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Stephen Montgomery-Anderson
sbmontg@clemson.edu

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“CUSTOME IS AN IDIOT”: HOW GENRE BENDING OPENS NEW MEANINGS
FOR *HÆC VIR, OR THE WOMANISH MAN*

A Thesis
Presented to
the Graduate School of
Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
English

by
Stephen B. Montgomery-Anderson
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Dr. Will Stockton, Committee Chair
Dr. Elizabeth Rivlin
Dr. Erin Goss

Abstract

Hæc Vir, or the Womanish Man is often conceived of as a satirical pamphlet. Moreover, scholars such as Linda Woodbridge and Simone Chess read the pamphlet as ultimately and explicitly arguing for a normative rendering of gender. Such readings, while acknowledging the rhetorical power and feminist nature of the crossdressed female character Hic Mulier's arguments, invariably discount them in favor of a supposed return to normalcy. I instead suggest that Hic Mulier's arguments be read as genuine and potentially altering. I further argue that we should read *Hæc Vir* as a closet drama. Bending the genre of the pamphlet allows common conceptions of Elizabethan drama to be used, chiefly drama's ability to hold more than one meaning simultaneously, even when those meanings are contradictory. Doing so will salvage Hic Mulier's argument and open other pamphlets to also containing multiple meanings.

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Introduction

Hæc Vir or, The Womanish Man (1620), while generally classified as a pamphlet, should be read as a drama. Because pamphlets are often considered to be conservative, their more subversive elements are frequently discounted. Reframing *Hæc Vir* as a drama allows for the power of those subversive aspects to be recognized without ultimately dismissing them under the guise of inherent conservatism, which, in this instance, refers to a work which ultimately seeks to enforce and describe the dominant and hegemonic forces of normativity. Reading *Hæc Vir* allows for an argument specifically against the containment of gender subversion within the safety of the text. Most scholars who examine *Hæc Vir* have read it strictly as a satire. While they highlight its radical feminist elements and comment on its argument for gender fluidity, their assumptions about pamphlet politics have led them consistently to assert that, for all *Hæc Vir's* potential for gender subversion, it instead inevitably conforms to a gender binary. By reading *Hæc Vir* as a drama, we can begin to recapture some of Hic Mulier's justification for self-expression, and, further for concepts of gender fluidity and gender subversion. By opening up these meanings and beginning to take her words seriously, we can begin to imagine that some of her audience might also have taken her assertions seriously as well.

Because the goal of this project is to authorize a reading of *Hæc Vir* as a type of drama as well as its usual classification as a pamphlet, it becomes necessary to spend some time establishing the subversive nature of early modern drama, particularly as it relates to gender. Subversion, for the purposes of this project, will refer to the subversion of gender norms or roles, unless otherwise noted. Consequently, this project will spend part of its space on an examination of *Twelfth Night*, using Stephen Greenblatt's "Fiction and Friction" and Casey Charles's

“Gender Trouble in ‘Twelfth Night’” as models for a reading of *Hæc Vir*. *Twelfth Night* is particularly relevant for this discussion since, as Greenblatt makes clear in his essay, previous interpretations rested on the play’s ability to contain all its unconventional gender performativity through the conventional ending of heterosexual marriage. Charles, in turn, makes available new readings, arguing that *Twelfth Night*’s conventional ending of marriage does not obviate its subversiveness. Critics tend to treat drama as a genre that is both able to hold and to express contradictory ideas within itself. Even when its first several acts, and more often its final act, explicitly support the *status quo*, other aspects of plays are highlighted for their power to destabilize gender. Moreover, those elements are celebrated for that power. Reading *Hæc Vir* as a drama affords it that same power.

After more firmly establishing a critical approach to drama as a uniquely liberating genre for early modern England – particularly as it relates to ideas of freer types of gender expression – this project will turn to the pamphlet *Hæc Vir* itself. I will first examine its scholarly consensus as conservative primarily through the work of Simone Chess and Linda Woodbridge, taking care to highlight the similarities between *Hæc Vir*’s scholarly trajectory and *Twelfth Night*’s. Chess and Woodbridge’s view is mainly that *Hæc Vir* upholds the gender binary. I suggest that this is partially through its status as a pamphlet, a genre which regularly finds itself confined to one, straightforward message. *Hæc Vir*, and, potentially, all pamphlets, is more complex. Found on its few pages are a cornucopia of radical and subversive thoughts, which are largely expressed by its self-declared woman character, Hic Mulier. Through a close examination of the text of *Hæc Vir* as a drama, it is possible to observe its own capacity to undermine gender norms while simultaneously maintaining an awareness of its conservative moralizing tendencies. By actively choosing not to discount the message espoused by the character Hic Mulier, we can instead

recognize her argument for what it is: a radical assertion of independence, both from male rule – she is an independent person on the road alone, allowed to speak for herself – and from tradition. *Hic Mulier* wants to break with an arbitrary past, and, through her persuasive abilities, provides an argument which *Hæc Vir* is unable or unwilling to answer. Moreover, through her, *Hæc Vir* suggests that pamphlets can contain a duality often ascribed to drama of the period, but seldom to pamphlets.

Although the word pamphlet describes many different types of communications, from musical leaflets and ballads to even plays, it was primarily a font of controversy. Pamphlets were a way for people – at least those who could read and write – to test their ideas in the public sphere and allow for a public response from others. Indeed, “the Elizabethan pamphleteers delighted in controversy, and they were very much at home with the notion of a debate where the only real issue is the eloquence with which a point was made” (Clark 177). Sometimes, the argument was the point, and the pamphlet as a form allowed for argument to double as entertainment, something which the word’s relationship to ballads and plays confirms.¹ It then becomes a simple and logical next step to dismiss the pamphlet as a source of any kind of “true” information – the pamphleteers were, after all, arguing for the sake of reading themselves in print. In contrast to this conception of pamphlets as spurious writing, however, Joy Wiltenbrug also tells us that “it becomes clear from reading these works [of street literature, or pamphlets] that one of their key aims is to help people solidify their social identity” (4). Beyond simply

¹ The OED Online notes that *pamphlet* was “In the 17th cent.” used variously of issues of plays, romances, chapbooks, etc., and also of newspapers and newsletters” (“Pamphlet, n.2”)

entertaining their audience – beyond, indeed, a type of commercial impulse to sell pamphlets – these pamphleteers sought to enforce a type of cultural hegemony. As a result of this desire, pamphlets can be used, with care, to work out the dominant views of society, as well as the subversive elements and anxieties that prompted their authorship.

