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# My Lord Lackbeard: Enfranchisement and expressions of beardlessness in Shakespeare's canon from 1594 to 1601

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My Lord Lackbeard: Enfranchisement and Expressions of Beardlessness in  
Shakespeare's Canon from 1594 to 1601

by

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**My Lord Lackbeard: Enfranchisement and Expressions of Beardlessness in Shakespeare's Canon from 1594 to 1601**

**CR Junkins**

**ABSTRACT**

William Shakespeare employs a series of male characters specifically described as beardless in those plays performed from 1594 to 1601. Will Fisher argues that such characters reveal early modern conceptions of masculinity; the beard was used in conjunction with other forms of material such as dress and weaponry to construct gender. Mark Albert Johnston notes that beards performed as currencies of exchange, denoting not just masculinity but economic power as well. Rather than signifying a lack or deficiency, the hairless chin is an active participant in a deeply complex tangle of competing political, economic and religious ideologies. Shakespeare's commentary on beardlessness occurs during an economic crisis in the late 1590's that significantly affected apprentices, when apprentice literature proved popular. The temporary prominence could also suggest a transition by Richard Burbage from playing young beardless characters to more mature heroes. This period also witnesses a shift in audiences as competing theaters open.

## My Lord Lackbeard: Enfranchisement and Expressions of Beardlessness in Shakespeare's Canon from 1594 to 1601

“He that hath a beard is more than a youth,” states Beatrice in William Shakespeare's *Much Ado about Nothing*, “and he that hath no beard is less than a man” (*Ado* 2.1, 32-4)<sup>1</sup>. She asks what she should do with such a beardless man: “Dress him in my apparel and make him my waiting-gentlewoman?” (*Ado* 2.1, 31-2). The scene is witty, assuredly, but it also provides a remarkable insight into ideas of early-modern English masculinity. On stage stands a beardless man, dressed in women's apparel, playing the role of Hero's noble cousin and waiting-gentlewoman, of which the audience was no doubt aware. And yet, the two beardless men dressed as Beatrice and Hero are not alone, for out in the audience are certainly beardless men too, apprentices, young men struggling for recognition of their masculinity as well as for their own enfranchisement into the English economy. Did Beatrice's words sting? Or did those beardless young men in the Globe Theatre look to the third beardless male character, Claudio, Benedick's “My Lord Lackbeard” (*Ado* 5.1, 189), for their validation?

Indeed they did, and their attention fell on other beardless male heroes who appear in Shakespeare's works that span from the mid-1590s to early 1600s. Shakespeare comments on beards in all but three of his plays, but his commentary on beardlessness and his characters who flaunt their beardless chins appear first in

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<sup>1</sup> All citations from Shakespeare come from David Bevington's fifth edition of *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*, as well as suggested dating for initial performances.

*Midsummer Night's Dream* as early as 1594. This trend fades some time around 1598 to 1601 with *As You Like It*.

Admittedly, a study of Shakespeare's commentary on beardless male characters seems trivial at first glance, but these details reveal a "perfect storm" of historical, cultural and economic forces along with personal, biographical influences on a cycle of popular early-modern English dramas. Beatrice's comment demonstrates a conscious understanding of beards as an essential criterion for masculinity, and recent scholarship by Will Fisher in "The Renaissance Beard" (2001) and *Materializing Gender* (2006) has examined this cultural phenomenon in detail. Fisher, however, focuses on the use of beards: I intend to examine beardlessness. Rather than signifying a lack or deficiency, the hairless chin is an active participant in a deeply complex tangle of competing political, economic and religious ideologies. The span of such comments in Shakespeare's canon likewise points to historical events that spur them and then fade. Shakespeare's commentary on beardlessness occurs during an economic crisis in the late 1590s that significantly affected apprentices, the very same beardless component of Shakespeare's audience mentioned earlier. Also, these beardless themes occur during a period when literature devoted to encouraging apprentices proved popular. Lastly, the temporary prominence of this theme in Shakespeare's work when compared to the work of other dramatists at the time perhaps indicates a two-fold force at work. First, the Lord Chamberlain's Men witness the transition of their principal male actor, Richard Burbage, from playing young beardless characters to more mature heroes. Second, a simultaneous shift in audience occurs at this time, as the beardless apprentice component of

Shakespeare's audience turns to other theaters while the Lord Chamberlain's Men seek closer ties with the Elizabethan court.

For the post-modern mind, the act of growing a beard or shaving a chin seems to exert little impact on determining an individual's gender. Gender is determined by biological traits or genetic markers; or so it seems. Recent critical work in gender theory in various disciplines such as literature, history and cultural studies has challenged this notion, suggesting that gender is more often "performative" rather than essential, as described by Judith Butler in *Gender Troubles*. For Butler, the act of identifying gender has greater importance than the essential category itself, based on the argument that no ontological essence can be determined with any certainty without a thorough understanding of the epistemology involved – how one identifies determines what one identifies. The act of determining gender is therefore influenced by the physical or corporeal signs, along with "acts, gestures, enactments" that are expressed "on the surface of the body" (173). Butler goes one step further by denying the existence of any ontological essence. Such essences are "fabrications" that have "no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality" (173). Gender then, in Butler's terms, becomes a "corporeal style, an 'act,'" as it were, which is both intentional and performative, where 'performative' suggests a dramatic contingent construction of meaning" (177). Such a performance occurs repeatedly, as the signs and acts must be expressed every time one individual interacts with another<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> I have noted the recent developments in essentialist arguments related to gender theory. For example, Deborah Tannen's *You Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation* (2001) and *You're Wearing That?: Understanding Mothers and Daughters in Conversation* (2006), in which she explore different communication strategies used by men and women, have proved popular in freshmen writing classes. I would also point out the infamous *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus* (2004) by John Gray.

Butler's argument that gender is a visual performance integrated into a continual dialogue with others suggests that the very notion of gender operates in a constant state of instability and flux, open to continual interpretation and redefinition. Such a state makes reading historical notions of gender even more fraught with uncertainty, as post-modern critics attempt to read visual performances without a thorough understanding of the "signs" that past periods used<sup>3</sup>. Therefore, in analyzing the use of beards and beardlessness in regards to masculinity, two clear warnings emerge. First, key terms such as "masculinity," "male," and "gender" operate differently in the early modern and post-modern periods, perhaps radically so. Second, the act of reading the "corporeal style" used by early modern individuals to perform gender requires a thorough understanding of the corporeal elements, beards versus beardlessness, among others. As a corollary,

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While these texts have kept essentialist arguments in circulation, I am finding essentialist arguments increasingly grounded in genetics, especially those observations of differences in behavior based on hormones. (Gender theory is not the only discipline being affected: history and economics have also seen forays into genetic theory. Gregory Clark's controversial *A Farewell to Alms* (2007), for example, broaches the idea that England's Industrial Revolution might have been fueled by traits passed down from generation to generation by genetics rather than parental training. In turn, such an argument cautiously suggests some essential differences between English citizens and other Europeans.) My focus in this essay is, of course, on the growth of facial hair, a physiological process dictated by hormones which is in turn managed by an individual's genes. Some men are predisposed to beard growth while others are relegated to a lifetime of smooth cheeks. However, I would call the reader's attention to the warning implicit in Thomas Laqueur's *Making Sex*: in the past, political and religious ideologies dictated how empirical observations were interpreted. Our current fascination with genetics may prove no different.

<sup>3</sup> Fisher warns against the use of the term "sign" in labeling material objects used in constructing gender during the early modern period. He notes that such a term "implies that the beard 'signaled' a gendered essence that actually resided elsewhere" (99). Such a distinction may seem trivial, but his definition is strategic in that, in structuralist thought, it denies the existence of a "signifier," which underscores his (and Butler's) theory that gender is constructed by material means. While I appreciate this distinction, I cannot help but to recall Butler's underlying argument in *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies that Matter* that understanding the epistemological act of determining gender is the key to understanding how gender is constructed due to the uncertainty inherent in attempting to identify any essential element that grounds gender. Her paradigm for gender construction is not just performative but discursive. What one sees in the use of beards (and other material objects used to "express" gender) is a form of communication, a language of symbols and actions. Secondly, Derrida's notion of *difference* points to the inherent lack of an essential essence in any definition; meaning is instead expressed by differences between terms as opposed to an essential quality. Therefore, I feel justified in using the term "sign" in referring to the role of beards and beardlessness in "communicating" gender while at the same time dismissing the notion that it refers to a particular essence.



because such a performance is so heavily repeated, the possibility exists that the discursive use of beards and beardlessness could have operated in a very unstable fashion, changing from year to year, day to day, and even from person to person.

Current interpretations of early modern conceptions of the body and gender rely on the prevalence of two theories, that of the role of humors (bile, phlegm, cholera and blood and their corollaries, hot, cold, moist and dry) and on early modern anatomists' fascination with the physical similarity or homology of male and female genitalia, as identified by Thomas Laqueur in *Making Sex* (1990). The body, as Laqueur points out, is interpreted using the "one-sex model."<sup>4</sup> Medieval and early modern scientists and physicians (based on earlier work by Galen) visually interpreted human genitalia as remarkably similar, save that the penis was expressed outwardly and the vagina inwardly. Testes correspond to ovaries, the scrotum to the womb. The inward versus outward expression was explained by the heat normally associated with males forcing the penis outward, while women, being cold, "lacked" the heat necessary to "perfect" their bodies. Therefore, gender existed on a single continuum, in which "sexual differences were matters of degree rather than kind" (125). In addition, Laqueur comments, "the body with its one elastic sex was far freer to express theatrical gender and the anxieties thereby produced" (125)<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> This acceptance of the Galenic one-sex model is by no means universal among scholars of early modern thought. Perhaps the best counter-argument has been put forth by Janet Aldeman in her essay, "Making Defect Perfection: Shakespeare and the One-Sex Model." By examining only those medical texts written and printed in England, Aldeman concludes that the Galenic one-sex model did not have a hegemonic hold over conceptions of gender. In fact, at least in England, the early modern period offers instead an environment in which varying models of gender are in play.

