Shakespeare’s *Cymbeline*:
Disguise, Gender Roles, Noble Birth, and Counterfeit Death

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A Note on the Text

The text of Shakespeare’s *Cymbeline* quoted throughout this thesis is that of *The Oxford Shakespeare*, edited by Roger Warren (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). However, in citing the character’s names, I have twice deviated from the Oxford edition, choosing the First Folio’s use of “Iachimo” and “Imogen” over the modernised form “Giacomo” and the historical form “Innogen.” For the purpose of clarity and consistency throughout this thesis, I have used the names “Iachimo” and “Imogen” also in quotations which originally had the modernised “Giacomo” and the historical “Innogen.”

All biblical citations are from the Authorized King James Version.
Introduction

In this thesis, I would like to address four different topics, which coincide with the four individual chapters. The first chapter deals with the concept of recognition and the notion of disguise. The first part includes a discussion of Aristotle’s definition of *anagnorisis* and an outline of the different kinds of recognition. The second part examines a major plot device in complicating the recognition process: disguise. Susan Baker distinguishes four kinds of disguise in Shakespearean drama, three of which will be discussed here: substitutive, task-oriented and improvisational disguise. This second part seeks to analyse these different types of disguise and their functions within the play. The first section concerns the substitutive disguise of Cloten. I will argue that Cloten attempts to erase Posthumus by adopting the latter’s clothes, but that this eventually leads to the erasure of Cloten himself. To support my argument, I will look at significant resemblances, both physical and temperamental, between Cloten and Posthumus. I will also analyse Imogen’s crisis, that is, her misrecognition of Cloten’s body as Posthumus’. Cloten’s disguise is also related to Posthumus feigned death, but more about this in the fourth chapter. The second section focuses on Imogen’s task-oriented disguise. First, I will show that Imogen needs to assume this disguise both to protect herself and to assert her chastity. Her disguise requires a transformation in class, nationality and gender; all three aspects will be analysed here. Second, I will illustrate that Imogen’s femininity becomes more articulated when she adopts her task-oriented disguise. Third, I will discuss her brothers’ and her father’s partial recognition as well as her husband’s misrecognition. Finally, I will explain why Imogen’s disguise is proposed by Pisanio rather than constructed by the heroine herself. The third section is about the improvisational disguise of Belarius, Guiderius, and Arviragus. All three of them adopt a Welsh disguise and, for that reason, I will devote special attention to the Welsh characteristics adopted by the characters. I will also discuss Cymbeline’s recognition of his two long-lost sons. The final section will look at Posthumus’ task-oriented and improvisational disguise. I will show that his disguise takes the form of national cross-dressing, whereby Posthumus’ changes of clothes coincide with his changes in national allegiance. I will illustrate that Posthumus’ costume changes are a visual demonstration of his flexible (national) identity, which combines both British and Roman values.

The second chapter addresses the aspect of gender politics in *Cymbeline*. More specifically, this chapter looks at the Renaissance gender stereotypes and how the relationships of the two married couples deconstruct the binary opposition of gender roles
(and even the patriarchal hierarchy). The first part of this chapter analyses the relationship between Cymbeline and his second wife, the Queen. I will illustrate that the traditional gender roles are reversed here: the Queen adopts male gender characteristics and Cymbeline attributes of the female character. I will show that this reversal is only temporary as the Queen – being a strong, independent woman, hence considered a threat to the social order – will be politically displaced in the final scene. I will argue that, even though, in the end, the patriarchal order is re-established and Cymbeline has restored his masculine authority, the patriarchal society is somewhat revised, leading to a more “feminised patriarchy,” governed by a “maternal” Cymbeline. I will also look at Cymbeline’s misrecognition of the Queen’s true (evil) nature. The second part is about the relationship between Posthumus and Imogen. First, the reversal of the marriage convention will be discussed. Second, I will employ the theoretical framework of Ruth Kelso to analyse the gender identities of Posthumus and Imogen. Kelso argues that gender roles in the Renaissance were defined based on two different ideologies: Christianity and paganism. She explains that the ideal woman adhered to Christian values, the ideal man to pagan principles. I will show that Imogen, as she is both socially and morally superior to Posthumus, violates the submissive model set forth for women.

The third chapter deals with both the seeming opposition of humble and noble birth and the convention of the noble savage in Cymbeline. It starts with a general discussion of the play’s attitudes towards the court (or the inside) and the country (or the outside). It will be argued that the royal court is marked by foolishness, flattery, and corruption, whereas the Welsh countryside is characterised by virtue and gentleness. Following this discussion of the court-country opposition, the princes’ nobility will be explored, taking into account the notions of innate and learned nobility. I will illustrate that the princes do not entirely fit into the category of the noble savage, because, although part of their nobility is innate, there is also another part that has been taught by the ex-courtier, Belarius. For these analyses, I will pay close attention to the theme of seeming.

