Early Modern Transgender Fairies

E Z R A   H O R B U R Y

Abstract The early modern fairy is a long ignored transgender figure. This article presents a transhistoricist analysis of how a range of "transgender" concepts manifest in the early modern literary imagination—instabilities, transformations, ambiguities, or indeterminacies in sex and gender—through the representation of fairies and the supernatural. It focuses on Ariel in Shakespeare's *Tempest*, Duessa in Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, and Jocastus in Randolph's *Amyntas*. Breaking from the threatening fairies of the medieval tradition, early modern writers reshaped how fairies were conceptualized in popular imagination, which inform our ideas of the supernatural and gender instability to this day. While transgender approaches to the medieval period have recently come to prominence, transgender approaches to the early modern remain marginal. This article seeks to establish what early modern fairies offer transgender theory and what transgender theory can offer early modern historicism. Through transgender readings of fairies and supernatural figures, this article demonstrates how such figures provided a space in which early modern culture could fantastically conceptualize transgender concepts and identities.
Keywords early modern, fairies, renaissance, Edmund Spenser, William Shakespeare

The fairies died out in the sixteenth century. Once a commonplace of the English landscape, creatures of the dangerous and marginal places, by the mid-seventeenth century fairies had come to be recognized as idle fancies or—for more imaginative Protestants—disguised demons. The monstrous, transgressive fairies of medieval English folklore were absorbed into the pretty, fanciful literature of William Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, Robert Herrick, and their contemporaries, from which are descended the "wee folk, good folk" (Allingham 1908: 339) of Victoriana fairy tales and modern fairies (Purkiss 2000: 158).[1] The fairies of early modernity found their way out of the English wilds and onto the stage and page, where they safely remained; it is here that some of the most recognizable and lasting literary fairies were created. And the gender of these fairies was remarkably unstable. This article pursues how a range of concepts we might call "transgender" manifest in the early modern literary imagination—instabilities, transformations, ambiguities, or indeterminacies in sex and gender—through the representation of fairies. I focus on three texts, two canonical and one marginal: Shakespeare's

Tempest, Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, and Thomas Randolph's *Amyntas*. In these I discuss three main themes: Ariel and genderless children; Duessa and deceptive, non-cis women; and Jocastus's promise of transsexual transformation. The article also engages throughout with how age and gender intersect in conceptualizations of early modern gender instability and how violent or phobic reactions to gender instability differ from or provide potential antecedents to modern transphobia, read via Julia Serano's interpretation of transmisogyny.

This is necessarily an article about trans historicity (see Aizura et al. 2014; Felski 1996). In queer theory, the tension between ancestralism and anachronism finds a broad solution in Valerie Traub's (2002: 32) compromise, "assum[ing] neither that we will find in the past a mirror image of ourselves nor that the past is so utterly alien that we will find nothing useable in its fragmentary traces." But debate remains on how one navigates sexual desire in the past, with historicism (Bray 1982; Goldberg 1992; Smith 1995; Traub 2002), unhistoricism (Freccero 2006; Menon 2016), homohistory (Menon 2016), and deconstructionism (Dinshaw 1999) providing alternative methodologies.[1] Ancestralism seeks to construct a historical continuity of transness and is most commonly represented by archivism or shadow histories that identity people such as Eleanor Rykener as early transgender figures. Here I may borrow—and queer—a theoretical axiom from Peregrine Horden's (1999: 45) work on dragons in the dark ages: "Dragons exist. . . . Let us entertain the idea that never having seen a dragon may reflect only narrowness of experience." Let us apply this formulation to fairies: for many medieval people, fairies exist. We might say the same of trans people, and having found few potentially trans people in the archives—such as Rykener, Mary Frith ("Moll Cutpurse"), Eleno de Céspedes, Alonso Díaz (Catalina de Erauso), and, more recently, Chevalier d'Éon and Juana Aguilar—may reflect only narrowness of experience.[3]

Unhistoricist trans temporalities, by contrast, are "asynchronous and nonnormative, and thus enabling of community formation" (Devun and Tortorici 2018: 520). As Leah DeVun and Zeb Tortorici point out, many scholars argue that attempts to construct histories of "transgender" are impossible "before the advent of the very vocabulary that generated its subject; to do so would risk divesting past gender practice of what made it meaningful in its own time and place" (520).[4] My methodology is primarily historicist, but I employ the kinds of "touches" advocated by unhistoricists such as Carolyn Dinshaw (2007: 178), whom I follow in "collapsing time through affective contact between marginalized people now and then." I also follow Simone Chess, Colby Gordon, and Will Fisher (2019: 1) in "tak[ing] aim at the misguided supposition that transition was unthinkable until the development of hormone therapies and surgical interventions." There are those who understand the transsexual as a product of twentieth-century

technology—Paul Preciado (2013) is eloquent on this theme—but while the surgical realities of sex affirmation are recent, the imaginative conception of sexual transformation is an ancient idea. My interest, then, is not with ancestralism but the representation of transgender concepts in the literary imagination. For brevity, I use *transgender* as a catch-all for forms of gender instability, rather than as a term designating identity. I also follow the medievalists M. W. Bychowski and Dorothy Kim (2019: 20) who argue, "Neither medieval nor transgender existed as words used by people in fourteenth century England, yet medieval and transgender describe realities that may exist regardless of whether a person whom they describe possessed the terminology." My focus, however, is not the Middle Ages but the more neglected sphere of early modernity.

