyly's *Gallathea*

In his letter dedicated to the author in the beginning of William Shakespeare's infamous First Folio, the playwright Ben Johnson casts the man amongst other great playwrights of the time: Kid, Marlowe, and Lyly, all of whom he outshined. Though Johnson links the two playwrights in his illustrious forward to the Folio, this is not the only connection they shared. Michael Shapiro hails Shakespeare as the master of crossdressing plots and claims that one of Shakespeare's earlier plays, *the Two Gentlemen of Verona*, saw the first instance of crossdressed crossgendered acting on the stage.<sup>64</sup> Shapiro's claim, however, is easy to refute and the play's influences easy to trace: critics agree that the first performance of the play most likely occurred in 1598, when Francis Meres mentioned the play by name and recommended the readers of his common book to see the play.<sup>65</sup> This play was performed almost fifteen years after John Lyly's court performance of *Gallathea* in 1683-5, the plot of which features two female characters crossdressing as men.<sup>66</sup> And while Lyly's play appeared first in the timeline of crossdressed crossgendered plays, Roger Warren explains that the plot of *Two Gentleman* closely resembles the plot of another of Lyly's works of prose, titled *Euphesus*, which

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<sup>64</sup> Michael Shapiro, *Gender in Play on the Shakespearean Stage: Boy Heroines and Female Pages* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994) 65. Crossdressed crossgendered refers to male actors portraying female characters dressing as men, often as a form of disguise, and mostly in comedy plays.

<sup>65</sup> Brett Gamboa, "Introduction to The Two Gentlemen of Verona," *The Norton Shakespeare: Comedies*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt (New York and London: Norton & Company, 2016) 145-6.

<sup>66</sup> John Lyly, *Gallathea and Midas*, ed. Anne Begor Lancashire (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1969).

was printed in 1578, a whole two decades before the performance of Shakespeare's play.<sup>67</sup>

As modern readers, we can only speculate the intentions of Johnson's forward to Shakespeare at the beginning of the Folio, though the link between himself, Shakespeare, and Lyly is not only forever cemented in the pages of all editions of the Folio, it is also solidified by their use of crossdressing crossgendered plots. While it may be safe to say that Shakespeare most prolifically featured the plot in his plays—five of his thirty-six plays in his 1623 Folio featured the trope—Johnson also used the trope in his *Epicoene*, and their uses were undoubtedly, though possibly indirectly, influenced by Lyly's *Gallathea*: a playwright they both obviously revered. The link between these three does not end here: Phyllis Rackin connects gender ambiguity, marriage plots, and the collective fantasy of androgyny present on the stage in Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, Johnson's *Epicoene*, and Lyly's *Gallathea*.<sup>68</sup> Rackin claims that crossdressing crossgendered plots imitate the very real conditions in which women lived during the early modern era and the need that led some women to crossdress: Shakespeare and Lyly seek to “imitate the defects of the real world but also to supply what is wanting.”<sup>69</sup> To supply what is wanting, Shakespeare and Lyly remove their characters from spaces heavily surveilled by rigid power structures and resituate them into spaces that allow for unfixed gender, alternative forms of love, and anti-normative desire to emerge and thrive.

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<sup>67</sup> Roger Warren, “Shakespeare and Lyly,” *The Oxford Shakespeare: the Two Gentlemen of Verona* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) 18-25.

<sup>68</sup> Phyllis Rackin, “Androgyny, Mimesis, and the Marriage of the Boy Heroine on the English Renaissance Stage,” *PMLA*, vol. 102, no. 1 (1987): 29-41.

<sup>69</sup> Rackin, 33.

Rackin, like many early modern scholars, claims that crossdressing crossgendered plots often result in heteronormative marriage despite the playwrights lack of interest in fixed gender and because of this crossdressed heroines “are neither fully repudiated... nor fully authenticated.”<sup>70</sup> To support this claim, Rackin uses an example from Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night*: “Viola’s disguise as the boy Cesario is both repudiated when she marries Orsino and authenticated when her twin brother, Sebastian, marries Olivia.”<sup>71</sup> This, however, is not entirely the case, as Orsino and Viola do not get married within the play and the play does not end with a promise of their marriage either. Instead, Orsino promises love to the woman Viola and the man Cesario, demonstrating acceptance of Viola/Cesario’s unfixed gender. In *Gallathea*, unfixed gender is also authenticated and accepted by Gallathea and Phyllida when they pursue each other romantically thinking the other is a boy and when they commit to their relationship knowing that the other is a woman. In this way, *Gallathea* is a unique example of early modern queer love: while gender is important to at least one of the women, it is not necessary that they perform gender in a normative way for their relationship to be authentic.