<sup>5</sup> I find Laqueur's use of the word choice, "theatrical," somewhat ironic considering the earlier emphasis on Butler's use of the word "performative," especially in the context of research on beards in early modern stage conventions.

Will Fisher, as pointed out earlier, attempts to define the role of beards as a constructor (or more accurately for his argument, a “materializer”) of masculinity; for this reason, his work will remain a key text for much of this essay. Therefore, the critical assumptions that Fisher makes must be thoroughly examined and defined.

In regards to the one-sex model, Fisher warns that Laqueur’s reading of gender as malleable is “misleading” (23). He notes, “It does not follow from his [Laqueur’s] more general observations about the potential malleability of the male and female bodies to say that gender identity was ‘theatrical’ or that it could be put on or taken off with ‘ease’ like costumes in a theater” (23). In his criticism, Fisher echoes Butler’s warnings in *Bodies that Matter*. Butler states, “I never did think that gender was like clothes, or that clothes make the woman” (231). For Butler, the reason is again determined by the lack of any essential, internal characteristic in the individual because there is no interior “one” who dresses, but vice-versa: “the practice by which gendering occurs, the embodying of norms, is a compulsory practice, a forcible production” (230). Fisher’s criticism is perhaps unfair as Laqueur is careful to point out that “gender choice was by no means so open to individual discretion, and one was not free to change in midstream” (124). Yet Laqueur’s “one-sex model” suggests an anxiety present in the period, that individuals, particularly men, experienced a drive to declare their masculine status, and that due to the patriarchal nature of power in the period, this drive took on a cultural force rather than simply individual.<sup>6</sup> “Decisions about dress are actively compelled,” Fisher notes (23).

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<sup>6</sup> The anxiety of gender identity in a one-sex model is a compelling argument for the importance of growing a beard, but if beards were so instrumental, wouldn’t that custom operate where the one-sex model functioned at its height? Laqueur cites anatomical works from across Europe – England, Italy, Denmark, Germany and Switzerland, just to name a few. Richard Corson’s *Fashions in Hair* reveals examples of

Such decisions become less about the lack of or presence of agency than the need to make an “ideological” and often “unconscious act” (23).

Fisher differs from Butler regarding the importance of clothing. While Butler sees clothing to be a “dispensable artifact,” Fisher finds it “constitutive” (23). Here Fisher identifies a division in gender theory on the process of “modification.” Fisher compares the paradigm put forth by Donna J. Haraway, that cultural forces modify an individual’s essential gender (one begins as male and then changes), versus that of Butler’s, that cultural forces bring one’s gender into being using materialization, “matter.” While Butler does not view clothing as important, as noted above, Fisher sees it as an essential method for “materializing” gender. Through the use of handkerchiefs, codpieces and beards, “the gendered body is quite literally reformed or reconstituted” (24).

Beard growth alone did not define early-modern masculinity. Rather, beards worked as a single component of a larger collection of materials and actions, such as “the voice, swords, armor and daggers” (88). Fisher cleverly uses the metaphor of “weights on a scale” to describe how various material items can shift an individual back and forth from “male” to “female” (7, 9, 111). As I mentioned earlier, this essay seeks to examine beardlessness as an ideological act, rather than beard growth. The distinction is subtle, due to the inability of some participants to grow facial hair because of youth or physical reasons other than age. Even the term, beard-less-ness emphasizes the lack or negativity (less) of a state of being (ness). However, the distinction is crucial. Fisher’s project, and perhaps even Butler’s, is to ground gender construction in physical materialization: my

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various styles of beards and beardlessness moving in and out of fashion throughout Europe during the early-modern period.

analysis suggests that the negative state operates with similar effect. The absence of material constructs gender, which, in turn, suggests that the action of materializing or the drive to materialize gender rather than the material itself is the key. That said, the overwhelming majority of work in this field has focused on beards, and I am obliged to examine beards in order to glimpse the nature of beard-less-ness.

Fisher capably explores the ideological forces clustered around beards, and while I do not wish to re-examine those forces, I do wish to briefly restate his findings. An essential component of the beard's ideology involves the early modern conception of nature, or perhaps more appropriately, Nature. While science begins to emerge in this period, religion still possesses considerable if not hegemonic force. Religious truth precedes physical reality, and, in essence, creates it. Fisher's analysis of early modern anatomical and physiognomy texts reveals that the religious patriarchal ideology dictated how physical form was interpreted. For example, "women were 'born to subjection'"; therefore, "they have no beards" (105). Early modern writers began with the social order as described by theology, defined "Nature" as the perfect order begun at Creation, and any object or action that did not fit into that scheme became deviation.

This distinction is crucial because, as Fisher points out, early modern texts about beards are significantly proscriptive in nature rather than descriptive. Beard growth is less a physical indication of manhood than a cultural indication. Men are encouraged to grow facial hair in order to express their cultural and religious place. Specifically Protestant texts openly encourage beard growth, and Protestant clergy grew beards to differentiate themselves from clean-shaven Catholics "as an indication of their marriageability and reproductive capacity" (100). Fisher cites visual images such as the

title page to John Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* (1563) which shows bearded Protestants burning at the stake and waving palms and blowing trumpets in heaven, opposite clean-shaven and tonsured Catholics celebrating mass, and, more importantly, suffering in hell-fires along with demons (101)<sup>7</sup>. He also cites a similar woodcut depicting Archbishop Thomas Cranmer pulled by his beard from his pulpit by a beardless monk (100). Religious ideology operated in tandem with patriarchy and militarism. Because facial hair was seen as an "outgrowth of the production of semen" (107), early modern writers associated it with the ability to father children, and, in fact, many of Shakespeare's comments related to beards stem from this interpretation.<sup>8</sup> Fisher cites the constant use of "martial language and metaphors" in describing beards in such texts as Jacques' seven ages of man speech in *As You Like It*, Helkiah Crooke's *Microcosmographia* (1615), Nicholas Udall's *Thersites* (1537) and the pamphlet *Haec Vir* (1620).

Fisher does not cover one ideological force at work, and that is an economic one. Mark Albert Johnston, in his 2005 essay "Playing with the Beard," argues that the beard acted "as a means of specifically economic (gender) differentiation" (82). Johnston arrives at this conclusion through Stephen Orgel's research on the nature of adult male desire for both women and boys during the period. In *Impersonations*, Orgel sees women and boys as operating in the same economic category regarding early modern England's patriarchal society; "the distinction," he notes, between men and the category of women and boys lies "between fathers or guardians and children, not between the sexes" (13). As such, women and boys become objects of desire, desire rooted in their role as a "medium of exchange" (103). For Johnston, then, the beard becomes "a marker of both

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<sup>7</sup> Ironically, the demons appear to have beards due to their beastly faces.

<sup>8</sup> Fisher cites as his example Troilus' white hair inside his beard (Troilus and Cressida, 1.2.146-51).

economic differentiation” of men from boys, but also one of “similitude” of men as fellow patriarchs (80). Johnston marginalizes the religious, militaristic and patriarchal ideologies present in the use of beards to denote masculinity; the economic force is key, as the beard operates “only inasmuch as that masculinity is understood as economically constituted” (82).

Johnston makes a very surprising claim: “apprentices were dissuaded from sporting beards by charges levied against their Masters” (92), taken from Sidney Young’s *Annals of the Barber Surgeons of London* (1890). For Johnston, this regulation indicates that the transition from beardlessness to beard-wearing had little to do with physiological changes brought on by puberty but instead with the transition from apprentice to master. More importantly, the regulation of beard growth demonstrates that beardlessness operated as a “sign” and as a “marker” in and of itself in the construction of masculinity, as opposed to a lack of masculinity. To have no beard indicated not an individual’s age but his place within the early modern English economy dominated by notions of patriarchy, and, if Johnston’s reading is correct, a “sign” imposed upon apprentices by the patriarchy.

The transition of the beardless young male to bearded master is clearly one fraught with anxiety. For the youth, the transition represents moving out of the vulnerable, dependent child position and into the role of independent member of the patriarchy with its incumbent rights and privileges. Such anxieties for the youth would be understandable, but Orgel argues that patriarchs, indeed the patriarchy itself, existed in a constant state of instability and threat. “Authority exists only when it is exerted,” Orgel writes, “and it must be exerted over someone” (123). Patriarchal power relationships did

not exist as vertically as the Great Chain of Being that it sought to mimic: “the patriarchy of fathers impinged on that of husbands, both were at odds with the patriarchy of the crown, and even the crown could be charged with usurping the prerogatives of God the Father” (124). This system of alternating father-figures results in every male individual “feminized in relation to someone” (124). And yet, the system relied on at least one male child, usually the eldest, taking on the father’s role, and even that was not entirely certain.

