

**Tribhuvan University**

**Gender Ambiguity in William Shakespeare's *As You Like It* and**

***The Two Gentlemen of Verona***

**A Thesis Submitted to the Central Department of English**

**In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for the Degree of**

**Master of Arts in English**

**By**

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**Letter of Recommendation**

Mr. Anup Shahi has completed his thesis entitled “Gender Ambiguity in William Shakespeare’s *As You Like It* and *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*” under my supervision. He carried out his research from 2065/05/01 B.S. to 2065/12/15 B.S. I hereby recommend his thesis be submitted for viva voice.

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## **Abstract**

In *As You Like It* and *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, the heroines Rosalind and Julia disguise as men to become compatible with men. Both of them are independent-minded and strong-willed girls. Rosalind acts as a shepherd to escape from her cruel uncle, Duke Frederick, and to test Orlando's love for her. In the second play, Julia dresses as a boy and disguises herself as her fiancé's page, in order to follow her lover, Proteus. This helps them achieve a greater amount of freedom. Although cross-dressing in Shakespeare's two comedies makes the heroines' gender identity ambiguous: they are both men and women, owning both femininity and masculinity, it helps to deconstruct Renaissance gender stereotypes, the binary opposition of gender, and eventually, patriarchy.

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**Approval Letter**

This thesis entitled “Gender Ambiguity in William Shakespeare’s *As You Like It* and *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*” submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University by Mr. Anup Shahi has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.

**Members of the Research Committee**

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## Chapter I

### Introduction

This work attempts to study gender ambiguity in William Shakespeare's two comedies, *As You Like It* (1600) and *Two Gentlemen of Verona* (1594). In both of the plays, the major female characters don a masculine disguise. Though Shakespeare makes them dress up as men as a strategy to produce comic effects, which makes the heroines' gender identity ambiguous, this act signifies something which helps women attain greater liberty in male-dominated society. In the first play, Rosalind, an independent minded, and strong-willed girl, acts as a shepherd to escape from her cruel uncle, Duke Frederick, and to test Orlando's love for her. In the second play, Shakespeare created the first of many female characters in disguise. In this play, Julia dresses as a boy and disguises herself as her fiancé's page, in order to follow her lover, Proteus to Milan. Unfortunately, she discovers he has betrayed her and is trying to win the love of Silvia, whom his best friend also loves. They become both men and women at the same time, owning both femininity and masculinity, sometimes creating confusion among the audience. Thus, Shakespeare's act of giving masculine quality to his female characters in the two plays deconstructs Renaissance gender stereotypes, the binary opposition of gender, and eventually, patriarchy, as the act grants these heroines the freedom of movement, authority, and equality with men though it makes their gender identity ambiguous.

Cross-dressing not only grants these heroines the freedom of movement and authority, but also makes their gender identity ambiguous. Julia, in order to act freely in a patriarchal society, transforms herself into a boy to pursue her lover. Rosalind disguises as a shepherd to avoid the cruelty of her uncle, an

agent of patriarchy. In male attires the heroines construct their masculinity and reveal their masculine qualities like intelligence, courage, and capability. Meanwhile, they still keep feminine qualities like chastity, constancy, tenderness and fragility; so in some way their ambiguous gender identity helps them to obtain equality with men.

At the time when Shakespeare wrote, women were not allowed to act on stage, so, Shakespeare frequently used disguise. They were considered as a mere instrument in social, political and public life, as is clearly shown throughout Shakespearean works. Women married the men their parents stated. They had no say in the matter. So, female parts were performed by young boys dressed as women wearing heavy make-up. And often, in turn, they were disguised as men by means of which the natural of performance was achieved. This is also a good example of the insignificance of the woman at the time of making decisions, and above all, in choosing a husband.

Shakespeare's comedies seem to substantiate the view that during the Elizabethan period women's and men's spheres were strictly separated from each other. Men were the ones in power, the people who took all the important decisions, while the perfect woman had to be obedient and loyal to her husband/father, to trust his wisdom and ability to judge the situation rightly and then to take an accurate way of action. It cannot be denied that during Shakespeare's times women were far from being equal to men and that this attitude is also reflected in many of Shakespeare's works, which thrive with loving and loyal women such as Desdemona. Nevertheless, it would not be accurate either to deny that in some of Shakespeare's works, women have the



courage to take their fate into their own hands and subvert male authority, even if this occurs within a very limited space of action.

Throughout Shakespeare's comedies we are confronted with a whole range of very strong female characters who refuse to act according to the rules imposed upon them, but differ in their behaviour from the ideal that they are supposed to follow. Some women take up male attire in order to be able to go for their goals while other characters dare to speak their mind in spite of the fact that this behaviour is considered to be inaccurate for the female gender. It is obvious that Shakespeare is not afraid of confronting his audience with extraordinary female characters who manage to make the action of the comedies much livelier and more thrilling.

Shakespeare may not have wanted to underline and reaffirm women's equality to men; he may have had the sole purpose of creating humour by presenting female characters as strong ones on stage. We can argue that Shakespeare made his female characters break with the rules imposed upon them, which converted them into a source of humour. He indirectly attacked the male discourse at the time through the means of humour because probably the time was not yet ripe for female characters, who could be viewed as being an equal to her male contemporaries.

### **Characteristics of Shakespearean Plays**

Repeated studies of Shakespeare plays do not debate their beauty and variety. They deal with issues that are of perennial interest and significance to human life. They are also the studies on the subtle problems in human relations. His characters are true to the eternal facts of human life, not merely the superficial studies of contemporary society. Therefore we still understand and

sympathize with them as much as we love or hate those who live around us. All the great playwrights have this power to some extent, but Shakespeare has it more than any one else. He possessed “almost unbelievable understanding of human psychology, a god like love and compassion for the world and its inhabitance, and a richness and control of language such as no other English writer has had” (Rees 54).

Like other tragic dramatists of his time, Shakespeare followed a Senecan tradition, which came partly from Seneca (The Roman tragic dramatist who died A.D. 65), and partly from the medieval ‘mystery’ plays, which were still acted during his boyhood. Seneca was quite popular writer of thriller who specialized in stories of revenge, and had no hesitation about showing bloody and horrible deeds on the stage, and frequently used ‘ghost’ in his stories. Shakespeare, as a tragic dramatist, worked in Seneca’s style, but his genius saved him some of the crudity of the Senecan tragedy. It is after Seneca that some of the dramatist began dividing their plays into five acts, and so did Shakespeare. He added some from this tradition to the tradition of medieval English plays, and the actual condition of the Elizabethan drama took its form and structure. It is what makes a Shakespearian tragedy stand out of the plays of Sophocles or Euripides.

His art and expression at every stage was molded and evolved by life. He possessed the gift of handling any subject of life impersonally and there is no mark of the dramatist’s ego to be perceived in his plays. His plays are the natural expression of human suffering and pleasure. He has looked upon every point of morals, philosophy and the conduct of life in his plays. His characters are men and women of flesh and blood. They are not confined to the plays; rather, they

maintain their own individuality. They echo the feelings of the spectators and we feel ourselves beyond the stage.

