Title: Women in Men's Clothing: Apparel and Social Stability in *The Roaring Girl*

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Title

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[(essay date 1984) *In the essay below, Rose argues that* The Roaring Girl, *with its depiction of the cross-dressing Moll Frith, presents "an image of Jacobean society as unable to absorb one of its most vital and complex creations into the existing social and sexual hierarchies."*]

The central figure in Thomas Middleton and Thomas Dekker's city comedy ***The Roaring Girl*** (c. 1608-1611) is a woman named Moll Frith, whose distinguishing feature is that she walks around Jacobean London dressed in male clothing.1 It should be stressed that Moll is not in disguise: she is neither a disguised player, a man pretending to be a woman; nor is she a disguised character, whose role requires a woman pretending to be a man. Unlike the disguised heroines of romantic comedy, Moll seeks not to conceal her sexual identity, but rather to display it. Although certain of the *Dramatis Personae* in ***The Roaring Girl*** occasionally fail to recognize her immediately, the fact that Moll is a woman is well known to every character in the play. She simply presents herself in society as a woman wearing men's clothes. Demanding merely by her presence that people reconcile her apparent sexual contradictions, she arouses unspeakable social and sexual anxieties in the established society of the play. Indeed Middleton and Dekker create Moll as the fulcrum of ***The Roaring Girl,*** and the other characters' reactions to her tend to define them as social and moral beings. As a result, society's effort to assess the identity of this female figure in male attire becomes the central dramatic and symbolic issue of the play.

Recognizing the title figure's assumption of male attire as the symbolic focus of social and moral concern in ***The Roaring Girl*** allows us to connect the play with the intense, often bitterly funny debate about women wearing men's clothes that was taking place in contemporary moral and religious writing, and which came to a head in 1620 with a pair of pamphlets entitled, respectively, *Hic Mulier: Or, The Man-Woman,* and *Haec-Vir: Or The Womanish-Man.*2 Indeed the figure of the female in male apparel emerges from the documents of this controversy much as Moll Frith does from the text of ***The Roaring Girl***: an embodiment of female independence boldly challenging established social and sexual values and, by the fact of her existence, requiring evaluation and response. Although historians of Renaissance conduct literature as well as more recent literary critics have discussed the *Hic Mulier / Haec-Vir* controversy,3 no attempt has been made to view ***The Roaring Girl,*** with its "man-woman" heroine, in the context of this debate. Both because the controversial issue involved has an ongoing importance in Renaissance England and because I am not seeking to establish a direct influence between documents and play, the small chronological discrepancy between the performance and publication of ***The Roaring Girl*** (c. 1608-1611) and the high point of the debate (1620) is not relevant to my purposes here; rather I am interested in exploring the fact that the figure of the female in male attire is portrayed in both dramatic and social contexts with simultaneous admiration, desire, abhorrence, and fear. The following essay attempts to demonstrate the ways in which parallel treatments of women in men's clothing in the drama and the debate illuminate this phenomenon of fashion as the focus of considerable moral and social anxiety aroused by changing sexual values in Jacobean England; and to show that, taken together, artistic representation and social commentary suggest a deep cultural ambivalence in the British Renaissance about female independence and equality between the sexes.

**I**

Elizabethan and Jacobean sermons and conduct books continually castigate the fickleness of fashion and the vanity of sumptuous apparel. To cite one very typical example, the writer of the sermon "Against Excess of Apparel" in *Homilies Appointed to be Read in the Time of Queen Elizabeth* sees the English preoccupation with the novelties of fashion as a futile expenditure of energy, indicating an endlessly detrimental spiritual restlessness: "We are never contented, and therefore we prosper not."4 Furthermore the conservative spirit frequently links propriety of dress with the coherence of society and views as a threat to social stability the tendency of the pretentious or the newly prosperous to dress so elegantly that it was becoming increasingly difficult to distinguish among social classes by the varied attire of their members.5 Along with the upwardly mobile and the fop, women were singled out as creators of chaos for seeking to seduce men other than their husbands by wearing enticing clothes and for being generally disobedient, disrespectful, shallow, demonic, and extravagant in their preoccupation with fashion.6

From these characteristic themes the phenomenon of women dressing in male clothing begins gradually to assume a distinct identity as a separate issue; or, more accurately, as an issue that, in its symbolic significance, articulates a variety of social and moral concerns. The few available references to the phenomenon in the 1500s are largely parenthetical. In the early part of the sixteenth century, the idea of women wearing men's clothes apparently seemed too appalling even to be feared. Ever zealous of female virtue, John Louis Vives, for example, issues an ultimatum on the subject in *Instruction of a Christian Woman* (c. 1529) only as a last line in his chapter on feminine dress, a mere after-thought to the more important prohibitions against brazenness and extravagance in female attire. Citing Deuteronomy 22.5, he writes, "A woman shall use no mannes raymente, elles lette hir thinke she hath the mans stomacke, but take hede to the woordes of our Lorde: sayinge, a woman shall not put on mans apparell: for so to do is abhominable afore God. But I truste no woman will do it, excepte she be paste both honestee and shame."7 Vives' confidence in womanly docility was, however, misplaced. In George Gascoigne's satire *The Steele Glas* (1576), complaints about women in male attire, although still relegated to the status of an epilogue, are nevertheless becoming decidedly more pointed and vociferous:

"What be they? women? masking in mens weedes?

With dutchkin dublets, ... and with Jerkins jaggde?

With high copt hattes and fethers flaunt a flaunt?

They be so sure even *Wo* to *Men* in dede."8

The astonished despair of female modesty expressed in Gascoigne's mournful pun takes the form of accusations of sexual and, by clear inference, social, moral, and cosmic perversion in the rhetoric of Phillip Stubbes. Writing in 1583, in the midst of a general denunciation of the apparel of both sexes, Stubbes mentions women with "dublets and Jerkins as men have heer, buttoned up the brest, and made with wings, welts, and pinions on the shoulder points, as mans apparel is."9 Stubbes lucidly states his indignant alarm at the possibility of not being able to distinguish between the sexes: "Our Apparell was given us as a signe distinctive to discern betwixt sex and sex, and therefore one to weare the Apparel of another sex is to ... adulterate the veritie of his owne kinde. Wherefore these Women may not improperly be called *Hermaphroditi,* that is, Monsters of bothe kindes, half women, half men."10

While Stubbes' rhetoric is always colorfully extravagant, the topic of women in male attire continued to elicit highly emotional reactions at a growing rate, particularly in the second decade of the seventeenth century when, amidst a marked increase in satiric attacks upon women in general, references to the "monstrous ... *Woman* of the *Masculine Gender*" multiplied notably.11 As Louis B. Wright has demonstrated, this expansion in both the volume and hostility of satire against women represented the misogynistic, ultra-conservative voice in the lively debate about woman's nature, behavior, and role that was taking place in the moral and religious writing of the early decades of the century.12 According to Wright and other critics, the content of this conduct literature can be distinguished roughly along class lines: where "learned and courtly" works tended to discuss women in the abstract and spiritualized terms of neoplatonic philosophy, middle-class tracts disputed more practical and social issues, such as the appropriateness of female apparel.13 While the documents in the controversy surrounding women in male attire indicate that both upper- and middle-class females followed the fashion, they are much too partisan and factually imprecise to convey the actual extent to which the style was adopted.14

Nevertheless by 1620 the phenomenon of women in men's clothing had become prominent enough to evoke an outraged protest from King James, recorded in a letter of J. Chamberlain to Sir D. Carleton, dated January 15, 1620:

Yesterday the bishop of London called together all his clergie about this towne, and told them he had expressed commandment from the King to will them to inveigh vehemently against the insolencie of our women, and theyre wearing of brode brimed hats, pointed dublets, theyre haire cut short or shorne, and some of them stilettoes or poinards, and such other trinckets of like moment; adding that if pulpit admonitions will not reform them he would proceed by another course; the truth is the world is very much out of order.