The key then to understanding the roles of beards and beardlessness in constructing gender in the early modern period lies in understanding this transition from youth to adulthood. For the post-modern mind, the transition is based on age. Voting rights are awarded in the United States at the age of 18; military service begins at that age as well. Individuals may purchase alcohol at 21. The right to marry without parental consent begins at 18 for most states, with Mississippi at the lowest – 17 for males, 15 for females – and Nebraska at the highest – 19<sup>9</sup>. For the early modern period, this transition was not so exact. In *Adolescence and Youth in Early Modern England* (1994), Ilana Krausman Ben-Amos states that the transition “could continue well after a child reached the age of discretion, his twentieth birthday, the legal age of 21, and even beyond” (32). Rather than age, two significant events signaled the transition from youth to adulthood. The first is marriage, which Ben-Amos describes as the “single most important” (208). The second involves the shift from an apprenticeship state to that of an independent member of the economy. The transition follows this pattern: “the acquisition of negotiating skills; the evolution of material preoccupations and concerns for betterment; and the assumption of responsibilities for other people, both young and old” (208).

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<sup>9</sup> Puerto Rico’s age for marriage without parental consent, interestingly, begins at 21.

This tension and anxiety are apparent in the cycle of Shakespeare's plays that deal with beardless young men searching for marriage and the enfranchisement into patriarchy and independence that marriage represents. One may argue that Shakespeare addresses this anxiety due to the number of apprentices in his audience because the presence of apprentices in the audience has been well established by previous scholars; for example, Andrew Gurr catalogues references to apprentices in the audience in his second appendix in *Playgoing in Shakespeare's London* including William Fleetwood (215), Henry Chettle (216), Thomas Nashe (217) and John Fletcher (236). Gurr's appendix also includes references to youths in the audience: Anthony Munday (214), Stephen Gosson (215), Edmund Spenser (218) John Fletcher (235, 236) and T. Gainsford (239). Charles Whitney documents references in guild records in his essay, "Usually in the Working Daies," and Steve Rappaport does also with court minutes in his 1989 *World Within Worlds*.

Not only were apprentices a significant portion of the audience, but the Lord Chamberlain's Men, like all acting troupes in the period, are deeply implicated in the apprenticeship system. With no guild of their own, actors relied on membership in other guilds in order to call on the privileges of being a freeman in the city. David Kathman has catalogued the various guilds in which actors and playwrights claimed membership, notably Edward Alleyn (Innholders), Robert Armin (Goldsmith), Ben Jonson (Bricklayer), Thomas Kendall (Haberdasher), Anthony Munday (Draper), Richard Tarlton (Haberdasher and Vinter), Francis Walpole (Merchant Taylor), and John Webster (Merchant Taylor), among others. Kathman also suspects that Richard Burbage called on his father's membership in the Joiners (21). The apprenticeship system worked for actors



because, as Kathman notes, “freeman were under no obligation to practice the trades of their companies, and a substantial minority made their living in other ways” (3).

Secondly, members of a guild were allowed to train their apprentices in whatever skills they practiced at the time, rather than the skills generally associated with the guild. As Kathman points out, one could be “apprenticed and freed as a Goldsmith, for example, without his ever having handled a piece of gold” (3).

As for apprentices, most were bound to the Drapers, Goldsmiths or Grocers, either to a freeman member of the acting troupe or, as Kathman states, “a third party who agreed to let his apprentice be trained as an actor” (4). These apprentices, as is commonly argued, performed female roles. Kathman observes that “many apprentices went on to become sharers or hired men” (4), but Orgel disagrees. He notes that of the boy apprentices who played female roles, only seven are recorded as having graduated to adult actors (69).<sup>10</sup>

More fascinating for Orgel are the ideological implications surrounding the grafted use of the guild system onto the acting troupes. To begin with, the similarities in power relationships between the master and apprentice and the husband and wife have already been identified by Sue-Ellen Case. Because records exist for only seven apprentices who played female roles becoming principal actors, Orgel suggests that this indicates “two different classes of actors,” specifically “men and boys, masters and indentured servants” (69). Secondly, this use of the guild system, or perhaps even the abuse, helps to explain the sometimes acrimonious relationship between the guilds and

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<sup>10</sup> The performers in the boy companies did not participate in the apprentice model. Kathman reports that boy companies used contracts lasting three years, “below the seven-year minimum required by the 1562 statute” (16). Orgel records that boy performers could actually be impressed into service (66).

the acting troupes. The guilds commonly complained that plays tempted their apprentices away from their work, and Charles Whitney has capably catalogued the various antiplaygoing ordinances pronounced by London guilds in his 1999 article, “Usually in the Werking Daies.” Orgel argues that these complaints are also charged by two issues. First, the troupes acted as “unlicensed guilds, and even antiguilds” (67). Second, the troupes usurped “one of the most visible perquisites of the craftsmen’s companies” – the privilege of performing the mystery plays (67).

This ambivalent relationship between the acting troupes and the guild system helps to explain Shakespeare’s commentary on beardlessness in *Midsummer Night’s Dream*. During the production of the play within a play, the rude mechanicals face a crisis in their performance of “Pyramus and Thisbe”: how to use their beard props. Quince selects Bottom to play Pyramus, while Flute is cast as Thisbe. “Nay, faith,” Flute objects, “let not me play a woman. I have a beard coming” (*MND* 1.2, 41-2). When Bottom offers to perform the role, Quince tells him, “You can play no part but Pyramus, for Pyramus is a sweet-faced man” (*MND* 1.2, 77-8). Now excited, Bottom asks “What beard were I best to play it in?”—whereby he launches into an inventory of available props: “I will discharge it in either your straw-colored beard, your orange-tawny beard, your purple-in-grain beard, or your French-crown-color beard, your perfect yellow” (*MND* 1.2, 81-2, 84-87).

While the text does not specify Bottom’s beardlessness, there are many indications that he is. Bottom states that he can hide his face behind a mask to play Thisbe. Fisher notes that such a mask would have resembled the “chinclout” worn by Follywit in Thomas Middleton’s *A Mad World My Masters* or the “eggshell vizards”

listed in the Revels Office inventories (93). Were Bottom beardless, the audience could clearly see the ineptitude of the rude mechanicals as play-makers, with the bearded man playing the woman and the beardless man offering to hide his face (for no reason, if he has no beard) but then dressing himself with a false beard to play the man. However, Bottom can indeed be bearded in the play, with his impulse to wear a second beard similarly as ludicrous but perhaps not as obvious. To this I suggest Quince's jest that "Some of your French crowns have no hair at all, and then you will play barefaced" (*MND* 1.2, 88-9), which is a reference to the baldness due to syphilis (or the "French disease"), would indicate that because Bottom currently has no facial hair, he is already suited to play the part of a syphilitic, a sight-gag the early modern audience would have found delightful. Lastly, in his scene with Titania's fairy servants, Bottom remarks, "I must to a barber's, monsieur, for methinks I am marvelous hairy about the face" (*MND* 4.1, 23-4). Had Bottom begun the play with a beard, feeling hair upon his face would not seem altogether marvelous.

Fisher adds two other critiques which reinforce the textual clues to Bottom's beardlessness. Having Bottom begin the play beardless reinforces his transformation: "his cross-species metamorphosis would have been compounded by his gender change from boy to man" (92). Bottom's name also recalls the English tradition of comparing the cheeks of the face to the buttocks, a crude joke made infamous by Chaucer's "Miller's Tale." Fisher notes as an example a sixteenth-century woodcut "of a young man bending over, exposing his buttocks to the viewer, with a caption that reads: 'to drink with me, be not afferde, for here ye see growth never a berde'" (92).

The criticism here is evidently pointed to the guilds and their inability to accurately perform theater, and, interestingly enough, Shakespeare's strategy involves the rude mechanicals inability to perform gender. That the rude mechanicals, guild members themselves, cannot reproduce their very same status of adult males, freemen, patriarchs, is openly ridiculed. This lack of skill is made even more evident by the rude mechanicals actual performance, in which Tom Snout the Tinker declares first his actual name and then his intention to play the part of a wall (*MND* 5.1, 155). Bottom the Weaver as Pyramus openly thanks the "courteous wall" for creating a chink by spreading his fingers apart (*MND* 5.1, 177). In order not to frighten the ladies, Snug alerts the audience that he is not a lion but instead a Joiner (*MND* 5.1, 221). As Hippolyta declares, "This is the silliest thing that ever I heard" (*MND* 5.1, 209). Indeed, and Shakespeare's withering satire is devastating.

But does Shakespeare's harsh critique apply to the apprentices as well? Many would point to Hamlet's renowned distaste for the groundlings, but Shakespeare's portrayal of apprentices is typically kind. For example, in *2 Henry VI* (1589-1592), Shakespeare has Peter Thumb, an apprentice armorer, fight against the charge of treason, as accused by his master. In a trial by combat, Peter prevails, and the King draws him close with the words, "Come, fellow, follow us for thy reward" (*2 Henry VI*, 2.3, 105). In fact, Mark Thornton Burnett notes that unflattering portrayals of apprentices are rare before 1600. "Most often," Burnett writes, "the impassioned and easily inflamed apprentice is treated either humorously or exhilaratingly" (31). Andrew Gurr likewise notes that theaters actively advertised to apprentices using "hand-written playbills" (*Stage*, 11).

Despite their rowdy reputation, apprentices had sufficient education and sophistication to appreciate well-written and well-performed plays. According to David Cressy, only 18% of apprentices could not sign their name (129). Burnett points to the production of an entire literary subculture for apprentices, including “jest-books, ballads, didactic tracts, satirical pamphlets and plays” (27). Burnett also notes that apprentices in “more prestigious companies” could have easily afforded the admission into the theaters, and he supposes that those apprentices to “smaller companies lower down the scale . . . stole money to meet the admission charges or slipped into the theaters without paying” (28). Ben-Amos also records a difference in lifestyles for apprentices in “mercantile and distributive trades”: she writes, “They dressed differently and more luxuriously and spent more money . . . on clothing, hats, stockings, or gloves which distinguished them as merchants, and sometimes even as courtiers and gentlemen” (197).