In his early plays Shakespeare is more concerned with plot but in his later plays he seems to be more concerned with characterization. Hamlet, Macbeth, King Lear, Julius Caesar, Iago, Miranda, Rosalind, Viola, Ophelia, Desdemona, Portia etc., whether good or bad belong to humanity and evoke our sympathy, hatred or love. We can study various phases of human nature through his characters' over-thinking or over-intellectualization of hamlet, over ambition of Macbeth, simplicity of Lear, the problem of racial discrimination in Othello, patriotism of Brutus, friendship of Antonio, villainy of Iago, romance of Orlando, beauty of Miranda, humour in Falstaff, melancholy in Jacques, devotion in Desdemona, fidelity in Imogen and intellectuality in Portia and so on.

Shakespeare sympathized deeply with his characters and does not like to reveal the ragged follies of his time like that done by Ben Jonson. His plays are the glowing and glittering pictures of human beings in their different phases. Through the mouth of Hamlet, in the play of that name, he presents a wonderful picture of man, "What a piece of work is man! How noble in reason, how infinite in faculties, in form and moving, how express an admirable in action, how like and angel in apprehension, how like a god the beauty of heart, the paragon of animals!"

He is a master of love which he displays in varied and colorful aspects from time to time. He utters some poignant lines of love in his plays. The course of true love never runs smooth:

Things base and vile, holding no quality,

Love can transpose then to form and dignity.

Love looks not with the eyes 'but with the mind'

And therefore is wing'd Cupid painted blind;

Nor hath love's mind of any judgment taste. (qtd. in Traversi 289)

Love maintains and sustains his plays. *Romeo and Juliet* is his greatest love tragedy. He presents beautiful pairs of lovers in his other plays as well: Miranda and Ferdinand, Rosalind and Orlando, Desdemona and Othello, Portia and Bassanio – who make the examples of extreme love and devotion. Such a glorified conception and ideal love can be found only in the works of Shakespeare. However, Shakespeare also shows the mockery of love as that of Benedick and Beatrice in *Much Ado About Nothing* and that of Bottom and Titania in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Shakespeare does not give us a clear cut philosophy of life but his plays abound in such utterances which reflect the wisdom of human life and the genius of the one who composed them. In *As You Like It*, for example, he says:

The world's a stage

And all the men and women are merely players.

In *The Tempest*, he utters:

We are such stuff,

As dreams are made on, and our little life

Is rounded with a sleep.

In *Macbeth* we read:

Life is but a walking shadow, as a poor player

That struts and frets his hour upon the stage

And then is heard no more; it is a tale

Told by and idiot, full of sound and fury

Signifying nothing.

We find, in *All Is Well That Ends Well*:

The web of our life is of mingled yarn,

Good and ill together.

In *Hamlet* we find, there is nothing good or bad,

but our thinking makes it so. (Qtd. in Webster 77)

In this way, Shakespeare's plays communicate a profound knowledge of the wellsprings of human behavior, revealed through portrayals of a wide variety of characters. His use of poetic and dramatic technique creates a unified aesthetic effect out of a multiplicity of vocal expressions and actions is recognized as a singular achievement, and his use of poetry within his plays to express the deepest levels of human motivation in individual, social, and universal situations is considered one of the greatest accomplishments in literary history.

### **Shakespeare's Works and a Short Critical Response**

For twenty four years from 1588 to 1612, Shakespeare was writing actively and with few breaks. Scholars and critics tend to study his works by classifying them in periods according to the development of thought and increasing workmanship. The first is the one between 1588 and 1595. The major plays of this time are *Richard II* (history), *Midsummer Night's Dream* (comedy) and *Romeo and Juliet* (tragedy). In these plays it seems that "the main motive and interest lay in stage production rather than in literary accomplishment. His method was to find old plays or takes suitable for rewriting and turning and turning into successful stage plays" (Turner XI).

He wrote his famous comedies during the early phase of his dramatic career that spanned from the late sixteenth century to early seventeenth century. The work of the early period is, as a whole, extremely slight in texture; the treatment of life is superficial; there is no depth of thought and characterization; and the art is evidently immature. However, the work is characterized by youthful exuberance of imagination, by extravagance of language, and by constant use of puns, conceits, and other affectedness. Regarding the early comedies, Edward Albert writes: “They are full of wit and word play usually put into the mouths of young gallants, but often the humour is puerile and the wit degenerates into mere verbal quibbling, of this type are the plays like *Two Gentlemen of Verona*” (100).

The second period between the years of 1599 and 1601 includes the most sparkling and distinctive of Shakespearean comedies and the historical plays *Henry IV*, Parts I, II with the famous character, Sir John Falstaff. In those plays there is no gloomy or tragic atmosphere other than the actual tragedy of the historical events. In *Twelfth Night*, *Merchant of Venice*, *As You Like It*, and *Much Ado About Nothing*, the two chief characters are young women, of whom one is tall and the other is short. Those two assume male disguise for some purposes. There is nowhere prominent male character, but the female element is the most important. The third stage covers the period between 1601 and 1608, and is marked by the great four tragedies, *Macbeth*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth* and *Hamlet*. All of them show the grace and serious side of human life, and the disaster and punishment which follow inevitably on human error and sin; there is one central character who gives the name to the play.

Shakespeare's later comedies are more matured and show a rapid growth and development in his genius. They reflect a deeper knowledge of human life and human nature; the characterization and the humour have become more penetrating; thought has become weighty. Edward Albert regards the plays like *As You Like It* as full of vitality and containing many truly comic situations, and reveal great warmth and humanity. This shows that Shakespeare drew real-life situation to attack social evils of English society at the time. David Daiches notices that more adult tone in these plays. He says: "The texture is richer, the overtone subtler. The comic elements enrich and comment on the Romantic elements, and the Romantic attitude is itself is gently mocked at the same time it is glorified, as a result the play represents an attitude to life" (259). Similarly, Derek Traversi comments on this play as he says:

The opening scenes of *As You Like It* introduces the issues of human life in society under a variety of conventional forms which are seen to concern both the family and society as a whole. The play is not only an evasion, an escape into a world of mere poetic fancy, but also it lays focus on disorder and the sinister reversal of the most natural human relationships. (283)

Shakespeare's comedies, in addition to providing entertainment, reveal customs, traditions, prejudices, specific mode of thought and behaviour as well as beliefs typical of that period. While analyzing the structure of the comedies, we cannot avoid historical and political connotations. In order to understand how the society as a whole was regarded and what the roles of both genders were, it is

necessary to study the history of that period. In this regard, S. Greenblatt comments:

Shakespeare's comedies are without question full of material objects, both called out as stage properties and referenced in dialogue. And the plays are of course key sites for the intervention of critics concerned to recover the material conditions that produced historical ideologies, institutions, subjectivities, and sexualities. (148)

Besides this, his comedies indicate that there was a clear borderline between men and women. Their obligations were strictly subdivided. Men were given force and power while women had to content themselves to be obedient and submissive.