On February 12, Chamberlain adds the following: "Our pulpits ring continually of the insolence and impudence of women, and to helpe the matter forward the players have likewise taken them to taske, and so to the ballades and ballad-singers, so that they can come nowhere but theyre eares tingle; and if all this will not serve, the King threatens to fall upon theyre husbands, parents, or frends that have or shold have power over them, and make them pay for it."15 The King's protest amounted to a declaration of war. While undoubtedly resulting in part from James' considerable misogyny,16 the actions following his protest also revealed that, among all the satiric targets on the subject of female fashion, women in men's clothing had assumed threatening enough proportions in the conservative mind to be singled out in a conscientious and thorough attempt to eliminate the style from social life. In February, 1620 the pamphlets *Hic Mulier,* which represented the conservative viewpoint, and *Haec-Vir,* which defended the practice of women wearing male attire, appeared. Because the pamphlets are anonymous, it is impossible to link their opinions to the gender of their author or authors. More importantly, the subject of the unconventional "man-woman" had evolved into a full-fledged debate, in which conservative and liberal positions are clearly and elaborately defined.

Wright believes the hostile conservative response to women in men's clothing was a defensive reaction against an increasingly successful demand both for moral and spiritual equality between the sexes and for greater social freedom for women: freedom, for example, from confinement to the home, from the double standard of sexual morality, from wife-beating and from forced marriage. "The average [i.e., middle-class] woman," Wright concludes, "was becoming articulate in her own defense and ... was demanding social independence unknown in previous generations."17 According to Wright, the female adoption of male apparel aggressively and visibly dramatized a bid for social independence, which comprised a largely successful and coherent challenge to existing sexual values that is reflected in *Haec-Vir,* a pamphlet Wright believes to be "the *Areopagitica* of the London woman, a woman who had attained greater freedom than any of her predecessors or than any of her European contemporaries."18 It is true that the challenge that women in male attire presented to the existing imbalance of power between the sexes can be discerned in the vindictive bitterness of the opposition to the androgynous style. Yet Linda T. Fitz has recently provided a useful and fascinating corrective to the hopeful interpretation of the extent and coherence of Jacobean feminism advanced by Wright and critics like Juliet Dusinberre by stressing the restrictiveness, rather than the liberating potential, of middle-class conduct literature. In her discussion of the controversy surrounding women in men's clothing, Fitz points out some serious oversights in Wright's optimistic view of the *Hic Mulier/Haec-Vir* debate; nevertheless Fitz ends by conceding that "Wright is quite justified in his ... assessment" of a resounding victory for female freedom articulated in this controversy.19 My own analysis of the debate suggests an attitude toward the *Hic Mulier* phenomenon and the sexual freedom it represented which is more complex than either Wright perceives or Fitz explores, an attitude that both acknowledges injustice and fears change, that wants sexual freedom yet perceives its attainment as conflicting with an equally desirable social stability.

**II**

After an introductory lament that "since the daies of *Adam* women were never so Masculine" (sig. A3), the pamphlet *Hic Mulier* or *The Man-Woman* begins by propounding a familiar Renaissance ideal of woman as chaste, maternal, compassionate, discreet, and obedient, a model of behavior and sentiment from which the notorious "man-woman" is believed to depart "with a deformitie never before dream'd of" (sig. A3v).20 In contrast to this modestly attired paragon, the *Hic Mulier* figure, sporting a "cloudy Ruffianly broad-brim'd Hatte, and wanton Feather ... the loose, lascivious civill embracement of a French doublet ... most ruffianly short lockes ... for Needles, Swords ... and for Prayer bookes, bawdy Jigs" is "not halfe man, halfe woman ... but all Odyous, all Divell" (sigs. A4-A4v). In elaborating the polemical intention of this pamphlet--to eliminate the heinous fashion by demonizing its proponents--the author builds a case around two major arguments.

As might be expected, the first group of arguments centers on the dangerous sexual chaos which the author assumes will result from the breakdown of rigid gender distinctions symbolized by the "man-woman's" attire. The writer perceives in *Hic Mulier*'s choice of male clothes unconventional sexual behavior; therefore she automatically becomes a whore, who inspires by her lewd example a pernicious illicit sexuality in others. As implied in the description of her "loose, lascivious civil embracement of a French doublet, being all unbutton'd to entice" (sig. A4v), she will allow, even invite, "a shameless libertie to every loose passion" (sig. C2). Despite--indeed because of--her mannishness, then, *Hic Mulier* displays and encourages a free-floating sexuality, a possibility which the author views as socially destabilizing and therefore disastrous, "most pernicious to the common-wealth" (sig. C2). As we will see, this interesting association between socially threatening female sexiness and the breakdown of polarized gender identities and sexual roles becomes very important in ***The Roaring Girl.*** The fear seems to be that without rigidly assigned, gender-linked roles and behavior, legitimate, faithful erotic relations between the sexes will become impossible and the integrity of the family will consequently disintegrate: "they [i.e., the "men-women"] are neither men, nor women, but just good for nothing ... they care not into what dangers they plunge either their Fortunes or Reputations, the disgrace of the whole Sexe, or the blot and obloquy of their private Families" (sigs. B2, C2).