Early modern trans studies is still wet behind the ears.[5] In contrast to the "transgender Middle Ages" (Bychowski 2016; Whittington 2018; Gutt 2018; Boon 2018; Mills 2018; Bychowski and Kim 2019; Gutt and Spencer-Hall forthcoming), early modern trans studies is—as Chess, Gordon, and Fisher (2019: 2) put it—"a little bit late to the party." Most research on gender instability in the early modern period has been confined to discussions of cross-dressing and boy actors,[6] and only very recently has this been examined through the lens of trans theory (Pfeffer 2013; Masten 2016; Varnado 2016; Munro 2018; Kemp 2019; Chess, Gordon, and Fisher 2019; Klosowska, Raskolnikov, and LaFleur 2019). Outside of but influential to trans studies, work on early modern gender instability has engaged with the materiality of gender, or gender as prostheses (Fisher 2006, 2001; Johnston 2011; Jones and Stallybrass 2000; Klett 2009; Shaughnessy 2010). It is also important to note work on "boys" as a separate gender category to men, pioneered by Will Fisher (2001), as well as Traub's (2002) work on the role of phalluses in lesbian identities. The intersection of the early modern supernatural and transness remains a curious lacuna among this scholarship, although some work has been done in medieval and theological areas (Gutt 2018; Mills 2018; Crawford 2019; Sanchez 2019; Gutt and Spencer-Hall forthcoming), and some on animality (Gordon 2019; Dugan 2019).[7] Theoretically, I draw on queer theory, historicism, and trans temporalities, moving between the past and present to variably historicize early modern transness and to bridge continuities with modern experiences. Some topics I omit for the sake of scope, such as the intersection with race,[8] with disability, with the relationship with the one-sex model (Laqueur 1990; King 2013), and the medicalized "hermaphrodite."[9] Early modernity understood transgender elements as fantastic and potentially wondrous but also employed them for comic or phobic purposes. The encounters in these texts often affirm rather than destabilize cisheteronormativity, and they may present a threatened, uneasy understanding of the mutability of sex and gender. This is the period in which the legacy of medieval fairies was transformed and codified into the

archetypical fairies of modern literature, with figures such as Puck, Oberon, and Mab displacing will-o-the-wisps, changelings, and green children in the popular imagination. As fairies were literarily domesticated, the popular supernatural potential for gender instability shifted.

I begin with beginnings: with childhood. Transgender children are excluded from their own histories. Gatekeepers claim they "have no history at all. Trans children are unprecedented and must be treated as such, with caution or awe" (Gill-Peterson 2018: 2). Jules Gill-Peterson challenges this narrative, identifying accounts of trans children in early twentieth-century medical records, but I wish to extend this refusal of the falsified novelty of trans children to an earlier point. I do not consider "transgender children" in the same sense as Gill-Peterson, as I am dealing not with real children but their fictional representation. Indeed, as Jacqueline Rose (1984: 3) argues of *Peter Pan*, "Peter Pan is a little boy who does not grow up, not because he doesn't want to, but because someone else prefers that he shouldn't . . . what is at stake in *Peter Pan* is the adult's desire for the child"; and, furthermore, "the child can be used to hold off a panic . . . that sexuality, while it cannot be removed, will eventually take on the forms in which we prefer to recognize and acknowledge each other" (10). This use of the constructed child to stave off a premature or nonnormative sexuality is further explored by Eve Kosofky Sedgwick (1991: 19) in a sociological sphere, where revisionist analysts only like "healthy homosexual[s]" who have "already grown up." At the time of her writing, there remained an absence in the discussion of "proto-gay children" (22), and even today queer children are often only recognized retroactively, once the queer adult already exists, perceptible only by a "backward birthing mechanism" (Stockton 2009: 7). The same problem arises for trans people. The trans child is presented as a novel phenomenon that can only be understood from the retrospective self-narrativization of the trans adult, which Dean Spade (2006: 319–20) challenges, finding "the gay childhood narrative" "strategic" and working to reject the theory that "forecloses the possibility that anyone, gender-troubled childhood or not, could transgress sexual and gender norms at any time." In the panic over twenty-first-century transgender children, who are treated like the eponymous "Midwich cuckoos," what is at stake is not the real child but the image of the child (Edelman 2004). The idea that gender instability in children is a product of modern medical practices is a pose, a political strategy, devised to protect not children but the dominant social order. This is the frame with which I approach *The Tempest*'s Ariel. The childlike, protean Ariel is treated not with the novelty or panic induced by the modern transgender child but with temperance and affection. While such ways of thinking about children have been erased because "trans children were central to the medicalization of sex and gender during the twentieth century in a very specific way, made valuable through a

racialized discourse of plasticity" (Gill-Peterson 2018: 3), I demonstrate positive, nonphobic fantasies of "transgender children" and provide a starting point for an earlier history of childhood and gender divergence.

