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Queer(ed) Bodies: Subversive Sexualities and Gender Identities in Shakespeare's *As You Like It*

Volkan KILIÇ*

Abstract

As far as Shakespeare's comedies are concerned, a recurring topic is the exploration of love via the portrayal of gender role transformations and the cross-dressing of female characters. This often involves the depiction of power dynamics between male and female characters, which may be seen as alluding to homoerotic relationships and transgressions of gender roles. Shakespeare, in his play *As You Like It*, reveals the reformulation and deconstruction of established and logocentric gender roles and sexuality, where female characters adopt trans-gendered bodies, queer identities, and homoeroticism through the concept of love and cross-dressing in many respects. It is also plausible to assert that Shakespeare's representation of identity remains in a state of flux, subject to construction. The flexibility of identity, sexuality, and desire in the play inherently contests and deconstructs simplistic dichotomies of hetero/homo and masculine/feminine. In this regard, Shakespeare adeptly critiques established gender paradigms and conventions, undercutting them through the representation of characters embodying both male and female attributes. Within this framework, Shakespeare challenges established gender conventions and norms, effectively subverting them through the portrayal of characters who transcend traditional gender boundaries. More precisely, the female characters defy their prescribed gender roles, giving rise to a portrayal of a homoerotic love triangle involving Phebe, Orlando, and Rosalind/Ganymede. Thus, this study examines Shakespeare's comedy *As You Like It* in light of queer theory, focusing on the queer methodology of gender as a performative act and Judith Butler's view of the constructed nature of sexual identity. The characters, notably Rosalind/Ganymede, Celia/Aliena, and Phebe engage in the subversion of conventional gender roles, thus challenging established societal norms and expectations. Their collective actions align with Judith Butler's concepts of gender fluidity, performative identity, and the disruption of societal conventions through a queer lens. Shakespeare employs their behaviour and interactions to stimulate contemplation and examination of the intricate nature of gender roles and societal expectations.

Keywords: *As You Like It*, William Shakespeare, Queer Theory, gender.

Queer(leşmiş) Bedenler: Shakespeare'in *Nasıl Hoşunuza Giderse* Oyununda Tersine Çevrilen Toplumsal Cinsiyet Rolleri

Özet

Shakespeare'in komedilerine bakıldığında toplumsal cinsiyet rolünün tersine çevrilmesi ve kadın karakterlerin karşı cins olarak kıyafet değiştirmesi başlıca konulardandır. Bu oyunlarda genellikle erkek ve kadın karakterler arasındaki güç dinamiklerinin yansıtılması, karşı cinsin kılığına girmek, homo-erotik ilişkiler ve cinsiyet rollerinin tersine çevrilmesi ve yıkılması gibi hususlar açıkça görülebilir. Aynı şekilde,

* Dr. Öğr. Üyesi, Hatay Mustafa Kemal University, Department of English Language and Literature,
e-mail: volkankilic25@hotmail.com
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8961-5519.

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Shakespeare'in *Nasıl Hoşunuza Giderse* adlı oyununda, kadın karakterler "trans-cinsiyetli" bedenlerini, queer kimliklerini ve homo-erotizmi, kıyafet değiştirme yoluyla ön plana çıkararak, kendilerine geleneksel olarak biçilen söz-merkezci (logo-centric) cinsiyet rollerini yapı-sökümüne uğratarak cinsiyetin yeniden şekillendirilmesini göz önüne sermektedirler. Bu da Judith Butler'ın postmodern cinsiyet bağlamında, toplumsal cinsiyet kimliklerin hiçbir zaman sabit olmadığı, fakat sürekli olarak toplum tarafından inşa edildiği anlamına gelebilir. Oyundaki cinsel kimlik ve arzunun akışkanlığı aslında her türlü temel hetero/homo, eril/dişil ikilemine meydan okumaktadır. Bu bağlamda Shakespeare, erkek ve kadın karakterleri tasvir yoluyla geleneksel cinsiyet rollerini ve normlarını tersine çevirerek kendi zamanının ataerkil toplumuna bir şekilde meydan okumaktadır. Özellikle kadın karakterler beklenen cinsiyet rollerinden ve sınırlarından sapmakta ve bu da oyunda Phebe, Orlando ve Rosalind/Ganymede karakterlerinde olduğu gibi homoerotik bir aşk üçgeninin temsiliyle verilmektedir. Bu çalışma, Shakespeare'in *Nasıl Hoşunuza Giderse* adlı oyunundaki Rosalind/Ganymede, Celia/Aliena ve Phebe karakterlerinin geleneksel toplumsal cinsiyet rollerini tersine çevirdiklerini, toplumsal beklentilere ve normlara meydan okuduklarını ve bunların Judith Butler'ın toplumsal cinsiyet akışkanlığı, kimlik performansı ve yıkıcılığa ilişkin görüşlerini temsil ettiklerini öne sürmektedir. Dolayısıyla Shakespeare burada da belirtildiği üzere ve oyunun da başlığında olduğu gibi, kişinin cinsiyet rolünü, bu cinsiyet farklı olsa bile, istediği veya arzuladığı şekilde inşa edebileceğini öne sürüyor.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Nasıl Hoşunuza Giderse*, William Shakespeare, Queer Kuramı, Toplumsal cinsiyet.