Despite readers' ability to parse subversive elements, the common conception of the pamphlet as conservative ultimately leaves no room for the pamphlet to properly express those subversive elements. Wiltenburg calls women's freedom in pamphlets "fleeting," essentially acknowledging that the pamphlet is incapable, in the end, of asserting the independence of women in a society that, while becoming more individualistic, proved unable to conceive of women as individuals because "their reproductive role presented a constant reminder of human interdependence" (64, 19). Under this limited view and whatever their potential, pamphlets argue for a kind of sameness, or a return to a better time. They invoke nostalgia, referencing a past when men were stronger and more assertive, and women were womanlier. While not the primary text for this project, Phillip Stubbes's *Anatomie of Abuses* serves as a prime example for this type of nostalgia. Stubbes's mouthpiece Philoponus, in speaking to his interlocutor Spudeus, says,

I have hard my Father, with other wyse Sages affirme, that in his tyme within the compass of foure or five score yeres, when men ... [wore more traditional clothing] ... men were stronger than we, helthfuller, fayrer complectioned, longer lyvinge, and finallye, ten tymes harder than we (E).

Stubbes's reverence for the past and the manlier men contained therein demonstrates not only the importance of clothes in constructing identity in early modern England – on which more later – but also demonstrates why conservatism is often associated with pamphlets. Stubbes sees progress as destructive, both for the individual and, more importantly, for the country. Its people are becoming effeminate, and thus weaker, leading to potential danger for the health of the country.

These types of concerns also animate *Hæc Vir* and its companion pamphlet, *Hic Mulier* or, *The Man-Woman* (1620). *Hic Mulier*, the first of the pair to appear in print, is a diatribe against women who present themselves in masculine clothing, and, further, who act like men. It portrays women as both monstrous in their “mannishness” and overtly feminine, articulated best in its description of crossdressing women as both “halfe fish, half flesh; halfe beast, half monster” while simultaneously accusing them of “being all unbutton'd to entice” (*Hic Mulier* A3). These women are both definitively not-women – everything but women, really – and all too much women. More importantly, however, is the emphasis on their danger to men. Masculine-women are a threat not only in their monstrousness, but in their ability to “entice.” They are frightening in their appearance and yet at the same time hypersexual and attractive.

Not all women are so called ‘masculine-women.’ As a result, the author of *Hic Mulier* is also careful to ensure that their argument is geared towards the “right” people, heightening the satirical nature of the pamphlet. In an attempt to stave off criticism, the author asks and answers a rhetorical question: “Are all women then turn'd Masculine? No, God forbid” (A3). This rhetorical turn echoes the turn to nostalgia in Stubbes's *Anatomie*, indicating that ‘masculine-women’ have made a choice, that not everyone has made that choice, and that there is a possibility to somehow unmake this choice. The satirical elements of *Hic Mulier* are further

highlighted as the author describes ‘masculine-women’ as “man in body by attyre, man in behavior by rude complement, man in nature by aptnesse to anger, man in action by pursuing revenge, man in wearing weapons: And in briefe, so much man in all things that they are neither men, nor women but just good for nothing” (B2). The obvious exaggeration is further emphasized by a preceding description which declares that some women are rich enough “to swim in the excesse of these vanities” (B2). The image created by these passages is of a world turned upside down, with the natural gender order subverted to the whims of these powerful women. Powerful women, women who can and moreover do make choices, are dangerous.

Hic Mulier’s author is obsessed with clothing and its capacity to fabricate identity. The instability of clothing as a marker of identity was well known to early modern writers, particularly anti-theatricalists, who felt that “costume can structurally transform” (Levine 4) people from one gender into another and that “action can shape doer” (William Prynne para. In Levine 13-14). This belief, coupled with popular stories of women transforming into men, drives the argument of *Hic Mulier*. Women becoming more traditionally masculine through dress and action could lead to them literally *becoming* men. *Hic Mulier* closes with a straightforward and earnest appeal to ‘masculine-women,’ imploring them to take on more traditional gender roles. Recasting their tone from the previous hyperbole, the author requests that “every Female-Masculine that by her ill example is guilty of Lust, or Imitation; cast off her deformities” (C3). While perhaps not exactly heartfelt, the pamphleteer’s plea seeks a more conservative morality. Although it also contains subversive elements, *Hic Mulier* fails to give a voice to its titular character. As a result, its potential for subversiveness is much diminished, and its conclusive demand for a return to the *status quo* becomes much more convincing as a genuine expression of belief.

Like its companion pamphlet, *Hæc Vir* is often read as an inherently conservative satire, lampooning ‘womanish-men’ in addition to the ‘masculine-women’ targeted by *Hic Mulier*. *Hæc Vir* is also different from its predecessor in that it consists of a dialogue between its two characters, appropriately named Hic Mulier – after her pamphlet – and Hæc Vir, the titular character. The two characters meet on a road and mistake the gender of the other due to their clothing. Though the conversation begins cordially, it swiftly devolves into an argument wherein the two characters attempt to convince the other of their individual wrongness in their appearance and mannerisms. Hic Mulier is accused of “*Unnaturalnesse*, to forsake the Creation of God” since she wears not only masculine but foreign clothes (*Hæc Vir* A3). Hic Mulier responds that clothing is only assigned by custom, and, anyway, “*custome* is an idiot” (B2). The conversation grows more heated, with Hic Mulier accusing Hæc Vir and the men like him of stealing women’s clothes and hobbies, necessitating that she and women like her take up the more masculine clothing and attitudes (C-C2). Eventually, both characters realize the error of their ways and, convinced by the overall strength of each other’s arguments, they agree to switch clothes and names as the pamphlet ends.

How *Hæc Vir* Endorses Conservative Gender Roles

The ending of the pamphlet, wherein the two characters appear to reaffirm the gender binary has often been used to argue that Hic Mulier’s argument throughout the pamphlet is rendered moot, despite any power that argument might seem to hold. For instance, Linda Woodbridge writes that “Despite the eventual collapse of *Haec-Vir* into orthodoxy, the first half of the dialogue falls very little short of being a flaming manifesto of liberty for women” (148).