However, the lifestyle of the apprentice was not a secure one, especially in the 1590s. The years 1594 to 1597 experienced poor harvests (Rowse 399), and incessant wars in the later years of Elizabeth’s reign ruined England’s finances (380). Rents increased, as did immigration of Dutch and French Protestant refugees (228). The period also demonstrated a rise in xenophobia, as seen in the pamphlets such as the notorious Dutch churchyard libel that brought down Thomas Kyd and Christopher Marlowe. During this time, apprentices were sorely pressed. Burnett reports that at least half of apprentices “failed to serve for seven years” (37). For Burnett, this timing is essential; he identifies the rise of a genre of literature written for apprentices encouraging them to persevere through their service and to identify with nationalistic goals. Most apprentice literature from the late 1590’s sought to encourage “the civic virtues of hard work and

obedience” (28), and the completion of one’s apprenticeship became a “moral necessity” (37).

Shakespeare’s beardless male heroes fall into this category of apprentice literature both in theme and in time period (late 1590s). His marriage dramas become more problematic, and the struggles that the beardless hero must face become framed in economic situations. Not only must the beardless youth persevere through the transition from dependent child to independent patriarch, but he must also acquire economic security as well. This struggle informs Bassanio’s journey to acquire Portia as his wife in *Merchant of Venice*, and the relationship between Antonio and Bassanio is an idealized version of mentor to apprentice.

Antonio is explicitly labeled as a merchant, but like the merchants of the mid-1590’s, he is a merchant with troubles. The play opens with his expressions of sadness, which his friends quickly assume is due to financial woes. These questions of economic troubles foreshadow the real crisis in Act Three, when word reaches Venice that Antonio’s vessels have foundered. Shakespeare identifies one wreck in particular, local to London, in the Goodwin Sands in the Thames estuary (*MV* 3.1, 2-6). Antonio claims that his sadness is not due to economic worries, but when asked whether he might be in love, Antonio vehemently denies it. However, Antonio certainly holds affection for Bassanio, a youth whom he subsidizes. Their parting in Act 2, Scene 3 is sweetly tender, and Antonio’s only request at losing his pound of flesh to Shylock is that Bassanio be present at his death.

Bassanio, though, clearly faces economic problems, as he wastefully spends the money Antonio lends him. He consciously admits that his situation stems from his

profligate nature: “I have disabled mine estate by something showing a more swelling port than my faint means would grant continuance” (*MV* 1.1, 123-5). However, he convinces Antonio to continue investing in him, using the metaphor of firing a second arrow in the general direction of the first in order to find both. Keep investing in me, he begs, so that he can one day “get clear of all the debts I owe” (*MV* 1.1, 134). The solution to Bassanio’s problem lies in marriage, an action, as noted earlier, that will ease a youth’s transition from a dependent into fully enfranchised guardian and member of the patriarchy. Bassanio has identified Portia, the heiress of Belmont, as his intended, and his praise of her speaks less of her beauty, “she is fair and, fairer than that word,” or character, “of wondrous virtues,” than her wealth and property (*MV* 1.1, 161, 162), for she is a “golden fleece,” troubled by “many Jasons come in quest of her” (*MV* 1.1, 169, 172).

In this opening act, Shakespeare positions Portia as a commodity to be won. Portia is destined by her late father’s will to be given to the applicant who can decipher the puzzle of the three chests. As Portia bemoans, she is a “worthless self” (*MV* 2.9, 18) and can make no choices on her own. This commoditization of women through marriage is developed throughout the play. For example, Jessica, Shylock’s daughter, is also portrayed as property. Lorenzo woos her, but his motives are unclear. He sees her as “fair,” yes, but he seems more concerned about the “gold and jewels she is furnished with” (*MV* 2.4, 31). In describing their elopement, Lorenzo claims that he “shall take her from her father’s house” (*MV* 2.4, 30) and even goes so far as to brag that he and his friends “shall please to play the thieves for wives” (*MV* 2.6, 24). When Shylock discovers Lorenzo’s theft, he conflates his daughter with his wealth, crying out in the

streets of Venice, “My daughter! Oh, my ducats! Oh my daughter! Fled with a Christian! Oh, my Christian ducats!” (*MV* 2.8, 14-5). This connection between Shylock’s daughter and his wealth is compounded when Shylock hears of Jessica’s profligate spending in Genoa. Shylock laments the “diamond gone” worth two thousand ducats, and wishes that Jessica “were dead at my foot, and the jewels in her ear!” (*MV* 3.1, 79-80, 83-4), exclaiming, “I shall never see my gold again” (*MV* 3.1, 103-4). Jessica is equated as jewels in this scene, but so is Shylock’s late wife. Jessica trades a ring for a monkey, and Shylock identifies that ring: “It was my turquoise; I had it of Leah, when I was a bachelor. I would not have given it for a wilderness of monkeys” (*MV* 3.1, 113-5). His misery from learning of the loss of his wife’s ring could be seen as sentimental, or given a more patriarchal interpretation, the misery could result from the loss of his property, both ring and daughter. The turquoise ring foreshadows the ring trick played by Portia on Bassanio, but, more importantly, it underscores the essential quality of marriage for the early modern man, that of entry into the ranks of fully enfranchised patriarchs.

To achieve Bassanio’s transition from economically bankrupt dependent to enfranchised male adult patriarch, Antonio and Bassanio must negotiate an unforgiving economic force in the character of Shylock. Shylock’s position within the play is an ambiguous one. His oft-quoted speech before Antonio, “If you prick us, do we not bleed,” reveals an intensely human character, far removed from Marlowe’s Barabas or the Vice character tradition from which Shylock was drawn. Even so, Shakespeare takes many opportunities to reinforce Shylock’s role signifying the harsh economic realities of the late 1590s. During the trial, the Duke labels Shylock as a “stony adversary, an inhuman wretch incapable of pity, void and empty of from any dram of mercy” (*MV* 4.1,



3-5). Antonio equates him with a force of nature, telling Bassanio that he “may as well go stand upon the beach and bid the main flood bate his usual height,” to “use question with the wolf why he hath made the ewe bleat for the lamb,” to “forbid the mountain pines to wag their high tops and to make no noise when they are fretten with the gusts of heaven,” rather than “question the Jew” (*MV* 4.1, 70-77). Shylock himself chooses not to answer why he would rather have Antonio’s flesh rather the three thousand ducats, choosing to “say it is my humor” (*MV* 4.1, 43).

“Which is the merchant here, and which is the Jew?” Portia asks (*MV* 4.1, 172). Shakespeare defines two separate economic forces at work by creating a crisis between Antonio and Shylock. Shylock explicitly identifies Antonio’s business practices as a point of animosity: “He lends out money gratis and brings down the rate of usance here with us in Venice” (*MV* 1.3, 41-2). If Shylock is portrayed as unforgiving, then Antonio is forgiving to a fault, at least to his Christian associates. He continues to invest in Bassanio, even when it appears Bassanio can never repay the debt: “My purse, my person, my extremest means lie all unlocked to your occasions” (*MV* 1.1, 138-9). Antonio is more than willing to stake his very life in his young ward. As economic forces go, he is the opposite extreme from Shylock. During a period of economic downturn, when at least half of apprentices cannot fulfill their years of service, staging a conflict between a heroic patron willing to sacrifice all versus an unforgiving force of nature bent of exacting legal obligations to the letter would have won approval from Shakespeare’s audience. Antonio and Bassanio are more than just an idealized version of master and apprentice; Shakespeare uses them as a critique of an economic system that exploits apprentices and then punishes them for their failures.

Antonio is saved by an unlikely source: Portia, dressed in men's apparel. Stephen Orgel and Charles Shapiro have capably examined the theoretical implications of cross-dressing in early modern theater. I argue that something more obvious is at work. Shakespeare places on stage a young, beardless apprentice to play an actual young beardless apprentice. Yes, the play depicts a young woman transgressing early modern gender taboos by mimicking a man and performing as a man within a misogynistic, patriarchal system, but the visual "double-entendre" should not be dismissed too quickly. The audience surely was not so blind as to overlook a young man dressed as himself. The play even calls attention to the oddity of a youth participating as a jurist: "let his lack of years be no impediment to let him lack a reverend estimation, for I never knew so young a body with so old a head" (*MV* 4.1, 159-62). Shakespeare exhibits on-stage a young, beardless apprentice using his wit and ingenuity to save his master from a remorseless economic and legal bind. While the differences between Antonio and Shylock serve as a critique of unforgiving masters within the apprentice system, Portia's victory also reveals to apprentices in the audience their role within the system and charges them with their task in saving their masters during the economic crisis of the time.