However ominous, the unleashing of Eros and the breakdown of sexual polarization do not preoccupy the author as much as do questions of social status and hierarchy. The implied norm behind the satire in the pamphlet is a stable society which derives its coherence from the strict preservation of such essential distinctions as class, fortune, and rank. Not only do women in men's clothing come from various classes in society; they also have the unfortunate habit of dressing alike, obscuring not only the clarity of their gender, but the badge of their social status as well, and thereby endangering critically the predictable orderliness of social relations. To convey the seriousness of this offense, the author employs the rhetorical device of associating the hated style by turns with decaying aristocrats and gentry ("the adulterate branches of rich stocks" [sig. B1]), women of base birth ("stinking vapours drawne from dunghils" [sig. B1]), females of the upper classes "knowne great" ("no more shall their greatness or wealth save them from one particle of disgrace" [sigs. B1v, B2v]), and middle-class wives (tailors have "metamorphosed more modest old garments ... for the use of Freemens wives than hath been worne in Court, Suburbs, or Countrey" [sig. C1v]), all of which leads to the indignant outburst: "It is an infection that emulates the plague, and throwes itselfe amongst women of all degrees ... Shall we all be co-heires of one honor, one estate, and one habit?" (sigs. B1v, B4v). Like death and disease, then, the female in male attire serves as a leveler; and, just as such issues as the inflated sale of honors by the Crown seemed to the conservative mind to be undermining social coherence by threatening the traditional prestige of inherited nobility, so the phenomenon of women of different social positions dressing in similar male clothing appeared intolerably chaotic. As Fitz has shown, English Renaissance women, particularly in the middle classes, used their apparel as a showpiece to advertise the prosperity of their fathers and husbands.21 That women should perversely refuse, by donning look-alike male clothes, to serve their crucial function as bearers of social class status and distinction is the issue that arouses the author's most vindictive antipathy: "Let ... the powerfull Statute of apparell but lift up his Battle-Axe, so as every one may bee knowne by the true badge of their bloud, or Fortune: and then these *Chymera's* of deformitie will bee sent backe to hell, and there burne to Cynders in the flames of their owne malice" (sig. C1v).

The pamphlet *Hic Mulier* ends with an invective against all social change (sig. C3). Given the hectic violence of this author's conservatism, it is not surprising that the rebuttal in the pamphlet *Haec-Vir: Or The Womanish-Man,* which appeared seven days later, would dwell on the folly of thoughtlessly adhering to social custom. Interestingly, the *Haec-Vir* pamphlet ignores the issue of whether women of different social categories dressing alike as men disrupt the alignment of social classes; instead the second pamphlet argues solely in terms of gender and sexual roles. Rather than appearing as the product of a single mind, *Haec-Vir* is presented as a dialogue between two characters, the *Hic Mulier* and the *Haec-Vir* figures, suggesting by its very form and by the introduction of a new figure, the womanish man, to whom I will return, a greater openness to discussion and to cooperation between the sexes. The irrationality of the author of the first pamphlet is also clarified and undercut at the beginning of the second when the two figures conduct a witty exchange about their mutual inability to identify one another's gender. Thus a tolerant and urbane tone is set in which *Hic Mulier* (now a sympathetic figure) can defend her behavior.

*Hic Mulier*'s defense elaborates in positive terms the fact that her attire symbolizes a demand for recognition of spiritual and moral equality between the sexes, a recognition which she regards as her birthright: "We are free-borne as Men, have as free election, and as free spirits, we are compounded of like parts, and may with like liberty make benefit of our Creations" (sig. B3). Consequently she counters *Haec-Vir's* charge that assuming male apparel makes her a mere slave to the novelties of fashion both by defining her outfit as symbolizing her freedom of choice and by redefining slavery as *Haec-Vir's* mindless submission to the tyranny of pointless custom, "for then custome, nothing is more absurd, nothing more foolish" (sig. B2). The customs she resents as most false and destructive to female freedom and equality are those gender-linked stereotypes which constrain female behavior to compliance, subordination, pathos, and passivity:

But you say wee are barbarous and shameless and cast off all softness, to runne wilde through a wildernesse of opinions. In this you expresse more cruelty then in all the rest, because I stand not with my hands on my belly like a baby at *Bartholomew Fayre* ... that am not dumbe when wantons court mee, as if Asse-like I were ready for all burthens, or because I weepe not when injury gripes me, like a woorried Deere in the fangs of many Curres: am I therefore barbarous or shamelesse?(sig. B3)

"*I stand not with my hands on my belly like a baby at* Bartholomew Fayre ... *as if Asse-like I were ready for all burthens.*" *Hic Mulier* argues that to reduce woman to the position of static icon, allegedly "so much better in that she is something purer" (sig. B1v) than man, is actually to infantilize and dehumanize her by denying her full participation in adult reality, which she optimistically defines as a world of creative movement and change, in which man can "alter, frame, and fashion, according as his will and delight shall rule him" (sig. B1v). This conception, which locates adult reality in the creative opportunities provided by public life, recognizes that women are unjustly confined by tradition to perpetual fantasy and immaturity. It therefore forms the most strikingly modern of *Hic Mulier*'s arguments.

The eloquence and clarity with which these convictions are expressed make the retrenchment that occurs in the pamphlet's conclusion all the more startling. Having established herself as the rational contender in the debate, the "man-woman" suddenly withdraws before the irrational onslaught of *Haec-Vir,* the womanish man who ignores her arguments, rather than systematically rebutting them. Suddenly the focus shifts to the way that *Haec-Vir* (who, it has been suggested, represents the homosexuality of the Jacobean court)22 has relinquished his manhood and become a fop, aberrant male behavior which is now viewed as the sole reason for the existence of the notorious "man-woman." In an astonishing abandonment of her considerable powers of logic, *Hic Mulier* nostalgically evokes chivalric gallantry, recalling the bygone days when men were men:

Hence we have preserved (though to our owne shames) those manly things which you have forsaken, which would you againe accept, and restore to us the Blushes we lay'd by, when first wee put on your Masculine garments; doubt not but chaste thoughts and bashfulnesse will againe dwell in us ... then will we love and serve you; then will we heare and obey you; then will wee like rich Jewels hang at your eares to take our Instructions.(sigs. C2v, C3v)

It is a bargain, an offer he can't refuse; the dialogue concludes with *Haec-Vir* having the last word, just as he had had the first, and the entire phenomenon of women in men's clothing is rationalized, not as an attempt to achieve unrealized social freedom for women, but rather to return society to the idealized sexual norm of gender polarization and male dominance. As in King James' protest and the end of the *Hic Mulier* pamphlet, responsibility for the unconventional style of female dress, now recognized by all as deformed, is seen to rest with men because power does.23

Although the concluding section of the *Haec-Vir* pamphlet articulates this drastic shift in perspective, it is nevertheless short, and it fails to cancel or even to qualify the dominant logic of *Hic Mulier*'s stirring defense of her freedom, a speech which remains the focus of the second pamphlet. We are therefore left with a disjunction between the stubbornly rebellious, salient content of the second pamphlet and the conservative structure of the debate as a whole. On the one hand, the dominant content of the *Haec-Vir* pamphlet convincingly challenges the justice and reality of the existing sexual power structure by enumerating the illusory, sentimental, and destructive premises on which it is based. On the other, the form of the debate as a whole perpetuates the status quo by attempting to absorb this cogent demand for change into a larger movement of re-aligning the established society into conformity with an old ideal, a rhetorical endeavor that does not, however, entirely succeed in quelling the vigor of the opposition. As a result of this disjunction between content and form, female independence and equality between the sexes are depicted in the debate as desirable and just, but also as impossible for a hierarchical society to absorb without unacceptable disruption.