Introduction

The rise of poststructuralism and postmodernism, which allowed for the reformulation, reconsideration, and deconstruction of Western logocentric ideology while highlighting the complexities of meaning, truth, and playfulness of language as well as the ambiguities of sexual and gender identities, marked the end of the 20th century in literary and cultural studies (Sullivan, 2003, p. 2). Along with Sullivan's ideas, Spargo (1999) has stated that queer theory draws upon several concepts from poststructuralist theory, encompassing Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic theories of fluid and destabilised identity, Jacques Derrida's deconstruction of binary conceptual and linguistic frameworks, and, notably, Michel Foucault's framework of discourse, knowledge, and power, hence queer theory incorporates concepts from poststructuralist thinkers, fostering the acceptance of the perspective that sexuality is discursively constructed (p. 41). As Karadaş (2022) asserts, "queer is that outer sphere where all logocentric binaries collapse, and presence always disappears in what Derrida calls the free play of signs" (p. 4). Foucault, a prominent figure in the evolution of queer theory, examines sexuality through the lens of the body. He argues in *History of Sexuality: An Introduction* that to break free from binaries, particularly in relation to sexuality, it is essential first to liberate the body. In Western cultural history, the body has been perceived not merely as a biological entity but as a convergence of discursive elements and as a space of "exploitation as an object of knowledge and an element of power relations" (Foucault, 1990, p. 107). Likewise, Judith Butler, in her book *Bodies That Matter*, stresses the Foucauldian view of the discursive construction of sexuality in a way that "sexual difference, however, is never simply a function of material differences which are not in some way both marked and formed by discursive practices" (1993, p. 1). In this respect, scholars working on gender and sexuality theories stress the fact that sexual identity is largely performed or

constructed rather than genetically fixed. Likewise, queer theory emerged as an academic framework that critically examines and interrogates conventional practices pertaining to gender and sexuality, encompassing investigations into diverse sexual orientations and gender identities while also engaging in a critical analysis of prevailing social standards. Queer theory, therefore, presents a critique of heteronormativity, which is the societal belief that heterosexuality is the standard or norm, and challenges the concept of gender binary, which is the acceptance of just two genders, male and female (Jagose, 1996, p. 1). According to Spargo (1999), queer theory does not adhere to a singular or systematic conceptual or methodological framework; rather, it comprises a diverse range of intellectual inquiries into the intersections of "sex, gender, and sexual desire" (p. 9). Originating from the disciplines of lesbian, gay, and gender studies, queer theory emerged during the 1990s. While it encompasses a range of interpretations, applications, and utilisations, queer theory can be generally defined as an exploration of gender practices and identities, as well as sexualities that diverge from the established norms of cisgender and heterosexual orientations. Scholars and proponents of queer theory adopt a critical stance towards essentialist perspectives regarding sexuality and gender, perceiving these concepts as products of social and cultural construction (Nayar, 2010, p. 91). As Stanivukovic points out, "when employed within early modern literary criticism, queer, as a concept rooted in the deconstruction of sexuality, desire, and embodiment, has primarily encompassed four key categories that form the foundation of critical discourse. These categories include discussions related to the sodomite and homoeroticism in the portrayal of male same-sex desire, as well as the tribade and lesbianism in representations of female same-sex desire" (2017, p. 17). Yet, it is further claimed by Stanivukovic (2017) that the term, queer, "has also been used to contrast the cultural and political power that demands knowledge of any identity defined in transparent and fixed terms. In this sense, 'queer' represents 'a challenge to the ontological grounding of desire and politics'" (p. 18). In queer theory, also individuals' desires play a significant role in shaping their choices and actions, which, in turn, influence the prominence of different desires in their lives. This process facilitates the impact of performative acts on behaviour and the formation of one's self-identity. Ultimately, while individuals have the agency to select from among their desires, they do not have the capacity to determine which desires define their core identity. This perspective bears resemblance to Rohy's (2011) concept of a self that is both subject to and influential over chance factors, highlighting the complex interplay between agency and contingency (p. 57). In this regard, Shakespeare's comedy, *As You Like It*, can be a proper example of the revealing reformulation and deconstruction of established and logocentric gender roles and sexuality, where female characters adopt trans-gendered bodies, queer identities, and homoeroticism through the concept of love and cross-dressing in many respects. Bulman (2004) claims that Shakespeare frequently employs gender as a means of enacting role-playing in his

comedies, which strengthens the idea that gender is constructed and based on roles that we play in society (p. 31). As far as Shakespeare's comedies are concerned, a recurring topic is the exploration of love via the portrayal of gender role transformations and the cross-dressing of female characters. This often involves the depiction of power dynamics between male and female characters, which may be seen as alluding to homoerotic relationships and transgressions of gender roles. As in the play, this is evident through the portrayal of intimate love relationships, such as the bond between Celia and Rosalind. Notably, Rosalind assumes the name "Ganymede"[1] as a disguise to assess Orlando's capacity for love towards her. Rosalind's character exemplifies Judith Butler's concept of gender as a performative act. By adopting her disguise, Rosalind attains a newfound sense of autonomy and liberation, enabling her to express her desires openly and unabashedly.

