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"Or whatever you be": Crossdressing, Sex, and Gender Labour in John Lyly's Gallathea

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Article abstract

This article explores sociologist Jane Ward's gender and sexuality theory: the notion of "gender labour," in which a cisgender (not crossdressed or trans) partner participates in co-creating his or her partner's queer gender. While work on gender labour thus far has focused on contemporary subjects, this article demonstrates the ways in which the concept can be generatively applied to an early modern context. The concept is pushed to its extremes in John Lyly's Gallathea, in which the two genderqueer crossdressers, Gallathea and Phillida, each thinking that the other is male, create and enact romantic love scenes that involve gender play and a co-created divestment from biological sex.

"Or whatever you be": Crossdressing, Sex, and Gender Labour in John Lyly's *Gallathea*[1]

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This article explores sociologist Jane Ward's gender and sexuality theory: the notion of "gender labour," in which a cisgender (not crossdressed or trans) partner participates in co-creating his or her partner's queer gender. While work on gender labour thus far has focused on contemporary subjects, this article demonstrates the ways in which the concept can be generatively applied to an early modern context. The concept is pushed to its extremes in John Lyly's* Gallathea*, in which the two genderqueer crossdressers, Gallathea and Phillida, each thinking that the other is male, create and enact romantic love scenes that involve gender play and a co-created divestment from biological sex.*

Cet article examine la théorie du sexe et du genre de la sociologue Jane Ward, en particulier la notion de « négociation du genre » dans laquelle des partenaires cissexuel (ni travesti, ni trans) contribuent à créer l'identité homosexuelle de l'un et de l'autre. Alors que la recherche sur cette « négociation du genre » s'est surtout penchée sur des questions contemporaines, cet article montre comment cette notion peut être appliquée à des contextes relevant des débuts de la modernité. Cette notion est poussée à l'extrême limite dans le Gallathea *de John Lyly, pièce dans laquelle deux personnages travestis et homosexuels, Gallathea et Phillida, qui pensent que leur vis-à-vis est un autre homme, créent et réalisent des scènes d'amour entraînant des jeux de genre et une révélation commune de leur sexe biologique.*

This essay uses representations of sex acts between crossdressed[2] characters on the early modern English stage to explore a new concept in gender

1. Many thanks to Amyrose McCue Gill, Vanessa McCarthy, and the participants in the "Sex Acts" panels at RSA 2013. Thanks also to members of the Wayne State University Group for Early Modern Studies.

2. I prefer the compound word "crossdress" over "cross-dress" for several reasons: while cross-dress is more common in academic publications, crossdress seems to be the more common use within online and in-person crossdressing communities. The compound term mirrors other compounds in gender and sexuality discourses, including "cisgender" and "transgender"; like those terms, crossdresser indicates a category of queer identity, more than simply modifying "-dressing" with the idea of crossing binary gender. I further use crossdresser instead of the more dated and clinical "transvestite," which carries a history of medicalization and stigma and places less emphasis on the potential for positive and prideful action and agency in the act of crossdressing.

and sexuality theory: the notion of "gender labour," in which a cisgender[3] partner (not crossdressed or trans*[4]) participates in co-creating his or her partner's queer gender. While work on gender labour thus far has been situated primarily in the social sciences and has focused on contemporary subjects, this essay demonstrates the ways in which the concept can be generatively applied to literary analysis, to fictional characters, and to an early modern context. For example, gender labour is pushed to its extremes in John Lyly's *Gallathea*, in which two female-to-male crossdressers, Gallathea and Phyllida, each thinking (perhaps) that the other is male, create and enact romantic love scenes that involve gender play and a co-created divestment from biological sex. While readings of this undoubtedly queer play have primarily focused on how it can be read for signs of female-female or male-male same sex attraction (particularly in relation to the bodies of the boy actors of St. Paul's Cathedral), I offer an alternative possibility: that the play is less about any one fixed sexual identity or attraction, and more about the partnered project of creating and maintaining gender. I propose that gender labour not only enables sex acts but also becomes itself an intimate and sexualized undertaking. At the same time, if gender labour is a sex act, it is also a social, familial, and interpersonal one. Making visible the gender labour in this play reveals a radical and exciting early modern capacity for models of partnered investment in queer gender.

John Lyly's *Gallathea* has long been of interest to scholars of early modern gender and sexuality, but has also evaded neat categorizations. Written no later than 1585 and no earlier than 1583, most likely in early 1584,[5] the play,

3. "Cisgender" is a term used to describe individuals whose personal gender identity is aligned with their gender as assigned at birth and/or their anatomical sex; cisgender individuals are also sometimes called gender normative. The term is used in relation to transgender identities, and seeks to normalize trans* identification by similarly marking so-called normative genders. I use cisgender not only to clarify which characters perform queer genders and which don't, but also to emphasize that all genders are performed, and that there is no natural or default gender linked to anatomical sex or biology.

4. Trans* is an umbrella term that refers to all of the identities within the gender identity spectrum, including but not limited to transgender, transsexual, and genderqueer identities. The asterisk is borrowed from computer search term use, and indicates that the abbreviation stands in for the full range of possible identities included under that umbrella.