Ariel's childlike nature brings into question the age of fairies. Childhood may be characterized by "growing toward a question mark," or "growing sideways," as Kathryn Bond Stockton (2009: 6) writes. Early modern childhood was a genderless or feminine sphere, wherein boys and girls dressed identically (before breeching), and both were under the care of first midwives and then mothers, sisters, and nurses. To grow up, little boys in the early modern period moved "from the world of the household, dominated by mothers and nurses, to the public world of education, church and state, overwhelmingly dominated by men" (Purkiss 2000: 138). For boys to move between these states, from feminine childhood to masculine adulthood, they had to be educated and disciplined. A boy was made a man by a humanist education. They had to be taught Latin, Greek, and philosophy to rid their heads of "old wives' fairy rubbish," as Erasmus (1904: 214) describes it. Such education had to be accompanied by discipline, often by corporal punishment. A child must be beaten to dissuade him from feminine corruption and pedagogy, or he will never "grow up."[10] A boy must be educated and disciplined in order to exorcise the fairies.

But a child who does not grow up cannot be educated or masculinized and remains growing toward Stockton's question mark. "Children grow sideways as well as up," writes Stockton (2009: 6), partly because "they cannot, according to our concepts, advance to adulthood until we say it's time." In this sense, fairies are analogous to contemporary discussions of arrested development in queer culture, what Jack Halberstam (2005: 153) describes as "the stretched-out adolescences of queer culture makers that disrupt conventional accounts of subculture, youth culture, adulthood, and maturity." Like boys, fairies are often creatures of mischief. Many of Shakespeare's fairies are also subservient to a figure of nobility, and while such fairies may meet occasional discipline, this is only ever to ensure the aims of the disciplinarian are correctly carried out, and it is never for the fairy's maturation. Such forms of discipline do not prevent mischief, they only ensure that the correct sort of mischief is performed. So thus we see Oberon's chastising of Puck—"What hast thou done?" (Shakespeare 2016: 3.2.88)—and Prospero's of Ariel—"Thou liest, malignant thing!" (1.2.257)—but this is only ever to redirect their mischief, not to curb it. School boys might fear the birch, but the oak is Prospero's punishment of choice, and it is not one easily escaped: "I will rend an oak / And peg thee in his knotty entrails" (1.2.295). The Victorian association between fairies and childhood that gives us Peter Pan is rooted in this Shakespearean repurposing of fairies' violence as childish mischief. A mortal boy must have the fairies beaten out of him, but a fairy is never expected to grow up.

Prospero's treatment of Ariel is an ambiguous pose of both father and schoolmaster, but while the question of Ariel's gender has long provoked oblique discomfort, it has received little direct critical discussion. As Christine Dymkowski (2000: 48) writes in one of the few sustained treatments of the subject, "Although . . . the English theatre has often used Ariel's gender as an instrument of ideological struggle, it has rarely used Ariel to contest the dominant cultural view of gender itself." The part of Ariel may have been played by a woman as early as the Restoration, and was predominantly a female role between the eighteenth and mid-twentieth centuries (Button 2001; Dymkowski 2000: 34).[12] This chronology demonstrates how easily seventeenth-century audiences could accept a woman in the part,[13] while later performances served to translate Ariel's mystical otherness into a kind of feminine mystique, as well as to accord with the Victorian view of fairies as tinkling fancies meant for the feminine realm of childhood. I wish to deconstruct the means by which Ariel's gender has been traditionally assembled.

Physically, Ariel is often (and possibly, depending on when we identify Ariel's costume changes,[14] more often than not) in a female form. Ariel embodies a harpy, a water nymph, and Ceres—all female figures. The boy actor who played Ariel would also likely have been he who played the principal romantic heroines.[15] There are obvious parallels between Prospero as director and Ariel as actor, and the audience would be primed to read the actor as female from other roles. There is nothing in the text to suggest Ariel has male sexual characteristics. There are, however, three instances in which Ariel is referentially gendered as male: "I come . . . Ariel and all his quality" (1.2.189–93), Ariel declares, and two stage directions refer to how "he vanishes in thunder" (3.3.82–83) and "claps his wings" (52–53). These stage directions were likely added by Ralph Crane, and thus we must acknowledge that this gendering is a post hoc assessment of Ariel. This is not to say Ariel has a preexisting gender outside the text, but Crane's interpretation is only that: an interpretation. Yet Ariel also self-genders: "Ariel and all his quality." Case closed, then: Ariel uses male pronouns and therefore identifies as male. But this is linguistically anachronistic. While gender-neutral pronouns existed in this period, such usage was rare. Unless a figure is specifically designated female, both masculine and genderless figures would be referred to as "he" (Nevalainen 2006: 82). To conclude that Ariel's use of "his" grants Ariel a male gender is not only to ignore early modern pronoun usage, but to arbitrarily privilege such pronoun use over Ariel's choice of physically female forms, as well as insisting that Ariel should conform to human understandings of gender rather than the very different sphere of fairy gender.