Additionally, the play highlights Phebe's affection for Rosalind/Ganymede as another example of the exploration of love and sexual identity. In this context, it can be observed that Shakespeare subverts gender roles and sexuality through the portrayal of male and female characters. Phebe, a shepherdess within the play, serves as another compelling example of a character who disrupts conventional gender norms. Initially attracted to and in love with Rosalind (disguised as Ganymede), Phebe later redirects her affections towards Silvius, a man deeply devoted to her. This shift implies Phebe's capacity for affection towards both men and women, thereby challenging the conventional binary perspective of sexuality. Specifically, the female characters deviate from their conventional gender roles and boundaries, resulting in the depiction of a homoerotic love triangle involving Phebe, Orlando, and Rosalind/Ganymede. As in the play, the heterosexual love between Orlando and Rosalind is subverted to a homoerotic love between Orlando and Ganymede/Rosalind, and Phebe and Ganymede/Rosalind. This paper seeks to show how Shakespeare represents transgendered sexuality and homoerotic love among female and male characters by challenging and transcending gender norms and sexual identities through the characters' cross-dressing and homoerotic love inclinations. Accordingly, Shakespeare's play *As You Like It* will be re-read in the light of queer theory, centring on the notion of gender as a performative act and Judith Butler's view of the constructed nature of sexual identity. The study contends that several characters, including Rosalind/Ganymede, Celia/Aliena, and Phebe, subvert traditional gender roles, challenging societal expectations and norms, and they collectively contribute to Butler's views of gender fluidity, the performance of identity, and the subversion of societal norms in the light of queer perspective. Shakespeare uses their actions and interactions to provoke thought and reflection on the complexities of gender roles and expectations.

[1] James Saslow (1986), who looks at how Ganymede was shown in art in the West between the 15th and 17th centuries in his book *Ganymede in the Renaissance: Homosexuality in Art and Society*, states that the word "Ganymede" was used to describe a gay man's object of desire from the Middle Ages until the 17th century.

Queer Theory

Queer theory is a current of thought that questions and discusses traditional notions about sexual orientation, gender identity, and sexuality. As an academic approach, it challenges traditional understandings of gender and sexuality, emphasises diversity and freedom of identity, and creates a more inclusive and just society through the revision of social norms and the acceptance of diverse experiences and identities (Nagoshi, 2016, p. 22). It challenges accepted norms about how gender and sexuality are regulated according to position and norms in the social structure (Nayar, 2010, p. 185). Queer theorists emphasise diversity and variability rather than reducing sexual orientation and gender identity to hard limits. In this context, queer theory criticises heterosexual-centred approaches and aims to make room for non-heterosexual experiences and identities. It offers a framework for understanding the complexity of identities and experiences and embraces multiple perspectives. In short, queer theory aims to offer a more inclusive and liberating approach to gender and sexual orientation by questioning the assumed norms and social functioning regarding heterosexism (Thomas, 2009, p. 21-22). It encompasses various disciplines such as queer theory, feminist theory, social theory, sociology, and psychology. The informal utilisation of the term 'queer theory' gained prominence in the 1990s through the scholarship of individuals like Gloria Anzaldúa, who drew inspiration from Michel Foucault's 1976 publication, *The History of Sexuality*. Foucault's work proposed that identity is not an inherent aspect of individuals and that sexuality is shaped by social constructs. The year 1990 witnessed two pivotal publications: Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's seminal work *Epistemology of the Closet* and Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble*, both of which expanded on the theory of gender performance. It was during this period that Teresa de Lauretis organised a conference on queer theory. Her use of the term 'queer' at the time sparked considerable controversy (Giffney, 2009, p. 4). The term “queer theory” was therefore coined by de Lauretis in her 1991 article “Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities.” In this article, she elucidates her use of the term, indicating that it encompasses three interconnected objectives within the framework of this theory. Firstly, it involves a rejection of heterosexuality as the standard against which all sexual formations are measured. Secondly, it challenges the notion that lesbian and gay studies constitute a unified and homogenous entity. Thirdly, it places significant emphasis on examining the various ways in which race influences sexual biases (p. iii-iv). De Lauretis (1991) suggests that queer theory can encompass all of these critical perspectives simultaneously, thereby offering the opportunity to fundamentally reconsider all aspects of sexuality (p. viii). As a result, queer theory offers a questioning, critical, and inclusive perspective in many fields. It questions heteronormative ideas and aims at social change by including a wider range of experiences and identities on sexual orientation and gender issues.

