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The Doublet and Hose: A Question of Identity in *As You Like It*

Identity is one of the most crucial interests in feminist theory, and much of Feminism is directed at discussing the factors responsible for the constructing of gender identity in society and literature. If gender is a social construct of patriarchal interests, then feminine identity is also a social construct, which undermines the “real” identity of a woman. Or, as Juliet Mitchell would have it, patriarchal control is exercised over women through four levels – production, reproduction, socialization, and sexuality. This has resulted in mutually exclusive masculine and feminine roles, resulting in binary oppositions, such as – masculine > feminine; bread-earner > housekeeper; strong > weak; intellectual > emotional; moral > virtuous; dominant > submissive, etc. However, it is also misleading to posit gender as the sole determinant constituting identity, for innumerable other factors are automatically involved, such as race, class, culture, location, or historical time. The importance of gender remains in that it works over and above, and along with all these other factors of social identity.

One of the external factors underlying gender identity is clothing. Till the end of the 19th century, Western, particularly English clothing, was sharply gender differentiated. The modern concept of unisex clothing had not yet been conceived, and in any case, such a concept was a direct outcome of the feminist movement, which was a mid-twentieth century phenomenon. During the Renaissance, as in later times, a woman’s clothing was designed to be “femi-

nine” – that is, to highlight the womanly “curves”, and more importantly, to restrict movement and free physical activity, in an attempt to ensure that the wearer behaves in a “ladylike” manner. The “employments” of a high-class lady of the time would be:

[...] spinning at wool and flax, fine and coarse needlework, embroidery, fine cooking, curing, preserving, distillery, preparing medicines from the herbs at the prescription of the doctor or by family tradition, and last but not least the making of fruit syrups and home-made wines from currant, cowslip and elder, which played a great part in life before tea and coffee began to come in... (Trevelyan 265)

All of them being home-oriented jobs, the huge gowns and the “seven-fold fence” of the petticoats did not pose too much of a problem, even though freedom of movement could never be accomplished as afforded by the “doublet and hose” of men. The upper class male dress was no less colourful and flamboyant than that of women, and red breeches with velvet cloaks were quite common. However, it served two purposes – to attract the opposite sex, and to allow the greater physical mobility that a man required. The difference between the aims and purposes of the clothing of the two sexes is well defined in the following passage:

In the Elizabethan day the goal of women’s fashion was to show the woman’s status in society and make her as attractive as possible. Women wanted as small and petite waist as possible, so they did anything to make their waists small or appear smaller than the actual size. Women in the Elizabethan days wore ruffles to show status in society. Sleeves of women’s gowns had a certain appearance of being puffy.

It was not only in the colors, or the lack of them, that the new fashions differed from those of the preceding generation. Bombast was the stuffing used in doublets and hose in order to swell them out, eliminating all folds and creases. It consisted of rags, flock, horsehair, cotton, or even bran, although bran sometimes led to disaster, since all the bran ran out if the clothes got torn. The bombasting of the doublet over the chest and the stuffing out of breeches naturally made the waist seem smaller, and the effect was increased by the use of tight-lacing. The short, bombasted breeches, especially in the form of trunk hose, exposed a considerable amount of leg, and the introduction of knitting made it possible for leg coverings to fit the limbs more neatly than they had done before.

There was a growth in the ruffle in the 1500s. A simple string was drawn through the upper edge of the shirt to form a ruffle. The ruffle was an example of the “hierarchical” element in dress. When women wore them, they always had another element to be noted. This was the “Seduction Principle,” as it has been called, an attempt to exploit the wearer’s charms as a woman. For example, women wore a ruffle in order to show their status in society. The Elizabethan compromise was to open the ruffle in front to expose the bosom, and to allow the ruffle to rise in gauze wings at the back of the head. This fashion can be seen quite clearly in portraits of Queen Elizabeth. (Bridges, “Women’s Fashions”)

The “doublet”, according to the *Concise Oxford Dictionary*, was “a man’s short, close-fitting, padded jacket”, while “hose” was a combination of “stockings, socks, and tights”. Here is a sample of Elizabethan upper class clothing:



The following picture is from 1461. It shows the doublet with a high waist, but much lower, below the hip line, it connects to the hose. By the late 1460s and early 1470s the hose started coming up higher. The method of pointing the hose to the doublet was still the same.



The picture on the left shows how the hose came higher up the hip almost to the modern waist line. The picture on the right shows the points on the hose that tie off to the bottom edge of the doublet to keep the hose up.