**III**

A pronounced ambivalence toward sexual equality as represented by the *Hic Mulier* figure is discernible in the *Hic Mulier/Haec-Vir* debate, then, and this attitude can be viewed in aesthetic terms as a disjunction between content and form. In ***The Roaring Girl*** a similar dislocation between thematic content and dramatic form can be perceived in the representation of the title character, Moll Frith, a point to which I will return. Middleton and Dekker modeled their unusual central figure after a real-life "roaring girl," popularly known in Jacobean London as "Moll Cutpurse." As this name implies, the real Moll was an underworld figure, notorious as a thief, whore, brawler, and bawd. Much of the reliable evidence we have about her exists in the court records made after her several arrests for offenses that included a scandalous appearance at the Fortune Theater, where she "sat there upon the stage in the publique viewe of all the people there p[rese]nte in mans apparrell & playd upon her lute & sange a songe."24 Most of the existing criticism of ***The Roaring Girl*** attempts to date the play with reference to this incident.25

Whatever the precise connections between the events in the life of the actual Mary Frith and the performance and publication of ***The Roaring Girl,*** the court records show that the playwrights drew heavily on the habits and physical appearance of the real-life Moll, with her brawling, singing, and smoking, her lute, her boots, her sword, and, above all, her breeches; as has been suggested, it is also probable that Middleton and Dekker were attempting to benefit from the *au courant* notoriety of the actual Moll in the timing of their play.26 Nevertheless in his address to the reader attached to the 1611 quarto, Middleton takes pains to distinguish the created character from the real person, hinting that the play will present an idealized interpretation of this odd figure: "'Tis the excellency of a writer to leave things better than he finds 'em."27 In fact the playwrights maintain an ambivalent attitude toward the outlaw status of their central character, in whom courageous moral and sexual principles combine with a marginal social identity, both of which are symbolized in the play by her male attire.

The address to the reader and ensuing prologue clarify the controversial nature of the title character and emphasize the importance of assessing her identity:

                                        Thus her character lies--

Yet what need characters, when to give a guess

Is better than the person to express?

But would you know who 'tis? Would you hear her name?

She's called mad Moll; her life our acts proclaim.

(Prologue, 26-30)

In their introduction of Moll Frith, the playwrights evoke themes identical to those surrounding the *Hic Mulier* figure in the *Hic Mulier/Haec-Vir* debate. First, they associate Moll's male apparel with erotic appeal and illicit sexuality.

For venery, you shall find enough for sixpence, but well couched and you mark it; for Venus being a woman passes through the play in doublet and breeches; a brave disguise and a safe one, if the statute untie not her codpiece point.("To the Comic Play-Readers")

Secondly, as in the debate, erotic questions are less preoccupying than social ones: the entire prologue attempts to assign Moll a specific class and rank, "to know what girl this roaring girl should be / For of that tribe are many" (Prologue, 15-6). While the dramatists assure us that their Moll is neither criminal, brawler, whore, nor city wife, the question of her actual social status is left unanswered. As the action unfolds, the playwrights' vision of the controversial "roaring girl's" exact position in the Jacobean social hierarchy gradually assumes its distinct and complicated shape; and other characters are defined as social and moral beings according to their responses to her.

The play has a traditional New Comedy plot in which a young man, Sebastian Wengrave, outwits his snobbish, greedy father, Sir Alexander Wengrave, who has threatened to disinherit Sebastian if he marries the woman he loves, all because of her relatively meager dowry. The subplot involves a theme equally characteristic of the Jacobean dramatic satirist: the attempt of lazy, poor, arrogant, upper-class "gallants" to cheat and seduce the wives of middle-class shopkeepers. Like the prologue and the *Hic Mulier/Haec-Vir* debate, the main plot stresses social issues while the secondary plot focuses on erotic complications. The conservative faction in the play is most strikingly represented by the father, Sir Alexander, and the lecherous, misogynistic gallant, Laxton, both of whose negative attitudes toward Moll resemble those of the author of the *Hic Mulier* pamphlet toward women in men's clothing.

Moll enters the play for the first time during the subplot, as Laxton and his cohorts are busily seeking to form illicit liaisons with shopkeepers' wives, chuckling privately over their erotic cunning and prowess. In this Renaissance equivalent of the locker room, Moll, who will smoke and swear, is greeted enthusiastically by the men, although with considerably less relish by the women, one of whom screams, "Get you from my shop!" (2.1.248). Both men and women, however, associate her mannishness with deformed and illicit sexuality:

Mrs. G.Some will not stick to say she is a man, and

some, both man and woman.

Lax.That were excellent: she might first cuckold

the husband, and then make him do as much for the wife.

(2.1.219-22)

Like the author of the *Hic Mulier* pamphlet, Laxton finds this mannish woman sexy ("Heart, I would give but too much money to be nibbling with that wench") (2.1.193-94); he also automatically assumes from her unconventional sexual behavior that she is a whore: "I'll lay hard siege to her; money is that aqua fortis that eats into many a maidenhead; where the walls are flesh and blood, I'll ever pierce through with a golden augur" (2.1.203-05). Complacently, Laxton secures an assignation with Moll, to which he travels overcome with self-pleasure and a thrilling sense of his own power in arranging a forbidden encounter.

Laxton is unpleasantly surprised. In his confrontation with Moll, which takes the appropriate form of a duel, Moll emerges as a defiant champion of female freedom from male sexual dominion, a role symbolized by her male attire. When Laxton arrives on the scene searching for a woman in a "shag ruff, a frieze jerkin, a short sword, and a safeguard [i.e., a petticoat]" (3.1.34-35), Moll appears instead in male clothes, the significance of which she underscores: when Laxton, who takes a few moments to recognize her, remarks, "I'll swear I knew thee not," Moll replies meaningfully, "I'll swear you did not; but you shall know me now." Laxton, who is not at all clever, mistakes this response for an erotic overture: "No, not here; we shall be spied" (3.1.58-61). Discarding subtlety as hopeless, Moll beats up Laxton while delivering a stirring oration on the sexual injustices suffered by women at the hands of arrogant, slanderous men:

Thou'rt one of those

That thinks each woman thy fond flexible whore ...

How many of our sex, by such as thou,

Have their good thoughts paid with a blasted name

That never deserved loosely ...

There is no mercy in't.

(3.1.77-93)

Furthermore, Moll attributes female sexual vulnerability specifically to the superior social power of male seducers, which she defies:

In thee I defy all men, their worst hates

And their best flatteries, all their golden witchcrafts,

With which they entangle the poor spirits of fools,

Distressed needle-women and tradefallen wives;

Fish that must needs bite, or themselves be bitten.

Such hungry things as these may soon be took

With a worm fastened on a golden hook.

Those are the lecher's food, his prey; he watches

For quarreling wedlocks and poor shifting sisters.

(3.1.97-105)

Finally, she does not simply dwell on female victimization, but asserts positively the capacity of women for full sexual responsibility, authority, and independence:

I scorn to prostitute myself to a man,

I that can prostitute a man to me ...