The concept of sexuality and gender reconstruction is central to queer theory, which posits that these constructs are not bound by rigid and predetermined rules. Consequently, there is considerable variation in the sexual orientations and gender identities of people (Giffney, 2009, p. 6). Queer theory posits that heterosexuality is a socially constructed norm and asserts the value of sexual and emotional experiences that deviate from this standard. This perspective acknowledges the presence of diverse sexual identities and forms of relationships, hence questioning established cultural conventions (Sullivan, 2003, p. 28). The concept of multiplicity in sexual and gender identities is a central tenet of queer theory. According to this theoretical framework, gender and sexuality are not confined to a binary or static understanding but rather include a wide range of expressions and orientations (Nayar, 2020, p. 184). Queer theory advocates for the recognition and acceptance of this diverse spectrum of identities. This setting encompasses discussions pertaining to the experiences of individuals who identify as transgender and the wide range of sexual orientations present throughout society (Nayar, 2010, p. 185). The concept of identity and the exercise of freedom of expression are central to queer theory, which places a strong emphasis on the autonomy of people to freely articulate and manifest their sexual and gender identities. This is the act of resisting societal pressures and instances of exclusion (Callis, 2009, p. 216). Queer theory, in this respect, is a scholarly framework that challenges and critiques prejudice and injustice rooted in sexual orientation and gender identity. It facilitates the advancement of social transformation and the pursuit of justice. The emergence of queer theory may be traced back to the field of lesbian and gay studies in literary and cultural texts. This interdisciplinary approach examines the historical portrayal of homosexuality as abnormal, pathological, and criminal while emphasising the significance of sexuality as a crucial aspect of critical analysis (Rubin, 2006, p. 151). Furthermore, queer theory has a keen interest in examining the dynamics of power, societal judgements, and institutional prejudices that underpin depictions of both heterosexuality and homosexuality. Through redefining identities and establishing a cultural and political domain inside the dominant heterosexual paradigm, queer theory challenges the marginalisation and stigmatisation of non-heterosexual orientations, seeking to dismantle perceptions of deviance, abnormality, and difference from heterosexuality (Nayar, 2010, p. 184). Furthermore, queer theory is concerned with the underlying power dynamics, societal evaluations, and institutional prejudices that shape how heterosexuals and queer identities are portrayed. Queer studies have also been defined as "an attempt to redefine identities and carve out a cultural or political space within the dominant heterosexual paradigm, to simply stop being invisible or the "perverted" or "sick" and "other" of heterosexuality" (Nayar 2007, p. 118). As a result of its central focus on systems of oppression, queer theory might be characterised as unavoidably political.

Queer theory draws significant inspiration from the contributions of French intellectuals, particularly the philosopher Michel Foucault. Foucault (1990) wrote in his book *History of Sexuality* that sexuality is a part of power structures and discourse (p. 82-91). Foucault (1990) says that homosexuality and queer sexuality have been pushed to the side by making some forms of sexuality seem unnatural and bad, and people who are gay have been put under surveillance (p. 124-127). As he further claims, power has a significant role in classifying and mapping the sexuality of the body, primarily via the discourses and power dynamics embedded within institutional frameworks such as medicine, religion, and the law (Foucault, 1990, p. 126). This indicates that sexuality has moved from being solely associated with physicality to influencing cultural and discursive factors, from the realm of the body to the realm of culture. Sexual identity, hence, becomes a cultural product rather than a bodily one. As a matter of fact, putting sexuality in the context of discourses of medicine, religion, and law, Foucault's (1990) *History of Sexuality* demonstrates how heterosexuality, or normal sexuality, emerged through demonising homosexuality in society. As far as Foucault's views are concerned, contemporary sociologists and cultural theorists consider sexuality as a social construct, in which sexual identity too is constructed out of discourses.

Judith Butler, often recognised as a prominent scholar examining prevalent conceptions of gender and sexuality, extensively incorporates Foucault's concepts into her work, with a particular emphasis on the exploration of gender. Along with Foucault's views on gender and sexuality, Butler challenges the conventional understanding of gender as a stable and innate aspect of identity in her work, *Gender Trouble*. Through an examination of language, cultural norms, and societal expectations, she introduces a new way of thinking about gender, one that emphasises its performative nature. Butler (2001) writes that "there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performativity constructed by the very expressions that are said to be its results" (p. 33). In this regard, central to her theory is her critique of essentialism, the idea that there are fixed and inherent characteristics that define what it means to be male or female. In other words, she challenges the assumption that specific gendered behaviours are inherent, demonstrating how the performance of gendered conduct (typically associated with femininity and masculinity) is, in fact, a form of enactment. This performance is imposed upon individuals by normative heterosexuality. Butler further argues that essentialist notions of gender are problematic because they fail to account for the diversity and fluidity of human experiences. By challenging the notion that gender is determined by biology or a set of fixed traits, she opens up space for a more complex and nuanced understanding of gender identity. She also points out that "the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality" (Butler, 2001, p. 173). In this manner, she contends that gender is something one does or acts rather than something is. Gender identity is not pre-existing but is constructed and enacted through repeated

and stylized actions, behaviours, and gestures. Particularly, individuals perform their gender roles, often unconsciously, according to societal norms and expectations. This performative aspect of gender suggests that it is subject to change and disruption. As Butler (2001) has indicated,

> If gender differentiation follows upon the incest taboo and the prior taboo on homosexuality, then "becoming" a gender is a laborious process of becoming naturalized, which requires a differentiation of bodily pleasures and parts on the basis of gendered meanings. Pleasures are said to reside in the penis, the vagina, and the breasts or to emanate from them, but such descriptions correspond to a body which has already been constructed or naturalized as gender-specific. In other words, some parts of the body become conceivable foci of pleasure precisely because they correspond to a normative ideal of a gender-specific body. Pleasures are in some sense determined by the melancholic structure of gender whereby some organs are deadened to pleasure, and others brought to life. Which pleasures shall live and which shall die is often a matter of which serve the legitimating practices of identity formation that take place within the matrix of gender norms (p. 89-90).