The ring trick also performs a role. The ring is bestowed on Bassanio, not only as a vow of fidelity to his wife but also as a symbol of the power of their marriage to transition Bassanio from dependent youth to enfranchised patriarch. "This house, these servants, and this same myself are yours, my lord's," Portia proclaims, adding, "I give them with this ring" (*MV* 3.2, 170-2). When Portia in the guise of Balthazar asks for the ring as payment for freeing Antonio, Bassanio initially balks. Antonio then convinces

Bassanio to break his wife's vow: "My lord Bassanio, let him have the ring. Let his deservings and my love withal be valued 'gainst your wife's commandment" (*MV* 4.1, 447-9). Clearly, the legal and political vows between men outrank those of men to women. As Bassanio later claims, "I was beset with shame and courtesy. My honor would not let ingratitude" (*MV* 5.1, 217-8). The breaking of the vow is, of course, admitted by Bassanio when Portia asks to see the ring. Revealing her role as Balthazar, Portia also informs Bassanio that his place in her marriage bed is forfeit because he bestowed their ring on "another man." Once again, Antonio steps in to restore the marriage. In order to begin the marriage, Antonio offers up his flesh. Now, he places his "soul upon the forfeit, that your lord will nevermore break faith advisedly" (*MV* 5.1, 251-2). Portia gives Antonio the ring, and Antonio transfers it to Bassanio. The significance of the ring trick relates not only to Bassanio and Portia but also to Bassanio and Antonio. Antonio confronts the two separate vows: one to uphold the economic bargain by which Bassanio can transition into the state of enfranchised patriarch, the second to uphold the moral and legal integrity of Bassanio's marriage and Bassanio's moral duty to act as a virtuous patriarch for their new family. During a time when the vows between masters and apprentices were obviously failing, *The Merchant of Venice*, whose very title identifies Antonio and not Bassanio, Portia or Shylock as at least the titular hero of the play, illustrates the virtues of upholding vows, even when those vows threaten body and soul<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> Such a claim, of course, does not diminish Portia's role as heroine. For example, Julius Caesar dies at the beginning of Act 3, and yet Shakespeare chose the title, Julius Caesar, rather than Brutus. Antonio does, however, seem to fade into the drama as a plot point when instead he should be seen as an extremely pivotal role.

The focus of *The Merchant of Venice* is intensely economic and represents Shakespeare's foray into apprentice literature. But what of the beardless nature of the apprentice? Is Bassanio's character determined by the text to be performed beardless? Nerissa describes Bassanio as "a scholar and a soldier" (*MV* 1.2, 111). Soldiers, as mentioned earlier, are typically identified with beards. On the other hand, Shylock calls Bassanio a "good youth" (*MV* 4.1, 141) which implies beardlessness. The text is not explicit, but Bassanio's role as Antonio's dependent, along with his perilous transition into that of husband and patriarch, argues forcefully that Bassanio would have mimicked the beardless apprentice.

Similarly, Portia's portrayal of the young male jurist underscores early modern notions of beardlessness. As quoted earlier, Shakespeare emphasizes Balthazar's "lack of years" with "so young a body." Shakespeare's decision to portray Portia's Balthazar as a talented youth rather than a patriarch is extremely significant. He certainly could have dressed the apprentice actor in a beard prop, but doing so would have dangerously challenged the social order of the time. Portia dressing as a patriarch would have been too much for the audience to accept. As David Cressy points out in "Gender Trouble and Cross-Dressing in Early Modern England," the very thought of women dressing as men inspired damning pamphlets from Phillip Stubbes and the anonymous author of *Hic Mulier*. Shakespeare is able to circumvent this controversy by having Portia shift from female to young boy, both of which, as Orgel argues, occupied the same sexual category. This shift is technically a "non-shift" and is essential for Shakespeare's examination of the economic plight of beardless apprentices because it restricts the play's performance to emphasize the resourceful nature of the "not yet men" coming to the patriarch's rescue.

*The Merchant of Venice*, then, centers on the economic forces that determine manhood with beardlessness in the background. *Much Ado About Nothing*, on the other hand, moves beardlessness to the foreground. Here Shakespeare is quite specific about the portrayal of beards and beardlessness, more so than in any of his other plays. The character of Claudio, whose interest in marrying Hero motivates much of the plot, is chided by Benedick as “My Lord Lackbeard” (*Ado* 5.1, 189). He is also referred to as “boy” several times throughout the play, and his martial abilities are often contrasted with his youth, as in the opening lines of the play, “He hath borne himself beyond the promise of his age, doing in the figure of a lamb the feats of a lion” (*Ado* 1.1, 13-5).

Unlike *The Merchant of Venice*, the transition of youth through marriage is not an issue in *Much Ado About Nothing*. Claudio seems to be enfranchised through both his prowess as a warrior and his status as a count. Also, Benedick revels at the thought of bachelorhood. While *Merchant of Venice* focuses on the need for a familial quality within the master-apprentice relationship, *Much Ado About Nothing* evaluates the visual forces that operate in assessing an individual. As mentioned earlier, based on the research by Fisher and Johnston, the beard acted as a visual signifier of a young male’s transition from dependent apprentice to enfranchised patriarch. Shakespeare questions, not just the beard’s significance as a visual signifier, but all visual signifiers. In terms closer to an early modern vocabulary, Shakespeare’s *Much Ado About Nothing* explores the gap between the semblance of virtue and the internal qualities of virtue: or, as Claudio describes it, “the sign and semblance of her honor” (*Ado* 4.1, 32).

David Bevington suggests that the play on words in the title, of *Nothing’s* pronunciation in an early modern London accent as *noting*, indicates an emphasis on

overhearings which “are constant and are essential to the process of both misunderstanding ... and clarification” (219). Actually, Shakespeare repeatedly emphasizes the problem of misreading visual clues rather than mishearing. Masks play a significant role in the texts. During the carnival masque, characters both disguise their identities and exploit the opportunity to communicate openly. The use of masks in Act 2, Scene 1 foreshadows the use of masks during the wedding trick in Act 5, Scene 4. Secondly, characters both question and unquestionably rely on visual performances. For example, Don Pedro, Claudio and Leonato are able to trick Benedick into believing that Beatrice’s disdain is actually a mask for her affections in Act 2, Scene 3. As Don Pedro remarks, “she doth but counterfeit” (*Ado* 2.3, 106). Ironically, Benedick accepts the lie because of Leonato’s part in the trick: “I should think this a gull but that the white-bearded fellow speaks it. Knavery cannot, sure, hide himself in such reverence” (*Ado* 2.3, 122-4). Thirdly, Don John’s deception involving Borachio’s wooing Margaret as Hero can only work when Don Pedro and Claudio “see” the scene. Don John’s claim is not enough. Both men must visually witness Borachio speech to a woman in Hero’s garb at Hero’s window. Lastly, both Claudio and Leonato are convinced of Hero’s guilt because they misread the blush on her cheeks on hearing the claim of her infidelity. Claudio notes, “Behold how like a maid she blushes here! Oh, what authority and show of truth can cunning sin cover itself withal! Comes not that blood as modest evidence to witness simple virtue?” (*Ado* 4.1, 33-7). Leonato agrees: “Could she here deny the story that is printed in her blood?” (*Ado* 4.1, 121-2). Clearly, for *Much Ado About Nothing*, visual clues are horribly suspect. Claudio himself asks, “Are our eyes our own?” (*Ado* 4.1, 71).

The role of beards in determining masculinity is openly questioned in this play, as noted by Beatrice's comments on marrying a beardless man introduced in the opening paragraphs of this essay. *Much Ado About Nothing* offers a unique perspective on the power of the beard by having Benedick seemingly appear in Act 2, Scene 3 after having removed his beard. According to David Bevington's gloss of Act 3, Scene 2 of *Much Ado About Nothing*, Benedick "appears onstage beardless in this scene for the first time" (238n). Claudio remarks, "the old ornament of his cheek hath already stuffed tennis balls" (*Ado* 3.2, 43-4). Shakespeare goes to great lengths to foreshadow Benedick's sudden change through Beatrice's dialogue in Act 2, Scene 1: "Lord, I could not endure a husband with a beard on his face! I had rather lie in the woolen" (*Ado* 2.1, 27-8). Benedick has shaved either to impress Beatrice, or, as Don Pedro asserts, to appear younger.

Fisher suggests that "the actor who played Benedick would almost certainly have worn a false beard or a smooth mask in order to enact the mid-performance shift" (119). The use of a chin mask is problematic, however. Would the Lord Chamberlain's Men have resorted to such a prop after Shakespeare's withering critique of this practice in *Midsummer Night's Dream*? Fisher adds that in *Much Ado About Nothing*, "neither he [Benedick] nor any of the other characters calls attention to this fact in quite the same way as Bottom does" (119), but I disagree. While the rude mechanicals explicitly discuss the staging of beard-wearing and beardlessness, the actors of *Much Ado About Nothing* clearly draw the audience's attention to the transition and its comic meaning.

Reginald Reynolds, in his delightful 1949 book *Beards*, suggests that Claudio's quip about tennis balls relates to fashion commentary popular during the period, that "the

long, full beard” had become the “butt of ridicule at the end of the sixteenth century” (236). While his work is intended for entertainment, Reynolds does cite a number of passages in early-modern drama as evidence of his claim. In *Coriolanus*, Menenius declares, “your beards deserve not so honorable a grave as to stuff a butcher’s cushion or to be entombed in an ass’s packsaddle” (*Cor.* 2.1, 86-8). John Lyly in *Midas* has Motto offer to Licio, “Not onely the golden beard and euerie haire, (though it be not haire,) but a dozen beards, to stuffe two dozen of cushions” (*Midas* 5.2, 169-72). In Thomas Dekker’s *The Honest Whore, Part II*, Orlando claims, “if any man would ha lent but halfe a ducket on his beard, the haire of it had stufed a paire of breeches by this time” (3.2, 11-3). In his prose work, *The Gull’s Hornbook*, Dekker describes the “Mahametan cruelty . . . to stuffe breeches and tennis-balles with that, which, when its once lost, all the hare-hunters in the world may sweat their hearts out, and yet hardly catch it again” (238).

Though Fisher does not connect Benedick’s transformation with changes in fashion, he does discuss the ideological framework behind particular styles of beards. He identifies the “spade beard” as representative of the soldier class, and that such a style is intended to “evoke fear” (95). Jacques, in his seven stages of man speech in *As You Like It*, speaks of the “soldier, full of strange oaths and bearded like the pard” (*AYL* 2.7, 148-9), which Bevington glosses as “having bristling mustaches like the leopard’s” (312n). The beard of a soldier, Fisher notes, is “figured as a weapon,” going so far as to describe it as a man’s “last line of ‘defense’ against effeminization” (107).