The personnel of Shakespeare's company may have changed since he wrote the comedies around his two talented boy actors and anyway there was Richard Burbage, the great tragic actor of the day, and a member of the company. So we must consider the possibility that the nature of the tragedies was influenced by the fact that Burbage required such parts as Lear and Othello. Similarly, the two boys might have grown up and that there was none other skilled in playing female parts, may have accented at least in part for the comparative subordination of the women in the tragedies. Lady Macbeth and Cordelia disappear from the stage for long periods. *Julius Caesar* was written early in this period, and seems to form a kind of intermediate step between the comedies and the tragedies. Towards the close of the 3<sup>rd</sup> period, style and expression become free and forcible, with a disregard of formal rules, as if the thoughts of the dramatics were too powerful for the ordinary limits of speech.



The last period (1608-1612) is what, for want of a better term, has been called the period of romantic dramas. They are plays which it is difficult to class as either tragedy or comedy. In such a play as *Cymbeline*, there are definitely tragic and serious elements but the play winds up with happy endings in which the good characters are successful and wicked ones are forgiven. In this period, there is the same skill in character drawing, but the merit of the play is poetical rather than dramatic. Perhaps they too show that the classical unity of time cannot be set aside to the extent of showing the events of a whole life time. The plays of this period show the joys of country life or rural scenery and the satisfaction that comes from reunion between friends and relations who had been parted for a long time. Here we may see the writer's final return to Stratford and reconciliation with his wife and family. The dramatic structures of the play, then is loose and lacking in the unity of the tragedies, for *Cymbeline* and *winter's tale* are more like a dramatized record of events than a compact stage play. The period ended in the year 1612.

Although numerous critics in the past centuries have analyzed Shakespeare's comedies from various perspectives, they have not yet bothered to study his plays from feminist perspective. So, the present research seeks to explore the gender ambiguity in the two plays.

The thesis has been divided into four chapters. The first chapter presents an introductory outline of the work – a short elaboration on the hypothesis, a glimpse of Shakespeare plays and a short critical response. Moreover, it gives a bird's eye view of this entire work. The second chapter tries to explain the theoretical modality briefly that is applied in this research work. It discusses

gender, gender identity, a brief explanation of some feminist critical terms as a theoretical tool to analyze the text.

On the basis of the theoretical framework established in the second chapter, the third chapter analyzes the text at a considerable length. It analyzes how Shakespeare's act of giving masculine quality to his female characters in the two plays deconstructs Renaissance gender stereotypes, the binary opposition of gender, and eventually, patriarchy, as the act grants these heroines the freedom of movement, authority, and equality with men though it makes their gender identity ambiguous. Finally, the fourth or the last chapter sums up the main points of the present research work and the findings of the research work.

## **Chapter II**

### **A Study of Gender and Feminism**

#### **Gender Roles**

‘Gender’ is a term used to distinguish social and cultural sexual identity from biological sex. When we talk of gender we discuss the socio-cultural and psychological behavior of people that makes the distinction which is associated with the biology of the individual. Gender studies the roles and behavior of individual that creates a separate identity of man and woman and tries to analyze those situations in detail which otherwise would not have created. According to Joan Scott, “Gender becomes a way of denoting ‘cultural construction’ – the entirely social creation of ideas about appropriate roles for men and women. Gender is in this definition, a social category imposed on a sexed body” (1056).

While sex is biological, gender is psychological and culture term which the individual learns from the society in the process of socialization and is not the same in every society. It differs from society to society and culture to culture that creates distinct feature and a separate identity of an individual. So it is implied that the sex which we carry from birth and is biological is universal – same all over the world – and cannot be changed whereas gender, socially constructed is not the same throughout the world. This is the reason why we find different cultural practices and different roles of man and women in various societies and cultures. This can be implied that gender is socially or culturally constructed behavior of individual man and woman and can be changed according to the need and desire of the individual and society. History shows that gender roles have been changing over time

and as required by the circumstances. The concept of gender is based on stereotypes of male and female behavior that are often associated with female sex. For example, in most of the cases women rear children and do the household chores because they get hardly any time and opportunity to work outside. This has created a big gap between man and woman in terms of areas ranging from household works to office works to other social works. This has led to the discrimination between the two sexes.

Traditional gender roles cast men as rational, strong, protective, and decisive; they cast women as emotional (irrational), weak, nurturing, and submissive. These gender roles have been used very successfully to justify such inequities, which still occur today, excluding women from equal access to leadership and decision-making position – in the family as well as in politics, academia and the corporate world – paying men higher wages than women for doing the same job – if women are even able to obtain the job – and convincing women that they are not fit for careers in such areas as mathematics and engineering. Many people today believe such inequities are a thing of the past because anti-discriminatory laws have been passed, such as the law that guarantees women equal pay for equal work. However, these laws are frequently side-stepped. For example, an employer can pay a woman less for performing the same work as a man simply by giving her a different job title. So, women still are paid poorly in every society in comparison to their male counterparts.

Patriarchy is, thus, by definition sexist, which means it promotes the belief that women are innately inferior to men. This belief in the inborn inferiority of women is called “biological essentialisms” because it is based

on biological differences between the sexes that are considered part of our unchanging essence as men and women (84). A striking illustration is the word hysteria, which derives from the Greek word for womb (hystera) and refers to psychological disorders deemed peculiar to women and characterized by over-emotional, extremely irrational behaviour. Feminists don not deny the biological differences between men and women; in fact, many feminists celebrate those differences. But they don not agree that such differences as physical size, shape, and body chemistry make men naturally superior to women; for example, more intelligent, more logical, more courageous, or better leaders. Feminism therefore distinguishes between the word 'sex,' which refers to our biological constitution as female or male, and the word gender, which refers to our cultural programming as feminine or masculine, which are categories created by society rather than by nature.

The belief that men are superior to women has been used, feminists have observed, to justify and maintain the male monopoly of positions of economic, political and social power, in other words, to keep women powerless by denying them the educational and occupational means of acquiring economic, political, and social power. That is, the inferior position long occupied by women in patriarchal society has been culturally, not biologically, produced. For example, it is a patriarchal assumption, rather than a fact, that more women than men suffer from hysteria. But because it has been defined as a female problem, hysterical behavior in men won't be diagnosed as such; instead, it will be ignored or given another less damaging name, for example, shortness temper. Of course, not all men accept patriarchal ideology and those who don't – those who don't believe, for

example, that because men generally have been endowed by nature with stronger muscles, they have been endowed with any other natural superiority – are often derided, by both patriarchal men and women, as weak and unmanly, as if the only way to be a man were to be patriarchal man.

### **Feminism**

This gender role created gender discrimination. As a result, Feminist movement came which seeks equal right and status with men to decide on their careers and life. The patriarchy considers women weaker in every sphere of familial and social life. Because of this biological or physical construction and deep-rooted gender conception, men dominate women. Thus, the main objective of feminism has been to revolt against such ideology and parochial gender construction. Nowadays, the female writers have begun writing advocating for the emancipation of women from the oppressive patriarchy and have tried to establish women's position in male-dominated society.