Hence, she suggests that masculinity as a gender identity does not result from the existence of a penis but comes through certain behaviours and performances of roles, such as how to talk, how to wear, how to speak, and how to walk like men, and oppositely in society. She explores the potential for subversion and parody within the performative act of gender. She argues that by consciously and creatively challenging societal norms and expectations, individuals can disrupt traditional gender binaries and hierarchies. Through subversive performances, people can call attention to the constructed nature of gender and question the oppressive structures that govern it. Rethinking Foucault's notion of sexuality and gender and Simon de Beauvoir's idea that "one is not born, but rather becomes a woman" (qtd. in Butler, 2001), Butler (2001) asserts that "gender is repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory framework that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being" (p. 33). In this sense, she deconstructs essentialism and introduces the concept of performativity, which reshapes traditional understandings of gender identity and its cultural and societal underpinnings. Butler (2001) also writes that "gender proves to be performative—that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be" (p. 34). Hence, she contends that gender identity is not something one inherently possesses but something that is enacted through repeated performances of culturally prescribed norms and behaviours. Butler, thereupon, in her book *Bodies That Matter* challenges the binary understanding of sexuality and

asserts that it, too, is constructed through discourse and performance. She questions normative notions of heterosexuality and homosexuality, emphasizing the fluidity and complexity of sexual desires and identities (1993, p. 99-100).

In line with the psychological conceptions of masculinity and femininity held by the gender orientations, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's theory of gender holds that sex is innate or biological, similar to Foucault and Butler. In *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, Sedgwick (1985) introduced a nuanced understanding of gender as it relates to homosocial desire, challenging conventional interpretations of literary texts and the prevailing binary model of gender. Sedgwick's deconstruction of binary gender roles and her emphasis on the performative nature of gender identity have paved the way for subsequent scholars to explore gender as a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. Central to Sedgwick's theory of gender is the concept of homosocial desire. She argues that male-male relationships in literature are often saturated with complex emotional and erotic undertones, even if not explicitly sexual (Sedgwick, 1985, p. 1-2). According to Zhen (2018), "men and women differ in their access to power, so there are important gender differences, and the differences appeared in the social structure and constitution of sexuality" (p. 70). In this manner, in her concept of homosocial desire, Sedgwick puts out that

> The diacritical opposition between the "homosocial" and the "homosexual" seems to be much less thorough and dichotomous for women, in our society, than for men. At this particular historical moment, an intelligible continuum of aims, emotions, and valuations links lesbianism with the other forms of women's attention to women: the bond of mother and daughter, for instance, the bond of sister and sister, women's friendship, 'networking', and the active struggles of feminism (p. 2).

Sedgwick, in this respect, challenges the presumption that men's emotional bonds are solely non-sexual, emphasising the significance of homosociality in understanding the construction of gender. Sedgwick indicates how homosocial desire can be a crucial site for the exploration of gender roles and expectations. Sedgwick (1985) also examines the dynamics of male homosocial relationships in literature, underscoring the importance of such relationships in shaping both male and female characters. These relationships, she argues, are characterised by intense emotional bonds, competition, jealousy, and the negotiation of power (p. 2-3). Sedgwick contends that gender identity is not only formed through heterosexual relations but is also significantly influenced by interactions between men. Thus, male homosociality becomes a key site for the expression and regulation of gender norms (Sedgwick, 1985, p. 1). Sedgwick draws from Judith Butler's notion of gender performativity to argue that gender identity is not an inherent or stable

essence, but a social construct enacted through performance. In this view, gender identity is fluid and subject to change based on context and relationships. Sedgwick's perspective challenges the traditional binary understanding of gender, highlighting its performative nature within homosocial interactions.

Queer Identities, Gender, and Sexuality in *As You Like It*

Re-reading *As You Like It* in light of queer theory leads us to understand and examine homoerotic as well as heteroerotic relations among the characters. Homoeroticism is a major issue in the play, which can be analysed within the extremely intimate relationship in the form of the homoerotic love triangle, seen through love, sexual coquetry, or flirtatious acts between Rosalind and Orlando. Rosalind adopts Ganymede as a boyish name, disguising her as a shepherd, and she begins to play with Orlando, who is her lover and a wooing person. The relationship between Orlando and Ganymede begins in the Forest of Arden, where their paths cross. Young Orlando, who is infatuated with Ganymede (Rosalind), finds comfort and direction in her company. When Orlando tells Ganymede (Rosalind) about his feelings for Rosalind, it is a defining moment in his life and marks the beginning of a new chapter. The existence of Ganymede (Rosalind), a disguised character, enables Orlando to express himself freely and without regard for societal norms. Orlando undergoes emotional development and self-discovery as a direct result of his contact with Ganymede (Rosalind). Despite the fact that Orlando thinks his love is aimed at Rosalind, it is through his conversation with Ganymede (Rosalind) that he gains a better knowledge of his own desires and the meaning of love for him. In the end, Orlando's emotional development and a stronger awareness of genuine relationships are both a direct result of their relationship. Although Orlando is under the impression that he is conversing with a young man, the emotional intensity of their relationship hints that they may have a more profound connection. The ambiguity of their relationship challenges the notion of fixed sexual orientations and suggests the existence of same-sex desire outside of societal norms. Thus, in presenting the intimate male-to-male love and sexual relationship, Shakespeare in fact aimed at giving the idea that gender and sexuality are mobile, in which homoeroticism is indispensable (DiGangi, 1997, p. 484). One can claim that Shakespeare's incorporation of same-sex love into his work represents a ground-breaking departure from the prevailing norms of his era, especially when compared to earlier literature that largely omitted such expressions of desire. As Smith (1994) claims, "in the dalliance of ‘Orlando’ and Rosalind," they would have witnessed in literal fact what Orlando and Rosalind were playing out in fiction: a man and a boy flirting with abandon and getting away with it" (p. 147). Moreover, in Shakespeare’s time, boys played women’s parts, which brought about questions of homosexuality in English society through cross-dressing (Chess, 2016). Thus, in the case of Rosalind/Ganymede, cross-dressing, in many accounts, can be connected with homosexuality, which is seen through the relationship between