Rather than having Benedick appear clean-shaven before the play, wearing a false beard that he removes between Act 2, Scene 3 and reappearing 116 lines later sans beard, or having Benedick cover his beard with a chin mask, I argue that Benedick instead



begins the play with a long false beard resembling a soldier's which he removes to reveal a shorter, trimmed, more-fashionable beard. *Much Ado About Nothing*, after all, begins with the heroes returning from war. The transformation from war to domesticity is fitting for the drama and represents Benedick's first move in surrendering to Beatrice. Benedick criticizes Claudio for making just such a transition: "I have known when there was no music with him but the drum and fife, and now had he rather hear the tabor and pipe" (*Ado* 2.3, 12-5). Benedick's performance on stage as bearded or beardless, then, is a choice for each individual director, as is Bottom's.

*Much Ado About Nothing* represents, if not the height of Shakespeare's examination of beards, at least his most visual. Not only would the actors have visually performed various stages of bearded and beardlessness, but the dialogue continually draws the audience's attention to the performance. The ironic tone of the dialogue, especially Beatrice's comments, suggests an open rebellion on Shakespeare's part. The play does more than jest; it emphatically critiques the early modern custom of "noting" one's gender through beard wearing. Claudio exists in a constantly shifting state between enfranchised lord and lackbearded apprentice. Benedick likewise shifts between burly warrior and fashionably trimmed domestic. But only focusing on the men in the drama, along with Beatrice's comments, neglects the final beardless male on stage. Shakespeare devotes much stage time and dialogue to critiquing Hero's face. As mentioned before, the male apprentice actor is perhaps dressed in women's garb and labeled a female character, but the audience surely recognized the actor for what he was: a beardless male. Arguing otherwise creates an implication that such audiences were frankly stupid, an uncomfortable implication at best. Rather, Shakespeare presents a circle of men, most of

the patriarchs, misreading Hero's face and drawing conclusions which the audience has already been prepared to see as clearly false. The echo is hard to miss: early modern men are also examining the beardless male apprentices around them and arriving at similarly false conclusions.

In *Merchant of Venice*, Shakespeare examines the economic perils of transitioning from apprentice to patriarch, with some attention to beardlessness. For *Much Ado About Nothing*, he switches focus, with beardlessness at the forefront and the nature of patriarchy interrogated. *As You Like It*, though, seems to balance both issues. Like Claudio, Orlando from *As You Like It* is specifically described as a beardless youth. Celia fears for Orlando during his wrestling match with Charles, crying out, "Alas, he is too young!" (*AYL* 1.2, 145). Later, she describes him as a youth that "hath but a little beard" (*AYL* 3.2, 205). Rosalind also remarks that Orlando has "a beard neglected, which you have not" and compares it to a "younger brother's revenue" (*AYL* 3.3, 365-8). As with *Merchant of Venice*, *As You Like It* focuses on the perils that young men faced when transitioning from a dependant to an enfranchised patriarch. In *As You Like It*, however, Shakespeare concentrates on the role of education in this process. Here, Ben-Amos' earlier comment is extremely appropriate. The transition of youth to adult follows this pattern: "the acquisition of negotiating skills; the evolution of material preoccupations and concerns for betterment; and the assumption of responsibilities for other people, both young and old" (208). All three components are directly addressed in this play.

As Ben-Amos points out, early-modern conceptions of the difference between youth and adulthood centered on both Aristotelian and Augustinian arguments regarding experience. The youth relied too much on feeling than reason; the adult, according to

Ben-Amos, “reached perfection as a result of organic evolution, but also as a result of social experience” (29). While *Merchant of Venice* examines marriage as the transitioning point, *As You Like It* explores the importance the period placed on experience. Through proper experience and reasoning, a youth could then transition into mature adulthood, thus allowing him to marry. This emphasis on the shift from boy to man is made all the more apparent by Shakespeare’s wordplay: Orlando de Bois.

To the modern reader, Celia’s comment that Orlando has “but a little beard” suggests a confession that Orlando sports some sort of facial hair, enough to indicate that he possesses the essential generative qualities of manhood (heat and seminal fluids) which a full beard should expose. Such a reading, however, reveals more about our contemporary tendency to categorize individuals based on genetics or physiognomy, or an indication of a person’s character. For the early modern audience member, these categories are all too fluid. Both Celia and Rosalind insist on viewing Orlando as a youth despite the few hairs growing on his chin. Or, just as likely, if Johnston’s interpretation of laws dictating that bearded apprentices be fined is correct, Orlando is a young man required to keep his beard shaved. Reginald Reynold’s text playfully explores the poor shaving experience an early modern man might face, one in which the absences of soap and safety razors would leave a man’s cheek “as smooth as a toothbrush” (84).

Orlando opens the play by claiming that his older brother, Oliver, purposely blocks him from gaining the education and experience necessary to become a gentleman. Jaques, the middle brother, Oliver “keeps at school” (*AYL* 1.1, 5). As for Orlando, Oliver keeps him “here at home unkept,” for which Orlando claims, “differs not from the stalling of an ox” (*AYL* 1.1, 8-10). Orlando notes that he is “not taught to make

anything,” and that Oliver seeks to “mar that which God made, a poor unworthy brother of yours, with idleness” (*AYL* 1.1, 29, 31-3). Orlando retreats into the idyllic, pastoral world of Duke Senior’s forest exile, and there he is supposedly educated by the Duke’s tutelage and Rosalind’s guidance in the art of romantic courtship.

As with Portia and Beatrice, Shakespeare uses Rosalind to critique early-modern stage conventions in regards to young male apprentices as women. In *As You Like It*, the “boy plays girl” confusion reaches critical mass with a masterful “boy plays girl plays boy plays girl” performance. Rosalind escapes her uncle into the forest under the guise of “Ganymede.” There she realizes that Orlando is in exile with her and is writing dreadful doggerel in her honor. She strikes a bargain with Orlando: he (she) will “pretend” to be Rosalind, and Orlando will then woo him (her) in her (his) place. Ganymede/Rosalind claims that his/her goal is to cure Orlando of his love for the lady. Orlando is clear that he “would not be cured” (*AYL* 3.2, 413), but he engages in the deception none the less.

While Shakespeare describes a situation in which a youth must receive education in order to know the values and skills needed to be an adult man, he emphatically undercuts it. Orlando claims to lack the qualities of gentleness, and yet throughout the play, he demonstrates that such qualities are already inherent in his character. At the moment of his exile, Orlando gains a dependent in Adam, his father’s old manservant. The dependency is mutual; Adam’s gold sponsors Orlando’s escape into the forest. That Adam is a dependent Orlando must care for, rather than a servant who cares for him, is emphasized by Orlando hauling the old man onto his back and carrying him off stage at the end of Act 2, Scene 6, and by making his first duty the securing of food and shelter

for Adam before he will take food himself. Such behavior reveals a patriarch's duty, that of managing a household of dependents. Oliver's motivation for denying Orlando education is heightened by his understanding that Orlando is "gentle, never schooled and yet learned, full of noble device, of all sorts enchantingly beloved" (*AYL* 1.1, 157-9). Jaques, Duke Senior's melancholy companion, accedes that Orlando possesses a "nimble wit" (*AYL* 3.2, 272). Lastly, at the point of his salvation, when a lioness is about to pounce on his persecutor Oliver, Orlando risks his life to defend his brother's. These incidents demonstrate that the qualities of gentleness, honor and civic duty are characteristics inherent in the individual and not learned.

Secondly, Shakespeare implies that the courtly skills that a gentleman is expected to learn are merely customs, fine clothes meant to cover sin and corruption rather than outward expressions of virtue. Duke Senior describes the court as "envious" and "painted pomp" (*AYL* 2.1, 3-4). The champion of courtly values and sophistication is none other than Touchstone, the fool. As Touchstone tries to demean Corin for his lack of courtly skills, Corin replies that such skills are useless: "Those that are good manners at the court," Corin claims, "are as ridiculous in the country as the behavior of the country is most mockable at the court" (*AYL* 3.2, 43-6).

Lastly, one must question the value of Rosalind's strategy of educating Orlando in wooing ladies. Shakespeare clearly parodies Ovidian and Petrarchan traditions with Silvius and Phoebe. Even Rosalind joins in the critique as she diagnosis Orlando's love-claims: Orlando lacks the "lean cheek," "a blue eye, and sunken," "a beard neglected," "hose . . . ungartered," "bonnet unbanded," "sleeve unbuttoned," and "shoe untied" (*AYL* 3.3, 364-70). Both Rosalind and Orlando are smitten with each other from the beginning

of the play. If Rosalind succeeds in curing Orlando, she does so by showing him that the courtly love tradition is not a skill worth mastering.

Again, as with *Merchant of Venice* and *Much Ado About Nothing*, *As You Like It* fits easily within the genre of apprentice literature in that the economically troubled youth succeeds in transitioning from dependent to patriarch. Orlando has been promised both wealth and education, but Oliver holds these things from him. As I mentioned earlier, such struggles were common for the apprentice in the years the mid to late 1590s, when almost half could not finish their apprenticeships. Like Orlando, apprentices at the time found themselves at a loss, “not taught to make anything” and instead made to mar through “idleness.” *As You Like It* emphasizes that virtue might be an inherent trait, that the beardless young male is not automatically excluded from expressing those very virtues that characterize an enfranchised patriarch. Though he “hath but a little beard,” Orlando clearly shows that he understands the nature of his role as a patriarch, supporting Adam as a dependent, wooing Rosalind through Ganymede, and both forgiving and defending his older brother Oliver. Similar to *Much Ado About Nothing*, Shakespeare questions whether outward appearance can necessarily define inward qualities. Orlando is, after all, shocked to find nobility in a forest environment, as is demonstrated by his initial assumption “that all thing had been savage here,” to brandish a sword and to put “on the countenance of stern commandment” (*AYL* 2.7, 106-8).