5. See Anne Begor Lancashire, introduction to *Gallathea and Midas*, ed. Anne Begor Lancashire (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1969), i–xi. All subsequent quotations from Lyly's *Gallathea* refer to this edition.

a pastoral romance, was part of the repertoire of the St. Paul's Boys' Acting Company,[6] and it was performed at least once at court for Elizabeth I (hence its focus, however complicated, on virginity and chastity). The play appeared in a 1595 quarto based on an authorial manuscript, and was reprinted with the addition of two songs in Edward Blount's 1632 collection of Lyly's court comedies. In the primary plot of *Gallathea*, the sea god Neptune demands a sacrifice of a beautiful virgin from the town of Lincolnshire every five years.[7] As the time of the sacrifice approaches, two fathers (each believing his own daughter to be the most beautiful and therefore the most likely to be selected for sacrifice) separately decide to disguise their daughters, Gallathea and Phyllida, as boys, and to have them hide in the woods to escape detection and death.[8] In the woods, Gallathea and Phyllida meet and fall in love while in disguise, each claiming to believe that the other is a boy and, simultaneously, often seeming to suspect that the boy they love is perhaps actually a maid. Because the actors performing as Gallathea and Phyllida were boys, the staged effect was of boys, dressed as girls, dressed as boys, in love. While the play does not stage an explicit sexual encounter between the two lovers, it nevertheless suggests an offstage sex act when the two exit to an offstage grove together; though unscripted and unstaged, this moment is a crux in the play and perhaps the ideal test of gender labour: whatever happens offstage—and whatever we imagine might have been revealed by those potentially sexual acts, including, possibly, their sexed bodies—the lovers do not allow it to disrupt their mutual gender performance.

6. See Reavley Gair, *The Children of Pauls: The Story of a Theatre Company, 1553–1604* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

7. As Lancashire points out in her introduction, the setting of the play is "simultaneously England, past and present, and a timeless, legendary land filled with gods, nymphs, and monsters" (xviii). See also Phyllis Rackin, "Androgyny, Mimesis, and the Marriage of the Boy Heroine on the English Renaissance Stage," *PMLA* 102.1(1987): 31. Rackin compares Lyly's pastoral setting to Jonson's realistic London settings in *Epicoene*, suggesting, "For the girls and the gods in *Gallathea*, gender is arbitrary, unreal, and reversible because the vantage point transcends the social to include the realm of fantastic imagination and spirit where androgyny is an image of human self-completion rather than an aberrant social category" (31).

8. Significantly, Neptune is never fooled by these disguises, so there turns out to be no actual benefit to the crossdressing device besides the love affair that it enables. See also Kent Cartwright, "The Confusions of *Gallathea*: John Lyly as Popular Dramatist," *Comparative Drama* 32.2 (1998): 207–39. Cartwright argues that, while Neptune is not fooled by the crossdressing plot, the predestined sacrifice is nevertheless prevented by that plot device, which deprives Neptune of a virgin worthy of sacrifice (211).

Though the crossdressing plot is loosely based on classical sources, including Ovid's "Iphis and Ianthe,"[9] and on Italian neoclassical comedies,[10] this particular type of double-FTM-crossdressing plot is invented by Lyly; as Shapiro notes, Lyly's use of the "cross-gender disguise is rare for the mid-1580s and does not recur in his later works."[11] In the play's bizarre conclusion, Gallathea's and Phyllida's true identities are revealed, as is their love relationship. Venus, judging their love to be true, declares that she can turn one of the lovers into a man, so that they may marry, meeting the requirements of the comedy genre. The play never specifies which of the two will become male, but Gallathea and Phyllida nevertheless agree to the change. Interestingly, the play avoids staging the heterosexual marriage promised in the conclusion, just as it refuses to stage the most intimate scenes—in terms of their potential to depict both romance *and* sexual acts—between the two lovers in the forest. Thus, the play has been read as lesbian, showing love between two female characters

9. The story of Iphis and Ianthe can be found in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, 9.666–797. In the legend, Iphis is a female child raised as a boy by his mother because his father had sworn to kill any girl child. As a young man, Iphis loves and becomes betrothed to Ianthe, but their love is impossible because of Iphis's sex. To resolve the issue, the god Isis changes Iphis into a biological male in time for his wedding. Lyly complicates this plot by adding the element of the virgin sacrifice and by doubling the number of crossdressed characters, thus evading the easy heterosexual conclusion of the original tale.

10. Michael Shapiro traces double-crossed plots in which a single work contains both MTF and FTM crossdressers, which he calls "Lelia motifs," to a genre of sixteenth-century Italian secular vernacular neoclassical comedies, *commedia erudite*. In Bibbiena's *Calandria* (1513), a male and female pair of twins disguise themselves as one another; the double-crossdressing plot is revisited in the popular and influential play Gl'Ingannati (anonymous, 1531), from whose FTM crossdressed heroine Shapiro takes the name "Lelia" for the double-crossdressing motif, which was performed in Cambridge in the 1540s. Michael Shapiro, *Gender in Play on the Shakespearean Stage: Boy Heroines and Female Pages* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 218–19.

11. Shapiro, appendix B. See also Christian M. Billing, *Masculinity, Corporality and the English Stage* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2009). On Lyly's adaptation of his sources, Billing writes, "Far from attempting to represent the female body in any significant way, Lyly modifies his source so that both 'girls' can be disguised as boys. He uses a double FTM disguise plot that is entirely his own invention in order to allow boy-actors more clearly to present the voice, costume, and gender-specific motions of the biological entities that they really were" (62). This analysis, grounded in Billing's argument that the play should be read as about male-male homoerotics and the specific erotics of the boy actor, is limiting in its insistence that there is any one essential and authentic male voice or motion.

through the often-ineffective veil of their male disguises;[12] gay, showing love between two boy actors, dressed as boys, through the often ineffective veil of the fact that they are meant to be playing women;[13] straight, since the resolution appears to seek heterosexual closure; and queer, because that heterosexual closure is elusive, unstaged, and cannot undo the broader erotic work of the play. This complexity and unfixity at the heart of the play also makes it an ideal space to explore the work that Gallathea and Phyllida undertake in creating their own gendered experiences and identities; in turn, adding gender labour to the mix allows for a reading that is less dependent on the play's resolution (or lack thereof), or on the biological aspects of sex in *Gallathea*, as it is on the performance and practice of gendered meaning-making between lovers.

Gender labour

In her 2010 article "Gender Labor: Transmen, Femmes, and Collective Work of Transgression," Jane Ward examines a set of femme/FTM[14] sexual relationships

12. See Denise A. Wallen, *Constructions of Female Homoeroticism in Early Modern Drama* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Theodora Jankowski, *Pure Resistance: Queer Virginity in Early Modern Drama* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000); and Valerie Traub, *The Renaissance of Lesbianism in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). On female homonormativity, see Laurie Shannon, "Renaissance Homonormativity and Elizabethan Comic Likeness," *Modern Philology* 98.2 (November, 2000): 183–210.