Feminine and masculine relation has got predominance over the nature based male and female sexual relation at present. Domination of men over women in every social, economic, cultural and religious milieu of human life has precipitated the hierarchical power relation. This partiality, historically current, sustains itself in the form of male-domination against female subordination through ideological practices. The patriarchy fosters the gender based inequalities that describes man as superior and women as inferior, man as powerful and the woman as powerless. One of the leading American feminists Kate Millett sees patriarchy as “grotesque, increasingly militaristic,

increasingly greedy, colonialist, imperialistic, and brutal, with a terrible disregard of civil liberties, of democratic forms” (511).

As time passes, feminine consciousness gradually emerges among women and makes them realize the inhuman treatment of patriarchal system. From antiquity, women have gradually felt a need to launch a united movement against these injustices, inequalities and violence so as to eliminate discrimination and narrow the hierarchy between the two sexes, as Millett believes: “You don't have any oppressive system without its continuance being assured by members of the oppressed groups, that's true of oppressed people” (511). This led to the birth of feminism.

Feminism is concerned with women's voices, which are silenced in the patriarchal ideology. The feminists try to break the silence of women. So, Feminism is a political movement which has become successful in giving due place to the writing of non-canonical women writers. Feminism has come into practice as an attack against female marginalization as our society and civilization is pervasively patriarchal, that is, it is male-centered and controlled and is organized and conducted in such a way as to subordinate women to men in all cultural domains: familial, religious, political, economic, social, legal and artistic (Abrams 89). It is civilization as a whole that produces this creature- which is described as feminine. By this cultural process the masculine in our culture has come to be widely defined as active, dominating, adventurous, rational, creative, the feminine by systematic opposition to such traits has come to be identified as passive, acquiescent, timid, emotional and conventional.

Feminism is concerned with several norms and values that belong to the women's issues. Despite the diversity, feminism is often demonstrated as a single entity and somehow concerned with gender equality and freedom. Chris Beasley defines feminism as a "doctrine suggesting that women are systematically disadvantaged in modern society and as advocating equal opportunities for men and women" (27). The main common theoretical assumption as shared by all branches of the movement is that there has been an historical tradition of male exploitation of woman.

By the time women became conscious of their position and discrimination in society, many feminists raised their voice to end this discrimination between men and women. It shows the consciousness of women who have begun to reject their own passivity. Feminism came into existence for the sake of women rights and human equality. The main aim of the feminist movement was to develop women's personalities. It, therefore, studied women as people who were either oppressed or suppressed or rejected the freedom of personal expression. All women writers who struggled against patriarchy to contain their womanhood were generally, considered feminist. Men may also be feminists but they cannot be feminists in the real sense of the term because of lack of feminine experience. That's why, unlike ancient women, today feminists are proud of their existence. In this regard, Toril Moi, a feminist has written: "the word feminist or feminism are political labels indicating support for the aim of the new women's movement" (187).

In a nutshell, the term "feminism" explores the domination, exploitation, injustice and inequality prevalent in male-dominated society



where women's rights are violated in different terms and conditions. It also attempts to end various kinds of oppressions against women for their emancipation. From the short discussion done above, it can be summed up that feminism is not a simple or unified philosophy. Many different women – and even men – call themselves feminists, and the beliefs of these groups of people vary quite a bit.

### **Gender Identity and Ambiguity**

Closely associated with the term ‘gender’ is ‘gender identity’. ‘Gender identity’ refers to the self-awareness of one’s biological, social and cultural characteristics. Two other terms ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’ also derive from gender. They need to be distinguished from ‘male’ and ‘female’. ‘Male’ and ‘female’ derive from ‘sex’ about natural sexual difference and they are relatively stable terms. While the notions of ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’ is culture-bound and change along with economic and social order that underpins them. The notion “gender ambiguity” means that an individual’s gender is ambiguous, combining both masculinity and femininity. To talk about gender ambiguity is to deconstruct gender stereotypes, and to prove that every individual, man or woman, owns both masculine and feminine characteristics, neither is superior to the other. Stereotypically, gender is not ambiguous, and there is a clear demarcation of gender differences: ‘masculinity’ is attributed to ‘man’ while ‘femininity’ to ‘woman’. The stereotypical ‘manly’ characteristics are: sturdiness, aggressiveness, competitiveness, smartness, strong-heartedness, and toughness, and the stereotypical ‘womanly’ characteristics are: submissiveness, passivity, tenderness, mindlessness, emotionalism, sensuality, frailty, nurturance and

domesticity – the qualities that come naturally to natural women determined by reproduction. As Virginia Woolf claims in *A Room of One's Own*:

The age-old view was that women are naturally and biologically weak, fragile, and emotional, whereas men are strong, intelligent and capable. . . . Beyond these areas, women were personally, professionally and legally powerless in their male-dominated society. (qtd. in Bell, 84)

The formation of the stereotypes of gender originated from the myth of Genesis: female is a derivative of male; man takes priority over woman; woman serves man as his mirror, his temptress; and woman functions as a seductress of the evil powers of his own unconsciousness – “God gave Adam authority over Eve as a penalty for the Fall” (Dusinberre, 77). Man is superior to woman, and masculinity is superior to femininity; masculinity remains consistently opposed to ‘femininity’ – all these gender principles, in Marilyn French’s words, “have turned the ‘dichotomy’ of the sexes into a battle between the two opposing spheres rather than a harmonization of the masculine and feminine into an organic whole” (123).

As opposed to the fixed masculine/feminine gender binary opposition, Judith Butler, in her *Gender Trouble*, calls for a new way of looking at sex and gender: instead of trying to assert that ‘women’ are a group with common characteristics and interests, which reinforces a binary view of gender relations in which human beings are divided into two clear-cut groups: women and men, she would rather open up more possibilities for a person to form and choose his or her own individual identity.

Butler also notes that feminists have rejected the idea that biology is destiny, and then developed an account of patriarchal culture which assumes that masculine and feminine genders would inevitably be built, by culture, upon 'male' and 'female' bodies, making the same destiny just as inescapable. She prefers the historical and anthropological positions to understand gender as a relation among socially constituted subjects in specifiable contexts. In other words, rather than being a fixed attribute in a person, gender should be seen as a fluid variable which shifts and changes in different contexts and at different times. Thus concerning the following questions: 'What is gender, how is it produced and reproduced, what are its possibilities?' (Butler, xxiii), Butler argues that gender is not just a social construct, a core aspect of essential identity, but rather a kind of performance, a set of manipulated codes, a show we put on, a set of signs we wear, as costume or disguise.

In this sense, cross-dressing and gender are closely related. Cross-dressing is a man dressed like a woman or vice versa. Gender is everyone's costume, and everyone puts on his or her own gender identity. Butler's main metaphor for cross-dressing is 'drag', i.e. dressing like a person of the 'opposite sex'. All gender is a form of 'drag'; there is no 'real' core gender to refer to. Butler says: "There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; . . . identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (25). In other words, gender is a performance: it's 'what you do' at particular times, rather than a universal 'who you are'.

Butler thinks that the interrelation between gender and clothes is based on cultural inferences, which might be wrong. When a man is dressed as a

woman or vice versa, normally we regard his or her “real” gender as the reality without costume, the anatomy of the person, and we take the appearance as illusory. This kind of naturalized knowledge is based on a series of cultural inferences, but some of which might be erroneous. For instance, with regard to transexuality, it is no longer possible to derive a judgment about stable anatomy from the clothes that cover and articulate the body.