*As You Like It* marks the last of Shakespeare’s comedies that address the struggles of young, beardless male apprentices. One might describe *Twelfth Night* as Shakespeare’s “transition” from the “transition theme.” *Twelfth Night* includes a beardless young male character, Sebastian. Clearly he is performed beardless, as

Sebastian and Viola are so identical as to be mistaken for one another. Viola might wear a false beard, but such a prop would be inconsistent with her claim to present herself “as an eunuch” to Orsino (*TN* 1.2, 56). The play does not focus on Sebastian’s struggles so much as Viola’s, and Sebastian’s guardian and mentor, Antonio the sea captain, gives him little help in wooing Olivia. Viola’s love interest, Orsino, is already an enfranchised male, Duke of Illyria, and clearly does not need marriage to either Viola or Olivia to make him a patriarch. Between 1600 and 1601, then, Shakespeare ends his fascination with the struggles of beardless young men transitioning into fully enfranchised patriarchs.

Before examining the forces that might have encouraged Shakespeare to abandon this popular and fertile theme after 1600, I will first point out that Shakespeare does address beardlessness in three other plays during the mid to late 1590s, and two after 1600. These particular instances, however, do not involve the struggles of beardless young men but help illustrate the seriousness of those scenes directed at apprentices in *Merchant of Venice*, *Much Ado About Nothing* and *As You Like It*. The most notable character is Prince Hal from the two *Henry IV* plays between 1596 and 1597.

Shakespeare spends a great deal of energy in describing Prince Hal’s beardlessness in 2 *Henry IV*. Falstaff describes him thus:

[T]he juvenal, the Prince your master, whose chin is not yet fledged. I will sooner have a beard grow in the palm of my hand than he shall get one of his cheek, and yet he will not stick to say his face is a face royal. God may finish it when he will; ‘tis not a hair amiss yet. He may keep it still at a face royal, for a barber

shall never earn a sixpence out of it; and yet he'll be crowing as if he had writ man ever since his father was a bachelor (*2H4* 1.2, 19-27)<sup>12</sup>.

Falstaff's phrase "face royal" indicates a separate category of beardless male characters in Shakespeare's canon, men who by their royal blood are born masculine and do not require such symbols as beards to express their masculinity. Note that Falstaff claims that Prince Hal was "writ man ever since his father was a bachelor." Even before Hal's conception, his masculinity was unquestioned. The same could be said about the Dauphin from *King John*, written between 1594 and 1595: Phillip the Bastard calls the Dauphin a "beardless boy" (*Jn.* 5.1, 69). In the later *Antony and Cleopatra*, dated from 1606 to 1607, Cleopatra dismisses Octavius as "scarce-bearded Caesar" (*Ant.* 1.1, 22). These men operate outside of the fray, outside the malleability and detachability evidenced by Bottom and Benedick. They demonstrate that Shakespeare understood that masculinity existed as an essential element of the royal male, perhaps as an element of the royal's place in the Great Chain of Being.

The last example, Troilus from *Troilus and Cressida*, dated between 1601 and 1602, is more problematic. The play's early title pages labeled this drama a history, but Bevington categorizes the play as a "black comedy or comedy of the absurd" (455). Pandarus claims that Troilus "has not past three or four hairs on his chin" (*Tro.* 1.2, 113). Secondly, his chin is clear enough that Pandarus is able to identify a dimple (*Tro.* 1.2, 122). According to Pandarus, though, Helen states, "Here's but two-and-fifty hairs on your chin, and one of them is white" (*Tro.* 1.2, 158-9). Though Troilus is beardless,

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<sup>12</sup> With these lines occurring in the second part of the history cycle, and with the many references to Prince Hal as a youth and a boy in both, I believe it is safe to assume he was likewise performed as beardless in *I Henry IV*, as well.



Shakespeare seems to make little comment about its meaning. Instead, the play seems to focus on sexual exploits and political squabbles.

What, then, accounts for the five to seven year period in which Shakespeare dramatizes beardlessness? That Shakespeare is exploiting a physical characteristic of one of his fellow actors is certainly a possibility. Shakespeare's plays contain many specific references to a character's physical appearance. Perhaps the most obvious examples are the short and dark and tall and fair boy apprentices. The character of Hermia in *Midsummer Night's Dream* is described as an "Ethiope" and a "tawny Tartar" (*MND* 3.2, 256, 265), while Helena is teased for her height, her "tall personage": "are you [Helena] grown so high in his esteem because I am so dwarfish and low?" (*MND* 3.2, 292, 294-5). In *As You Like It*, Rosalind complains of being "uncommon tall" (*AYL* 2.1, 113). W. W. Greg has also identified examples of physical typecasting occurring with the actor John Sincler. Greg notes the constant references in *2 Henry IV* to the thinness of the character Beadle, who is marked in early folios as being performed by "Sinklo." The presence of other characters similarly described as thin, such as Slender in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and Sir Andrew Aguecheek in *Twelfth Night*, might also have been performed by him, which, Greg goes so far to suggest, "proves that Shakespeare was exploiting the remarkable appearance of a particular actor and was writing the part expressly for him" (266).

The beardless adult male actor should be handled no differently from the two apprentices and John Sincler. He, too, may represent a particular actor. Secondly, an examination of the number of lines assigned to this actor reveals him to be a principal actor within the troupe. In fact, this actor tends to receive the most lines, based on T. J.

King's analysis of the plays. For example, in *Merchant of Venice*, the character of Bassanio commands 329 lines, second only to Shylock at 335, followed by Antonio at 188 (King 184). In the case of *Much Ado About Nothing*, Benedick holds the lead at 339 lines, followed by Leonato at 336, Don Pedro at 204, and our Lord Lackbeard Claudio at 272 (193). The beardless youth again dominates in *As You Like It*, with Orlando having 304 lines to Touchstone's 273 and Jaques' 214 (202)<sup>13</sup>. Such a predominance of lines in the play, along with the significance of their characters, suggests that the beardless male principal actor is perhaps Richard Burbage.

Thomas W. Baldwin also identifies Burbage with these characters. His *The Organization and Personnel of the Shakespearean Company* is perhaps the best known work that attempts to assign actors to their particular roles and types. Despite the fact that his text first appeared in 1927, Baldwin is still frequently cited today, although Gurr warns that his assertions are "overconfidently detailed" (15). For the period 1594 to 1603, Baldwin assigns the roles of Prince Hal, Bassanio, Claudio, Orlando and Orsino to Richard Burbage based on the fact that Burbage is traditionally credited as the leading character actor of the troupe and because his age at the time would roughly correspond to the ages of these characters. Rosalind and Celia identify Orlando's hair as being reddish brown (*AYL* 3.4, 7-9), which matches Burbage's known portrait. With this theory in mind, Burbage would have created the roles of the beardless young male up until *Twelfth Night*, when he would have played Orsino to a younger, newer actor as Sebastian. Such a reading corresponds to Orsino's significance in the play, commanding 219 lines to Sebastian's 123 (King 104). Baldwin reads Falstaff's line, "Oh, for a fine thief, of the

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<sup>13</sup> Interestingly, the boy apprentice actor playing Rosalind has the most lines.

age of two-and-twenty or thereabouts” (*IH4* 3.3, 188-9) as a reference to Prince Hal’s age. Assuming Prince Hal to have been played by Burbage, Baldwin then calculates his birth to “about the summer of 1573” (239). Bernard Capp has since calculated Burbage’s birth to 1569, making him 27 or 28 at the time of *I Henry IV*’s initial performances. By the time Burbage played Orlando, with his “small beard,” he would have been between 31 and 32.

Herbert Moller’s fascinating sociological study, “The Accelerated Development of Youth: Beard Growth as a Biological Marker,” argues that “the facial hair of upper- and middle-class males consistently matured several years later in the life course than it does in the twentieth century” (753). The examples Moller cites for Shakespeare’s period range from 19 to 24 (753-5), whereas contemporary males can expect to begin shaving on average at 16 or 17 (749). Even with the later onset of facial hair, Burbage would have still been shaving in order to perform the Lord Lackbeard roles, a habit Shakespeare was sure to have witnessed and, given the nature of Benedick’s teasing, perhaps frequently mocked.<sup>14</sup> Leonato’s remark, addressed to Claudio, that Benedick looks younger, might have been a pointed jab at Burbage. Given that Capp’s date for Burbage’s birth places Burbage as the age of 26 when Falstaff declares him to be 24 might explain the addition of the very pointed “or thereabouts” to the text.

This analysis offers an admittedly speculative view into the operations of the acting troupe. If Burbage’s beard began to grow between the age range of 19 to 24, then it would have become an issue in time for Bottom’s discourse in 1594. Burbage might have begun to shave then, which would have countered Falstaff’s remark about Prince

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<sup>14</sup> Burbage could at least grow a beard, as his known portrait demonstrates (if his portrait is a representative likeness).

Hal that “a barber shall never earn a sixpence out of it,” as Burbage’s barber would have surely earned his keep by then. Leonato’s remark in *Much Ado About Nothing*, along with Beatrice’s jests, again would have been directed at Burbage. Lastly, though Orlando has a small beard, the apprentice boy actor in the role of Rosalind is able to say, “Why, God will send him more, if the man be thankful” (*AYL* 3.2, 206-7). By the time Burbage steps on stage as Orsino, the beardless trait is gone, and the comments in Shakespeare’s plays begin to fade.