13. See Billings, who writes that, "given what is actually presented to theatrical spectators, Lyly merely alludes to mixed-sex "normality" and spectators are left with an interpretive choice between two distinctly homoerotic phenomena: the male-oriented homoerotics of watching boy-actors dressed as boys, wooing each other (and perhaps their audiences) or the female-oriented homoerotics of watching girl characters do the same" (60).

14. Here Ward is referring to relationships between cisgender (gender identity matching assigned sex) females with feminine gender presentation and female-to-male (FTM) trans* partners. Ward notes that "while this article has focused on the gender labours femmes do to produce trans masculinity, a similar article could have explored the opposite relationship, as femininity requires very particular labours of masculinity to sustain it" (Ward, 252). Though *Gallathea* does not (and, due to historical specificity, cannot) represent a femme/FTM relationship, Ward's theory of gender labour nevertheless applies. While Ward's articulation of gender labour has been tremendously helpful to my thinking about queer relationality in early modern texts, it does create a dynamic where trans* genders are supported through cis genders, excluding cis-femme gender presentation from that trans* umbrella. Where Ward focuses on making visible the femme labour that often goes unacknowledged in FTM/femme relationships, she focuses less on the pleasures and benefits that some femmes might find in that co-creation; finally, as

as a way of understanding gender as its own form of labour and, further, to illustrate the labours provided by intimate partners to constitute gender subjectivity (237).[15] Because her research focuses in particular on relationships between femme-identified cisgender females in relationships with transgender males, Ward is especially interested in theorizing the feminized labours that "nurture new genders (or new gender formations) into public and private being" (237). In contrast to Butler's theorization of *self*-generated, often involuntary, acts of subject formation and performativity of gender,[16] Ward suggests that gender labour is

> the affective and bodily efforts invested in *giving gender* to others, or actively suspending self-focus in the service of helping others achieve the varied forms of self recognition they long for. Gender labor is the work of bolstering someone's gender authenticity, but it is also the work of co-producing someone's gender irony, transgression, or exceptionality. (237)

In other words, the cisgender femme partners of Ward's study not only bolster their partner's gender identities through surface reinforcements (like using chosen pronouns or names), but also through the more complex work of actually participating in the production of the partner's gender (through sexual acts and roles, through shared gender dynamics, through the private work of thinking and feeling one's sexual orientation in connection with a partner's gender identity). Ward describes the work of gender labour taking place in the realms of intimacy, homeliness, caring, and witnessing; she defines three forms of gender labour in which femme partners co-produce transmasculinity: "the labor of being 'the girl,' the labor of forgetting, and the labor of alliance" (242).

Being "the girl" is perhaps the most apparent way that femme partners of trans* masculine individuals bolster their partners' genders, one in which a partner develops or exaggerates her own gender performance to supplement and enhance her partner's. By playing "the girl" in appearance, domestic roles,

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she acknowledges, her study does not consider the dynamics of gender labour for FTMS who are single, have male or non-femme partners, etc, or on MTFs and their relationships.

15. Jane Ward, "Gender Labor: Transmen, Femmes, and Collective Work of Transgression," *Sexualities* 13.2 (2010): 236–54.

16. See Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990) and *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

and social situations, the femme partner creates space for her partner to be "the boy," even when that performance is ironic or queer.[17] The labour of forgetting is an internal and external process, one that might bolster the trans* person's identity, but also a private process of belief and understanding for the cisgender partner; this type of gender labour involves choosing not to know or linger on the trans* person's full gender history. Importantly, the gender labour of forgetting is not about denial or misinformation, but rather about manipulating memory to make space for queer and inclusive narratives. In *The Queer Art of Failure*, J. Halberstam makes a broader argument about the queerness of willful forgetting, writing that "the contingency of queer relations, their uncertainty, irregularity, and even perversity, disregards the so-called natural bonds between memory and futurity, and in the process makes an implicit argument for forgetfulness."[18] In the gendered labour of forgetting, the femme partner knows and understands that her partner is trans*, but actively forgets it, chooses to not know it, in order to co-produce his masculinity. And forgetting can be passive, too, when a partner's real commitment to and belief in her partner's gender make his gender history a non-issue in their day-to-day romantic, sexual, and domestic lives. Finally, the labour of alliance is one in which both partners, together, create the genders and gendered dynamics that work for them in public and in private. Together, they pick pronouns, develop behaviour patterns, and build language and family structures that reflect the truth of their mutually gendered identities. Of course, any of the FTM subjects of Ward's study can constitute his gender alone, or without a partner. But her work shows the ways that partners participate in, and deepen, the development and deployment of queer gender through large and small labours.

These acts of gender labour are overlooked not only in the contemporary trans/femme relationships that Ward examines, but also in the gender work of characters like Gallathea and Phyllida. My discussion of *Gallathea* will focus on the latter two, which are less gender-role specific and therefore more available

17. Of course, there are many trans* people not in relationships with femmes, many femmes not interested in "being 'the girl,'" and many queer relationships that do not approximate heterosexual roles and patterns. Still, this is one of the forms of labour that Ward observes in her study, and one that I have anecdotally seen at work frequently in my own queer community.

18. Judith Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 74.

to the play's double-MTFTM[19] crossdressing device. The labour of forgetting, of the strange epistemological stance of knowing-unknowing or refusing-to-remember, is especially helpful in understanding how and why Gallathea and Phyllida can be at once committed to each other's masculine performance and suspicious that the other is female. Similarly, the labour of alliance explains and situates their mimetic commitment to one another despite and outside of their biological sex. Even the remaining type of labour, of "being 'the girl,'" haunts the play through the unresolved conclusion that leaves audiences wondering who will take up the labour of masculinity and femininity when the two lovers, who have thus far expressed only queer gender together, are meant to resolve their love in a heterosexual marriage.