For Woodbridge, the pamphlet has reinforced the gender binary, and it cannot help but do so. Examining a passage where Hic Mulier describes herself and other ‘masculine-women’ as “poore weake women” (*Hæc Vir* C2 in Woodbridge 147), Woodbridge suggests that “with a little ingenuity, one might extricate the author from these unfeministral straits. One could argue that the passage is tongue-in-cheek, that the reference to “poore weake women” by a woman sporting a Leaden-hall dagger is transparently ironic [...] But I am very much afraid that the passage was meant literally” (147). In other words, the satire here is strictly the involvement of the *Hæc Vir* type in the ridicule, allowing for the author of *Hæc Vir* to “diagnose” the problem as relational – that both genders must be separate and opposite in relation to each other. They are only legible in their separateness. In the end, “*somebody* has to wear the breeches” (147). Thus, the pamphlet reinforces the gender binary. The ending, which “would not have ended with *Haec Vir*’s proposal, apparently accepted by *Hic-Mulier*, that they exchange clothes, behavior, and Latin pronominal prefixes and live happily ever after” unless the text fundamentally accepted the premise that men and women should be separate, confirms that reinforcement (148). The ending, for Woodbridge, erases all the subversion which may have appeared in the text prior to that ending.

Like Woodbridge, Rachel Warburton reads *Hæc Vir* as reaffirming gender norms during the moments it most seems to undermine them. For instance, even though “*Hic Mulier* discusses the historical and cultural mutability of mourning dress, greeting customs, men’s facial hair and riding sidesaddle” her “defense of social and semiotic instability [...] is undermined by her sartorial nonconformity” (169). Here we see one of *Hic Mulier*’s most eloquent arguments in favor of change and choice rendered moot because she cannot be credible. In these moments when she is speaking, she is not conforming to gender norms. For Warburton, as well as for *Hæc*

Vir, Hic Mulier's failure to conform ensures that anything she says is summarily dismissed. The very instability of clothing as a marker of identity, and specifically gender identity, is one of the primary impulses animating *Hæc Vir's* argument. As a result, because the author's intentions appear to be advocating for "a (re)trenchment of the correct social order" especially through gender roles, the arguments of Hic Mulier, however compelling, are undercut (166). Warburton also directs attention to the conclusion of *Hæc Vir*, which she says, "provides readers with a resolution that involves a return to femininely dressed and obedient women and the assumption of proper masculinity by men" (170).² Here, again, we see that the ending enforces a return to the gender binary. *Hæc Vir* cannot be subversive because everything returns to a sense of normalcy at its close.

Hæc Vir has also been found to be conservative throughout its text, not even waiting until the end to conduct a swift turn away from radicalism. Will Fisher claims that the text is "explicitly concerned with the production and regulation of sexual difference" (107). He points to a passage on hair, noting that Hæc Vir's beard is described as a weapon, "the last line of "defense" against effeminization" (107). Here, the beard manifests the differences between men and women, helping to construct the effeminate Hæc Vir's manhood. It might be the only difference between the two characters, but it is a difference that the pamphlet itself seems to insist on as Woodbridge noted above. Even in its most radical moments, when the differences

² Warburton dismisses Hic Mulier's argument much sooner in the pamphlet, suggesting that Hic Mulier claims "Since, after God's Creation, nothing new can be created even with newly-coined phrases, cross-dressing women are already within the realm of the intelligible, are not subversive" (170). Thus, *Hæc Vir* is unable to supply a gender non-binary reading. Hic Mulier somehow already fits into the gender norms.

between men and women appear to be at their most fraught, *Hæc Vir* reinforces the gender binary, dismissing its specter of subversion precisely as it raises it.

The final stages of the pamphlet, though, still hold the greatest potential to “correct” the radical argument that *Hic Mulier* makes, since it is during that ending that *Hic Mulier* and *Hæc Vir* apparently agree to return to the gender roles of their forebears. Simone Chess writes that “doublecrossdressing plots [narratives in which two characters interact while crossdressed] explore the possibility that gender might be transferable and contingent;” however, “they most frequently end their cross-gender experiment by reinforcing traditional gender norms even as they undermine them” (72). At heart, doublecrossdressing narratives, for all their potential to subvert gender norms, end up reinscribing “the idea that there are only two sexes and two genders” (43). They are conservative in nature since they are relational. A ‘masculine-woman’ is only wrong if there is some kind of ideal man to compare her to. By staging meetings between such characters, doublecrossdressing narratives enhance those characters’ relational aspects. Describing *Hæc Vir*, Chess writes that while

Hic Mulier and *Hæc Vir*’s cross-gender dressing and presentation are perceived as crossdressing and do the queer work of crossdressing in the world of pamphlets[...] [T]he balanced equation of relational gender is articulated in an even more demonstrative manner when gender presentation is fully doublecrossdressed, in texts where not only gendered dress and gendered behavior are exchanged between two characters as they is (sic) in *Hic Mulier* and *Hæc Vir*, but where the two characters are actually doublecrossdressed in an equal but opposite manner (50).

Because *Hic Mulier* and *Hæc Vir* correct the misapprehension of their gender at the outset of the pamphlet, the “queer work” that it can perform is limited. As pamphlet readers, we are forced to reckon with that knowledge immediately. It is clear that Chess believes that *Hæc Vir* has exhausted the ability of pamphlets to represent queerness. As a result, her examination of doublecrossdressing requires a change to a separate genre: that of drama.