Orlando and Ganymede in the play. It is thought that in the performance of the play on the Elizabethan stage, Rosalind's role is played by a boy disguised as Ganymede (a boy), and Orlando's desire and love for Ganymede are therefore the homosexual and homoerotic feelings of a man to a boy. Traci (1981) highlights that regardless of the sexual orientation of the boy actors portraying Rosalind/Ganymede and Orlando, the text humorously underscores the possibility of a homosexual relationship between men (p. 96). Orlando and Ganymede (Rosalind) meet in Act III of the play, and although he calls Ganymede her lover Rosalind, he feels her male desire as he demands Ganymede "love me," "Wilt thou have me" (4.1.147) as he asks Ganymede. Thus, they pretended to be lovers in the fantastic world; in fact, this refers to homo-erotic love and homo-erotic marriage, which took place when they entered the Forest of Arden. Traci (1981) states in this respect that Arden symbolises playfulness and the atmosphere of fantasy, being "a place where a very mixed collection of people very happily go their own various ways" (p. 91). Likewise, the Forest of Arden in the play serves as a space where traditional social norms and gender roles are upended. It is in this environment that characters can form intense emotional bonds with members of the same sex. In this manner, the Forest of Arden is depicted as an idealised and Edenic realm, an escape from the realities of tradition and rules, serving as a refuge where individuals can seek solace and authenticity, unconstrained by societal norms and free to adopt new identities. Rosalind's disguise as Ganymede allows her to engage in close relationships with both Orlando and her cousin Celia (disguised as Aliena). The friendship between Rosalind (as Ganymede) and Orlando takes on homoerotic undertones as they spend time together in the forest.

Examining the homoerotic male love in *As You Like It*, queer theory reflects the nature of homosexual desire, affecting the construction of gender. The play contains elements of homoeroticism that are subtly woven into the narrative, particularly in the relationships between certain male characters. These moments of homoeroticism contribute to the play's exploration of love, desire, and the fluidity of human affections. As Butler (2001) has stated, gender is socially constructed due to the fact that society pushes individuals into different roles as males and females, and as a man acts in a female nature, a woman can adopt a manly nature (p. 8). This indicates the idea that manliness and femininity are socially constructed, as in the example of Rosalind/Ganymede and Orlando, because in *As You Like It*, Orlando adopts a feminine identity, while Rosalind adopts a masculine identity, although she does not have a penis. Therefore, Butler (2001) states that there is no certain discernment between heterosexuality and homosexuality, but these are only gathered through performances and actions (p. 191). Hence, the relationship between Orlando and Rosalind (disguised as Ganymede) may initially seem like a heterosexual attraction, which takes on a homoerotic undertone when we consider that Orlando is drawn to Rosalind even when she presents herself as a young man (Ganymede). Orlando's affection for Rosalind transcends her outward appearance

and is rooted in a deeper emotional connection. This suggests that Orlando's love for Rosalind goes beyond traditional gender boundaries.

Apart from male homoeroticism and homosexuality as between Ganymede and Orlando, in *As You Like It,* there is a homoerotic triangular love relationship between Phebe-Ganymede/Rosalind, which is female homoeroticism. In this respect, as it is apparent in the play, homosexuality happens not only with male-to-male bondage but also with female-to-female bondage. Phebe is a shepherdess who falls in love with Ganymede at first sight. The love of Phebe for Ganymede is therefore homoerotic love because there is love between a female and another female. However, this homoerotic love results not naturally but artificially, as Rosalind is transgendered and cross-dressed as Ganymede, a beautiful boy with womanly traits and effeminacy. Beckman (1978) suggests that Rosalind can be linked to the Renaissance archetype representing various combinations of masculinity and femininity, symbolizing the union of Mars and Venus (p. 47). The play deals with homoeroticism in a variety of ways. The play's cross-dressing plot involves a female character disguising herself as a guy and acting in a masculine manner. Shakespeare's plays include female characters that use the tactic of crossdressing as a strategic means to attain their objectives. In addition to increased safety and mobility, the clothes traditionally associated with males often allow for more freedom of expression. In this context, the theatrical production has a male actor assuming the role of a female character, who then assumes the guise of a male character and afterwards portrays female characters on stage. Furthermore, near the conclusion of the epilogue, there is a clear acknowledgement of the actor's actual gender in relation to the character of Rosalind. At this point, Rosalind breaks character, as the male actor who has been portraying a female role comes forward and speaks directly to the audience using their own voice. In doing so, they express their thoughts on how they would behave if they were really women. It can be stated that Shakespeare's play aligns with Judith Butler's theory of performativity by portraying characters who challenge traditional gender roles and norms through cross-dressing and the adoption of alternative identities. The play highlights the fluidity of gender and underscores how individuals enact and perform their gender identity, illustrating the complex interplay between identity, performance, and societal expectations. Despite the fact that it occurs at the conclusion, the epilogue serves as a transition between the fictitious and actual worlds, to which the audience is about to return. The audience has the potential to fully realise the extra-theatrical reality before and after the performance, but during the play, the audience is expected to collaborate as much as possible with the author and the actors by making use of their imagination, believing in the plot, and experiencing the emotions of the character.