To complicate this further, Ariel is not merely androgynous but also childlike and mischievous. Though Ariel may be boylike, as Fisher (2001: 155) has

argued, "it would appear that boys were considered to be a different gender from men during the Renaissance" and that gender was constituted prosthetically (Fisher 2006), an idea that Preciado (2013: 227) and Halberstam (2005: 51) turn to in a twenty-first-century context. Furthermore, for Stephen Orgel (1996: 109), the boy and the woman are economically analogous and "women and children . . . become the cultural metonyms for the working classes";[16] of course, fairies are frequently servants as well, to humans or to other fairies, and the intersection of fairies, class, and gender is one that deserves more thorough treatment than can be granted here. Ariel is Prospero's "chick" (5.1.316), "bird" (4.1.184), and "servant" (4.1.33); Ariel is "quaint" (1.2.317). Ariel is also petulant: Prospero's first interaction with Ariel in which he must remind Ariel of Sycorax's tyrannous rule is very much that of a teacher and his pupil, catechistically formatted, with Ariel not taught maturity but obedience (1.2.244–300). To return to Fisher's point, if boys may function as a third gender, Ariel is far more readily collapsed into that third gender of servile, androgynous, shape-changing, dramaturgical childhood than that of a man.[17] For Julie Crawford (2019: 81), writing of John Milton's angels, "the most elevated state of embodiment is characterized by the absence of binary sex." Ariel, a being of fluidity and the elements who "ride[s] / On the curlèd clouds" (1.2.190–91), is similarly privileged: a nonbinary fairy, with that indeterminacy defined not only by their elemental nature but also by their role as child.

This works both ways. If the nonbinary mode may be best aligned with supernature, it is not just fairies that are read as trans but also trans figures that are read as fairies. In *Cymbeline*, Belarius comes across the cross-dressed Innogen asleep in his cave and exclaims, "But that it eats our victuals I should think / Here were a fairy" (3.6.40–41). He continues, "By Jupiter, an angel—or if not, / An earthly paragon. Behold divineness / No elder than a boy" (43–45). Only able to construct gender from the sartorial fetish, Belarius would more easily see a fairy or an angel than a cross-dressed girl. Innogen's gender ambiguity renders her supernatural. And as Belarius moves back to the mundane, he must emphasize her age, Innogen being "no elder than a boy!" Not simply "a boy" but "*no elder than,*" suggesting that cusp of adolescence. Such liminal ages are the realm of fairies, especially female adolescence, which is the time at which one is most likely to encounter them (Purkiss 2000: 86). Contrary to Ariel, rather than a fairy guise enabling gender instability, Innogen's transgender guise causes her to be read *as* a fairy. Thus when Belarius encounters transness, it is foremost read in a supernatural mode.

Transness may be celebrated, as it is for Ariel and Innogen, but it may also provoke disgust. The titular fairy of Spenser's *Faerie Queene* (2003) is Gloriana, a representation of Elizabeth I, and in this poem of doppelgängers one of Gloriana's many shadow selves is the "false sorceresse" Duessa of book 1 (12.34.294). For

Susan Stryker (2006: 9), "transgender people who problematize the assumed correlation of a particular biological sex with a particular social gender are often considered to make false representations of an underlying material truth, through the willful distortion of surface appearance." Julia Serano (2007: 36) specifies this argument for trans women, who are categorized as either "deceptive" or "pathetic," those in the former category "play[ing] the role of sexual predators." But in the Spenserian imagination, falsehood itself is represented through a perceived disconnect between biological sex and social gender. Duessa allegorizes falsehood (and Mary, Queen of Scots), appearing as a beautiful woman whose true nature is betrayed by the exposure of her misshapen genitalia.[18] Duessa seeks to mislead the knight Redcrosse from his quest and is described as "false Duessa seeming Lady faire," wherein her deceptive nature is defined by this semblance of fairness concealing foulness and sexual instability (4.13.110).