### **Gender Problems in Renaissance**

In Shakespeare’s time, the Christian moral required Elizabethan women to stay at home, thus some women had to disguise themselves to enter the public sphere. Originating from women’s disguise phenomenon, Shakespeare created his brilliant cross-dressed heroines.

The Renaissance was a transitional period from the medieval time to the modern, a culture full of contradictions. On the one hand, influenced by the medieval culture, the Renaissance culture was full of male dominance, and the late sixteenth century England was a patriarchal society. In this resolutely hierarchical culture, women were, no matter what their wealth or rank, theoretically under the rule of men. Because women were generally believed to be less rational than men, they were deemed to need male protection. Legally, a woman’s identity was subsumed under that of her male protector. Women’s position of inferiority required them to strive for four virtues: obedience, chastity, silence, and piety. ‘The good woman was closed off, silent, chaste, and immured within the home’ (Howard, 424). As Gerlach, Almasy, and Daniel observe:

In most of Renaissance society, women as the feminine represented the following virtues which, importantly, have their meaning in relationship to the male: obedience, silence, sexual chastity, piety, humility, constancy and patience. (188)

Since women were not supposed to ‘leave their house’ and to travel alone, in traveling some women might have worn male clothing for protection. There are many records of women who did walk in the streets of London in the clothes of the other sex. This can be detected from moralists’ writing. For example, William Harrison, the social commentator, in his *The Description of England*, remarked that, “I have met with some of these trulls in London so disguised that it hath passed my skill to discern whether they were men or women” (qtd. in Howard, 420). The word, ‘trull’ means “a low prostitute, or concubine; a drab, strumpet, trollop. If women’s male disguise was discovered, they might be suspected to “lead a loose life” (Howard, 421), even be punished as the following example shows: “one woman, Johanna Goodman, was whipped and sent to Bridewell in 1569 simply for dressing as a male servant so that she could accompany her soldier-husband to war” (Howard, 421).

On the other hand, the Renaissance culture was also a culture of humanism. Humanists like Sir Thomas More, Erasmus, Luther and Calvin had all devoted themselves to the elevation of women’s position, and “they all knew that that position could not be altered without a changed view of the nature which had determined it” (Dusinberre 306). Humanists encouraged women to be educated. According to historical records, Erasmus once visited More in England and was deeply impressed by More’s insistence on an

education for his daughters (Pitt 17). In More's work *Utopia*, "all men and women flock to lectures" (Dusinberre, 205).

Moreover, as the most exceptional woman in Shakespeare's time, Queen Elizabeth I ruled the realm for 45 years, from 1558 to 1603. During her reign, England underwent great changes and witnessed prosperity in various fields like politics, economy and culture. Her contribution to the country proves that women could also be outstanding, knowledgeable, and masculine. Her masculine qualities, as Pitt points out, are, "fearless courage, toughness, arrogant defiance and a provocative defense of territory" (29). The Queen enjoyed Shakespeare's plays, and he acted before her at Greenwich in 1594 (Badawi 33). It is reasonable to infer that Elizabeth I has influenced Shakespeare's writing of the brilliant cross-dressed heroines.

Humanists' advocacy and practice brought about far-reaching social consequences. Influenced by humanists' preaching, English girls from noble families received their education in the household of some other educated ladies, and were either educated by them alone, or with the help of the tutors from Oxford or Cambridge. For example, Lady Anne Clifford was one of the tutors, for "she knew well how to discourse of all things, from Predestination to Sleasilk" (qtd. in Dusinberre 207). Through education, a circle of noblewomen appeared, centering round Elizabeth. Through education, all these women learnt equal terms with men to some degree, and they could therefore assess the validity of society's attitudes to women from a standpoint denied to most women. As a result, "the prominence of educated women in Elizabethan and Jacobean society made the Elizabethans sensitive to the whole area of masculinity and femininity" (Dusinberre, 212).

Shakespeare was quick in reflecting the intellectual influences of his time. That's why most of his plays could be popular in his lifetime. All the heroines Julia, Portia, Rosalind, and Viola are from aristocratic or wealthy families, educated, intelligent, and courageous enough to disguise themselves as men to enter the men's world. In this way, Shakespeare also catered for his women audience. The following chapter analyzes the two plays – *Two Gentlemen of Verona* and *As You Like It* in a greater detail to examine gender roles and ambiguity.

### Chapter III

#### **Gender Ambiguity in *As You Like It* and *The Two Gentlemen of Verona***

In these two plays, both of the heroines disguise themselves with men's clothes and names: Rosalind as Ganymede and Julia as Sebastian. Under men's names, they act as men and their masculine characteristics are shown. Meanwhile, they still keep their femininity. Therefore, cross-dressing mingles two identities together: a woman and a man. Having both masculine and feminine characteristics, the heroines' gender is ambiguous. In disguise, Shakespeare's heroines reveal their masculine characteristics. Thus, the heroines construct their masculine appearance before traveling, which proves that masculinity is constructed.

In *As You Like It*, Rosalind, the daughter of Duke Senior, is considered one of Shakespeare's most delightful heroines. She is independent minded, strong-willed, good-hearted, and terribly clever. When her cruel uncle Frederick, who has usurped her father's dukedom and banished him, banishes Rosalind too on no justifiable ground, the conflict between them arises. Earlier, her uncle has let her stay at court as his daughter, Celia and Rosalind are very good friends and cannot live without each other. When Celia pleads with Duke Frederick to allow Rosalind to stay, she points out that the pair has always slept in the same bed – people normally slept two to a bed in Shakespeare's time – and went everywhere together, “coupled and inseparable” (I. iii. 78). The women's special bond is not lost on those who witness their friendship – as Duke Frederick's courtier, Le Beau, exclaims, the cousins share a love that is “dearer than the natural bond of sisters” (I. ii. 289). This shows how the patriarchy does not understand this bond as it tries to limit the freedom of



women. What it cares is its honour and status in society, which Rosalind challenge by acting as a man. So, rather than submissively sneaking into defeated exile, she resourcefully uses her trip to the Forest of Ardenne as an opportunity to take control of her own destiny. She decides to own masculinity so as to escape the oppressive patriarchy. When she disguises herself as Ganymede – a handsome young man, Rosalind’s talents and charms are on full display.

Elizabethans could be very inflexible in their notions of the sexual and social roles that different genders play. They placed greater importance than we do on the external markers of gender such as clothing and behavior; so to Elizabethans, Rosalind’s decision to masquerade as a man may have been more thrilling and perhaps even threatening to the social order. By assuming the clothes and likeness of a man, Rosalind treats herself to powers that are normally beyond her reach as a woman. By subverting something as simple as a dress code, Rosalind ends up transgressing the Elizabethans’ carefully monitored boundaries of gender and social power.