As in the play, Rosalind relishes her freedom and uses it for her own purposes while dressing in disguise. In fact, she runs away from the court, tests the

feelings of her lovers, and sets up the last wedding scene. Through the practice of cross-dressing, she is able to conceal her true identity as a woman and create one that is of the other gender. She begins to benefit from the verbal and physical freedom that comes with playing the part of a man. Rosalind steers the performance into a kind of desire that is heterosexual as well as homoerotic by way of the masculine improvisation she performs throughout the play. Ganymede's decision to assume a male identity adds a unique dynamic to the relationship. By assuming the persona of Ganymede, Rosalind creates a space where Orlando can confront his desires openly. Ganymede embodies idealised masculine characteristics, allowing Orlando to navigate his feelings within the framework of patriarchal norms. This gender transformation challenges traditional gender roles and unlocks hidden aspects of their relationship. Also, it can be stated that Rosalind's adaptation of Ganymede foreshadows the homoerotic meanings that play a role in the play. As Rosalind says, "I'll have no worse a name that Jove's own page, / And therefore look you call e Ganymede. (Shakespeare, 2001, 1.3. 131-132). Rosalind, in this respect, has a wide selection of male names to choose from, but she decides to pick the one that is connected to the young woman who was Zeus's lover in Greek mythology. This is a name that was also used during the Elizabethan period as a common adjective indicating a male receiver of masculine devotion.

Nevertheless, in the play, once Rosalind takes on the male identity of Ganymede, she finds herself the object of love for another female character. As in the play, Ganymede's androgynous identity creates ambiguity, which adds to the homoerotic tension between Phebe and Ganymede. Phebe is drawn to Ganymede at first because she thinks he is a young man, which blurs the borders between her heterosexual and homoerotic desires. This ambiguity allows Shakespeare to explore the fluidity of sexual attraction and the malleability of identity in a manner that was both subversive and thought-provoking for his Elizabethan audience. Phebe represents another facet of challenging conventional gender norms. In this regard, Phebe considers Ganymede to be a male consciously and thus conforms to the prevalent heterosexual discourse. However, it is exactly the traits that may be categorised as feminine that draw Phebe to Ganymede. As Phebe says:

> It is a pretty youth-not very pretty
>
> He will make proper man. The best thing in him
>
> Is his complexion…
>
> He is not very tall; yet for his years he's tall
>
> There was a pretty redness in his lips,
>
> A little riper and more lusty red
>
> Then that mixed in his cheek; twas just the difference.

Betwixt the constant red and mingled the damask.
(Shakespeare, 2001, 3.5, 113-123)

During the first part of her reminiscences, she compares Ganymede to the standard of conventional masculine characteristics, but in the final four lines given above, she feminises Ganymede's mouth and cheek. Furthermore, homoeroticism circulates in the play, from Phebe's desire for the feminine in Rosalind/Ganymede to Rosalind/Ganymede's desire to be the masculine object of Phebe's desire. Throughout the course of their courtship, Orlando embraces Ganymede as his beloved and behaves towards her accordingly. Rosalind says, “I would cure you if you would but call me Rosalind, and come every day to my cote and woo me" (Shakespeare, 2001, 3.2.433). Here, Rosalind, who is disguised as Ganymede, tells Orlando to come and woo her. This act of accepting Ganymede as his beloved and wooing him depicts the male-to-male relationship in the play. Orlando is unconscious of the fact that Rosalind is disguised as Ganymede. Thus, Orlando and Ganymede’s relationship can be considered male eroticism. Rosalind's use of disguise can also be viewed as a symbolic representation of the flexibility of gender. By effortlessly shifting between male and female roles, Rosalind questions the idea of gender as a static and binary concept. Instead, she illustrates that gender is a performative identity, subject to transformation and adaptation. From a Butlerian perspective, it can be stated that Rosalind's adoption of the Ganymede persona exemplifies the performativity of gender. By donning male attire and adopting a masculine persona, she challenges the binary understanding of gender as fixed and reveals it to be a performative act. Her transformation into Ganymede not only underscores the fluidity of gender but also serves as a means of gaining agency and freedom. Furthermore, during their discourse, the two lovers use a great deal of lingo that is associated with the feminine. Ganymede is called a “pretty youth” by Orlando (Shakespeare, 2001, 3.2.328). Also, Ganymede says, “as the cony that you see where she is kindled” (Shakespeare, 2001, 3.2.332). Here the word “cony” is a term of fondness and compliment for females, and Rosalind describes where she lives as "in the skirts of the forest, like fringe upon a petticoat” (Shakespeare, 2001, 3.2.329). The fake marriage comes to an end when Orlando takes the boy he thinks is Rosalind as his wife. In point of truth, Orlando and Ganymede enter into a male marriage, but as the distance between Rosalind and Ganymede decreases, the differences between homoerotic and heterosexual relationships also decrease.