She that has wit and spirit,

May scorn to live beholding to her body for meat;

Or for apparel, like your common dame,

That makes shame get her clothes to cover shame.

(3.1.116-46)

Like the sympathetic *Hic Mulier* figure in the debate, Moll takes upon herself the defense of all women. Indeed Laxton's attempted violation of Moll's chastity connects her with, rather than distinguishes her from, the shopkeepers' wives, most of whom are willingly engaged in sexual collusion with the gallants when the play begins. As a result, we perceive that the "man-clothed" Moll,28 the notorious roaring girl and *Hic Mulier,* is actually a sexual innocent compared to the conventional middle-class wives. More important than the wives' hypocrisy, however, is their eventual reform; at the end of the play they see through the schemes of their would-be seducers and choose to reject them in favor of their husbands just as Moll's defeat of Laxton has portended that they would. The seducing gallants who represent illicit sexuality therefore turn out not to constitute a real threat to the social order at all. Moll herself recognizes this fact immediately: "Oh, the gallants of these times are shallow lechers ... 'Tis impossible to know what woman is throughly honest, because she's ne'er throughly tried" (2.1.336-40).

As Moll's defeat of Laxton makes clear, free-floating, amoral eros is stripped of its socially destructive power when women decide to take responsibility for themselves. The aborted sexual encounter between Moll and Laxton also dramatizes the specious logic involved in connecting Moll's unconventional male attire automatically with whorish behavior. In their depiction of Laxton's complacence, the playwrights clearly associate lechery and misogyny with obtuse, unobservant social conformity.29 As we have seen, the idea of mindlessly adhering to social custom is the principal target of the sympathetic *Hic Mulier* figure when she defends her freedom in the debate. In ***The Roaring Girl*** this theme is amplified in the main plot through the representation of the censorious attitudes and actions which Sir Alexander Wengrave takes toward Moll Frith.

In his self-righteousness, self-deception, and self-pity, Sir Alexander is all self, incapable of distinguishing his emotional attachments from virtue. Proud of what he thinks is his shrewd observation of social life, trying to conform to a preconceived ideal, he continually misapprehends the realities which confront him. Sebastian recognizes that his father's vulnerability to the opinion of others exceeds even his greed, and he forms a plan to gain both his inheritance and his true love, Mary Fitzallard, by telling his father that he plans to marry Moll Frith, the outrageous roaring girl who fights, smokes, swears, and wears men's clothes. Like Laxton, Sir Alexander assumes from Moll's masculine attire that she is both a whore and a thief, who can be entrapped into stealing money, exposed, and safely removed from the proximity of his son. Like Laxton, he fails repeatedly in his assaults on her integrity.

Sir Alexander inveighs against Moll as a monster (1.2.130-36; 2.2.81-83), a siren (2.1.219-20), a thief (1.2.175; 4.1.201-06; 2.2.139), and a whore (1.2.137; 2.2.160). One funny scene shows him spying on her, appalled as her tailor fits her for breeches. Like the conservative author of the *Hic Mulier* pamphlet, Sir Alexander perceives in Moll's male clothing a symbol not only of perverse sexuality, but also of the inevitable disintegration of stable marital relations: "Hoyda, breeches? What, will he marry a monster with two trinkets [i.e., testicles]? What age is this? If the wife go in breeches, the man must wear long coats, like a fool." (2.2.81-84). At the end of the play, before a nearly-reformed Sir Alexander has discovered his son's true marital intentions, Moll's urbane teasing exposes his desire to maintain rigid gender roles as a regressive anxiety:

Moll: (referring to herself) Methinks you should be proud of such a daughter,

As good a man as your son ...

You do not know what benefits I bring with me;

No cheat dares work upon you with thumb or knife,

While you've a roaring girl to your son's wife.

(5.2.153-62)

More than any of the specific evils he attributes to her, Sir Alexander fears Moll's conspicuousness, her unconventionality, her social aberrance; the sheer embarrassment of having such a daughter-in-law is equivalent to ruin. "Why wouldst thou fain marry to be pointed at?" he asks his son. "Why, as good marry a beacon on a hill, / Which all the country fix their eyes upon, / As her thy folly dotes on" (2.2.142-46). It is Sir Alexander's shallow, malicious willingness to accept received opinion without observing for himself, his bourgeois horror of nonconformity, that moves Sebastian to a rousing defense of Moll, the clearest articulation of her honesty in the play:

He hates unworthily that by rote contemns ...

                                                  Here's her worst,

Sh'as a bold spirit that mingles with mankind,

But nothing else comes near it; and often times

Through her apparel somewhat shames her birth;

But she is loose in nothing but in mirth.

Would all Molls were no worse!

(2.2.176-86)

And it is precisely this thoughtless social conformity, dramatized by his malignant intolerance of Moll, that Sir Alexander abjures at the end, thereby making possible the formation of a new comic society which will be both flexible and just:

Forgive me; now I cast the world's eyes from me,

And look upon thee [i.e., Moll] freely with mine own ...

I'll never more

Condemn by common voice, for that's the whore,

That deceives man's opinion, mocks his trust,

Cozens his love, and makes his heart unjust.

(5.2.244-51)

In "The Place of Laughter in Tudor and Stuart England," Keith Thomas analyzes the ways in which comedy conservatively affirms the status quo by revealing, mocking, and containing social tensions; yet, Thomas points out, "There was also a current of radical, critical laughter which, instead of reinforcing accepted norms, sought to give the world a nudge in a new direction."30 Given the heavy emphasis which the majority of English Renaissance society placed on gender-polarized sexual decorum and subdued, modest female behavior, it is evident that, with their idealized comic portrait of the *Hic Mulier* figure Moll Frith, Dekker and Middleton were joining those who, like the author of the *Haec-Vir* pamphlet, were beginning to call for greater freedom for women and equality between the sexes. As we have seen, serious opposition to Moll is represented in the play as mindless conformity. Not only do the playwrights decline to link Moll's freewheeling, immodest habits and appearance with perverse or dishonest behavior, but they also give her ample opportunity to acquit herself from her reputation as a criminal (5.1.323-73). Furthermore, Dekker and Middleton portray as noble Moll's integrity in refusing Sebastian Wengrave's proposal of marriage, made before she knows it is only a sham to deceive his father. Like the sympathetic, eloquent *Hic Mulier* figure, Moll refuses the conventional subordination required of a wife:

I have no humor to marry ... I have the head now of myself, and am man enough for a woman. Marriage is but a chopping and changing, where a maiden loses one head, and has a worse i' th' place.(2.2.38-48)

Moll's virginity represents the particular condition of independence which Carolyn Heilbrun defines as "that fierce autonomy which separates the individual from the literal history of his sexual acts":31 "Base is that mind that kneels unto her body ... / My spirit shall be mistress of this house / As long as I have time in't" (3.1.149-52).