To approach Duessa from transhistoricity, we see how she is represented with the same tropes Serano (2007: 14) identifies as the tactics of traditional sexism by which trans women are commonly represented in modern media: hyperfeminization, the attribution of transition to sexual causes, and preoccupation with genitalia. Duessa is hyperfeminized with a focus on "frivolous" (Serano 2007: 14) costuming, wearing "garments gilt" (5.26.232), "gorgeous gold" (233), and "ornaments that richly were displaid" (8.41.360), and comes "adornd with gold and jewels shining cleare" (5.21.182). These external, prosthetic beauties contrast with the hideous somatic reality they conceal; similarly, "her craftie head was altogether bald," prosthetically imitating femininity she cannot possess (8.46.415). Serano's second point concerns the assertion that trans women "transition for primarily sexual reasons," and Duessa's beautiful, feminine façade is attired only to seduce knights away from the cis women they protect. Redcrosse is tempted to abandon Una, the representation of chastity, to whom Duessa is the false alternative. Una is the platonic ideal of maidenhood against which Duessa is measured, and thus Duessa's beauty always serves as an artificial imitation of the feminine, normative, cis virgin. Duessa similarly misleads Fradubio, a knight now transformed into a tree. Fradubio compares Duessa's false beauty to that of his former love, "th' one seeming such, the other such indeede," and ultimately abandons the true woman in favor of false Duessa (2.37.326). Thus Duessa's beauty is, like that of trans women, portrayed as a false construct that imitates, competes with, and misleads men from appropriate heterosexuality.

Serano's final point concerns the sensationalization of sex-affirmation surgery and the state of trans women's genitalia. Despite Duessa's ability to appear outwardly beautiful, she cannot alter her monstrous genitalia; when Fradubio spies her in a state of undress (an invasion of privacy that goes unaddressed), he finds "her neather parts misshapen, monstruous" and "more foule and hideous, /

Then womans shape man would beleeve to bee" (2.41.361–64). Later, her inter-sexuality is associated with old age, as she is seen to possess both "dried dugs, like bladders lacking wind, / Hong downe, and filthy matter from them weld" (8.47.420–41). When Duessa is finally defeated, her fate is one of violent exposure that confirms her false, malicious nature by the state of her genitalia. She is forcefully stripped so that "their eyes might her behold" (8.49.411), and she becomes the subject of the public gaze as the "amazd" (49.433) onlookers gaze upon her "deformed" body (434), her "secret filth" (46.414), her "misshaped parts" (412), and "her filthy feature open showne" (49.440)—a familiar trope for rep-resentations of trans women in modern media. Their paranoid epistemology is confirmed by exposure (Sedgwick 2002: 138–41), not merely justifying this vio-lence but confirming its ethical imperative. As Stryker (2006: 10) writes, "Those who commit violence against transgender people routinely seek to excuse their own behavior by claiming they have been unjustly deceived by a mismatch between the other's gender and genitals."[19] This is further articulated by Serano (2007: 37): "Their 'secret' trans status is revealed in a dramatic moment of 'truth.' At this moment, the 'deceiver's' appearance (her femaleness) is reduced to mere illusion, and her secret (her maleness) becomes the real identity." For Duessa, it is this same mismatch that justifies the violence perpetrated against her and which justifies the exposure of her "deformed" genitalia that reveals her as the repre-sentation of falsehood.

Duessa is not a real trans woman. She is a phobic fantasy that understands the hiding of sexed characteristics as undertaken purely to mislead men away from chastity, fidelity, and Protestantism. The same trope is employed in the contemporary *Churchyard's Challenge* (Churchyard 1593), in which the speaker encounters a pageant of beautiful fairy nobility. He beholds a "King, / a faire familiar spréet" with his "Lady like the Fairie Queene," accompanied by "Dames and Nymphes most chast" (176). And then on "a stately mighty mount" comes a lady "all clothed in white" who proclaims, "A woman sure I am" (177)—but such self-identification is soon subverted. The beautiful fairy pageant is revealed to be an illusion conjured by devils, and the speaker is faced instead with a parade of "fearefull bugges" who chastise him for forsaking God in favor of these trifling pleasures. What once appeared a parade of nobility are revealed to be shadows "with bellies big and swagging dugges, / more lothsome then a witch" (180)—coded as abject, aged women. For Judith Butler (2014), "we are all ethically bound to recognize another person's declared or enacted sense of sex and/or gender." Yet in these Protestant ethics the man is bound to acknowledge and expose deception. The more dedicated we are to truth, faith, and chastity, the easier we will be able to identify these deceptive, aged, transgender monsters for what they truly are: the embodiment of Catholic deception.[20]

A trans person may hide their gender identity for fear of violence, but modern "victims" of their secrecy claim it is done with malicious intent (Sharpe 2017). These early modern figures give no evidence of possessing any interior "gender identity" or dysphoria and present as beautiful women only to mislead men. Modern phobias of the transgender "trap" find obvious congruence with these anxieties; thus we can see how such phobic fantasies precede modern transmisogyny and derive from an older fear of, superficially, the supposedly deceptive nature of women but, more deeply, men's fear that their own sexual desires might betray them. Spirits "can either sex assume, or both," as John Milton (2003: 1.424) writes, and this is as much a source of threat as wonder.