(En)gendering Subversive Readings in *Twelfth Night*: A Case Study

In contrast to pamphlets, drama is generally afforded more capacity for gender subversion even when their authors attempt to reinforce gender norms. Chess herself, writing about George Chapman’s *May Day* (1611) insists that “Though each crossdresser is restored to his or her “proper” clothes, their romantic relationship is forever transformed and queered by their experiences of life as another gender” (58). Conspicuously absent from Chess’s analysis is any notion that the play is ultimately conservative, or that it upholds gender norms. Instead, “the final scene [of *May Day*] is so complex that it’s hard to tell if Chapman is even attempting to, let alone succeeding at, restoration of order” (57). *May Day* might not seek to reinforce gender norms at all, due to its complexity, indicating that complexity is a necessary component, for Chess, of subversion. Chess seems to have no problems conceiving of *May Day* as subversive as it acts to change its characters even after they have reverted to their original and “correct” identities. Chess extends a similar capacity to Ben Jonson’s *Epicoene* (1609) when she writes:

Undervalued and over trusted by women, Epicoene is the centerpiece of the play, a female metamorphosed, a potential vindicator for women, a trustworthy gentleman, and, most powerfully and importantly, a holder of secrets. Among these secrets, is the secret of the subversive power of the trafficked object – a power informed by access to locked-away resources, household secrets, and the potential for change and revolution within, not outside, the trafficked position, that is demonstrated by MTF crossdressers (85).

Drama appears uniquely able to subvert, to the extent that the character Epicoene has a certain type of power specifically *because* they crossdress. They can inhabit both worlds seamlessly. Chess finds that “The empathetic mirroring that comes from doublecrossdressing [...] is often contained and redirected by the end of the narrative, at least nominally” and that even single crossdressing narratives “generally [...] end up [...] containing and restricting the radical potential of their disruption of the trafficking system” (42, 73). However, neither *May Day* nor *Epicoene* seem burdened by these expectations in the same way that *Hæc Vir* is. Instead, they are capable of holding two entirely separate meanings at the same time, both containing and liberating simultaneously.

Scholarship of William Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night* (1623), in addition to sharing many of the same concerns of clothing and gender performativity with *Hæc Vir*, follows a similar trajectory to the one which I am attempting to sketch out for *Hæc Vir*, and, as a result, makes an especially apt case study for examination. Stephen Greenblatt, in his influential essay “Fiction and Friction,” while eventually positing an argument for containment of gender subversion in *Twelfth Night*, does seek to open up new meanings in contrast to C.L. Barber. Barber suggests that “a temporary, playful reversal of sexual roles can renew the meaning of the normal relation,”

asserting that “it is when the normal is secure that playful aberration is benign” (C.L. Barber qtd. in Greenblatt 72). For Barber, the gender subversion is not only erased by the conventional marriages at the close of *Twelfth Night*, gender norms are confirmed by the failed attempt at subversion. This construction of *Twelfth Night* matches the constructions of *Hæc Vir* that I highlighted above: the ending – which reinforces the gender binary – obviates any subversiveness in the remaining text, leaving it powerless.

Although Greenblatt ultimately argues that *Twelfth Night* contains its subversive elements through its conventional marriages, he does acknowledge that the play blurs the distinctions between men and women. In a direct refutation of Barber, he “suggest[s] that *Twelfth Night* may not finally bring home to us the fundamental distinction between men and women; not only may the distinction be blurred, but the home to which it is supposed to be brought may seem less securely ours, less cozy and familiar, than we have come to expect” (72). Shakespeare in *Twelfth Night* spends much of his time troubling gender, especially in the case of Viola, which I examine further below using Casey Charles’s work as a template. Greenblatt, too, highlights Viola, suggesting that “[Viola’s] transformation [back into women’s clothing] is not enacted – it remains “high fantastical” – and the only authentic transformation that the Elizabethan audience could anticipate when the play was done was the metamorphosis of Viola back into a boy” (92). Male performers played women, rendering the performativity of gender on stage for the run time of the play.

The knowledge that Viola’s role was performed by a boy almost certainly would have registered to the audience at some level throughout *Twelfth Night*. Michael Shapiro tells us that “play-boys [enacting] female roles” would have “raised questions about the stability of established gender roles” (37). Early modern English drama, then, is inherently subversive, in

that it cannot help but explore gender performativity through its very nature, echoing fears of anti-theatricalists that, despite their arguments to the contrary, there might not be a true essence pointing at identity after all. When the audience sees Viola on the stage, they see Viola the woman as well as the young man performing her. Her later performance of a young man provides another layer of performativity. Nonetheless, for Greenblatt, “The apparently random accidents [in *Twelfth Night*] are at once zany deflections of direction, intention, and identity and comically predictable drives toward a resolution no less conventional than the one for which Orsino had longed” (70). Sebastian’s substitution for Viola is zany, sure, but it is necessary for the conventions of both comedy, which necessitate a marriage, and early modern England, which in this instance demand a return to the normative heterosexual pairings. Greenblatt’s *Twelfth Night* ends conservatively.

Casey Charles, in turn, reads *Twelfth Night* as a play concerned with how crossdressing shapes and subverts gender identity, while at the same time resisting a neat return to norms. This subversion, as noted above, can be found in theater more broadly, as the fact that boys and young men perform women lends them an androgyny which demonstrates that “performance shows gender to be a part playable by any sex” (Charles 128). In other words, gender is constructed, and the Renaissance theater more or less proves that construction by its very existence as a cross-dressing institution: boys played women. Shakespeare truly explores gender though, through the character of Viola whose “gender ambiguity [...] sets the stage for the representation of a plethora of desires: homoerotic attraction between Orsino and Cesario, heterosexual attraction between Orsino and Viola, and lesbian attraction between Viola and Olivia” (132-133). These attractions appear variously homo- and heteroerotic depending on how much the audience and the characters are aware of at any point. The key, though, is that “Cesario plays his part so well

that Olivia immediately catches the plague of lovesickness” (131). Viola, the young woman, is so effective at performing Cesario, the young man, that Olivia falls in love with the performance.

Viola’s performance is far more complicated for Casey, though. I suggested above that the character of Viola had two layers of performativity: that of the young man performing a female Viola, and that of the female Viola performing a young man. Casey acknowledges additional layers of performance as he points out that, when wooing Olivia, Viola is representing Orsino. Thus, in the moments she is wooing Olivia, Viola is wearing four layers of identity. She is, all at once, ostensibly a young man underneath all of that clothing (who presumably performs young manhood outside of the theater), that young man as Viola, Viola as Cesario, and Cesario as Orsino’s proxy (Charles 131). If we borrow from Will Fisher’s *Materializing Gender* the concept that “men and boys were quite literally two distinct genders” in the Renaissance, then Viola is performing gender at an astonishing rate, as she is a crossdressing man, a crossdressing woman, and a crossdressing boy in addition to representing a boy, a woman, and a man respectively (87). *Twelfth Night* is thus, in this reading, highly subversive. Moreover, this subversion is not safely ended by the conclusion, in which Viola remains Cesario as Orsino quite nearly demands, saying “Cesario, come / For so you shall be while you are a man” (*Twelfth Night* 5.1. 408-9). The concluding image presented is of Orsino walking of stage with Cesario, and not Viola. Nothing has been resolved, and the ambiguity remains.