How far does ***The Roaring Girl*** go in its sympathetic imaginative vision of sexual nonconformity, female independence, and equality between the sexes, all conditions embodied in the title character? Clearly Laxton's humorous stupidity and Sir Alexander's petty malice are no match for Moll's integrity, vitality, intelligence, and courage. Yet a more subtle counter-movement in the play resists the absorption of Moll into the tolerant new society which forms in the final scene.

Far from direct disapproval, this strand of qualified feeling can be discerned as an ambiguous undercurrent in the primarily positive attitude with which Moll is regarded by Sebastian and his fiancée, Mary Fitzallard, the couple whose relationship and opinions represent the desirable social norm in the play. For example, when Sebastian reveals to Mary his scheme of pretending to court Moll, he describes the roaring girl as "a creature / so strange in quality" (1.1.100-01) that Mary could not possibly doubt his love. As noted, Sebastian provides the major defense of Moll in the play; but the defense, while eloquent and just, is delivered to his father in the course of a deception and is couched entirely in terms of existing standards of sexual decorum, the basis of which Sebastian never questions: "and oftentimes / Through her apparel [she] somewhat shames her birth; / But she is loose in nothing but in mirth" (2.2.183-85). Is Sebastian referring to Moll's gender, social status, or both in his reference to her birth? This point is never clarified, nor is the rather odd remark which Mary makes when Sebastian introduces her to Moll:

Seb.This is the roaring wench must do us good.

Mary.No poison, sir, but serves us for some use;

Which is confirmed in her.

(4.1.148-50)

Furthermore, Moll herself seems to acquiesce in the view which regards her as aberrant, thereby indirectly affirming existing sexual values: when Sebastian proposes to her she responds, "A wife you know ought to be obedient, but I fear me I am too headstrong to obey ... You see sir, I speak against myself" (2.2.40-41, 62). These and similar remarks are too infrequent and undeveloped to undercut the predominant theme of approval and admiration which surrounds Moll in the play; but they do qualify the potential for any radical change in sexual values implicit in the full social acceptance of Moll Frith.

The play makes clear that, if the stifling, malignant conformity which unjustly opposes Moll is one thing, incorporation of her into society is quite another. Full social acceptance is no more the destiny of the *Hic Mulier* figure in this play, no matter how benevolent, than it is the fate of the sympathetic *Hic Mulier* in the debate, no matter how reasonable, eloquent, or bold. Earlier I observed that the playwrights' ambivalence toward Moll can be discerned as a disjunction between thematic content and dramatic form. While the dominant content of ***The Roaring Girl*** elicits but does not clarify this issue, formal analysis makes its subtlety more readily perceptible. A brief discussion of the function of disguise in the play should help to clarify the point.

Although Moll Frith wears male clothing, she makes no attempt to conceal her identity and all the other characters know she is a woman: in short, she is not in disguise. When used simply to denote a costume, worn in a play or festival for example, "disguise" could be used as a morally neutral term in Jacobean England. But discussions of apparel in the moral and religious literature more often use "disguise" as an inclusive censorious term meaning, roughly, "deformity of nature" and comprehending in the range of disapproval not only the player, but the fop, dandy, overdressed woman and, of course, the *Hic Mulier.*32 According to this conservative mentality, the roaring girl would be in "disguise"; but, as we have seen, the play rejects precisely this negative interpretation of Moll's apparel. More illuminating for present purposes is a brief comparison between Moll and the disguised heroines of Shakespearean romantic comedy.

In contrast to Moll, who insists on being recognized as a woman, heroines like Rosalind and Viola seek to conceal their identities and to protect themselves by masquerading as men. Modern criticism has been particularly adept at recognizing the symbolic, structural, and psychological functions of these romantic disguises. On the psychological level, the male disguise allows the Shakespearean heroine the social freedom to extend her personality and expand her identity by exploring the possibilities inherent in male sexual roles.33 This opportunity for heightened awareness and personal growth incorporates into the desirable comic society formed at the end of the play an androgynous vision, recently defined as "a psychic striving for an ideal state of personal wholeness, a microcosmic attempt to imitate a mythic macrocosm," in which "being a human being entails more than one's sex identification and attendant gender development"34

The romantic comic form, however, represents neither a mythical nor a revolutionary society, but a renewed traditional society, whose stability and coherence is symbolized by marriage and is based on the maintenance of traditional sexual roles.35 It is the temporary nature of the heroine's male disguise which contains the formal solution to the potential psychological and social problems it raises: that is, the heroine gladly sheds her disguise with its accompanying freedoms at the end of the play, in order to accept the customary social role of wife, thereby allowing the play's androgynous vision to remain spiritual and symbolic without awakening the audience's dissatisfaction or desire for social change.36 Northrop Frye has shown that the resolution of comedy, which is usually erotic, is often brought about by a bisexual Eros figure who, like Puck, "is in himself sexually self-contained, being in a sense both male and female, and needing no expression of love beyond himself." In Shakespeare's later comedies, this structural role is taken over by the disguised female; but when the Eros figure is no longer supernatural, "his" character must break down, as Viola's does into Viola and Sebastian in *Twelfth Night,* or be superseded, as Rosalind's is, by the figure of Hymen in *As You Like It.*37 As another critic puts it, "The temporary nature of the male disguise is of course essential, since the very nature of Shakespearean comedy is to affirm that disruption is temporary, that what has been turned topsy-turvy will be restored."38

Like Shakespearean comedy, ***The Roaring Girl*** concludes festively with the re-formation of a flexible and tolerant society, whose stability and integration are symbolized in marriage. But in ***The Roaring Girl*** the functions performed by the disguised heroine in Shakespeare are structurally divided and displaced. Moll clearly answers to much of Frye's analysis of the comic Eros figure: first, with her self-imposed virginity, refusal to marry, and men's clothes, she is "in a sense both male and female" and needs "no expression of love beyond [her]self"; secondly, it is she who brings about the benevolent and satisfactory resolution of the action when she actively helps Sebastian to gain Mary. Sebastian recognizes her function as the play's Eros figure when he says, "Twixt lovers' hearts she's a fit instrument / And has the art to help them to their own" (2.2.204-05). In Frye's terms, Moll is a figure in whom Eros "is a condition, not a desire."39 But unlike Puck, Moll is not supernatural; she is human and will not disappear from social life. She is neither on an odyssey toward sexual and social integration, as Rosalind and Viola are, nor can she be said to grow psychologically, happily internalizing the discovery of love and freedom in the way that they do. She has no intention of marrying, no intention of relinquishing either her outfit or the unconventional principles and behavior it represents. She therefore assumes the social and psychological freedom of the traditional disguised heroine without providing the corresponding reassurance implicit in that heroine's eventual erotic transformation. These functions are instead displaced onto Mary Fitzallard, who, disguised as a page, joyously sheds the disguise to take her place as Sebastian's wife in the final scene. Moll,on the other hand, having served as the instrument who brings about the happy ending, is nevertheless excluded from the renewed comic society of married couples which forms on the stage at the end of the play. Sir Alexander makes this clear when he defines the new society by addressing "You kind gentlewomen, whose sparkling presence / Are glories set in marriage, beams of society / For all your loves give luster to my joys" (5.2.260-62). The playwrights conclude ***The Roaring Girl*** with an epilogue in which they emphasize the strangeness of the fictional, and the criminality of the real, Moll Frith.