I turn finally to the story of Jocastus, "a fantastique sheapherd" and fairy fanatic, who attempts, alchemically, to transition into "Jocasta" so that she might marry King Oberon and become the Queen of fairyland.[21] This is Randolph's *Amyntas* ([1638] 1917), first performed in 1630—several decades later than these other works. Unlike *The Tempest*, this was performed by a company exclusively composed of boy actors, the Children of the Revels, and it is not a coincidence that the only play to consider male-to-female (MtF) transformation is performed entirely by boy actors.[22] It is the story of two fools: Mopsus and Jocastus, an augur and a shepherd. Jocastus loves only the fairies and urges Mopsus to seek out a "*Fairy* Lady" for his bride (1.3.5). Mopsus will have none of this. His idea of fairies is very Shakespearean, the kind of insectlike creatures who live among the undergrowth: he will not "looke a wife in nutshells" or "wooe a gnat"—he "must have flesh and blood" (9–11). Yet Jocastus is dedicated to pursuing a fairy bride—or husband, as eventually comes about. Jocastus is gulled into mistaking the mortal boy Dorylas for the fairy prince Oberon, who offers him the opportunity to transform into a woman and become his fairy bride. The plot occurs at Jocastus's expense: these scenes are comic and make of him a fool, but Dorylas's Oberon creates a ludic festival space in which such topsy-turvy impersonations of fairy princes also allow for transness to conceptually exist.

Jocastus loves the fairies, regardless of gender. When first confronted with what he believes to be Oberon and Queen Mab, Jocastus's primary interest is the queen. He does not hesitate to kiss Queen Mab "with admirable courtship" and thinks "there will be of *Iocastus* brood in *Fairy*" (2.6.6). Such extramarital affairs are common for Oberon and Titania of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and Jocastus himself has a fairylike hedonism. There is a fairy way of thinking and a mortal way of thinking—the fairy strategy conceptualizes such hedonistic affairs and gender transformation, and once Jocastus starts to think in that mode, then the idea of transness can emerge. Though his first object of romantic affection is Mab, Jocastus's interests soon shift when Oberon/Dorylas seems to mistake him

for a woman: as Dorylas tells Jocastus, "A beauteous Lady, bright and rare, / Queen *Mab* her selfe is not so faire" (5.6.14–15). But Jocastus does not object to being read as a woman. Having first pursued Mab, his interests now turn to Oberon in the sodomitical pun, "Does your grace take me for a woman then?" (16), expanded in Dorylas's comment, "Lady you will ruin mee" (24). A man would be ruined indeed, should he "take" (fuck) a man "for a woman." There is only one way for two men to have sex and avoid sodomy: one party must become a woman. Despite first claiming "I am no woman!" (25), Jocastus soon admits, "I alwaies thought I was borne to be a Queene" (63). This is no contradiction: Jocastus initially understands that his genitalia exclude him from female identification and asks if he will face a "geelding" (26), but Dorylas/Oberon promises a more fantastical means of gender transformation. Mystical gender transformations are a commonplace of classical mythology, and medieval fairies were also capable of changing their genders, like Muldumarec of Marie de France's (1999) "Yonec," but such representations grow rare by the seventeenth century. By this period, gender transformations are the relics of an age when the woods and our own bodies were less known, were less stable.

Jocastus is free of the modern need to narrativize one's gender dysphoria in order to transition.[23] There is no early modern etiology of transness; he undertakes transition almost on a whim. While much early autobiographical writing by trans women (and representations of the "pathetic transsexual") focus on the difficulty of appearing sufficiently feminine and attractive, Jocastus's pretransition beauty is the source for Oberon/Dorylas to prompt her transition: "Are you no woman then? / Can such bright beauty live with men?" (32–33). Jocastus immediately embraces the possibility of an alchemical change: "Cannot your Grace distill me to a woman?," hoping for the seventeenth-century equivalent of hormone-replacement therapy (35). The idea is lifted from Oberon's sexuality-altering potions in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, but in Randolph's play it is gender, not sexuality, that can be transformed by a fairy plant. The herb here is moly, a false friend with the Latin *mollis*, meaning softer, effeminate. Moly plays a similar role to the surgical intervention reified in early trans autobiographies as the crucial transformative act that will create womanhood (Stone [1987] 2014; Hausman 2006): in a precursor to comments such as Lili Elbe's (2020: 148) on her surgery making her "a complete woman," Jocastus is urged to "tast this Moly but agree, / And thou shalt perfect woman bee" (38–39).

While Jocastus is mocked for her transgender identity, this identity primarily serves to illustrate the foolishness of her fairy beliefs, rather than being something to mock on its own terms. If Jocastus agrees to marry Oberon, then "Queene *Jocasta* thou shalt bee" (43). Marriage and moly will provoke this transformation, Jocastus to Jocasta, with the kind of transgender linguistics we see

in Ovid's Caenis/Caeneus. Once state power—Oberon—permits physical gender transition, Jocasta commits to the real-life experience and will "live full time in the preferred gender" (Meyer et al. [1979] 2001: 7). She refuses her servant's misgendering: "Bro[mius]: Why master, are you mad? / Io. Your mistrisse sirrah" (53). The name is abbreviated "Io." so there can be no apparatic or paratextual authority outside the dialogue to assert that her name is "really" Jocastus. Jocasta is allowed, however briefly and however comically, to exist. Mopsus now has no difficulty calling her "Gracious sister" (and calls her "sister" again even once the trick has been revealed—once the comic space has allowed for trans identities to be conceptualized, they are easily absorbed; 62, 79). The logic of gender transition is remarkably simple for one so committed to biopolitics, for "our grace has said it, and it shall be so" (54). The state determines gender—here, Oberon; today, gender recognition panels. Jocasta is no longer concerned with questions of biological essentialism: while physical transition is necessary for Jocasta to fulfill her identity, that identity was created and conceptually permitted by Oberon's approval. An early example indeed of state-decreed transgender biopolitics, and an inversion of the modern state role in transition.