Other contemporary sociological scholarship following Ward continues to have striking connections to *Gallathea*. For example, in her 2012 article "Normative Resistance and Inventive Pragmatism: Negotiating Structure and Agency in Transgender Families," Carla Pfeffer also writes about cisfemale partners of trans* males.[20] She asks, "Are relationships between trans people and their partners socially assimilationist and normative or counternormative? […] How might choosing to 'pass' as unremarkably heterosexual hold both pragmatic and limiting potentials for these couples in terms of mediating social identity group membership and accessing valuable social institutions and resources?" (577). These questions get at the core of the discourses that surround the queerness of Gallathea and Phyllida's relationship in *Gallathea*. Are they counternormative and queer (and, if so, what sort of queer)? Or are they ultimately assimilationist, eventually seeking a heterosexual solution to both their desire and their romantic connection? Pfeffer's question about the choice to "pass" is a return to Ward's notion of gender labour, in which "passing," when it is the goal, is very much an intentional, mutually constituted project. And this is the crux of *Gallathea*, too: are the lovers ever "passing" for male (and/or, are the boy actors ever "passing" for female or FTM), either with each other or

19. The boy actors (male) perform female characters (female) who crossdress as boys (male); hence, male-to-female-to-male, or MTFTM crossdressing is at the centre of the play. Because the play's conclusion offers the possibility that one of the crossdressers will be transformed from biologically female to biologically male, while the other will stay female, an argument might be made that this is actually an MTFTMTF/M plot.

20. See Carla A. Pfeffer, "Normative Resistance and Inventive Pragmatism: Negotiating Structure and Agency in Transgender Families," *Gender & Society* 26.4 (2012): 574–602.

in the broader world of the play? If they are, or if they seem to be, their success comes from their mutual labours of forgetting and alliance, two of Ward's key forms of gender labour. And if they are not passing, or are choosing not to pass, then are they (or Lyly) intentionally or unintentionally resisting the assimilationist heteronormative drive of the play?

Finally, recent trans* scholarship has helped to clarify the stakes of gender labour and passing both in life and, by extension, in literary representation. For example, Schilt and Westbrook[21] demonstrate the ways that queer genders undermine heterosexuality: "heterosexuality requires a binary sex system, as it is predicated on the seemingly natural attraction between two types of bodies defined as opposites. The taken-for-granted expectation that heterosexuality and gender identity follow from genitalia produces heteronormativity—even though in most social interactions genitals are not actually visible" (443). If and when trans* people "pass" in their desired social genders, their appearance may be (incorrectly) taken as evidence of their biological or genital sex. But sexual encounters can "disrupt the taken-for-granted assumptions that people who look like women have vaginas and people who look like men have penises," and, through this disruption, "illuminate the processes and mechanisms behind the everyday unfolding of not just doing gender but also doing heteronormativity" (444). The genital question, or, more broadly, the question of biological and anatomical sex, is one that lurks in the literal margins and off-stage areas of *Gallathea*, because of Phyllida and Gallathea's repeated romantic dalliances that take place outside the view of the reader or theatrical audience. One of the great unknowns—and I want to suggest that this unknowing is best described as the active gender labour of forgetting—in the play is whether the two engage in sexual activity, and, if so, whether the types of sexual activity might reveal any anatomical or biological information between them. Theodora Jankowski insists, for example, that the fact that the two continue to claim to be unsure if the other is male or female even after their off-stage dalliance is a sign that the text holds an alternative to masculinist and genital-focused sexuality by offering "the possibility of a kind of desire and an economy of pleasure that is focused on the lovers' entire selves rather than that small portion located between their

21. Kristen Schilt and Laurel Westbrook, "Doing Gender, Doing Heteronormativity: 'Gender Normals,' Transgender People, and the Social Maintenance of Heterosexuality," *Gender & Society* 23.4 (August 2009): 440–64.

legs."[22] But where for Jankowski this seems to mean, in part, making room for same-sex desire and sexual practices between women, I instead argue that the new economy of pleasure is grounded in the play's suggestion that it might be possible—even optimal—to know *and* not know about a lover's body; to use the gender labour of forgetting to make gender more than anatomical, and the labour of alliance to mutually sustain and enjoy unknowing and androgyny.

Gender labour in *Gallathea*

In explaining the theory of gender labour above, I briefly outline some of the ways that gender labour might be used to understand and complicate readings of *Gallathea*. In a play that frustratingly keeps sex acts and sex changes off the stage, the labour and mutuality of co-producing and sustaining gender presentation is nevertheless front and centre. The first crossdressing character in the play, Gallathea, appears already in her boy's attire (in fact, the audience will never see her dressed in women's clothes, requiring a labour on our parts to know, understand, and remember that the character is female, even though she is played by a boy and dressed as a boy). In the opening act of *Gallathea*, the titular character asks her father "why you have thus disguised me" (1.1.8). Here, though already passing for male, Gallathea seems detached from her masculine presentation and sees it as something her father has done to her, not as something she is producing on her own. Similarly, when her future love Phyllida initially appears (in female clothes), Gallathea is at first resistant to her father Melebeus's plan. Of her men's apparel, she says, "It will neither become my body nor my mind" (1.3.16). Here, while her literal meaning is that the men's clothes will not suit her, the dialogue also foreshadows the play's conclusion, in which one of the two lovers will have the chance to *become* male in body and, presumably, in mind.[23] The idea that her clothing can not, at this point in

22. Jankowski, 263.

23. Cartwright outlines the way that small aspects of the play have been used to guess at which lover is potentially transformed at the play's conclusion. He writes: "This line, along with the fact that Phillida [sic] appears at first in women's clothes while Gallathea never does, has been taken to suggest that Gallathea is the one whose sex would, hypothetically be changed by Venus after the play's conclusion. According to some, the play *does* hint tantalizingly at its choice, in that Gallathea's concern for honor (1.1) and Phillida's for clothing (1.3) predict which virgin will become a man and which will remain a

the play, become her matches Gallathea's sense that her gender presentation is exclusively external and unrelated to her sex or identity.