At the end of *Gallathea*, one of the girls is transformed into a man, and many scholars, including Rackin, take this as Lyly reinstating heteronormativity on the couple. Audiences may accept, at the conclusion of the play, that a marriage between a man and a woman takes place but accepting this marriage as a heterosexual union means that audiences must accept the unfixed state of gender and the possibility that an individual’s gender can change. *Gallathea* represents the emergence of a new social category of gender, one that is not a combination or reunification of male and female, but a category

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<sup>70</sup> Rackin, 31.

<sup>71</sup> Rackin, 31.

that allows for distinct changes in identity and gender expression. Within the fantastical landscape of *Gallathea*, this new social category consists of transgender individuals, as well as anti-normative women.

### Testing Boundaries

We might define a queer space as a realm or dimension or landscape that allows for or exists because of the practiced actions of a place. The stage is a place, but the practice of gender—how actors perform bodies, male or female, both or neither—occupies the space of that place. If we accept that the stage is a queer space that allows for deviations from normative gender expressions (both hetero- and homo-) then we also might entertain the idea that the vast landscapes within the boundaries of a performed space might also offer the characters within that performance the necessary room to practice gender variations. Queer spaces exist to accommodate anti-normativity and explorations in gender and sexuality that test the limits of whatever heteronormative binary may be expected outside of or even surrounding that space. For example, the queer stage could be described also as a liminal space, because it shares a boundary with a presumably heteronormative audience. That boundary separates the performance of variations in gender and anti-normativity from the audience, and, on a larger scale, from the surrounding communities and surveillance of local power structures. These boundaries are often imitated within the plays performed within the queer space of the stage. On the queer stage, we see form and function combine to produce plays that explore anti-normativity, queer identity, and alternative forms of love that flourish in the absence of the keen eyes of patriarchal hierarchies and power structures that enforce heteronormativity.

In *Gallathea*, queer space is found within the forest of Lincolnshire—a place thought to be uninhabited and not under the surveillance of the villagers. Unbeknownst to the villagers, the forest houses many divine entities, such as the goddess Diana, her nymphs, and Cupid, and happens to fall under the domain of Neptune. However, Neptune’s surveillance of the forest, while primarily unobtrusive, allows the inhabitants of the forest to exist ungoverned. This perceived lack of governance imbues the characters with a sense of curiosity and the freedom to explore gender, love, and desire in ways that are restricted outside of the forest: such is the case with Gallathea, Phyllida, and Diana’s nymphs. In order to understand how the forest operates as a queer space, we must first look at the boundary between the forest and the town of Lincolnshire and the governing power structure that enforces the boundary between the two places.

The play begins outside of the forest: Gallathea, already dressed as a boy, and her father Tityrus sit under the tree dedicated to Neptune’s sacrifice, where he explains the need for her disguise. The people of Lincolnshire once “in a time past” were loyal to Neptune in his “stately temple of white marble” and made frequent sacrifices “by fire to get safety by water, yielding thanks for perils past/ and making prayers for good success to come” (1.1.12-18).<sup>72</sup> Invading Danes destroyed Neptune’s temple and “instead of sacrifice committed sacrilege, instead/ of religion, rebellion, and made a prey of that in which they/ should have made their prayers” (1.1.20-23). In return for the destruction of his temple, Neptune destroyed the land surrounding Lincolnshire, but decided to assuage

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<sup>72</sup> John Lyly, *Gallathea*, ed. Anne Begor Lancashire (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1969). All direct quotations can be found in this edition of *Gallathea* and will be cited in text with act, scene, and line numbers.

the villagers of “their miseries” if every five years the fairest, virginal daughter is sacrificed to the god (1.1.141-42).