Indeed, it is this very freedom that Rosalind seeks as she departs for the Forest of Ardenne: “Now go we in content, / To liberty, and not to banishment” (I.iii.139-140). By christening herself Ganymede, Rosalind underscores the liberation that awaits her in the woods. Ganymede is the name of Jove’s beautiful young male page and lover, and the name is borrowed in other works of literature and applied to beautiful young homosexuals. But while the name links Rosalind to a long tradition of homosexuals in literature, it does not necessarily confine her to an exclusively homosexual identity. To view Rosalind as a lesbian who settles for a socially sanctifying marriage with Orlando, or to view Celia as her jilted

lover, is to relegate both of them to the unpleasantly restrictive quarters of contemporary sexual politics. The Forest of Ardenne is big enough to embrace both homosexual and heterosexual desires – it allows for both, for all, rather than either/or.

Rosalind is ‘more than common tall’ which enables her to look more like a man. She arms herself with a ‘curtle-axe’, a ‘boar-spear’, anyway, a ‘martial outside’. In this way, Rosalind can play the man convincingly:

Were it not better,  
Because that I am more than common tall,  
That I did suit me all points like a man?  
A gallant curtle-axe upon my thigh,  
A boar-spear in my hand; and, --- in my heart  
Lie there what hidden woman’s fear there will, ---  
We’ll have a swashing and a martial outside,  
As many other mannish cowards have  
That do outface it with their semblances. (I. iii. 118-25)

Rosalind is confident because she is more than common tall; she suits to be like a man, which implies that ‘tall’ is related to men. If a woman is tall, she owns masculinity to some degree. Though Celia does not disguise as man, Celia’s devotion to Rosalind is unmatched, as evidenced by her decision to follow her cousin into exile. To make the trip, Celia assumes the disguise of a simple shepherdess and calls herself Aliena. This reflects a woman’s solidarity with the plight of another woman victimized by patriarchy.

Rosalind has good reputation among the people of her country due to “her smoothness, her very silence, and her patience” (I. ii. 80). Thus, Duke

Frederick wants to banish her so that Celia, his daughter, can be the “more bright” and “more virtuous” (I. ii. 83). Therefore, in disguise, the heroines’ gender identities are ambiguous: they are both men and women, both masculine and feminine.

The nobleman’s son Orlando, who has fallen in love with Rosalind at first sight, runs through the Forest of Ardenne, mad with love after defeating the court wrestler, Charles. Another reason why he leaves his house is that his faithful servant Adam warns of his elder brother Oliver’s plot against his life. Out in the forest, he hangs poems that he has composed in Rosalind’s honor on every tree, hoping that passersby will see her “virtue witnessed everywhere” (III.ii.8). Rosalind enters, disguised as Ganymede. She reads one of Orlando’s poems, which compares her to a priceless jewel. Touchstone, a clown mocks the verse, claiming that he could easily churn out a comparable succession of rhymes. He does so with couplets that liken Rosalind to a cat in heat, a thorny rose, and a prostitute who is transported to the pillory on a cart. Rosalind rebukes Touchstone for his meddling. Just then, Celia enters disguised as the shepherdess Aliena. She, too, has found one of Orlando’s verses and reads it aloud. The women agree that the verses are terribly written, yet Rosalind is eager to learn the identity of their author. Celia teases her friend, hesitating to reveal this secret until Rosalind is nearly insane with anticipation. When Celia admits that Orlando has penned the poems, Rosalind can hardly believe it. Like a smitten schoolgirl, she asks a dozen questions about her intended lover, wanting to know everything from where he is to what he looks like.

As Celia does her best to answer these questions, despite Rosalind’s incessant interruptions, Orlando and his brother, Jaques enter. Hiding, the women

eavesdrop on their conversation. Orlando and Jaques clearly do not care for one another's company and exchange a series of barbed insults. Jaques dislikes Orlando's sentimental love, declaring it the worst possible fault, while Orlando scoffs at Jaques's melancholy. Eager to part, Jaques walks off into the forest, leaving Orlando alone. Rosalind decides to confront Orlando. She approaches him as the young man Ganymede, and speaks of a man that has been carving the name Rosalind on the trees. Orlando insists that he is the man so "love-shaked" and begs her for a "remedy" (III.ii.332-333). She claims to recognize the symptoms of those who have fallen under the spell of true love, and assures Orlando that he exhibits none of them. He is, she says, too neatly dressed to be madly in love. She promises to cure him if he promises to woo Ganymede as though Ganymede were Rosalind. As Ganymede, Rosalind vows to make the very idea of love unappealing to Orlando by acting the part of a fickle lover. Orlando is quite sure he is beyond cure, but Rosalind says, "I would cure you if you would but call me Rosalind and come every day to my cot, and woo me" (III.ii.381-382). With all his heart, Orlando agrees. Here, instead of waiting to be wooed, she adopts the freedom to court a lover of her choosing. By subverting something as simple as a dress code, Rosalind ends up transgressing the Elizabethans' carefully monitored boundaries of gender and social power, though it makes her gender ambiguous.

Shakespeare's women characters are active and determined rather than passive and submissive and they are not immured within home. They put on men's clothes and travel alone, to be a lawyer or soldier, to pursue their goals, especially for love. All the heroines, including the two in the selected two plays, Rosalind and Julia also try their best to take the initiative in love, and they succeed eventually. Rosalind is active in tutoring Orlando in love.

She disguises as Ganymede and promises Orlando to cure his love sickness. Her method is to ask Orlando to court Ganymede like Rosalind. In Ganymede's disguise, Rosalind displays to Orlando what true love is and matures Orlando.

Rosalind might be construed as a spoilsport, out to ruin everyone else's fun by exposing the crumbling foundations of their love fantasies, but there is much more to her than this simplistic interpretation. Certainly, even her closest confidante Celia misunderstands her, claiming that Rosalind, in her attempts to drain the excess of Orlando's romanticism, has succeeded in disparaging the entire female sex. Rosalind's goal is less to represent the female gender than to show Orlando that, just as there is no such thing as a perfect and heroic love, there is also no such thing as an ideal and ideally worthy woman. By stripping Orlando and herself of the ideals that preoccupy him, Rosalind prepares them both for love in the real world, for a love that strikes a balance between the transcendent and the familiar, and for a love that blends the loftiness of Silvius's poetry with the baseness of Touchstone's desires. Thus, Rosalind's attacks on Orlando's idea of love are not an attack on love itself. After all, Rosalind herself is clearly and deeply in love. Her attempts to furnish Orlando with a more realistic understanding of love are a means of ensuring that their relationship will thrive in a world less enchanted than Ardenne.

The cross-dressed Rosalind's identity is more ambiguous. Rosalind disguises herself as Ganymede, and as Ganymede, she acts as Orlando's Rosalind in the wooing scenes. Thus Rosalind-cum-Ganymede has three roles: Rosalind, Ganymede, and Orlando's Rosalind. By performing the last role, Rosalind plays out the masculine constructions of femininity. Cross-

dressing enables her to demonstrate femininity in a man's disguise. Two persons under the same appearance can be a man and a woman; then one person with two faces under different circumstances can perform both masculinity and femininity.