Jocasta is easily moved to love for Oberon; the two exchange only thirty lines before she is "up to th'eares in love" (41). It is Oberon's (pretended) fairy power, we assume, both magical and aristocratic, that moves Jocasta so quickly to romance. But though Oberon is "really" a disguised mortal boy and Jocasta is the butt of the joke, there is no disgust in this scene. Jocasta, fool though she might be in falling for the disguise, is mocked only for that foolishness; they are not repulsed by her sodomitical or transgender love. Once the fantastical possibility of gender transition has been created, Jocasta desires the same for her servant, Bromius, who would "make a very pretty waiting maid" (45). The motivation seems aesthetic rather than sexual or romantic. As Bromius is a servant, there would be little compromise to his social power (in Jocasta's eyes) should he become a woman. A pretty maid to wait on a beautiful queen—such is Jocasta's transgender fairy dream.

It should not be overlooked that Jocasta is played by a boy actor, not an adult man. Lucy Munro (2018: 218), in analyzing the relationship between gender, age, and status in the play, argues,

> *Amyntas* would lose far more of its impact without an all-boy cast, since the putative trans woman is an adult man. If Jocastus is played by a boy actor, he can at least potentially be transformed. . . . In contrast, if Jocastus were to be played by an adult man the sequence would take on a different tone—perhaps more comic, perhaps more bleak—in the context of a theatrical culture in which adult men rarely, if ever, performed female roles.

True—although we cannot really imagine the performance dynamics of such a play if Jocasta were *not* performed by a boy actor, because men were never transformed into women.[24] A man may become a woman if he is played by a boy, and if a fairy is involved; otherwise, opportunities for MtF transformation remain beyond the reach of early modern drama.

But our Prince Oberon is not a fairy. Like Belarius, what we took for a fairy is only a boy—only this time, it really *is* a boy, not a boy-who-is-a-girl-who-is-a-boy. There can be no magical transformation, and transsexuality is denied us. Yet ludic though the scene might be, Jocastus did become Jocasta, if only socially, for a little while. "I long to tast this *Moly*," she says, just before the jest is revealed, and it is this with which we are left (59). Had Shakespeare's Oberon been here rather than Randolph's theatrical imitation of him, perhaps that transformation could have occurred.

Amyntas does not celebrate transgender identity. But it depicts a trans woman pursuing physical transition and doing so confidently and openly. She is not presented as disgusting, frightening, or dangerous; she is mocked only for her gullibility. How foolish of her to believe she could transition—and how foolish, too, to believe in fairies. This play was written in 1630, thirty-five years after *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in which fairies were met through the veil of "slumber" (5.2.55), and twenty years after *The Tempest*, in which Prospero drowned his magical book. We are a long way from the medieval fairy realities of Robin Good Fellow. Belief in fairies, and belief in trans people, is now only a joke. In *Amyntas*, the fairy and the trans woman thus occupy the same space: an impossible figure, not disgusting but ludicrous; silly, but not hateful. To believe in fairies is as foolish as to believe in being trans, Randolph suggests—yet that does not stop writers from constantly depicting transgender people, fairies, and transgender fairies.

Conclusion

Few actors are as critically acclaimed in the role of *Twelfth Night*'s Olivia as Mark Rylance. "It is difficult to imagine that *Twelfth Night* could be performed more effectively than it currently is at the Globe theatre, in an all-male production," Alex Needham (2012) writes. Critics construct a ritual of the appropriate way to enjoy the cross-dressed male body. "Rylance takes you through sex to some spiritual area beyond," writes Paul Taylor (2002), while Ben Brantley (2013) celebrates the enlightened state of not laughing at men in dresses and thus enjoying Shakespeare authentically: Rylance "show[s] he's as brilliant in trousers as he is in a dress [which] makes you think, 'This is how Shakespeare was meant to be done.'" Praise for Rylance is predicated on the assumption that a man in a dress must be innately funny, and Rylance is hailed for exhibiting acting so powerful it makes you forget your transmisogyny—this is authentic Shakespeare.