Here we see the formation of a hierarchical patriarchal order that services and benefits men only; for women, in this order, have essentially one role to fulfill as fair, sacrificial virgins. But why is this exactly? In the landscape of the play, men seem to have caused the problems that demand sacrifice as a form of penance and yet the play demands that women suffer, through death, the miseries of men. A simple interpretation might be that non-virginal women suffer a social death, as virginity was considered the ideal state of the female body, however, Theodora Jankowski suggests that within patriarchal societies, men have not only constructed the definition and cultural significance of virginity, they also determine who remains a virgin and who does not, as an intact virgin marks a woman with the highest value in a sexual economy regulated by men alone.<sup>73</sup>

In the sexual economy of Lincolnshire, a woman’s value is determined not only by her beauty but also by her status as a virgin. Tityrus, Gallathea’s father, says to her, “thy beauty will make thee to be thought worthy of this god” (1.1.61-2). That Gallathea’s “beauty” will make her “worthy of this god” signifies two things: to be considered worthy, one must be perceived as beautiful; to be chosen as a sacrifice, one must be “the fairest and chastest virgin in all the country” (1.1.43). This implies that a woman’s worth is solely determined by their beauty and virginity, and only these qualifications will assuage Neptune and ease the (male-created) miseries of the town. And while Neptune did create these conditions, he is not the one that chooses the sacrifices, that is up to the

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<sup>73</sup> Theodora Jankowski, *Pure Resistance: Queer Virginity in Early Modern English Drama* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000) 5-6.

men of Lincolnshire. Neptune, as the ultimate authority, has granted the townsmen the power to assign female worth to beauty and virginity.

Though Neptune imposes this condition onto the townspeople, and the town has historically complied, that does not mean that everyone is willing to participate in or even comply with this kind of female oppression. Tityrus is unwilling to offer his daughter as a sacrifice and proclaims this:

To avoid, therefore, destiny, for wisdom ruleth the  
 stars, I think it better to use an unlawful means, your honor  
 preserved, than intolerable grief, both life and honor  
 hazarded, and to prevent, if it be possible, thy constellation  
 by my craft. (1.1.62-66)

“My craft” here refers to Tityrus dressing Gallathea as a man and sending her into the forest to prevent her selection as a sacrifice, as her female body meets both qualifying conditions. In a way, this is the “destiny” of all women that fulfill the sacrificial requirements. Gallethea’s “stars” have determined her destiny, to be fair and chaste and a sacrifice to Neptune. But Tityrus is determined to change her destiny, her “constellation” through his own “craft,” by preventing her sacrifice. Gallathea should not be penalized (hazarded) for her “honor,” rather her honor should be preserved. In a way, Tityrus (and later Melebeus, Phyllida’s father) acknowledges that assessing worthiness based on beauty and chastity is entirely unfair to the women that meet these conditions, but he also knows that the only way to circumvent sacrifice is to disguise his daughter as a man, because fairness (beauty) and chastity for men does not have inherent value in the same way that it does for women.

On the boundaries of the forest, there is a binary sex-gender system in place, that has very real demands of the women participating in that system. In this space, virginity not only qualifies a woman for ritual sacrifice, but it is also a “temporary premarital condition necessary for ensuring a woman a future as wife and mother.”<sup>74</sup> Not only is gender binary, but so are there binary oppositions in the role of women in this society: being a virgin qualifies you for death, while not being a virgin must indicate marital and maternal status. From Tityrus’ perspective, disguise is the only way to remove Gallathea from this binary.

In fact, it is essential that Gallathea is removed from this conditional sex-gender system because she is uninterested in participating in her father’s plot and the male-determined sexual economy that associates female honor with beauty and virginity. Gallathea asks her father, “Do you not know, or doth over carefulness/ make you forget, that an honorable death is to be preferred/ before an infamous life” (1.1.75-76), and then she declares: “I am but a child, and have not lived/ long, and yet not so childish as I desire to live ever. Virtues/ I mean to carry to my grave, not gray hairs” (1.1.6-78). She would rather die with her honor intact than evade her “destiny” and live in disguise. To enforce this, she insists “Suffer/ me therefore to die, for which I was born, or let me curse/ that I was born, sith I may not die for it” (1.1.81-83). According to Jankowski, a virgin’s “bodily integrity” is “reinforced by a...spiritual integrity, a purity of thought as well as deed” which manifests in an apparent removal from “any economy of pleasure.”<sup>75</sup> Defying destiny, for Gallathea, is a punishment worthy of death, and so she sees the outcome the same: die as a sacrifice or die of dishonor, but either way her destiny has

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<sup>74</sup> Jankowski, 3.