In a sense the dramatists call attention to both a structural and social ambiguity in the world of the play by refusing to conflate Moll and Mary into a single figure.40 By excluding Moll from the traditional, rejuvenated society demanded by the comic form, Middleton and Dekker never quite succeed in separating her from her outlaw status, despite the approval and admiration with which her integrity, courage, and freedom are depicted in the play. It is true that Moll herself displays nothing but a benign indifference toward acceptance by established society: "I pursue no pity; / Follow the law and you can cuck me, spare not; / Hang up my viol by me, and I care not." (5.2.253-55). Moll's good-natured indifference allows the predominant tone of the ending of the play to remain festive. Yet her definition of herself as anti-social (5.1.362-63) and her exclusion by others combine to render unsettling the fact that her sexual independence has left her isolated from the very social structure which her courage and vitality have done so much to enliven and renew. The question of her social identity, raised at the beginning of the play, therefore remains unresolved at the end. It is because she has helped to create a society from which she is both excluded and excludes herself that Moll's status remains unclear; insofar as it is ambiguous, marginal, and problematic, Moll's social identity can be seen as a metaphor for the changing condition of women in early modern England.

**IV**

Both ***The Roaring Girl*** and the *Hic Mulier/Haec-Vir* debate represent the figure of the woman in men's clothing as the symbolic focus of concern about sexual freedom and equality in Jacobean society. Each text depicts this unconventional figure as attractive and virtuous, while those who regard her as socially and sexually disruptive are represented in contrast as hostile, anxious, and self-deceived. When confronting the irrationality of her enemies, the *Hic Mulier* figure emerges as the voice of reason and common sense. In both play and debate it is she who possesses imagination, insight, and courage; it is she who embodies the promise of freedom and even of happiness. Nevertheless this hopeful, likeable figure fails in each context to gain full social acceptance; not only is she excluded by others, but she herself acquiesces in her own defeat: in the debate she retreats completely, surrendering to the very values she had arisen to oppose; in the play she remains pleasantly isolated from society, a loveable outlaw whose eccentricity insures that she will not constitute a social threat. But while these formal resolutions of debate and play are both agreeably festive in tone, neither effort to adhere to the comic purpose of reconciling social tensions is entirely convincing. The powerfully rendered figure of *Hic Mulier* continues in each case to tower over the less compelling society that endeavors unsuccessfully to absorb her; viewed in terms of aesthetic logic, the *Hic Mulier* figure becomes content that cannot (illogically) be contained by form.

With their similarly ambivalent visions of *Hic Mulier* and Moll Frith as necessary but disruptive, benevolent but anti-social, both the debate and the play present an image of Jacobean society as unable to absorb one of its most vital and complex creations into the existing social and sexual hierarchies. The mixed approval and exclusion of the *Hic Mulier* figure evident in artistic representation and social commentary indicate a simultaneous search for and rejection of greater flexibility in sexual values. The parallel treatments of the controversy surrounding women in men's clothing in the dramatic and moral literature therefore combine to illuminate a particularly heightened time of groping for resolutions: in both ***The Roaring Girl*** and the *Hic Mulier/Haec-Vir* debate, the moral ambiguity and social challenge of sexual identity and equality as they were perceived in Renaissance England stand sharply before us.

**Notes**

1I would like to acknowledge my gratitude to the Monticello College Foundation and The Newberry Library, whose generous support made possible the research for this essay.

2The full names of these colorful pamphlets are as follows: *Hic Mulier: Or, The Man-Woman: Being a Medicine to cure the Coltish Disease of the Staggers in the Masculine-Feminines of our Times* and *Haec-Vir: Or The Womanish-Man: Being an Answer to a late Booke intituled Hic-Mulier.* All citations from the pamphlets are taken from the edition published by *The Rota* at the University of Exeter, 1973.

3See Louis B. Wright, *Middle-Class Culture in Elizabethan England* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1935), pp. 494-97; Carroll Camden, *The Elizabethan Woman* (New York, 1952), pp. 263-67; Juliet Dusinberre, *Shakespeare and the Nature of Women* (London, 1975), pp. 231-71; Linda T. Fitz, "What Says the Married Woman: Marriage Theory and Feminism in the English Renaissance," *Mosaic,* 13 (Winter, 1980), 1-22; and Linda Woodbridge, *Women and the English Renaissance: Literature and the Nature of Womankind, 1540-1620* (Urbana, 1984), pp. 139-51.

4Quoted from *Certain Sermons or Homilies Appointed to be Read in Churches in the Time of Queen Elizabeth* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1908), p. 327.

5See, for example, "Against Excess of Apparel" in *Homilies;* Thomas Nashe, *Christs Teares over Jerusalem,* 1593, in John Dover Wilson, *Life in Shakespeare's England* (Cambridge, 1920), p. 125; and Phillip Stubbes, *Anatomy of Abuses,* 1583, ed. Frederick J. Furnivall, The New Shakespeare Society (London, 1877-1879), pp. 33-4.

6See, for example, William Harrison, *Description of England, 1587* in Wilson, pp. 124-25. Cf. Wright, p. 493; Camden, pp. 257-67; and Fitz.

7John Louis Vives, "Of raiments," in *Instruction of a Christian Woman,* trans. Richard Hyrde (1557), Book II, Chap. VIII. Deuteronomy 22.5 reads: "The Woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment: for all that do so *are* abomination unto the Lord thy God."

8George Gascoigne, *The Steele Glas,* 1576, in ed. Edward Arber, *English Reprints,* V (London, 1868), pp. 82-3.

9Stubbes, p. 73.

10Stubbes, p. 73. Cf. Harrison, in Wilson, pp. 124-25.

11Henry Fitzgeffrey, *Notes from Black-fryers,* 1617. Cited by Wright, p. 492. See Wright, pp. 483-94 for other references to the "man-woman," including Barnabe Rich, in *The Honestie of this Age* (1614); Alexander Niccoles, in *A Discourse of Marriage And Wiving* (ed. of 1620); and Thomas Adams, in *Mystical Bedlam* (1615).

12Wright, p. 490. Anger against women reached its zenith in Joseph Swetnam's misogynistic tract, *The Araignment of Lewd, Idle, Froward, and unconstant Women* (1615), which had ten printings by 1634 and inspired several responses (see Wright, pp. 486-93), including a stage-play, *Swetnam, the Woman-hater, Arraigned by Women,* (1620).

13Wright, p. 507 and Fitz, pp. 2-3.