Early modern concepts of gender were not just unstable when they were performed on the stage. They were also unstable in the real world. Despite all of their posturing and biblical quotes, early modern polemicists were specifically concerned with that instability. Michael Shapiro writes that “women found cross-dressing were [...] labeled as prostitutes for [...] the misuse of sartorial gender markers to accomplish their own private ends” (17). Clothing is

inherently fungible, leaving room for outside interpretation. Leaving people open to interpretation of others provides space for incorrect conclusions, hence the fears of the early modern writers above. Moreover, “clothing is the catalyst for the woman’s change of sex. The “conceit” of wearing masculine clothing “induce[s]” and “strengthen[s]” her imagination, and this quite literally transforms her into a man” (Fisher 12). The stakes for clothing were enormously high. Clothes were quite easily changeable, and if this change could stir the imagination, if imagination had the power to enact material, physical change in early modern England, then simply changing clothing could alter the bodies and attitudes of the people who wore them (14). *Hæc Vir* and works like it attempt to contain these fears within them, but instead make them explicit and expose them for the nonsense that they are.

Reading *Hæc Vir* as a Closet Drama

The pamphlet *Hæc Vir* provides multiple occasions for a reading as a drama, starting with the characters’ introductions to each other. After she is mistaken for a knight, Hic Mulier responds “Is she mad? or doth shee mocke mee?” before misgendering *Hæc Vir* (*Hæc Vir* A3). His response is nearly a mirror of hers: “Pittie of patience, what doth hee behold in mee, to take me for a woman?” (A3). These two lines are not spoken directly to each other, but rather as asides. Put more plainly, they are spoken to an unseen audience, which both characters and author seem aware of, at least for a moment, before turning their attention to the matter at hand. These lines also have the effect of giving the characters a certain level of interiority. With these few words, *Hæc Vir* and Hic Mulier are established as not only caricatures but characters, beings with agency that both represent the concepts presented by their names and the individuals who

have been given those names. It becomes possible to imagine that those characters have lives outside of their representation within these pages of the pamphlet *Hæc Vir*. I am not asserting that other pamphlets lack characters, plot, or dialogue.³ Instead, my claim here is that given its tendency toward intimacy and interiority, *Hæc Vir* is uniquely positioned among pamphlets to also be read as a closet drama.

In part because of significant similarities to scholarship surrounding *Twelfth Night*, and in part due to shared concerns addressed within its pages, *Hæc Vir* should be read as a closet drama. Closet dramas are plays which are meant to be read. More importantly for this discussion, closet dramas, with their intimate settings and discussions, represent an opportunity to think through questions of identity and how it is constructed, particularly as it is constructed by women. Closet drama operates as a subspecies of drama, and much of what has been covered above regarding gender subversion in drama more broadly also applies to closet drama. Alexandra Bennett, writing about Elizabeth Cary's *The Tragedy of Mariam* (1613) notes that drama, "with [its] implicit articulations of the conditions of performance, highlight[s] the discrepancies between inner subjectiveness (those of the players) and the outer manifestations (the words and gestures they enact)" (307). By giving us glimpses into the characters' inner lives, by emphasizing interiority both in setting and character development, closet drama takes that delineation between inner and outer self even further, placing it squarely within the character. Bennett uses the character of Mariam to underscore this distinction between inner and outer self, writing that "The

³ See Phillip Stubbes's *Anatomic of Abuses* or the anonymously authored *Dialogue upon dialogue, or, L'Estrange*, no papist nor Jesuite, but the dog Towzer shewed in a short and plain dialogue betwixt Philo-Anglicus and Philo-L'Estrange.

possibility of a deliberate discrepancy between her inner and outer selves is always in the background of her actions” (300). Mariam, despite appearing in a play not meant to be performed on stage, has constructed an outward persona (actions, clothing) that may not match her inner self. Part of her ability to do so rests on the nature of closet drama, where intimate settings are alternated with public performances, thus giving Cary the ability to more clearly distinguish the two for audiences. We can see the difference between inner and outer more clearly specifically because of closet drama.

In addition to its status as a pamphlet, *Hæc Vir* shares many of the common characteristics of closet dramas. Marta Straznicky tells us that closet dramas “share a number of formal features [... which are ...] an introductory argument outlining the context and action of the play, a list of speakers, division into acts, lengthy sententious speeches typographically represented in continuous text columns, and a chorus serving to prompt and guide interpretation” (12). *Hæc Vir* lists its two interlocutors on the first page of dialogue, even going so far as to call them “The Speakers” (A3). The first section of the dialogue outlines the action of the play, as *Hæc Vir* asks *Hic Mulier* to “let me take a full survey, both of thee, and all they dependants,” followed by *Hic Mulier*’s demand to “give mee leave to answere for my self” (A3). The stakes and action set out, both characters engage in “sententious speeches” as they accuse each other of improper dress and action according to their gender. This failing is a moral one, as *Hæc Vir*’s references to “*Baseness, Unnaturalnesse, Shamelesnesse, [and] Foolishnesse*” make clear (A3). While perhaps not quite so explicit as act and scene numbers, or a voice labeled “chorus,” *Hæc Vir*’s explanatory side notes help to divide the pamphlet up into easily identifiable parts, as when *Hic Mulier* engages in “A defence of change” (B). These notes also play the role of the chorus as

they gesture towards how we are meant to interpret the pamphlet and the arguments contained therein.