<sup>75</sup> Jankowski, 171.



been determined: the Gallathea that exists at that moment will not exist at the end of the play. The only hope for Gallathea's survival is to be removed from this sexual economy and sent into the forest.

While the need to remove Gallathea from the surveillance of the townsmen and potential sacrifice seems crucial and immediate, the same cannot be said for her counterpart Phyllida. Take for instance, this important distinction between the two: when we first are introduced to Gallathea, she is already dressed in men's attire, indicated by the stage note at the beginning of I.i.-- "[Enter] Tityrus, Gallathea [*disguised as a boy*]."<sup>76</sup> Because Gallathea is introduced to the audience as a boy, the issue seems more pressing and urgent: she's not only in disguise but she is ready to flee. When Melebeus and Phyllida enter the play in 1.iii, Phyllida asks her father, "how shall I be disguised" (1.3.13-14), indicating that she is still dressed as a woman. Even though Melebeus suspects his daughter may be chosen as a sacrifice, he says "Everyone thinketh his own child fair, but I/ know that which I most desire would least have/ that thou art fairest" (1.3.4-6), because Phyllida is not already disguised the issue seems less urgent. Interestingly, Phyllida, after agreeing to disguise herself as a man, makes one bold statement: "It will neither become my body or my mind" and living as a man will make her "keep company with boys, and commit/ follies unseemley for my sex, or keep compnay with girls and / be thought more wanton than becometh me" (1.3.18-20). Phyllida's ideas of male behaviors and desires align with the sexual economy and sex-gender system present in the landscape of the play: she believes that dressing like a man, though she is a women, will either push her into the company of men or make her the

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<sup>76</sup> Lyly, *Gallathea*, 6.

recipient of unwanted female attention. Neither of these options are agreeable to her, as she does not want to be companions with men or to reciprocate potential romantic affection from other women. Before entering the forest, Phyllida displays a distinct displeasure in wearing a male disguise and the expectation that she will have to perform male behaviors. Gallathea, on the other hand, is not at all concerned with the sexual economy or sex-gender system, she is more interested in the concepts of honor and virtue, neither of which are explicitly female or male traits.

Even before entering the forest, we can see that not only are the boundaries of the landscape in flux but so are ideals of morality and heteronormativity. Gallathea is ready to test the boundaries of gender normativity, as defining characteristics such as honor, courage, and virtue, are of the utmost importance for all genders, whereas Phyllida is interested in maintaining the heteronormative binary established in this sexual economy. That does not mean that Phyllida wants to become a sacrifice, rather she does not want to be in situations that compromise her female body or femininity. The willingness of both fathers to transgress, to defy the demand of sacrifice, demonstrates the fluctuation in the boundary between the forest and Lincolnshire, as they are willing to push against the hierarchal patriarchal order to save their daughters lives, but they are also actively subverting heteronormative gender by disguising their daughters as men. Despite donning a disguise, Phyllida will attempt to maintain heteronormative gender expectations, but Tityrus, Melebeus, and Gallathea are actively participating in anti-normative behaviors—not to dismantle the hierarchical patriarchal order but to save lives.

#### Queer Space: The Forest

One might argue that the main plot of *Gallathea* is the story of Gallathea and Phyllida's romance while they inhabit the forest in their male disguise, though I offer an alternative reading: *Gallathea* is not so much concerned with maintaining the concept of heteronormative romantic love, rather it seeks to affirm and celebrate kinds of love that seems off-limits to characters with predetermined gender expectations. The kinds of love that emerge throughout the plays causes characters to question their loyalty, their vows of chastity, and their existence as one-sexed bodies in a strict sexual economy. Though Gallathea and Phyllida's developing relationship may be at the heart of or even the central focus, they are not the only anti-normative bodies functioning in the queer space of the forest. Diana's nymph's and the god Cupid also test boundaries and corrupt gendered expectations.