Rosalind's character in *As You Like It*, and the question of her search for identity, is closely bound up with the clothing she dons in the course of the play. Before her exile to the forest, she is certainly intelligent and witty – as we find in her conversations with Celia; but there is no doubt at all that she is somewhat constrained in both thought and action. In all respects she is Celia's subordinate; she is obliged to Celia for even the roof over her head. Though some sparks of her innate light-heartedness do shine out sometimes, as when she "mocks at the good hussif Fortune" (1.2.30) with Celia, she is on the whole, melancholy and listless. She, of course, explains her behaviour as mourning for her exiled father, but neither the audience, nor Celia is fooled. Indeed, Celia even expresses her doubts when Rosalind's melancholy intensifies after Orlando's wrestling match – "But is all this for your father?" (1.3.10). It is Celia who plays the dominant role all through their sojourn in the court. It is she who expresses the greater quality of love and devotion for her cousin, it is she who sparkles with light-heartedness and fun; it is she who constantly endeavours to lift up Rosalind's "feeble" spirits; it is she who is ready to stand up to her father when he exiles Rosalind; and it is she who initially plans their escape into the Forest of Arden, where the Senior Duke is living in exile. Moreover, Touchstone's first loyalty is to Celia, not Rosalind; and it is for her sake that he agrees to leave his beloved court and accompany his mistress as her protector into an environment which he heartily abhors. Rosalind, on the other hand, is content to play second fiddle to Celia's enterprise, and seems on the surface to be calm, collected and restrained – all that an ideal woman should be. She is well-loved by all, but not for liveliness or gaiety. As her uncle says –

Her very silence, and her patience
Speak to the people and they pity her.

(1.3.75–76)

In short, she exhibits exactly those qualities that totally escape her in the forest. She shows many admirable attributes there, but silence and patience are certainly not among them. In the court she is a perfect lady, and behaves unerringly like one.

The moment she puts on a man's dress, however, her entire demeanour is transformed. It is astonishing what a simple doublet and hose can do in the expression of an individual's personality. To Rosalind, the taking on of a man's appearance does not merely entail a change of garment. She believes that while dressed as a man, she cannot bring shame to the image of a man –

I could find in my heart to disgrace my man's
Apparel and to cry like a woman; but I must comfort
The weaker vessel, as doublet and hose ought to show
Itself courageous to petticoat.

(2.4.3–7)

This is not the only time she mentions a doublet and hose. It seems almost that the doublet and hose are the actual source of strength for a man. It is said that you cannot judge a book by its cover; but in Rosalind's case the cover is everything. It does not hide her true personality or her identity; it serves to release it from years of restraint, and to express her true identity in the process. The doublet and the hose represents all the freedom and uninhibitedness that Rosalind in her gowns and ribbons had been denied, and therefore, from Act II onwards, Rosalind becomes a completely different character altogether. Gone is the shy maiden, looking coyly at the victorious Orlando after the wrestling match. She now takes on all the responsibilities that an elder brother would take for a younger sister. In this respect, Rosalind's role in *As You Like It* can be interpreted as a critique of woman's role in society – she cannot assert herself unless she shows herself to be like a man. The clothing, therefore, is everything. Portia's garments give her the respect and responsibility of a judge. Rosalind and Viola must be dressed as men to assert their authority in society. In doublet and hose, therefore, Rosalind can do what she has never done before. It gives her the opportunity and freedom to take decisions, to bear responsibility, to move about freely in the open woods of Arden, and to mock and laugh at social pretensions which she had so far unquestioningly condoned. Her entire role as Jove's page is a huge indictment of socially constructed gender roles, of courtly conventions and of love conventions. In other words, her clothing allows her to express herself as an individual, and to assert that identity which the petticoat had so far concealed. In doing so, she stands femininity on its head, overturning all those characteristics which make a woman "feminine" – submissiveness, timidity, gentleness, non-argumentativeness, and vulnerability to masculine violence. It is the outside of a woman, in particular, her clothing, which makes her all these. That is why Rosalind acknowledges that "Beauty provoketh thieves sooner than gold" (1.3.106), and almost in the same breath talks of changing her exterior to prevent such circumstances from occurring:

We'll have a swashing and a martial outside,
As many other mannish cowards have
That do outface it with their semblances.

(1.3.116–118)

She can now have witty repartees and arguments on equal terms with men, and win them too, proving herself intellectually superior to almost all the men in the play. Also she need not show herself as patient and all-suffering as she had done previously. Her quick temper now bursts out easily, as when she launches on a loud and long harangue on seeing Phebe contemptuously rejecting the advances of Silvius. Also, even though she is alone with Celia, she is always in agonies of impatience when she is waiting for Orlando to come.