Addressing the similarities between *Hæc Vir* and closet dramas is not to assert a one-to-one relationship, and I do not mean to suggest that the two are precisely analogous. Rather, I mean to suggest that *Hæc Vir* deliberately invites these comparisons with closet drama, especially as it relates to performativity. In fact, it is precisely the ways in which *Hæc Vir* differs from closet drama which heighten the tension between the two genres. While acknowledging its invitation to be read as a closet drama, it is also important to recognize inherent differences. Bennett suggests that “closet drama is fundamentally an elite drama, impossible to dissociate from a cultural literacy that is in one sense part of the public domain” (5). *Hæc Vir* is decidedly not meant for the elites – it was sold in a public place, not circulated among a select group of nobles. Nonetheless, both pamphlets and closet drama share a preoccupation with engaging in “political discourse” (15). Even closet drama did not only “confine itself to the closed spaces in which elite literary activities occurred” (16). Instead, both seek to converse with the outside world, whether in a public or private setting. That *Hæc Vir* does not perfectly match up with closet dramas is a strength. It shows its author to be aware of multiple conventions, using the one best suited to their purposes.

Hæc Vir is greatly concerned with the construction of identity, both as it relates to *Hic Mulier* and to women more broadly. After *Hæc Vir* accuses her of being a “Slave to Novelty,” *Hic Mulier* responds that “Bondage or Slavery, is a restraint from those actions, which the minde (of it owne accord) doth most willingly desire” (*Hæc Vir* A3, B). True slavery is a lack of ability to make choices, and moreover, a lack of change. All nature changes, so why should “poore woman [have] such a fixed Starre” (B)? Instead, women should be allowed to construct

themselves as they wish without restrictive oversight, and women should be allowed to alter those choices, since every other creature can. *Hic Mulier* finally declares that “I might instance in a thousand things that onely Custome and not Reason hath approved. To conclude, *Custome* is an Idiot” (B2). *Hic Mulier* argues that she should be allowed to determine for herself how she is defined. This argument does not indicate in any way a return to a conservative gender binary. Instead, *Hic Mulier* suggests that the mere fact of having been dressed alternatively has inextricably altered the two characters.

The ending of the pamphlet, where the two characters agree to exchange clothes and pseudo-Latin prefixes, has consistently been read as reinforcing a gender binary – a return to the *status quo*. In other words, traditional readings of the pamphlet have tended to emphasize the ways in which it contains its subversive implications. In order to counter that containment and reclaim *Hæc Vir*'s subversiveness, it is necessary to imagine the characters as part of a drama, where they have selves both before and after the pamphlet, and where they have to react as if on a stage. *Hæc Vir* concludes the pamphlet by saying “we will heere change our attires, as wee have chang'd our mindes, and with our attires, our names” (*Hæc Vir* C2). This declaration seems to indicate both agreement and containment, representing the same call to action found in *Hic Mulier*. Indeed, as referenced, it is usually read that way, because *Hæc Vir* is read as a pamphlet, and the subversive power of pamphlets is ostensibly limited. However, the implications of *Hæc Vir* as a drama are vastly different and offer new readings.

It is here, at the end of the pamphlet where the practicalities of drama become the particularly salient. As in *Twelfth Night*, we neither see nor obtain a description of the characters changing their clothing to more appropriately resemble their new agreement. Chess, arguing that the characters should be conceptualized allegorically as representations only of the ideas

represented by their names, imagines that “They seem to be sharing a set amount of clothing between them, as if there is only one ruff, one set of earrings, one fan. Therefore, with every female gender signifier that Hæc Vir takes, Hic Mulier is made masculine to an equal degree” (47). In this conception of the characters, it is not difficult to imagine the clothing almost magically transporting from one to the other as easily as the characters change their names, and supposedly, their minds. However, in drama, the practicalities of the situation make such an exchange difficult. Therefore, the pamphlet closes with Hæc Vir and Hic Mulier changing names without yet swapping clothing, leading to another formulation of gender and gender expression, where their names match their supposed “true” gender, while their clothing continues to “lie.” Further, we have already seen that the characters express an exteriority that seems to belie their inner selves – and the entire pamphlet is concerned with the very idea that the outside should represent some inner essence. It does not necessarily conclude, then, that their representation at the end of the pamphlet manifests their “true” selves somehow more than the representation at the beginning of the pamphlet.

It is clear that for the author of *Hæc Vir* in particular, the clothes that Hic Mulier wears shape the perceptions of her femininity – or lack thereof – more than the other ways in which she performs femininity. After Hic Mulier has given her response to Hæc Vir’s accusations, he tells her that “notwithstanding your elaborate pleas for freedome, your severe condemnation of custome, your fayre promise of civill actions, and your temperate avoiding of excesse, whereby you would seem to hugge and imbrace discretion,” until she changes the clothing that she wears, until she alters her appearance, “you shall never lose the title of *Basenesse*, *Unnaturalnes*, *Shamlessnesse*, and *Foolishnesse*” (*Hæc Vir* B4). Hæc Vir not only completely dismisses Hic Mulier’s arguments by choosing not to address them on their merits. He also makes it apparent

that Hic Mulier's presentation of her outer body so overshadows her womanly virtues' "avoiding of excess" and "imbrace [of] discretion" as to render them meaningless. Further, he is suggesting that the body underlying those clothes does not matter. Hic Mulier's first impression of clothing is all that matters for Hæc Vir. Her body is not the location of an essence which makes gender.

The author of *Hæc Vir*, then, suggests that Hic Mulier's body is both separate from, and subordinate to, her clothing. This separation is fascinating, given that, according to Fisher, "the physical aspects of masculinity were thoroughly imbricated with [...] more performative ones" (106). Masculinity is a combination of the body and actions. Femininity, given that it is only legible in relation to masculinity, is constructed likewise. Yet Hæc Vir dismisses all of the "physical aspects" and what might be termed "feminine actions" in favor of prosthetic indicators. Hæc Vir separates these two indications of femininity – Hic Mulier is seen acting in a feminine manner, extolling the virtues of womanhood, with 'masculine-women' wearing clothing that is "warne, thrifty and wholesome" (*Hæc Vir* B3). At the same time, that clothing leads to perceptions of her as a man. Perhaps more importantly, she has short hair, which Fisher indicates Renaissance writers believed to "be [a] "natural" [attribute] of masculinity" (131). This hair is a type of the prosthetic signifier of gender noted earlier. Much like clothing, hair can be removed or altered at will. The key distinction is that hair was "natural." It was supposed in this way to be more reliable, meaning its prosthetic qualities caused considerable anxiety. The author's decision to subordinate Hic Mulier's body to more prosthetic and alterable identity markers, rather than relieving the anxiety surrounding gender performativity, instead calls more attention to it, serving to further subvert gender norms. The type of body beneath the clothing is immaterial to gender.