For Cupid, love is valued above all human emotions and bodily conditions. In his first appearance in the forest, he asks an unnamed nymph if there is even one amongst Diana's troop that "followeth the sweetest thing, sweet love?" (1.2.13). She, of course, answers that Diana and the nymph's consider love "a foolish thing" (1.2.21) and that they will "follow Diana in the chase" because her "virgins are all chaste, delighting in the bow that wounds the swift hart in the forest, not fearing the bow that strikes the soft heart in the chamber" (1.2.24-6). Here, the nymph play's on the hunter and Cupid's bow to contrast the focus of the two: for Diana and the nymph's, the bow makes them strong, both physically as they hunt their prey, and emotionally, as they resist the softness created by Cupid's bow. By these guidelines, love is a weakness that prevents the nymphs from being chaste and following Diana. Virginity, in the forest, is also the currency of a sexual economy, though a vow of virginity in the forest buys the nymph

entrance into Diana's troop, physical strength, and a sisterhood of equally honorable women, unlike outside of the forest where sacrifice is paid by fairness and virginity. While virginity, in both spaces, is essential for the female inhabitants, virginity in the forest provides companionship between the nymphs, loyalty and devotion, and Diana's protection.

Diana's matriarchal leadership of the forest provides a distinct parallel and opposition to the hierarchical patriarchal order of Lincolnshire under Neptune's control. The value of virginity is inverted within the forest, it is no longer meant to fulfill male needs or assuage male miseries, it instead allows the nymphs to participate in a community sustained entirely by female companionship. In a way, Cupid's presence in the forest is just as destructive as Neptune's in Lincolnshire, for after the nymph denies all desire for love, Cupid devises a plan to corrupt the nymphs loyalty and vow of chastity to Diana by fostering within them a love for the male-disguised Gallathea and Phyllida. Cupid, to prove that all bodies are subject to the "power of a mighty god" (2.2.1-2) disguises himself as a nymph so that he can prove to "Diana and all her coy nymphs" (2.2.2) that:

There is no heart so chaste but thy bow can wound, nor

Eyes so modest but they brands can kindle, nor thoughts so

Stayed but they shafts can make wavering, weak, and wanton. (2.2. 3-5)

Cupid's tyrannical objective is to destroy the very thing they value the most: their chastity, honor, and loyalty to Diana. If the nymph's break their vows they will be rejected from Diana's sisterhood of devoted women, but even worse than that, if they give into the bodily desires of love, they will lose their chastity, the very root of their

sense of honor. While Neptune's call for the destruction of the female body ends in death, Cupid's destruction of the female body happens through complete ostracization from their community, loss of companionship, and the degradation of their bodies. Cupid will do all of this to prove that love is superior to loyalty, what he cannot foresee is that romantic love and loyalty can coexist within the same body.

Ironically, in an effort to save Gallathea and Phyllida, their female bodies have been ejected, by their fathers, from the patriarchal society of Lincolnshire. It may seem that their male disguises prevent them from fully joining the female community within the forest, however, Jankowski argues that it is precisely because of their female bodies, virginity, and resistance to Neptune's sacrifice that allows them entrance into Diana's queer space within the forest.<sup>77</sup> By entering the forest, Gallathea and Phyllida become unwilling and unaware participants in Cupid's plot to corrupt the nymphs. Because of Cupid's plot, the nymph's Ramia, Eurota, and Telusa all declare to abandon their oath to Diana and pursue their love for either Gallathea or Phyllida in their male disguises. Telusa declares she "will forsake Diana" and "die" for the male-disguised Phyllida (3.1.98); Ramia and Eurota both profess their love and desire to "have" the male-disguised Gallathea (3.1.99-103). Though the nymph's make these declarations, they also demonstrate the dire emotional pain they experience in breaking their vow to Diana with exclamations like "would I were no woman," "Would Tytirus [Gallathea] were no boy," "Would Telusa were nobody" (3.2.113-6). Even though Cupid has orchestrated this entire situation, the nymph's experience the very real pain of breaking their vow of loyalty to Diana, as they must understand the consequences of that decision, but it also invalidates

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<sup>77</sup> Jankowski, *Pure Resistance*, 17.

their sense of self and torments them. For Diana, there is no greater dishonor than idleness caused by love, for idleness is the ideal physical state of lovers, but idleness prevents the nymphs from physically existing in the demanding space of the forest. Diana informs the nymphs that “of all affections love hath the greatest name and the least virtue” (3.4.28-29): essentially, romantic love corrupts virtue, and by default the nymph’s vows of chastity to Diana.