The play also adds an interesting twist on the stage convention of cross-dressing as Rosalind decides to use her disguise as Ganymede, in effect, to woo Orlando. The erotic possibilities here are nearly endless, considering that Rosalind dresses as a rather effeminate man and offers to provide Orlando with love lessons so that Orlando may win his beloved Rosalind. The complexities of the situation multiply when we consider that in Shakespeare's era, Rosalind would have been played by a boy actor. As the audience watches a boy playing a woman who plays a man in order to win a man's love, the neat borders of gender and sexuality become hopelessly muddled, thus causing gender ambiguity.

The heroines show their intelligence and capability, even better than those men present. Although the heroines show their masculinity in cross-dressing, they are still biologically female and physically weak sometimes, and they still hold feminine characteristics like tenderness, affection, and chastity. Rosalind faints when Oliver, Orlando's brother, shows her the napkin 'dy'd' in Orlando's blood. And when Oliver encourages her by saying, "Be of good cheer, youth. You a man? You lack a man's heart" (IV. iii. 166), Rosalind's answer is "I should have been a woman by right" (V. iii. 178). Towards the end of the play, Orlando has failed to show up for his morning appointment with Ganymede, the disguised Rosalind, and she is distraught. She wants desperately to weep.

In the second play, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* Julia, a strong-willed woman like Rosalind, takes the initiative, managing to win her lover back. Just after Julia and Proteus claiming love to each other, Proteus is sent by his father to the house of Duke of Milan to study. In order to be with Proteus, Julia disguises herself and comes to Milan where she sees Proteus courting Sylvia, the Duke's daughter. Julia disguises herself as a page calling herself Sebastian to be Proteus's servant and is assigned by Proteus to woo Sylvia. Instead of wooing, Julia tells Sylvia that Proteus has a lover at home, thus Sylvia dislikes Proteus. Eventually, Julia reveals her true identity; Proteus realizes Julia's beauty and marries her.

Before embarking on her journey as a disguised youth, Julia asks Lucetta, a waiting-woman to her, to help her devise a plan to travel to Milan to visit Proteus. Lucetta warns Julia that it is a long and dangerous journey, counseling her to wait for his return. Here, she indicates at the hurdles the male-dominated society might put on her way to her freedom of choice. However, Julia insists that a "true-devoted pilgrim is not weary" (II.vii.9). Lucetta responds that she wants only to ensure that Julia's love does not exceed the bounds of rationality. Lucetta is frightened of crossing the boundary set by the patriarchy. When Lucetta asks Julia how she would go, Julia reveals that she plans to disguise herself as a boy for the journey, so as to avoid the unwanted advances of lecherous men. She requests Lucetta to design her a costume befitting a high-class page. She says: "Not like a woman; for I would prevent/The loose encounters of lascivious men: Gentle Lucetta, fit me with such weeds /As may beseem some well-reputed page" (II. vii. 41-43). She is ready to take risks for the love of Proteus. She believes

that Proteus is so pure, sincere, and immaculate that seeing him is worth any risk. Lucetta is skeptical of Proteus' alleged faultlessness, but Julia chides Lucetta, instructing her to love Proteus just as Julia herself does.

Lucetta puts forth the idea of rational love as a counter to passionate love. As a servant, she is aware of the practical nature of marriage as social necessity, financial security, and religious sanctification of sexual relations. Because of her low status, she views passionate love as a luxury of characters in romances, and marriage as an arranged business transaction in which the woman's desires are ignored. Her concept of rational love is thus realistic, taking into account, on a grand scale, man's failings, and on a practical scale, the failings inherent in men.

Lucetta's understanding of how maleness functions in society positions her as a foil to Julia. When Julia praises Proteus' oaths, tears, and "instances of infinite . . . love," Lucetta responds that these words and actions are all "servants to deceitful men," implying that Julia has been fooled by the same tactics that all men use to trick their innocent sweethearts (II.vii.70-72). Lucetta's blunt stance on love accentuates Julia's naïveté, especially when Julia compares her impending journey to Proteus to a pilgrimage, believing the love she shares with him to be pure and immaculate. Lucetta is far more aware of the practical issues of the masculine world: she is suspicious of Proteus' promises, knowing that he is wont to stray. Her insistence that Julia wear a codpiece – a covering for the male genitalia – with her disguise is a crude but nonetheless practical suggestion for a woman hoping to act as freely as a man. She says: "You must needs have them with a codpiece, madam" (II. vii 53). It epitomizes Lucetta's understanding that social freedom



– in the Elizabethan world – derives from maleness, the most recognizable aspect of which is strong sexuality.

In Milan, Proteus meets Sebastian/Julia and takes an immediate liking to the seeming page. He asks Sebastian to deliver a ring to Silvia -- the ring that Julia gave Proteus at his departure. Greatly vexed at Proteus' infidelity, Julia sighs that she “cannot be true servant to my master/Unless I prove false traitor to myself” (IV.iv.97-98). Though Julia acts as a servant, she easily gets access to the world of men. Proteus says:

Sebastian, I have entertained thee,  
Partly that I have need of such a youth  
For 'tis no trusting to yond foolish lout,  
But chiefly for thy face and thy behavior,  
Which, if my augury deceived me not,  
Witness good bringing up, fortune and truth:  
Therefore know thou, for this I entertain thee.  
Go presently and take this ring with thee.  
Deliver it to Madam Silvia. (IV. iv.68-77)

Sebastian goes to Silvia's chamber to deliver the ring and collect Silvia's portrait. Silvia expresses her dislike for Proteus, especially when she realizes that the ring originally belonged to Julia. Sebastian thanks Silvia for being sympathetic to Julia's wronged love. Intrigued, Silvia asks Sebastian if he knew Julia. Sebastian replies that he was very close to Julia, and even once wore one of her dresses for a pageant at Pentecost. Silvia departs, and Julia compares herself to the picture of Silvia, believing that her looks are better than Silvia's.

The encounter between Silvia and Julia is significant because it marks the first time that two characters express and share concern about others: both are simultaneously outraged at the philandering Proteus and worried about the abandoned Julia. In discussing such important concepts as friendship and romantic love, the two women are able to relate to each other, despite the fact that Julia views Silvia as her rival. Julia physically travels easily between the world of men and women albeit through her disguise.

Silvia and Julia trade objects – Julia's ring and Silvia's picture – and stories just as Valentine and Proteus will ultimately trade women. The interaction between these two women is far more meaningful than the haphazard rush of the play's ending, in which the play's intended couples are hastily paired up again, allows. A feminist reading of the play would interpret the bond of female friendship – despite Julia's disguise – as the most important, enduring, and under-developed aspect of the play. Silvia and Julia are both resourceful women who take risks in order to be reunited with the men they love. Neither betrays her man. Julia sublimates herself in order to be true to her love, forcing herself to withstand the discomfort of helping the man she loves woo another woman. And, each of them remains true to the other woman as well: Silvia in her sympathy for Julia, and Julia, as Sebastian, in her unwillingness to drag Silvia into Proteus' web of treachery and betrayal.

Julia also does errands between her lover Proteus and his new lover Silvia. Julia makes use of her disguise to alienate Proteus from Sylvia. Julia's mind travels easily between the world of men and women, between Julia the woman and Sebastian the page. When Proteus orders his page to deliver his

former lover Julia's ring to Sylvia, Julia the woman bitterly upbraids Proteus, "It seems you loved another, to leave her token. She is dead, belike?"