The names of the two characters further demonstrate the difficulty of “correctly” categorizing them. Those names, both of which are composed of “false Latine” are themselves a representation of the two characters’ appearances” (*Hæc Vir* A3). *Hæc Vir*, the titular ‘womanish-man’ and his counterpart *Hic Mulier*, the ‘man-woman,’ both have elements of each sex in their names, hinting at a type of indeterminate body beneath. The two characters defy description without recourse to what is supposed to be their opposite, since determining the opposite of a ‘man-woman’ or a ‘womanish-man’ is difficult to impossible. If, as the pamphlet argues, there are only two genders, then the only thing that might be opposite both of them simultaneously is no gender at all. *Hic Mulier* says that “according to your own Inference, even by the Lawes of Nature, by the rules of Religion, and the Customes of all civill Nations, it is necessary there be a distinct and special difference between Man and Woman, both in their habit and behaviours” (C2). Men and women, in *Hæc Vir*’s logic, are meant to be distinguishable. And yet, even at the close of the pamphlet, when the two characters have allegedly agreed to change their names, the pamphlet still notes that the speaker is *Hæc Vir*. Further, the two characters are easily able to manipulate these supposedly natural markers sufficiently well to fool others, even when that is not their intention. These external factors demonstrate not only the difficulty in fixing gender, but through careful analysis, allow for that difficulty to play out on stage and page.

Hæc Vir mimics the instability of gender represented on the early modern stage through its characters’ costuming. In early modern England, all actors were biologically male, with the characters presenting as women played by young men or boys. According to Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass, this transvestite casting means that “The actor is both boy and woman, and he/she embodies the fact that sexual fixations are not the product of any categorical fixity of

gender. Indeed, all attempts to fix gender are necessarily prosthetic: that is, they suggest the attempt to supply an imagined deficiency” (217). Gender is not marked by the body, but by the clothes and attachments placed on the body. Nonetheless, underneath all that clothing, the boy is still a boy. A boy actor playing a woman, then, is two in one – he represents simultaneously both himself as a boy and the character as a woman. The twoness inherent in this conception is not limited to boy actors: the men playing other men are also both themselves and the character that they are playing. This two-as-one is also found at the beginning of *Hæc Vir* as the characters are described as a ‘man-woman’ and a ‘womanish-man,’ which mirrors the he/she construction used by Jones and Stallybrass.

Hæc Vir’s body also contains fraught and alterable and seemingly “natural” gender markers. *Hic Mulier* gleefully points to the transience of such markers when she says, “were it not for that little fantastical sharp pointed dagger that hangs at your chin, & the crosse hilt which guards your upper lip, hardly would there be any difference between the fayre Mistris & the foolish Servant” (*Hæc Vir* C). *Hæc Vir* is only recognizable as a man because he has some hair on his face. His hair, however, is perceived as an unreliable marker of his identity as a man. Fisher notes that “since facial hair could be removed, grown, or even at times transferred, this meant that when masculinity was materialized through this part, it would have been understood as being prosthetic” (128). So, facial hair is not nearly as strong a marker as, say, attitudes and activities. Nonetheless, it is here used as the sole representation of *Hæc Vir*’s masculinity, making it the most important gender marker. *Hic Mulier*’s continues to emphasize its instability as she points out that men “pluck and tugge every thing into forme of the newest received fashion” (*Hæc Vir* C2). In part a response to *Hæc Vir*’s accusation that women like *Hic Mulier* are “slave[s] to novelty,” *Hic Mulier* also demonstrates the sheer precarity of *Hæc Vir*’s status as

a man (A3). While he still has his own facial hair, his ability to continue to represent manhood is subject to the whims of fashion just as much as hers might be. In fact, the only way he can continue to perform manhood, given his clothing, appearance, and general attitude, is to assert that manhood himself. At the beginning of the pamphlet, he corrects Hic Mulier's misgendering, saying "But fair *Knight*, the truth is I am a Man," thus declaring his own ability to present his gender as he wishes (A3). In this way, the pamphlet allows its reader the same license to disregard outside perceptions and claim their own power to self-define. Further, the pamphlet asks its audience to do the same thing that they might do while watching a drama play out on stage: accept what they are told above what their eyes discern.

Like Hæc Vir, Hic Mulier is also able to correct misperceptions of her identity. She responds to Hæc Vir's misinterpretation with "I would have you understand I am a Woman" (*Hæc Vir* A3). Hic Mulier's self-definition demonstrates that, at least in some instances, early modern England allowed for a certain kind of self-defining. Identity is often imposed or constructed on top of people by the institutions and mores surrounding them, regardless of their own preferences. Nevertheless, both Hæc Vir and Hic Mulier are allowed to self-identify their genders, and further, expect to be believed. This type of identity construction, says Judith Butler, "becomes a plausible concept only in the context of a social world that supports and enables that exercise of agency" (7). Butler is writing in the context of gender self-expression and self-determination in a contemporary non-binary system. I do not mean to suggest that the early modern thinkers in England "supported," for Butler's purposes, free expression. Rather, I wish to assert that both characters are allowed this power to self-define in the fictional world in the pamphlet, and that this allowance suggests at least some nominal level of social support for such expression, even if it is ultimately spuriously dismissed in *Hæc Vir*. On some level, such self-

determination, such declaration must be at least tacitly supported; if not, then it would not matter what the characters declared. They would be thought liars since all external markers indicated the exact opposite of their words – hence the humorous nature of the previous misgendering. Instead, we are left with a world where self-expression is, if not encouraged, then tolerated.

Hic Mulier spends much of her time arguing for just such self-expression, especially when it comes to clothing and how it might represent – or explicitly not represent – gender. She says that everything that lives makes choices, that they have “libertie to chuse their foode, liberty to delight in their food, and liberty to feed and grow fat with their food. The Birds have the ayre to fly in, the waters to bathe in, and the earth to feed on” (*Hæc Vir* B). Beasts have plenty of choices but are forced to remain in the same form which God has given them. They are unable to ornament or change their appearances. Men are special in that “both these and all things else, to alter, frame and fashion, according to his will and delight shall rule him” (B). While it might be argued that God’s will should also rule them – at least during the Renaissance – men in Hic Mulier’s construction can and should change what they look like on the outside, but only if they choose to. Some others may choose to wear more traditional clothing. Both are perfectly acceptable, given that they are choices made by individuals.