In the sexual economy of Lincolnshire, love never factors into the exchange of female bodies nor is it a condition for sacrifice to Neptune because the hierarchical patriarchal order does not need love to maintain its structure. In the forest, however, the matriarchal power structure needs the love of its female inhabitants to maintain its structure and any source that distracts that love is perceived as a threat that may dismantle the structure. Cupid proves to be that threat by corrupting nymphs to pursue romantic love instead of a love that sustains their community. Diana eventually captures Cupid and punishes him by shooting his own arrow at his heart and setting his sights on Circe. As the matriarchal leader of the forest, Diana has delivered a just punishment to Cupid by repaying the misery that he has caused within her nymphs. In a sense, this is one effort to correct the continuous female suffering caused by the men in the constructed landscape of the play. Here, Diana demonstrates anti-normativity precisely because she delivers a punishment worthy of the crimes: Cupid corrupted the hearts of her nymphs, so she corrupted the heart of Cupid, by using the very tool—Cupid’s bow—that caused such corruption. Neptune’s punishment for the destruction of his temple requires the men of the town to select a female, fair, virginal sacrifice; instead of punishing the men of the town for the crimes they committed against him, he deflects their punishment on to the

women of the town, and lets the men decide the most worthy candidate for sacrifice. In a way, Cupid becomes a surrogate for Neptune, and his punishment corrects the injustice committed not only upon the nymphs, but also on all previous women chosen as sacrifices. Diana delivers a punishment that reaffirms her matriarchal order but further solidifies the anti-normative, queer space of the forest.

#### Alternative Love

Besides the female community and love and loyalty between Diana and her nymphs, Gallathea and Phyllida also participate in an alternative form of love while in the forest. Recall that Phyllida declared that dressing as a man will never become her mind or body, and because of this she constantly struggles with her attraction to the male-disguised Gallathea. Almost immediately after donning the wardrobe of a man, she encounters Gallathea for the first time. The encounter sparks uncertainty within her, for she is immediately drawn to the supposed man she has just met, but she knows it would be socially unacceptable, within the heteronormative patriarchal order of her society, to pursue another man while she is disguised as a man.

This soliloquy demonstrates the uncertainty of her attraction to the male-disguised Gallathea:

Art thou no sooner in the habit of a  
 Boy that thou must be enamored of a boy? What shalt thou  
 Do when what best liketh thee most discontenteth thee? Go  
 Into the woods, watch the good times, his best moods, and  
 Transgress in love a little of thy modesty. I will-- I dare not;  
 Thou must-- I cannot. Then pine in thine own peevishness.

I will not--I will. (2.5.3-9).

Phyllida's dilemma, to transgress her modesty, emerges in the back-and-forth "I will—I dare not;/Thou must—I cannot." Transgressing her modesty has a double meaning: as a virginal woman, she would be pursuing a relationship on her own, not one facilitated by her father (the individual that would determine her value in accordance to the sexual economy of the play), which would socially jeopardize her reputation and be considered inappropriate; as a man, pursuing another man would be outside the limits of heteronormativity and invalidate any hope to maintain the gender expectation of the sexual economy of her social landscape. By entering the forest and pursuing the male-disguised Gallathea, Phyllida actively transgresses all forms of modesty and actively enables her to participate in anti-normative and alternative forms of love.

Phyllida's dilemma, still, is based almost solely on her ability to maintain heteronormative gender expectations, whereas Gallathea's hesitancy to pursue Phyllida takes shape in a different way. Gallathea asks, "Had it not been better to be a sacrifice to Neptune than a slave to Cupid?" (2.4.4-5), an indication that, again, her plight is more existential than simply maintaining gender expectations, as being a sacrifice or a slave jeopardizes her honor and virtue. At this point, neither is aware that the other is not a man, and therefore their choices to pursue the other is made as a man, to pursue another man. Eventually, their identities will be revealed if they intend to pursue a romantic or sexual relationship, but here, they actively decide to pursue an alternative form of love.