14Along with the numerous isolated references to the *Hic Mulier* phenomenon cited in Wright, these documents include the *Hic Mulier* and *Haec-Vir* pamphlets, noted above, and another pamphlet, *Mulde Sacke: Or The Apologie of Hic Mulier: To the late Declamation against her* (1620). By referring to the *Hic Mulier* phenomenon as a "transvestite movement," or even as a "rough-and-ready unisex movement" (p. 15), Fitz implies more coherence and range to the fashion than these pamphlets can document. Cf. Woodbridge, pp. 139-51.

15Edward Phillips Statham, *A Jacobean Letter-Writer: The Life and Times of John Chamberlain* (London, 1920), pp. 182-83.

16We should not, I think, take for granted that misogynistic and feminist attitudes can be aligned neatly with gender in the Renaissance. The relative paucity of literature in the early 1600s in which women are clearly speaking for themselves makes specifically female attitudes extremely difficult to distinguish and assess. Resolving the problem of the correlation between gender and attitude is not, however, prerequisite to the present analysis, which seeks to compare the sexual values clearly articulated in the *Hic Mulier/Haec-Vir* debate with the artistic conception of a *Hic Mulier* figure in *The Roaring Girl.*

17Wright, p. 490.

18Wright, p. 497.

19Fitz, pp. 16-17. Fitz, for example, sees as unfortunate the argument in *Haec-Vir* (sig. C2v) that it is a law of nature that differences between the sexes be preserved by designated dress and behavior. She also remarks that "Renaissance women so far accepted the masculine rules of the game that they felt they had to adopt the clothing and external attributes of the male sex in order to be 'free.' This was true in drama as in life: witness the transvestite heroines of Shakespeare's romantic comedies." See also Woodbridge, pp. 148-49.

20See Suzanne W. Hull, *Chaste Silent & Obedient: English Books for Women 1475-1640* (San Marino, Cal, 1982). Hull provides an ample bibliography of documents that articulate the Renaissance ideal of womanhood.

21Fitz, pp. 9-10. Also see Wright, pp. 490-91. See also Dusinberre, pp. 234-35.

22Dusinberre, pp. 234-35, 239.

23See *Hic Mulier* (sig. C2v): "To you ... that are Fathers, Husbands, or Sustainers of these new *Hermaphrodites,* belongs the cure of this Impostume; it is you that give fuell to the flames of their wilde indiscretion." Cf. J. Chamberlain, in Statham, pp. 182-83: "A tax upon unruly female relatives! ... the King threatens to fall upon theyre husbands, parents or frends that have or shold have power over them, and make them pay for it."

24Cited in P.A. Mulholland, *"The Date of The Roaring Girl," Review of English Studies,* 28 (1977), 22, 30-31. See also Andor Gomme, Introd., *The Roaring Girl,* by Thomas Middleton and Thomas Dekker, (London, 1976), pp. xiii-xix, and Margaret Dowling, "A Note on Moll Cutpurse--'The Roaring Girl,'" *Review of English Studies,* 10 (1934), 67-71. There is a pamphlet called *The Life and Death of Mrs. Mary Frith,* published in 1662, but it is not thought to be reliable. For a review of the play's dramatic and non-dramatic sources, as well as references to the real Moll Frith, see Gomme, pp. xiii-xix, and Mulholland, pp. 18-31.

25Mulholland, pp. 18-31, is the most recent example. Gomme, pp. xiii-xix, also sums up the attempts to date the play.

26Mulholland, 18-9. As Mulholland observes (pp. 20-1), the *Consistory of London Correction Book* record concerning Mary Frith, which he cites at length on pp. 30-1, provides an extraordinary account both of the actual Moll and of the vehement opposition in Jacobean society to women wearing male attire, which is one offense of hers that is reiterated in the *Correction Book* entry.

27Thomas Middleton, "To the Comic Play-Readers, Venery and Laughter," in Thomas Dekker and Thomas Middleton, *The Roaring Girl.* All citations from the play are taken from *Drama of the English Renaissance,* eds. Russell A. Fraser and Norman Rabkin (New York, 1976), II, 334-38.

28The phrase is from Fitz, p. 16.

29Laxton expresses his general view of women in 3.2.266-69: "That wile / By which the serpent did the first woman beguile / Did ever since all women's bosoms fill; / You're apple-eaters all, deceivers still."

30Keith Thomas, "The Place of Laughter in Tudor and Stuart England," *Times Literary Supplement* (January 21, 1977), 78.

31Carolyn G. Heilbrun, *Toward a Recognition of Androgyny* (New York, 1973), p. 39.

32See, for example, *Hic Mulier,* sig. C3: "Doe you make it the utter losse of your favour and bounty to have brought into your Family, any new fashion or disguise, that might either deforme Nature, or bee an injury to modestie." Cf. Harrison, in Wilson, p. 123: "You shall not see any so disguised as are my countrymen of England," and Nashe, in Wilson, p. 125: "England, the players' stage of gorgeous attire, the ape of all nations' superfluities, the continual masquer in outlandish habiliments, great plenty-scanting calamities art thou to await, for wanton disguising thyself against kind; and digressing from the plainness of thy ancestors."

33See Alexander Leggatt, *Shakespeare's Comedy of Love* (London, 1974), p. 202; Helen Gardner, *"As You Like It,"* in *Modern Shakespearean Criticism,* ed. Alvin B. Kernan (New York, 1970), pp. 199, 202; Helene Moglen, "Disguise and Development: The Self and Society in *Twelfth Night,*" *Literature and Psychology,* 23 (1973), 13-9; and Dusinberre, p. 257.

34Robert Kimbrough, "Androgyny Seen Through Shakespeare's Disguise," *Shakespeare Quarterly,* 33 (Spring, 1982), 20, 19. Cf. Margaret Boerner Beckman, "The Figure of Rosalind in *As You Like It,*" *Shakespeare Quarterly,* 29 (Winter, 1978), 44-51.

35Cf. Gardner, pp. 190-203 and Northrop Frye, "The Argument of Comedy," in ed. Kernan, pp. 165-73.

36Cf. C.L. Barber, *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy: A Study of Dramatic Form and its Relation to Social Custom* (Princeton, N.J., 1959), pp. 245-47; Leggatt, p. 211; F. H. Mares, "Viola and other Transvestist Heroines in Shakespeare's Comedies," in ed. B. A. W. Jackson, *Stratford Papers on Shakespeare* (McMaster University Library Press, 1969 for 1965-1967), pp. 96-109; and Nancy K. Hayles, "Sexual Disguise in *As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night,*" *Shakespeare Survey,* 32 (1979), 63-72.

37Northrop Frye, *A Natural Perspective* (New York, 1965), pp. 82-83.

38Clara Claiborne Park, "As We Like It: How a Girl Can be Smart and Still Popular," in *The Woman's Part,* eds. Carolyn Ruth Swift Lenz, Gayle Greene, and Carol Thomas Neely (Urbana, Ill., 1980), p. 108.

39Frye, p. 83.

40See Gomme, p. xxiii, who points out that Mary and Moll have the same name, and that Moll "impersonates" Mary in the final scene "in order to complete the trick which secures Mary's happiness."

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