From the start, Phyllida associates crossdressing with sexual activity, telling her father that, in boy's clothes, "I must keep company with boys, and commit follies unseemly for my sex, or keep company with girls and be more wanton than becometh me" (1.3.18–20). Even here, the text resists a single directionality for Phyllida's crossdressed sexuality; she may commit unseemly follies with boys, *or* she may become wanton with girls. Androgyny (and boyishness) remains polymorphous in terms of desire and sexual activity. At the same time, Phyllida shows an initial sense of herself as essentially female, regardless of her clothing change. She warns Melebeus, "I shall be ashamed of my long hose and short coat and so unwarily blab out something by blushing at everything" (1.3.20–22), implying that, because of her innate modesty and tendency to blush, both traditionally feminine qualities, her very body will betray her disguise (and, at the same time, her blushing potentially reveals her body's heat and her erotic desire).

The associative connection between femininity and blushing becomes a first bridge of connection between the two crossdressers when Gallathea reenters the play in act 2; still dressed as a boy, but now separated from her father, Gallathea worries, just as Phyllida did, that her blushing will "blab." Her first lines of soliloquy mirror Phyllida's: "Blush, Gallathea, that must frame thy affection fit for thy habit, and therefore be thought immodest because thou art unfortunate" (2.1.1–3). The two crossdressers model their sameness in their shared blushes and concern for modesty, which must be abandoned in their new clothes. Each works to frame her affection to fit her habit, a confusing notion in which affection can mean both behaviour and fondness, and habit can mean both their attire and their old way of being. Thus, Lyly again resists a single reading of the two crossdressers' relationship: do they develop affections (fondnesses) because of their habits (clothing), desiring one another's masculinity, or their habits (ways of being), desiring one another's female bodies or female socialization? Or is their courtship actually motivated by their development of male affections (behaviours) that sexualize their actions and make them wanton, as Phyllida suspected they might? In making the decision to hide

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woman. It is in her male disguise, furthermore, that Gallathea first greets the audience; Phillida enters in her maiden's weeds—stage images that may function proleptically" (222).

their blushes and suit their clothes, Gallathea and Phyllida take their first steps toward accepting their temporary masculine identities, a step that enables their queer courtship.

Initially both Gallathea and Phyllida are resistant to their fathers' cross-dressing plans and uncomfortable in their disguises: crossdressed alone in the woods, each essentializes her true femaleness, which she fears will reveal her through the physical display of blushing or the emotional limitations of modesty. But, as soon as they catch sight of one another, as soon as there are two crossdressers in relationship to one another, their attitudes toward and performances of their genders shift. Together, mutually, they begin the queer gender play that is at the core of *Gallathea*. When Gallathea first spots Phyllida, in the first moment where both are dressed as males on the stage at the same time, s/he says, "But whist, here cometh a lad. I will learn of him how to behave myself" (2.1.11–12). At least at first, Gallathea takes an uncomplicated view of Phyllida's gender, reading her/him as male. Interestingly, though, she thinks that she can borrow from "his" masculinity—that Phyllida is a boy who can help her, Gallathea, to become better at being a boy herself. Thus, even before the two speak, the play establishes the idea of gender labour; that one "boy" can hope that another can teach "him" how to wear and navigate the trappings of manhood.

Phyllida takes a similar tack when she sees Gallathea approaching. She tells herself, "It is a pretty boy and fair. He might well have been a woman; but because he is not, I am glad I am, for now under the color of my coat I shall decipher the follies of their kind" (2.1.19–22). These rich lines demonstrate the interconnectivity of the two lover's genders, at least in Phyllida's mind. First, she recognizes that Gallathea appears to be a boy, and she sustains that belief even as she observes what a pretty boy he is. Further, she chooses to do what Ward would call the labour of forgetting, by overlooking Gallathea's suspicious prettiness and accepting her as male, because that work allows her to "be 'the girl.'" Her admiration for Gallathea, and her work to see her as male despite possible evidence to the contrary, allow her to be glad to be (secretly) female. At the same time, her attraction to Gallathea does not inspire her to reveal herself; instead, she wants to go even deeper into disguise, so that "under cover of her coat" she might learn about boys and masculinity by watching Gallathea. Thus, Phyllida's approach to Gallathea demonstrates the labour of alliance as well as forgetting; she understands that she will be able to "do" her gender performance better if

she does it in proximity to Gallathea. In considering that Gallathea might be female and crossdressed just as she herself is, and then by denying that idea and suggesting instead that Gallathea has something to teach her about maleness and the follies of boys, Phyllida introduces the idea that she can participate in supporting or dismantling someone else's gender presentation. She does notice Gallathea's suspiciously familiar beauty, and she does seem to suspect, here and later, that Gallathea might be female—this option is especially available to Phyllida, as she herself is engaged in MTF crossdressing, so she certainly knows it's a possibility in the world of the play. But, instead of pursuing this option, she engages in the gender labour of forgetting: she shelves her concern and instead buttresses Gallathea's performance by reading her, intentionally, as a real boy with the capacity to teach her real-boy things.