Hic Mulier grants women the capacity for individual choice as well, sensing that their subordinate status necessitates their separation from the greater category of “Man.” Hic Mulier, in asserting that women should also be allowed this choice, asks if “only woman, excellent woman; so much better in that she is something purer, be onely deprived of this benefit” (B)? While this question appears contradictory in that it seems to assert that women have an essential difference from men – their purity – it is more important to note that this construction separates women out from humanity more broadly. Hic Mulier uses the noun “man” before, giving the

impression that she is referencing “mankind,” a common usage. However, by deliberately distancing men from women, she emphasizes that it is Hæc Vir who seeks to distinguish men from women. It is, after all, Hæc Vir who calls so-called ‘masculine women’ “all Hell, all Damnation” (A3). Hell and Damnation are neither positive descriptors, nor human ones. Hic Mulier is thus working within the boundaries set up by Hæc Vir in order to make her appeal more persuasive to his sensibilities. It is a deliberate rhetorical strategy to subvert the framework that he has set up.

Hic Mulier’s success in arguing despite these constraints is demonstrated through their competing responses to each other. After Hæc Vir’s second response to Hic Mulier, she says that he as “raysd mine eielids up, but you have not cleane taken away the filme that covers the sight,” while Hæc Vir later notes that Hic Mulier has “both rais’d mine eye-lids, [and] cleared my sight” (C, C2). Hic Mulier is left seeing everything through a filter, while Hæc Vir now sees everything clearly, and yet, crucially, it is the character Hic Mulier’s argument which is ultimately more persuasive. While, as noted above, Chess supposes that the pamphlet is ultimately conservative and reinforces a gender binary, I would suggest that the metaphorical film on Hic Mulier’s eyes acts as an *unnatural* prosthetic. If the patriarchal system is the natural system ordained by God, if, by Hæc Vir’s logic, “it is necessary there be a distinct and special difference between Man and Woman,” then Hæc Vir’s inability to completely remove the film demonstrates at least the partial failure of that system (C2). There is no indication that Hic Mulier has accepted the value system inherent in those words. Instead, when she says them, she demonstrates that she can work within Hæc Vir’s own reasoning to remove blame from herself and onto him. The end result requires her to accept no responsibility for her actions, and further, requires her to take no actions herself, at least that the audience sees. Rather, she acquiesces to nothing, and takes no on-

stage/pamphlet moves towards acceptance, critically leaving the ending open to interpretation.

There is no simple conclusion to the “problem” of ‘masculine-women.’ In fact, it is not clear that there is a problem at all.

In *Hæc Vir*, Hic Mulier works hard to assert not only her right to present herself as she likes, but also her equality with Hæc Vir. Hæc Vir gives her leave to argue against him, acceding to her demands. After Hæc Vir demands that she “stand, and let me take a full survey, both of thee, and all thy dependants,” Hic Mulier responds “Doe freely: and when thou has dawbed me over [...] then give mee leave to answere for my self” (A3). She not only seizes the authority to respond to his accusations, but she also follows with her own assessment: “I must intreat you to sit as many minutes, that I may likewise take your picture” (A3). In addition to taking a masculine role, Hic Mulier is asserting her equality. She may have to take a somewhat literal “dressing down,” but so does Hæc Vir. She is not alone in her supposed sins. Such a reading contributes to the view of the pamphlet as a satire, where “with every female gender signifier that Hæc Vir takes, Hic Mulier is made masculine to an equal degree” (Chess 47). It is funny to envision, and proposes a simple solution to the problem presented, wrapping everything neatly in a bow when finished. However, the equality represented by Hic Mulier’s power to answer her accusations in kind should not be so easily dismissed. Even the close of the narrative is predicated on Hic Mulier’s accession to the deal, which we do not witness, either in action or in

words. Instead, *Hæc Vir* simply announces that “wee have chang’d our mindes” without any evidence that *Hic Mulier* has changed her mind at all (C2).⁴

Conclusion

Hæc Vir is correctly classified as a pamphlet. It attempts to argue for a conservative return to a previous morality. Although *Hic Mulier* seeks to assert her own message of the world, urging a rupture with the past and a separation from tradition, *Hæc Vir* ultimately ignores this argument, instead imposing his own version of reality back onto *Hic Mulier*. In this way, *Hæc Vir* reinforces gender norms, enforcing a gender binary. Nonetheless, it is also and additionally a closet drama. *Hic Mulier* argues from a destabilized gender for a further destabilized future. While not explicitly granted through the course of the pamphlet, her conception is also not explicitly denied, even when the characters seem to agree at the ending. That ending, so often used to render *Hic Mulier*’s persuasive eloquence worthless, is actually the crux of the whole argument, containing as it does a host of unreconciled contradictions. The newly named *Hæc Mulier* and *Hic Vir* have not yet changed clothing, meaning they are continuing, at least for a while longer, to subvert gender expectations.

These contradictions, so central to drama in general, and closet drama in particular, are what ultimately help to properly categorize *Hæc Vir*. Its genre hybridity matches its gender

⁴ This female silence is a common feature of early modern comedy. Often, the leading male performer will assert an ending (see, for instance, *Measure for Measure* or *Much Ado About Nothing*), and the female lead is not given any more leave to speak.

hybridity. Because it embodies the established instability of gender, established not only through current readings of drama like *Twelfth Night*, but through the contemporary fears of anti-theatricalists, the pamphlet is best read as a drama, even and especially when it seems to call for upholding gender norms. It is, in fact, precisely at those moments of greatest conservative triumph that the pamphlet is at its most subversive. By reading *Hæc Vir* as a drama, these types of subversive readings are not only made available but unavoidable. Ultimately, then, *Hæc Vir* becomes both conservative and liberatory all at the same time. If, perhaps, other genres become open to this type of cross-genre reading, then they, too, can begin to contain within them more potential.

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