This line of reasoning suggests that Shakespeare’s plays show evidence of social dialogue occurring between the actors as well as the characters. Was the audience “in on” the joke? Would the audience have responded knowingly? Perhaps the appeal that Shakespeare’s plays offer scholars an opportunity to glimpse the inner workings of the acting troupe, men whom scholars have dedicated their lives studying, represents a romantic hope that is difficult to avoid. Unfortunately, without further evidence, the argument that Shakespeare’s beardless young gallant is a biographical comment on Richard Burbage’s career will always be a pleasant speculation.

The shifting of themes away from beardless young males acquiring place and position as enfranchised adults occurs simultaneously with a more notable shift in performance repertoires occurring throughout London after 1599, when the boys’ companies reopened at Paul’s and the Blackfriars. The diversification of the theaters suggests an obvious diversification of their repertoires whereby companies began to focus their attention on particular sub-sets within their audience. This assertion, however, remains problematic. Andrew Gurr, in fact, describes parsing out the “division between the popular and the privileged, when it came into existence and what playhouses

it separated people into” as “the most knotty item in this whole history of playgoing” (68). Gurr notes “no direct evidence of links between social polarisation and the playhouse repertoires favoured by different classes of playgoer” (51). Instead, scholars have resorted to what Gurr coyly labels “inference” to locate the various audiences with their preferred ideologies, namely, “that citizens were the standard kind of playgoer in the 1590s, but that they were a distinctly less normal feature of the later indoor playhouse audiences” (61). Gurr grounds his assessment of these changes by examining admission prices: the wealthy could afford the indoor theaters, while the rest remained with the amphitheaters (76).

In deciphering Shakespeare’s use of the beardless young male in conjunction with apprentices in his audience, this reliance on price to determine audience is equally problematic, as the Globe falls within the category of the amphitheaters. Brian Gibbons suggests that ideology might offer clues to audience compositions. In *Jacobean City Comedy*, Gibbons notes that while the Red Bull, Swan, Rose and Hope theaters tended to focus on themes of “cheerful patriotism and national satisfaction,” the Globe tended to side with Blackfriars and the Paul’s by expressing discontent with public affairs” (34). Gibbons then divides the late Elizabethan audience into two ideological categories: “the first includes lawyers, members of the Commons, merchants and Inns of Court students, nobility and gentry, the second more predominantly tradesmen, citizens, labourers, carriers, apprentices, servingmen” (34).

While the Globe Theatre and Shakespeare’s troupe, the Lord Chamberlain’s Men, did transition towards dramas that pleased the court, Gurr notes that this transition “was gradual and unemphatic” (77), unlike the abrupt end in 1600 to the young beardless male

trope. Clearly, another factor is present. The connection may be due to the abrupt loss of the Inns of Court students to the boy theaters. According to Gurr, Shakespeare's plays dealing with themes of love were "notably popular" with the Inns of Court students, who tended to keep "commonplace books of verse from Shakespeare's comedies" (154). There is, however, little evidence to suggest that the Inns of Court students suffered the same economic and social anxieties as the apprentices in transitioning from young beardless male dependent to fully enfranchised, bearded member of the patriarchy.

I suggest that the marriage comedies represent Shakespeare's subtle genius in creating dramas for his heterogeneous audience. As Mark Thornton Burnett notes, Shakespeare would have been discouraged to draft performances that expressly illustrated apprentices directly achieving success because such works would have been seen as "potentially dangerous and subversive" (37). Burnett adds, "Plays in which apprentices performed valiantly could be read as incitements to riot" (37). The genre of apprentice literature from the 1590s, then, tended to urge apprentices to participate peacefully and patiently within the patriarchal economy. "Shortages and dearth," Burnett argues, "were confronted in texts which reassured apprentices with tales of the riches and advantages they might gain if only in youth they remained moderate, disciplined, and abstemious" (36). Clearly, the struggles faced by Bassanio and Orlando fall within this category, as both characters are rewarded with "riches and advantages," and both characters begin their trials in a state completely opposite from "moderate, disciplined and abstemious." Faced with a situation in which he had to appeal to two segments of his audience, one that attended the theater to applaud poetic and lyric expressions of romance, the other that

attended to appreciate expressions of beardless young men acquiring fortune and position, Shakespeare crafts his marriage comedies to elegantly please both.

Throughout this essay, I have focused my attention on the beard-less-ness in order to argue that such a state represented a category rather than simply a lack. Such a lack is normally associated with immature stages of physiological development in males, but based on Johnston's reading of guild records, the imposing of fines on apprentices created a class of males who were "strongly encouraged," if not outright oppressed, into removing their facial hair in order to express physically this separate category. A clear dichotomy existed between those whom we typically describe as patriarchs—married males with dependents, either children or servants, enrolled as masters in guilds or privileged through aristocracy—and their charges, young males, apprentices, striving to achieve enfranchisement within the early modern economy. The issue may seem trivial, but this distinction provides an example of early modern gender being performed through a lack of material. The evidence suggests that the role of material, "matter" as Judith Butler so coyly uses the term, is much more complex and operates in a much less straight-forward manner than is generally recognized.

Such a reading also suggests exciting new avenues for future exploration regarding the performance of gender in the early modern period that are, unfortunately, beyond the scope of this thesis. For example, perhaps the drive to materialize gender, to reach a state of enfranchisement into the economic and political framework that defined early modern manhood, is a more crucial element in constructing gender than the material components. The unstable relationship between bearded male masters and their beardless apprentices indicates a power struggle. The conflict between a mattered body, the

bearded master, versus that of the un-mattered body, the lack-bearded apprentices, recalls Michel Foucault's king and prisoner in *Discipline and Punishment*. In Foucault's example, the king and prisoner participate in a "theoretical discourse, not in order to ground the 'surplus power' possessed by the person of the sovereign, but in order to code the 'lack of power' with which those subjected to punishment are marked" (29). While they are not exactly being "punished" by their masters, the beardless apprentices are clearly being used to define the boundaries of early modern masculinity. Granted, in this particular instance the majority of those individuals marked as "youths" are unable to mark themselves into masculinity until their bodies mature; however, the imposition of fines, as described by Johnston, indicate that at least some apprentices attempted to mark themselves as "men" without the economic and political components necessary to maintain that status. More importantly, this system of fines suggests a reaction by those males in power to counteract that "usurpation."

Perhaps, then, power relations play a role in defining gender during the early-modern period equally important as the material component. Many of the materials Will Fisher notes as components of male gender performance—swords, armor and daggers, for example—are weaponry. Johnston argues that beards are more closely aligned with economic power, and elaborate codpieces would only be available to those individuals with the wealth to purchase them. Returning to Fisher's metaphor of "weights on a scale" to describe how individuals progress along a continuum between categories of male and female, I wonder if these "weights" are not simply expressions of power rather than simply material.



This struggle between bearded and beardless categories suggests a second element of Foucault's examination of the physics of micro-power: he notes, "there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge" (27). Both parties, masters and apprentices, are clearly conscious of the role of beards as markers, and this consciousness pervades the examples of early modern culture left to us in various texts, not simply the Lord Chamberlain's plays that I have examined. Shakespeare's critique, however, reveals more than just a conscious understanding of the economic and political forces at work defining masculinity during this period. His cycle of plays in the mid to late 1590s seems to suggest a rebellion against such categories. He recognizes that the transition to adulthood is primarily driven by economic forces in *Merchant of Venice*. He openly ridicules the custom of visually interpreting manhood in *Much Ado About Nothing*. He suggests that the necessary requirements for an adult male, "the acquisition of negotiating skills; the evolution of material preoccupations and concerns for betterment; and the assumption of responsibilities for other people, both young and old" (Ben Amos 208), are present in the individual before education commences. The very term that Benedick attempts to use pejoratively against Claudio, "My Lord Lackbeard," draws attention to these two central elements: power, as Claudio is a count, a "lord," who can clearly express power in denouncing Hero, and material, as Claudio physically demonstrates his "lack-beardedness."

Lastly, I'm reminded of Stephen Greenblatt's comment from his "Introduction" to *The Power of Forms in the English Renaissance*. In examining Dover Wilson's interpretation of *Richard II*, Greenblatt is less fascinated by Wilson's reading than he is intrigued by the actual timing and placement of it, "a reading that discovers

Shakespeare's fears of chaos and his consequent support for legitimate if weak authority over the claims of a ruthless usurper – and the eerie occasion of his lecture” – Weimar, Germany, 1939 (5-6). Scholarship's interaction with texts often comments more on the timing of the interaction than the interaction itself. Shakespeare's use of beardlessness as a pervasive theme during the late 1590s has only recently been noticed – within the last ten years. Judith Butler's *Bodies that Matter* identified the importance of the material in gender construction in 1993, but focus on beards has been even more recent. Within this decade, beards as an indicator of masculinity have reappeared as a dominant concept. *Newsweek*, in its August 27, 2007, edition reported on men undergoing hair transplant surgery to encourage growth, not on their scalps, but on their chins. The rebirth of the “retrosexual,” as opposed to the “metrosexual,” has reached such critical mass as to inspire satire; on January 17, 2002, Fox's *The Family Guy* presented “Brian Wallows and Peter's Swallows,” in which the main character, Peter Griffin, resorts to growing a beard in order to appear more manly. Will Fisher, Mark Albert Johnston and myself, scholars interested in beards in the early modern period, are male: would asking if they had beards be inappropriate?

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