This labour of forgetting occurs in an equal but opposite way in the mimetic moment where Gallathea similarly wonders at Phyllida's beauty, suspicious in a boy: "I know not how it cometh to pass, but yonder boy is in mine eye too beautiful. I pray the gods the ladies think him not their dear" (2.1.44–46).[24] In the first line of the thought, Gallathea brings up the possibility that Phyllida is not passing fully for male, but in the very next line labours to forget that idea, using a male pronoun and assuming, aggressively, that the nymphs of the woods might be in love with Phyllida-as-boy, thus bolstering both Phyllida's performed gender and presumed heterosexuality even as it reminds readers of the crossdressing plot. Even this early in the play, Lyly plays with the queerness of both crossdressers' genders and highlights their androgynous presentation; not for the last time, the lovers notice and comment upon one another's femininity. And yet, they simultaneously invest in maintaining belief in the disguises by Phyllida's planning to learn about masculinity by observing Gallathea and by Gallathea's projecting male heterosexuality and an imagined female gaze upon Phyllida. While it is possible that Gallathea and Phyllida are each genuinely fooled by the other's disguise, and that these references to clues about their essential femininity are meant to be moments of dramatic irony for an audience who knows the crossdressing plot, the language of their mutual perception is nevertheless doing the work of constituting, validating, and bolstering their crossdressed gender presentations. It is worth noting in this scene as well that

24. On mimesis, homonormativity, and the lack of differentiation between the lovers, see Rackin and Shannon.

the lovers' gender labour has an extended effect on the audience, amplifying the dramatic irony of the disguise plot and reminding us, repetitively, that what we see is not what it seems: even as the lovers practise forgetting, they remind us of their work.

If their initial impressions of one another are grounded primarily in the gender labour of forgetting, the actual dialogue between Gallathea and Phyllida demonstrates the labour of alliance in full effect. Though the text is deliberately evasive as to whether or not either lover knows the truth of the other's sex, it nevertheless shows them playing together with the queerness of their genders and their relationship. This playful application of alliance is best demonstrated in a long and flirtatious discussion between the lovers in 3.2:

> P: It is a pity that Nature framed you not a woman, having a face so fair, so lovely a countenance, so modest a behavior.
> G: There is a tree in Tylos whose nuts have shells like fire, and, being cracked, the kernel is but water.
> P: What a toy it is to tell me of that tree, being nothing to the purpose! I say tis pity you are not a woman.
> G: I would not wish to be a woman, unless it were because thou art a man.
> P: Nay, I do not wish thee to be a woman, for then I should not love thee, for I have sworn never to love a woman.
> P: It were a shame, if a maiden should be a suitor (a thing hated in that sex), that thou shouldst deny to be her servant.
> G: If it be a shame in me, it can be no commendation in you, for yourself is of that mind.
> P: Suppose I were a virgin (I blush in supposing myself one), and that under the habit of a boy were the person of a maid: if I should utter my affection with sighs, manifest my sweet love by salt tears, and prove my loyalty unspotted and my griefs intolerable, would not then that fair face pity this true heart?
> G: Admit that I were as you would have me suppose that you are, and that I should with entreaties, prayers, oaths, bribes, and whatever can be invented in love, desire your favor, would not yield?
> P: Tush, you come in with "admit."
> G: And you with "suppose."

P (aside): What doubtful speeches be these! I fear me he is as I am, a maiden.
G (aside): What dread riseth in my mind! I fear the boy to be as I am, a maiden.
P (aside): Tush, it cannot be; his voice shows the contrary.
G (aside): Yet I do not think it, for he would then have blushed. (3.2.1–34)

Here, the two exchange riddles, jokes, and challenges, openly playing with the idea of gender and the limits of passing. Interestingly, they agree to a model of sexuality that is heterosexually oriented ("I would not wish to be a woman, unless it were because thou art a man"), but then queer it through a series of erotic hypotheticals and double entendre. In fact, at different points in the dialogue, each lover speaks from more than one gender identity; they are increasing their fluency in switching between male and female voices throughout their flirtation. The series of asides that interrupt their banter demonstrates the laborious part of their alliance. They each suspect, with fear and dread, that the other is female, and that their love, about which they are joking, will therefore be impossible.[25] Their next thoughts, though, as if in unison, find some way to forget that queer notion in favour of an ongoing co-production of mutual suspension of disbelief and sustaining of perception as primary evidence. In order for this kind of extended flirtation to work, there must be a co-creation of gender roles and receptions. The lovers together insist on sustaining their mutual masculine identities, even when they might know more than they let on, and they do so with a mimetic alliance that allows each to feel protected in her presentation and in the terms they have set for their relationship. This mutually created dynamic is celebrated in the charged moment in which the lovers head off-stage together for a private visit in a grove. Inviting Gallathea, Phyllida says, "Come, let us into the grove and make much of one another that cannot tell what to think of one another" (3.2.55–56). Here, the very language supports the idea that Phyllida and Gallathea are creating something together—making much of one another—through their mutually-agreed-upon refusal to reveal their own, or each other's, sex. In this seductive line, ambiguity is part of the erotics, not-telling part of the courtship. In this way, they demonstrate their alliance in one another's gender performance; their willingness to suspend

25. On the impossibility (and possibility) of female same-sex desire in early modern texts, see Traub.

disbelief, accept information at face value, and back up that support with action. Because the text denies the audience a view of any intimate or sexual acts that might take place in the grove, gender labour takes the place of the sex act; the mutuality of the couple's interactions, their alliance and intentional forgetfulness, become the only visual evidence of their romantic connection.

The two take the co-creation of gender-roles in their relationship further when Phyllida suggests, "Seeing we are both boys, and both lovers, that our affection may have some show, and seem as it were love, let me call thee mistress" (4.4.15–17). Here, the two begin to create their own language and terms for their relationship, dependent on the agreed-upon terms of their alliance (we are both boys, and both lovers). Their term of choice, "mistress," also allows them to test the limits of their shared labour of forgetfulness. To call Gallathea "mistress" but also insist that Gallathea is passing for a boy is possible, but it requires sustained effort to hold both ideas simultaneously. Gallathea pushes the idea still further, replying, "I accept that name, for divers before have call'd me mistress" (4.4.18). How can this not be a confession? How can she ask Phyllida to integrate this information with their carefully achieved agreement that they are both passing as male? The answer comes in a vague pun, "there lie the mistress," which plays on the homophone of "mistress" and "mysteries" (4.4.20), and also on "lie," which can be read in the sexual sense or in terms of dishonesty or secret-keeping.[26] The lovers' ability to play, linguistically and personally, with their names and histories demonstrates the success of their gender labour. They appear happy, at least for this scene, to sustain anatomical mystery in favour of role play and agreement. About this scene, Kent Cartwright refers to the lovers' enjoyment in "deferring certainty" and "willed uncertainty," capturing the idea of knowing unknowing and demonstrating the pleasure and potential in such an act (219). Just as the couples in Ward's study rely on the labours of forgetting and alliance to pass in the world, so too do Gallathea and Phyllida. But where Ward focuses on the often-overlooked labour of the cisgender female partners in each relationship and on their disproportionate and invisible labour to support their partners' presentation, *Gallathea* offers a model of more mutual labour, in which both partners have gender presentations in need of preservation *and* both participate in the work of sustaining, maintaining, and giving veracity