(IV.iv.74). In a soliloquy later, Julia reveals her inner struggle and growing dominance to gain Proteus's love again:

Come, shadow, come, and take this shadow up,  
For 'tis thy rival. O thou senseless form,  
Thou shalt be worshipp'd, kiss'd, lov'd, and ador'd!  
And were there sense in his idolatry,  
My substance should be statue in thy stead.  
I'll use thee kindly for thy mistress's sake,  
That us'd me so; or else, by Jove I vow,  
I should have scratch'd out your unseeing eyes,  
To make my master out of love with thee ! (IV. iv. 202-210)

Here, the gender ambiguity of Julia/Sebastian is obvious. Sebastian the servant encourages Julia the woman – 'shadow', to use disguise to 'make my master out of love with thee'. Julia-cum-Sebastian, a woman in man's disguise, perform both masculinity and femininity, capable of both suffering and action, prepares us for the fulfillment of love in the final scenes.

The quick and somewhat puzzling simplicity of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona's* conclusion allows thematic ambiguities to linger. In Proteus' feeling that Julia, still appearing male, is more attractive than Silvia and Valentine's deep devotion to Proteus, both sexual and gender identities are blurred. Julia's assumption of maleness gives her access to the male world, testing the boundaries of socially-perceived gender roles; that she maintains her outward maleness challenges Elizabethan sexual mores.

Cross-dressing permeates Shakespeare's work, in both the writing and the performance. On the most fundamental level, women were not permitted to act on the Elizabethan stage, so all female characters were played by men in women's attire. Cross-dressing becomes an important plot device throughout Shakespeare's plays, with one of the most famous examples being that of Viola donning a man's clothes to travel throughout Illyria, in *Twelfth Night*. By blurring gender lines, Shakespeare confronts his audience with the fact that much of its judgment of male and female behavior is tied to preconceived notions of how each gender should behave, rather than to each character's individual needs and motives. While this tactic may not be novel to a twenty-first-century audience, it unquestionably challenged the way gender roles were perceived in the Elizabethan era.

Throughout Shakespeare's works, the use of disguise offers characters the opportunity to gain access to things normally kept secret from them, such as others' attitudes toward them. Such insight into an unsuspecting individual's mind gives the disguised a power over that individual. Julia, like all of Shakespeare's women, is inherently afforded very little power by Elizabethan society. Pretending to be a man allows Julia access to the male sphere, and enables her to pursue her love in an active, male manner previously unavailable to her.

So in these plays disguise comes up as a mechanism which allows the liberation or the social emancipation for those people who adopt it: all the heroines manage to overcome all the imposed restrictions on women of the epoch thanks to the use of the disguise. Besides, this offers Shakespeare the possibility to allow disguised women to make subtle comments about the

social interaction between the man and the woman. In addition, the effectiveness of the disguise also implies that women have to adopt an appropriate discourse to their new role, a masculine register. So, the disguise becomes an instrument for women to put them at the same social level as men. It also provides women the authority and free movements that are required by the circumstances in which they are involved. However, the women's ability to adapt to their discourse, in form and content, and also their behaviour to a new condition, to an imitating identity, will be crucial for the control and success of the play.

On the one hand, the use of disguise leads to the following conclusion: due to the fact that other characters in the play and also the audience do not realize the real identities that are hidden behind the costumes, the tension of the moment is very peculiar. This is because the audience does not feel that they can be found out due to their possible mistakes if we pay attention to the linguistic features they use or the way they behave. So, the tension is rather due to the uncertainty provoked by the tragicomic aspects of the action. On the other hand, the disguise provokes confusing situations. This happens when another feminine character falls in love with the disguised characters.

To conclude, in disguise, these two heroines have ambiguous gender identities: they are women as well as men. Through cross-dressing they demonstrate masculine characteristics, which are mingled with their feminine characteristics. The fact that an individual owns both masculinity and femininity proves that masculinity and femininity are not two opposites, thus deconstructing gender stereotypes.

## **Chapter IV**

### **Conclusion**

On the basis of the preceding analysis we can conclude that gender stereotypes include: first, men own masculine characteristics and women own feminine characteristics, and there is no gender ambiguity; second, as the superior to the inferior, men are opposite to women, and masculinity is opposite to femininity; third, gender is fixed as sex. These gender stereotypes are suitable for a patriarchal world, for Renaissance England. In Renaissance England, officially, economically and politically, men dominated the society; women were subordinated to men. Dress, as a highly regulated semiotic system, was the code of one's identity, symbolizing one's gender and social classes. The stability of the social order depended much on maintaining absolute distinctions between male and female. If a woman put on men's clothes, she crossed the gender boundary, and encroached on the privileges of the advanced sex. To maintain the privileges of men, Renaissance gender stereotypes required women to wear women's clothes, to be submissive, passive, silent, closed off, and immured within home. However, in his plays, Shakespeare dresses his heroines with men's clothes, indirectly encroaching on the privileges of men, and deconstructs the gender stereotypes.

Therefore, in Shakespeare's plays, cross-dressing helps to deconstruct Renaissance gender stereotypes. First, cross-dressing helps women characters to travel alone, to enter the men's world, and to act as men, instead of being confined at home. Second, in men's clothes, the heroines Rosalind and Julia both demonstrate masculine qualities such as intelligence, wit, capability, and courage, which implies that women can also own masculinity. Third,

heroines also demonstrate their admirable feminine qualities such as tenderness, chastity, constancy, and selflessness, so their combination of feminine and masculine qualities proves that femininity and masculinity are not two opposites and masculinity is not superior to femininity. Finally, all the heroines take the initiative and control the action, especially when they pursue love. For example, Rosalind dominates the love games with Orlando. Their behavior suggests that they are not inferior to men. Shakespeare transforms his each heroine from the traditional past object to the current subject; activating her, giving her voice and empowering her with subjective initiative, but without depriving her of the admiring qualities of traditional femininity such as affection, tenderness and selflessness. For him, there is an easy cross-over of masculine and feminine traits to both genders.

Shakespeare saw men and women as equal in a world which declared them unequal. He did not divide human nature into the masculine and the feminine, but observed in the individual woman or man an infinite variety of union between opposing impulses. To talk about Shakespeare's female characters is to talk about his male characters, because he refused to separate their worlds physically, intellectually, or spiritually. In disguise, both the heroines perform both women's and men's roles, and their gender identities are ambiguous. They are both men and women. Rosalind, the woman is also Ganymede the shepherd; and Julia the woman is also Sebastian the page. Their double gender identities prove that gender is free-floating. Moreover, the heroines' masculine appearances are constructed through cross-dressing. They become men and show male qualities with men's clothes and behavior,

such as stride, being quarrelsome, boasting, and others. This shows gender is not fixed, but can be constructed. Therefore, through cross-dressing the heroines deconstruct the conventional Renaissance gender stereotypes. Cross dressing makes their gender ambiguous, and gender ambiguity deconstructs the binary opposition of gender, proving that gender is not fixed; masculinity and femininity are not opposed, but united in every individual.



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