This is nonsense, of course. An early modern audience would have reacted quizzically to fifty-three-year-old Rylance playing Olivia, as they would have expected a nine- to fourteen-year-old boy in the role. Transmisogyny remains essential to the glorification of Shakespeare's cultural import. The early modern period could be phobic of trans femininity, but we must recognize when those phobias accord with modern transphobia and when they do not. Transphobia too has a history. Transgender figures were not always comic in early modern literature, and the fairy offered a means by which gender transformation or nonbinary identities could be conceptualized. Our modern fairies are more rooted in Shakespeare and his influences than any other text. The names of their medieval predecessors, such as Muldumarec of "Yonec" or other magical gender changers like Bertilak of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (1972) are little known today in comparison to Oberon and his queen Titania. Early modern fairies remain some of the most recognizable otherworldly figures in Western culture, and yet the gender instability that once characterized them is repeatedly and deliberately forgotten in order to affirm false transphobic histories like those in which Brantley participates. The fairies and their transness might have died out, but we must not overwrite their memories. These fairies' gender instability delights, threatens, and persists. Fairies might be such stuff that dreams are made of, but these texts do not always allow us to wake up.

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Notes

1. For overviews of medieval fairies, see Green 2016 and Harf-Lancner 1991.
2. Ari Friedlander (2016) provides a good overview of the state of this field.
3. On historical trans figures in the medieval and early modern periods, see Wagner 2011; Goldmark 2015; E. Rose 2016; Karras and Linkinen 2016; Boon 2018; Bychowski et al. 2018; Clifton 2018.
4. A concept problematized in Gamble 2019.
5. Though few publications, there have been a number of conference panels and seminars on early modern trans studies. See "Trans* Historicities" at the Shakespeare Association of America 2016 meeting, "Trans/Early/Modern" at the Modern Languages Association

2018 meeting, "Shakespeare and Transgender Theory" at the Shakespeare Association of America 2018 meeting, and "Early Modern Trans Studies" at Bryn Mawr College (2019).

6. For early modern gender instability and cross-dressing on stage, see Howard 1988; Stallybrass 1992; Levine 1994; Orgel 1996; Sedinger 1997; Jones and Stallybrass 2000; Fisher 2001; Munro 2009; Johnston 2011, 2017; Sparey 2015; Stavreva 2018; Chess 2019; Rubright 2019.

7. On early modern perceptions of animals as hermaphroditic, see DiGangi 1997: 57; Pendergraft 1992: 75–79; Long 2006: 71–76.

8. For early modern trans studies and race, see Wagner 2019 and Arvas 2019.

9. While such figures share structurally similar traits of monstrosity with some early modern fairies, they are nonetheless distinct, and we must be wary of the "incoherent" view we develop of the early modern hermaphrodite by reading medical literature alongside the literary (Mann 2006: 68).

10. For gender and sexuality in the corporal discipline of humanist educational practices, also see Halpern 1991: 26–28; Bushnell 1996; Stewart 1997; Enterline 2012; Horbury 2019: 1–42.

11. The debate as to the earliest date at which Ariel was played by a woman concerns the ambiguous language of Pepys's review of productions of the Dryden and Davenant adaptation of *The Tempest*. For an overview of the perspectives in this debate, see Dymkowski 2000: 35n70.

12. Dymkowski (2000: 34–48) discusses the production history of Ariel's male, female, and nonbinary castings and provides some excellent photos.

13. For Dymkowski (2000: 37), this is because "the Restoration version stamped Prospero . . . as a figure of patriarchal authority." This "necessitates a demure Miranda, a beast-like Caliban and an Ariel whose willing servility is seen as natural and inevitable: in other words, a gossamer female fairy."

14. For discussions of when Ariel changes costume, see Jowett 1983 and Egan 1997.

15. For Ariel being played by a boy-actor, see Sturgess 1987: 77.

16. On boys, homosexuality, and class, see also Bray 1982: 43–57; Saslow 1986: 155–60; Smith 1995: 167–69; and Johnston 2005: 81–82.

17. For other readings of Ariel's gender, see Nesler 2012; and Boğosyan 2013: 92–105.

18. There are other figures in *The Faerie Queene* of interest to trans studies, such as the cross-dressed knight Britomart, the monstrous maternal beast Errour, and the Ovidian transformations to which multiple characters are subject.

19. See also the transgender panic defense; Woods, Sears, and Mallory (2016) offer a useful overview.

20. Associations between Catholicism and gender disorder or sodomy were commonplace, with the Pope compared to the whore of Babylon to contrast with the virginal Elizabeth I. See for example the illustration of the Pope as the whore of Babylon in the 1545 edition of the Luther Bible and William Baldwin's *Wonderfull Newes of the Death of Paule the III* (1552), in which the Pope, in Hell, provides his clergy with a chalice of his own menstrual blood in place of the blood of Christ. See also representations of Pope Joan (Freeman 2006), particularly in relation to "the hermaphrodite hypothesis" (Rustici 2006: 85–105).

21. I shift my pronouns from male to female to reflect Jocastus's understanding of transition.

22. Munro 2018 presents an interesting examination of this play in relation to boy actors, gender, class, and disguise.

23. See Hausman 2006 on the appropriation of autobiographical narratives of transition.

24.   Exceptions are merely transvestic characters like Falstaff in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. See Chess 2016 for MtF transvestism beyond drama.

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