26. Thanks to an anonymous reader of this article for the suggestion of the pun on "lie," and also for making the connection between "lie" in this passage and later references to chastity as "honesty" elsewhere in the play.

to each other's gender presentations. This mutuality makes sense because of their mutual disguises, but it also reflects the broader balance and equality in their relationship. Both queer in gender, both queer in desire, both ambivalent, the two mutually constitute the queer dynamic of their interactions.

Of course, the utopian queer mutuality that Phyllida and Gallathea co-construct throughout the play is challenged in the final "reveal scene" in act 5, scene 3. When their fathers reveal their daughters' biological sexes to Neptune and Venus, the two daughter lovers each lament (with continued mimetic equality) the other's sex:

> G: Unfortunate Gallathea, if this be Phyllida!
> P: Accursed Phyllida, if that be Gallathea!
> G: And wast thou all this while enamored of Phyllida, that sweet Phyllida?
> P: And couldst thou dote upon the face of a maiden, thyself being one, on the face of fair Gallathea? (5.3.113–18)

Here, their total denial and disavowal seems at odds with the gender labour that they display elsewhere in the play. Each expresses disbelief that she might have loved another woman, even as she has been playing and hinting at that throughout the play. When it is first challenged, then, it seems that their gender labour is limited only to their private play in the forest (witnessed only by Cupid, Diana, and Diana's attendants), and will not stand up to social and public pressure. Interestingly, both fixate on the impossibility not of loving a woman, but of loving a woman *as* a woman. In this sense, they have come full circle from their initial discomfort in boys' clothes, to the point where Phyllida regrets herself being female, if she is to love another female. In this moment, it is easy to read their previous alliance of mutually constituted ambiguous masculinity more as a kind of flirtatious role play than as a serious labour of creating, maintaining, and supporting gender presentation in the world.[27] Yet, despite this deflating moment of heteronormative defeat between the lovers,

27. I have written elsewhere about queer heterosexuality and the kinky sexual play that comes when the cisgender partner knows about a crossdressed lover's queer gender, understands the distinction between his biological sex and his gender presentation, and is specifically attracted to that queer alignment. I think that something different is at work, though, in these moments of gender labour, which are less about the erotic enjoyment of gender complexity and more about the day-to-day work of producing and maintaining gender.

Venus supports their relationship and suggests that there is an honesty and authenticity to the love that they have built despite—and, indeed, dependent upon—their crossdressed gender presentations. Venus adjudicates their love and announces, "I like well and allow it. They shall both be possessed of their wishes, for never shall it be said that Nature or Fortune shall overthrow love and faith. Is your love unspotted, begun with truth, continued with constancy, and not to be altered till death?" (5.3.134–38).

By focusing on the couple's love and faith (key components in their gender labour, which enabled their work at forgetting and alliance), Venus emphasizes the core values that motivate the lovers' relationship but that do not depend on stable gender roles or on anatomical sex. When she addresses Gallathea and Phyllida directly, she asks them about the purity, honesty, and constancy of their love. Most striking here is her emphasis on honesty. Though their entire relationship hinges on major omissions and intentional or accidental oversights, both lovers can swear, honestly, that their relationship was "begun with truth." This sort of truth is the essence of the labour of forgetting, in which one partner makes active decisions to not know something about the other. Though this sort of refusal-to-know could be seen as dishonest, the terms of the play demonstrate how, if it is generated from mutuality and love, choosing not to know can be both honest and a sign of faith. Even as the couple withheld information about their sexes, they also built an honest foundation for a queer relationship on its own terms, and so, at the end of the play, Venus seeks to reward that labour.

Laurie Shannon describes the conclusion of *Gallathea*, in which Venus ultimately announces that she intends to turn one of the two lovers into a man, as "the most elaborate and thorough consent process in any play I know," because it involves "clear, spoken agreement from three divinities, two fathers, and two lovers" (206). The copiousness of the consent and the complexity of its establishment, which includes debating points that range from the impossibility of sex change (from Diana) to the risk that such a change will bring to familial inheritance (Tityrus), is in keeping with the theme of co-production that runs through the play. Phyllida and Gallathea's consent in particular is once again mimetic, such that the two agreements together form one legal whole: Phyllida says, "I am content, so I may embrace Gallathea," and Gallathea responds, "I wish it, so I may enjoy Phyllida" (5.3.148–49). Where only moments before they were cursing each other's female names, they now embrace them in their

oath, happy to sign up for this marital resolution no matter how the mechanics take place. Here once again, both anatomical sex and sex acts are at the edge of the text, hinted at in the terms "embrace" and "enjoy." Though the lovers claim that they will happily undergo this change in one of their bodies in order to embrace and enjoy one another, there is nothing explicitly heterosexual about those two acts and no physical reason that the lovers would have to be male and female to do those things; their agreement, therefore, seems to be more about the social aspects of creating a publicly sanctioned relationship than about any rearranging of the intimate details of their romantic partnership.