Beyond Rosalind, Shakespeare’s *As You Like It* features additional characters who subvert conventional gender norms. Take Celia, Rosalind's cousin, for instance. She embodies strength and independence and is unafraid to assert herself. Moreover, she actively aids Rosalind in upholding her disguise. Celia adopts the identity of “Aliena” to accompany Rosalind in her exile. From the perspective of Butler, this multiplicity of identities and performances within the play can be considered as underscoring the notion that gender, like identity itself,

is not fixed but a product of social construction and performance. Celia's feeling of love for Rosalind can also be taken as an example of female homoeroticism because, although Celia knows Rosalind loves Orlando and Orlando loves Rosalind, she is jealous of Rosalind. The friendship between Celia and Rosalind is something out of the ordinary. Throughout the play, Shakespeare gives some clues about Rosalind and Celia's feelings for each other. As in the play, when Le Beau speaks to Orlando about the two sisters, "whose loves are dearer than the natural bond of sisters" (Shakespeare, 2001, 1.2.200), their relationship is set up as something extraordinary. It is set up as a same-sex pairing of intense and unorthodox intimacy. Again, when Rosalind is banished from the Duke's court, Celia confesses her love for Rosalind to the Duke. In this regard, Celia says in the play, which in fact reveals the homoerotic desire and lesbian feelings towards Rosalind:

> I did not entreat to have her stay.
>
> It was your pleasure, and your own remorse.
>
> I was too young that time to value her,
>
> But now I know her. If she be a traitor,
>
> Why, so am I. We still have spelt together,
>
> Rose at an instant, learned, played, eat together,
>
> And whersoe'er we went, like Juno's swans
>
> Still we went coupled and inseparable (Shakespeare, 2001, 5.3.63-70).

Here, phrases like "slept together", "we went like Juno's swan" and "coupled and inseparable" help us analyse the two sisters' relationship above from the natural relationship between sisters (Shakespeare, 2001). Their relationship can be analysed in the context of lesbian eroticism. The phrase "Juno's Swans" is taken from Roman mythology. The reference to 'swans' helps us analyse the female homoerotic desires of the two sisters. Rosalind and Celia, like the two swans, are inseparable, and it is believed that swans mate and stay together for a lifetime. Juno is the Roman goddess of love. As given in the play, Celia and Rosalind are friends; however, their friendship is so deep that they cross their gender boundaries when they act, and this female relationship is in fact homoerotic. In the context of queer theory, Celia and Rosalind's relationship and intimacy can be considered a same-sex relationship, which can be termed lesbian.

Conclusion

All in all, Shakespeare's play, *As You Like It*, can be a proper example of the revealing reformulation and deconstruction of established and logocentric gender roles and sexuality, where female characters adopt trans-gendered bodies, queer identities, and homoeroticism through the concept of love and cross-dressing in

many respects. As far as Shakespeare's comedies are concerned, a recurring topic is the exploration of love via the portrayal of gender role transformations and the cross-dressing of female characters. This often involves the depiction of power dynamics between male and female characters, which may be seen as alluding to homoerotic relationships and transgressions of gender roles. As such, the play delves into the complexities surrounding gender roles and sexuality. This is exemplified through the depiction of female characters who adopt cross-gender personas, engage in cross-dressing, and navigate various forms of homoerotic affection. It can also be stated that, for Shakespeare, identity is never fixed but is constructed. The fluidity of identity, sexuality, and desire in the play indeed challenges and deconstructs any basic hetero/homo, masculine/feminine dichotomy. In the context of queer theory, desires are not only about sexual orientation but encompass a wide range of personal inclinations, including romantic, emotional, and social desires. These desires influence the choices individuals make in their lives. In *As You Like It*, for example, characters like Rosalind and Orlando are motivated by their desires for love and connection, which drive their actions throughout the play. In this manner, Shakespeare effectively challenges traditional gender roles and norms by subverting them through the portrayal of male and female characters. Specifically, the female characters deviate from their expected gender roles and boundaries, resulting in the depiction of a homoerotic love triangle involving Phebe, Orlando, and Rosalind/Ganymede. Rosalind's character demonstrates Judith Butler's notion of gender as a performance. Through her disguise, Rosalind gains freedom and agency, allowing her to express her desires openly and freely. As in the play, the heterosexual love between Orlando and Rosalind is subverted to a homoerotic love between Orlando and Ganymede/Rosalind and Phebe and Ganymede/Rosalind. Hence, Shakespeare suggests here that, as with the title of the play, one can construct his or her gender role as she or he likes or desires, even if this sex is different.

Furthermore, the play offers a liberationist approach to sexuality that encompasses the myriad possibilities of human experience. In its entirety, Shakespeare's *As You Like It* serves as a compelling exploration of non-conventional gender dynamics and underscores the performative aspects of gender identity. Rosalind's adoption of a male persona empowers her with newfound agency and reveals the inconsistencies within a patriarchal social framework. Similarly, characters like Celia and Phebe contribute to the subversion of established gender roles. Thus, *As You Like It* retains its relevance and continues to provoke contemplation in contemporary contexts.

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