The influence of the change in her exterior is most to be seen in one particular aspect of her behaviour – the blatant sensuality in her encounters with Orlando, particularly in her enactment of “Rosalind” in the “love-cure”. In Shakespeare’s plays, as in Elizabethan society, a woman is either her father’s or her husband’s property (as is illustrated in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*), and must necessarily be subordinated to either of them. In the court Rosalind shows herself to be submissive and obedient. So it is when she returns to her identity as Rosalind at the end, when she subordinates herself to first her father, and then to Orlando, as social norms require. But while she is Ganymede, *pretending* to be Rosalind, and when Orlando *knows* her to be male and only *imagines* her to be Rosalind, she constantly shows herself to be his equal, or better, managing and directing the conversation as she wishes. Moreover, so uninhibited is she in her love games, that she thinks nothing of coming close to him, playfully bumping up against him, or sensually offering up her mouth to be kissed. Indeed, in one production of *As You Like It* – the RSC Production by Terry Hands in the 1980s, where Susan Fleetwood played Rosalind, and John Bowe played Orlando – there was emphasis on this sensuality. Their love-games in Act IV were shown to shock Celia, who was always the silent observer. Before rising to leave, Orlando, “pretending that she is naked, drops Celia’s shawl, which they have been using as a bedspread.”¹ This unabashed expression of sensuality is also there in her reference to the husband being made a cuckold, and in her account of the wooing of Celia by Oliver:

For your brother and my sister no sooner met, but they looked; no sooner looked, but they loved; no sooner loved, but they sighed; no sooner sighed, but they asked one another the reason; no sooner knew the reason, but they sought the remedy. And in these degrees have they made a pair of stairs to marriage, which they will climb incontinent, or else be incontinent before marriage. (5.2.31–38)

This is a reference to overwhelming *physical* attraction, and related in a language bordering on rawness. Rosalind clearly realizes that Celia and Oliver must be hastened into marriage, or natural desire without social restrictions will overflow in this natural habitat.

The question of sexual identity is, therefore, purposely problematized in *As You Like It*, and this entire problem revolves around the doublet and hose. A boy actor pretends to be a woman (Rosalind), who pretends to be a man (Ganymede), who again pretends to be a woman (Rosalind in the love-cure), and who later turns out to actually *be* a woman (Rosalind). Only in the first and last cases do we find that Rosalind is assuming a feminine identity as she is required to do in civilized society. The Rosalind in the love-cure, though played by Rosalind herself, is not the same woman at all, nor of the same character. She speaks and

¹ John Bowe’s account of the production, as quoted in Tomarken 578.

behaves in a way that the Rosalind of the court, the Rosalind whom Orlando originally fell in love with, would never have spoken or acted. Rather, she purposely acts as though she is a man playing the part of a woman.

Which, therefore, can we regard as the true identity of Rosalind? The feminine, bashful, patient woman at the beginning of the play – a role in which her genuine qualities are seriously hindered? Or the disguised Ganymede, in which role she opens out like a flower, carefree, lively, witty, and responsible? Or the pretended Rosalind in the love-game, in which role she is sharp, catty, and a critique of feminine stereotypes and both courtly and pastoral posturing? We would certainly like to believe that her “true” character is the one in which we like her best – that of Ganymede. But she herself makes it clear that that is only one side of the picture – “I am falser than vows made in wine” (3.5.73), she tells Phebe with all sincerity. She, indeed, never loses an opportunity to remind the audience that she is actually a woman, with a feminine character beneath the man’s apparel. “I could find it in my heart to disgrace my man’s apparel and to cry like a woman” (2.4.3–4), she says when she is tired. Again, to Celia she says when she is avid with impatience to know the identity of the author of the verses on the trees – “Dost thou think because I’m caparisoned like a man, I have doublet and hose in my disposition?” (3.2.188–90). With a woman’s love of listening to compliments, she uses her disguise to elicit expressions of love from Orlando for his Rosalind. And finally, to Oliver, she says with all honesty – “I should have been a woman by right” (4.3.175–76), when he taunts her for fainting like a woman. In fact, she does not show any reluctance at the end to shed her doublet and hose, and appear as the conventional heroine of a love-play, even though she seemed quite at her ease in the character of Ganymede – quite unlike Viola in *Twelfth Night*, who never seems to enjoy her disguise in any way.