In *Gallathea*'s elusive and ambiguous conclusion, Venus announces, "Neither of them shall know whose lot it shall be till they come to the church door. One shall be; doth it suffice?" (5.3.173–75). Queer scholarship of the play has focused on Venus's plan here: her refusal to reveal which lover will be made male.[28] Further, scholarship has emphasized Lyly's choice to leave the transformation and wedding uncompleted, allowing it to happen or not happen in the imagination of the audience and readers, but never giving us a view of the couple as man and wife. But these discussions often overlook the couple's last words in the body of the play, which serve as their final, and perhaps best, moment of mutual co-creation and shared gender labour. In a scene crowded with characters, voices, and opinions, the lovers respond to the ambiguity of Venus's offer by speaking directly and intimately to one another. Phyllida asks, "And satisfy us both, doth it not, Gallathea?" and her lover replies, "Yes, Phyllida" (5.3.176–77). Observed by the gods and by their entire village, Gallathea and Phyllida make a mutual decision to adapt to whatever sex or gender they end up with. With a goal of mutual satisfaction grounded in consent and agreement, and built on their foundation of crossdressed gender labour, the two are ready to accept whatever future is in store for them (including, but by no means limited to, heterosexual marriage).

Gender labour and sex change

One of the interesting and productive outcomes of applying the theory of gender labour to *Gallathea* is the effect it has on reframing questions of sex and

28. Christopher Wixson playfully summarizes the questions commonly asked at the play's conclusion: "[…] are these girls-as-boys in love? In lust? Who gets changed into a boy? Is this lesbian sexuality?" (243). See Christopher Wixson, "Cross-dressing and John Lyly's *Gallathea*," *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900* 41.2 (2001): 241–56.

gender in early modern literary and dramatic representation. For example, early modernists have long demonstrated evidence of Thomas Laqueur's description of a Galenic "one-sex" model—in which biological sex, though not necessarily gender, is fluid and without necessary distinctions between male and female—in plays from this period, despite the fact there is also evidence that the one-sex model was already less accepted as early as the sixteenth century, or that it existed simultaneously with other models.[29] Laqueur himself situates the turn from a one-sex to a two-sex model as occurring in the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries, though that change has since been noted to occur even earlier; interestingly, current medical and social models for talking about both sex and gender are now returning to a more spectrum-oriented model.[30] Certainly, the queerness of Gallathea and Phyllida's presentation in *Gallathea*, the relative ease with which they pass from female to male, and the dramatic irony of boy actors' male bodies undergoing all of those transformations on stage demonstrate the polymorphousness of gender, and with it, sex, in the play. Similarly, the play's potential to be simultaneously or variously read as female-same-sex, male-same-sex, and heterosexual indicates a kind of slipperiness around both anatomical sex and sexual preference and practice. And yet, the threat of a sex-change in the play's ambiguous conclusion undermines the sexual fluidity demonstrated elsewhere and suggests that there may be a more binary view of biological sex at work in the play, however impossible it is to stage.

Examining the conclusion through the lens of gender labour allows a third model for understanding the conclusion, in which the sex change actually *is* made as soon as the lovers agree to it; their partnered gender labour throughout the play has amply demonstrated their ability to co-construct their own genders and their gender dynamic as a couple. In giving their consent to Venus and agreeing to a heterosexual loophole that allows for their romance beyond

29. For larger arguments about how the one-sex model of understanding the sexed body was already out of favour by the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, earlier than scholars previously understood it based on Laqueur's arguments, see Donald Beecher, "Concerning Sex Changes: The Cultural Significance of a Renaissance Medical Polemic," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 36.4 (Winter, 2005): 991–1016, and Helen King, *The One Sex Body on Trial: The Classical and Early Modern Evidence* (New York: Ashgate, 2013).

30. Consider, for example, increasing awareness and understanding of intersex conditions, both hormonal and chromosomal, as evidenced in recent media discussions about Olympic athletes; in the realm of sexuality, note the rise of broad and flexible identity categories like pansexuality, meant to include attraction toward genders of all kinds.

the privacy of the forest, they seem to be volunteering to continue their labour indefinitely, choosing that one of them can play the boy as long as the other is willing to join him in the work of forgetting, alliance, and playing the girl to be his match. This reading does not resolve the question of whether the play and its audience believe in the malleability of anatomical sex, nor whether they are convinced by the unconventional route to marital heterosexuality. But it does offer an option that de-centres the troubling un-sex-change and replaces it with the promise that, whatever happens and however it turns out, the couple will work it out through mutual labour and alliance.

At the conclusion of her essay, Ward argues that:

> Focusing on gender labor draws attention to the collective work that produces and sustains gender. Though we already know that genders exist inside an interdependent gender system, little attention has been given to the laborious quality of reproducing other people's genders in daily life, and we remain without a clear mapping of the training, skills, duties, and specific efforts that various genders require. (251)

In *Gallathea*, at least, there is ample evidence of this kind of collective work surrounding the production of genders, especially queer or complicated ones. From the gods to the sub-plot comedic characters, every member of the play's community weighs in on, evaluates, or consents to some aspect of Gallathea and Phyllida's original transformation, their sustained gender passing, their romance, or their marriage plans. The audience, too, is implicated in the production of their gender, participating in our own experience of willful unknowing, suspension of disbelief, and grappling with the unstable conclusion and its meanings. But most of all, the two lovers do some of the mapping that Ward is asking for in her essay, demonstrating in their specific choices and actions the way that gender labour can enable queer romance and love. In the play's epilogue, which she presents still wearing boy's clothes, Gallathea addresses ladies and encourages them to yield to love and to Venus. Among her praises for Venus, she says that Venus is capable of "working things impossible in your sex and tempering hardest hearts like softest wool" (Epilogue, 4–5). Here, Gallathea literally means that Venus can create impossible transformations in women, including transformations of the heart (and, possibly but not certainly, transformations in anatomical sex). But, through the lens of gender labour,

these lines draw attention to the literal idea of *working* impossible things and *tempering* the heart; although the idea behind this concluding line is that Venus has tremendous power, the images that Lyly uses to make that point are grounded in meticulous, often difficult, and repetitive labour. Spoken by a boy playing a girl dressed as a boy in love with a girl dressed as a boy, this line balances the unbelievable conclusion of the play with the sustaining work that leads up to it. Miracles in love may be possible, but they remain grounded in collective labour.