Though it is not staged, Phyllida and Gallathea explore their relationship with each other while in the forest, and much of that relationship develops in the presence of



Diana and her nymphs. For example, after the two simultaneously realize the other is a “maiden,” (3.2.30;32), they test each other’s feelings:

G [aside]: I have known Diana’s nymphs enamored of him,

Yet hath he reected all, either as too proud, to disdain, or  
To childish, not to understand, or for that he knoweth him-  
Self to be a virgin.

P [aside]: I am in a quandary, Diana’s nymphs have followed him, and

Despite them, either knowing too well the beauty of his  
Own face, or that himself is of the same mold. I will once  
Again try him. [To Gallathea]. You promised me in the  
Woods that you would love me before all Diana’s nymphs.

G: Ay, so would love me before all of Diana’s nymphs. (3.2.42-51).

Not only have both been pursued by Diana’s nymphs and rejected them, they are apparently only interested romantically in the other, and after realizing that the other is a maiden, each decided to continue participating in the love that they declared in front of Diana. This exchange between Gallathea and Phyllida also demonstrates that part of their relationship is happening out-of-view. At the end of this scene, Phyllida suggests they go “into the grove and make much one another, that cannot tell what it think one of another” (3.2.55-6). While these lines may allude to a sexual exploration of each other’s body, they also offer a moment where Phyllida and Gallathea seek to not only affirm the state of the other’s body, but also see if their love can survive the test of same-sex intimacy. Though the exchange in the grove is hidden from view, Phyllida confirms the act when she discusses the virginal sacrifice with Gallathea. Here, she says, “It is happy you/ are

none, for then it would have fall'n to your lot because/ you are so fair" (4.4.1-3); these lines may possibly affirm that Gallathea is no longer a virgin and that Phyllida accepts both her outward gender expression and the state of her female body. As further evidence of this, Phyllida states "Seeing as we are both boys, and both lovers, that our affection/ may have some show, and seem as if it were love, let me call/ thee mistress" (4.4.15-7). For Phyllida to acknowledge Gallathea as both a boy and her mistress demonstrates that she is supportive of Gallathea's unfixed gender, and that she will love her despite her outward gender expression. Phyllida's ultimate commitment to Gallathea's unfixed gender expression comes when the two discuss the sacrifice and Gallathea voices her fear that she may still be sacrificed even though she would need to be "turned to a virgin" in order for that to happen (4.4.24-5). This further solidifies the fact that the two participated in a sexual exchange, but leads Phyllida to declare that she would follow "after him or her, and lead a melancholy life, that look for a miserable death" (4.4.43-5) if in the end Gallathea is still chosen as the sacrifice to Neptune.

These passages demonstrate that Phyllida and Gallathea participate in an alternative form of love that accommodates both the state of their body and their outward gender expressions. They are happy to be together as men and as women, though the limitations of their society will not allow them to be in a same-sex relationship as those kinds of relationships invalidate the sexual economy of Lincolnshire. Yet, even upon discovery in the presence of Neptune, they both declare their love for each-other out of disguise: "I will never love any by Phyllida. Her love is engraven in/ my heart with her eyes" and "Nor I but Gallathea, whose faith is imprinted in my thoughts by her words"

(5.3.127-30). Through an act of divine intervention, Venus declares that their love is true and offers to “turn one of them to be a man” (5.3.142.3).

It is never confirmed which is turned into a man, and many scholars consider this act of transformation to set right the gender unfixity within the play and align the two back on the trajectory of heteronormative gender. This seems too tidy a conclusion, and I suggest that the transformation of one female character to male might be one of the earliest examples of transgenderism from early modern drama. Though this kind of transformation is not entirely uncommon in literature, as a similar plot of transformation is featured in the tale of Iphis in Ovid’s *Metamorphosis*, a certain source of inspiration for Lyly; it does offer some insight into the different kinds of love present in early modern culture that was imitated by dramatists on the stage. It is no coincidence that same-sex relationships between males and females, transformations of biological sex, and non-normative gender expressions graced the stages of early modern theatres. If we assume that playwrights were fashioning art that imitated life, we might also assume that the early moderns were imitating elements of gender that were in as much fluctuation as the language they used to craft their stories. Just like those playwrights relied on the collective imaginations of their audiences to accept unfixed gender, it is not beyond the scope of imagination to consider that they were coming to terms with progressive concepts of gender and sexuality.

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