On the other hand, a considerable amount of confusion about her motives is generated from her very obvious misogyny. It is curious to note that notwithstanding her dearest friend being a woman, she has not a single utterance in the whole play that has anything good to say about women! During the Renaissance, in spite of a woman being the ruler of England, women as a whole were very much the second sex, without any kind of political or social power, and considered to be the property of the father or husband. There was in literature a duality of opinion about them – on one hand, in the Petrarchan tradition, they were idealized as virtuous virgins; on the other, they were represented as symbols of temptation, easily misled, and better always to be kept under strict control. If they did finally assert themselves, and move away from male control, they were either brought to ruin (like Lady Macbeth), or were forcibly brought under control (like Kate in *The Taming of the Shrew*). Men, before marriage, wooed their mistresses with superlative praises – much as Orlando and Silvius did, or as Jaques aptly summed up as “sighing like a furnace”; after marriage, they devoted

their energies to keeping their wives in hand. This, therefore, led to the duality of Elizabethan responses to women. Mocking at women was not uncommon in Elizabethan literature, and this exercise constituted much of their comedy. This duality is also seen in the representation of women on the stage. If the ideal women are faithful, calm, obedient, and virtuous, submitting to the patriarchal world, then it is also an age which gives us a surfeit of the other kind of woman – “Amazons, female warriors, roaring girls, and women disguised as pages” (Drakakis 182).

In the case of Rosalind it has been argued, that in the guise of a man, her mockery of women would be the conventional invective against women, aimed at giving her disguise more authenticity. In fact, it does fit in well with her love-cure, by which she proposes to cure Orlando of his infatuation for ever. As such, she purposely presents woman as fickle-minded, vacillating, heartless, and selfish, her normal behaviour being to –

[...] be grieve, be effeminate, changeable, longing and liking, proud, fantastical, apish, shallow, inconstant, full of tears, full of smiles, for every passion something and for no passion truly anything, as boys and women are for the most part cattle of this colour; would now like him, now loathe him, then forswear him; now weep for him then spit at him; [...] (3.2.398–405)

Later, she assures him that she would rather have a snail for a husband, because, as he has horns on his head, “he comes armed in his fortune, and prevents the slander of his wife” (4.1.58–59). This kind of cynicism about the character of women we may take to be natural in the circumstances, and put down to good-natured raillery. Indeed, it adds to her essential realism of character, where, by exaggerating the stereotypes of femininity, she brings out its ludicrousness and limitations. However, the same cannot be said of her angry lecture at Phebe, attacking her cruelly for her “ugliness”, and pulling her up for rejecting “a good man’s love”. She ends with a piece of good advice –

Sell when you can, you are not for all markets.
Cry the man mercy, love him, take his offer;
Foul is most foul, being foul to be a scoffer.
(3.5.60–62)

Finally, in the last act, one can pity Phebe for being almost forced to marry a man she does not love, and, like the union between Touchstone and Audrey, have grave doubts about their future together. In both these cases the woman’s does not matter – not even to the enterprising Rosalind. In fact, even in the guise of Ganymede, her mockery of woman becomes so incisive, that Celia feels it necessary to remonstrate –

You have simply misused our sex in your love-prate. We must have your doublet and hose plucked over your head, and show the world what the bird hath done to her own nest. (4.1.191–94)

The excuse of being true to her disguise by mocking women does not look very tenable when Rosalind does the same thing in her own identity as a woman. It is remarkable that in their very first appearance in Act 1, Rosalind and Celia's conversation turns on the discussion of women and their attributes, and not in very flattering terms, either. They mock the "good hussif Fortune" for not bestowing her gifts to women equally – "those that she makes fair, she scarce makes honest; and those that she makes honest, she makes very ill-favouredly" (1.2.36–38). In short, they begin by denying that beauty and honesty can go together – a theme which Touchstone dwells on at length later. In Touchstone's mouth, however, it is merely cynical; when it comes from Rosalind and Celia, it amounts to dirtying their own nests.

The gender ambiguity, which is used to such immense effect in Rosalind's character, is brought to a fitting climax in the Epilogue. It is almost a riddle, which she, appearing in skirts, *not* in doublet and hose, places before the audience before taking her leave. "If I were a woman", she says, "I would kiss as many of you as had beards that pleased me" (5.4.14–16). Note the "if". Rosalind dwells on the possibility of herself as not being a woman. Of course, we do know that in Shakespearean times a boy-actor, in the part of a woman, would be speaking these lines, and calling for applause from the crowd. But even in the modern context, the lines are not without irony, making us aware of the immensely ambiguous role that Rosalind plays throughout the play. She is both Rosalind and Ganymede, and she speaks with both the identities in mind. In this sense, she can address both the women and the men in the audience, and ask for love from both.

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