The fourth and final chapter seeks to analyse the concepts of counterfeit death (also called feigned death) and rebirth and their functions within Cymbeline. The first part examines these notions with regard to the heroine, Imogen. First, I will argue that her counterfeit death is caused by concerns about her chastity. In order to do this, I will look at Imogen’s individual interpretation of the sexual construct of female chastity. Imogen violates the conventional notion of chastity: it is her active way of displaying her virtue that leads to
her social death (and ultimately to her feigned death). I will demonstrate that, through her social death, Imogen’s agency is reduced and that it is her feigned death (and cross-dressing) that will help her to restore, at least to some extent, that agency that she enjoyed before. Second, Imogen’s (feigned) burial will be discussed, focusing on the pre-Christian burial practices. Third, I will look at Imogen’s feigned resurrection and her restored trust and belief in her husband. I will devote special attention to how Shakespeare tries to include the audience in the heroine’s experiences. Finally, I will examine Imogen’s rebirths – plural as she is reborn to her brothers, husband and father. (The rebirths coincide with the different moments at which the princes, Posthumus, and Cymbeline recognise Imogen’s true identity.) For this examination, I will look at the rituals which formally reunite Imogen with her father and husband.

The second part of this chapter discusses Posthumus’ feigned death and rebirth. I will argue that Posthumus’ counterfeit death is an (indirect) consequence of his desire to kill the vicious female aspects (“the woman’s part within himself” as he calls it) which endanger his masculine identity. First, I will analyse Posthumus’ misogynist speech, which reflects the medieval notion of the female body as something desirable and therefore dangerous, demanding control and submission. For the analysis, I will look at the interrelationship of the concepts of (female) chastity, procreation and illegitimacy. Second, I will discuss how Cymbeline manages to “protect” the protagonist by displacing his sexual feelings and desires (i.e. the woman’s part) onto his substitutes, Iachimo and Cloten: the displacement allows for the manifestation of Posthumus’ repressed sexual feelings, whilst it, at the same time, protects Posthumus from the dreadful results. I will argue that Cloten becomes the personification of the woman’s part and that he has to die in Posthumus’ place in order to purge Posthumus’ masculine identity of feminine contamination. Third, I will analyse Posthumus’ three rebirths – two private and one public. For the first analysis, I will focus on Posthumus’ change of clothes and argue that this costume change symbolises the killing of the old sinful self (corrupted by the woman’s part within him) and the birth of the new and changed self. The second analysis involves Posthumus’ dream, which, as I will argue, reunites him with his dead (and unknown) relatives in order to prepare him for the reunification with his other (alive and) public family. In the third analysis, I will look at Posthumus’ public rebirth which includes the reunion with his wife and allows him to be “fully” reborn. Finally, I will argue that

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1 The discussion is much indebted to Janet Adelman’s critical analysis of Posthumus’ contaminated masculine identity.
Posthumus’ sense of forgiveness (influenced by Imogen’s earlier forgiveness of him) inspires the rebirth of Britain.

The methodology that is used in this study is a close reading of several passages in *Cymbeline*. The thesis is a textual analysis for which I have used an interpretative framework in order to examine and understand the issues mentioned above. I look at the theatrical practices and historicise wherever possible – that is, I will explore the historical background and try to imagine the historical practices. In order to support the statements made in this thesis, explicit and implicit textual evidence will be identified. I will use carefully chosen quotations from the primary text as well as relevant extracts from secondary texts in order to establish the validity of the interpretation in the chapters that follow. The thesis focuses on the text itself, and only occasionally comments on the performance – for little is known about the staging of *Cymbeline* in Shakespeare’s time, and what is known is rather vague and obscure. However, I do consider audience-response criticism, as it deals with those to whom the play is essentially addressed, namely the theatrical spectators. I did not decide on a specific school of criticism. Nonetheless, feminist criticism has shown to be useful to this study as the play’s plot concerns the oppression of female characters in a patriarchal society.
1 Recognition and Disguise

1.1 Recognition - Anagnorisis

Recognition is a recurrent element in dramatic plots. It marks the moment when a character (and the audience) discovers the true identity of a previously encountered or known character or thing. The Greek term *anagnorisis*, coined by the philosopher Aristotle, is generally translated as “recognition,” however, depending on the level of surprise, the term has also been translated as “discovery” and “disclosure.” According to Aristotle, anagnorisis constitutes a fundamental component of the plot in tragedy as well as in epic. He defines the notion as a change from ignorance to knowledge, resulting in friendship or enmity on the part of those people destined by the poet for good or bad fortune. Aristotle’s definition is threefold. First, recognition implies the idea of change: there is a change in knowledge – one gains and regains knowledge. Second, recognition changes the relationship between the characters (i.e. recogniser and recognised), tending either to love or to hate. Third, recognition together with the changed relationship affects the fate of the recogniser, or of both recogniser and recognised. Aristotle focuses primarily on the recognition of people by other people. This recognition, as Northrop Frye points out, can also be identified as a formerly unrecognised attribute of a particular character. Consider, for instance, the end of *Cymbeline*, in which the title character finally recognises the true character of the Queen. However, Aristotle notes that anagnorisis is not restricted to humans as it can also be observed with inanimate things (i.e. an object, an event). The recognition, though of a specific person, object or event, generates universal knowledge, because, as Aristotle maintains, poetry is more philosophical than history, that is, the former’s declarations are universal, whereas the latter’s are particular.

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3 Piero Boitani, ‘Something Divine in Recognition,’ in *Recognition and Modes of Knowledge: Anagnorisis from Antiquity to Contemporary Theory*, ed. by Theresa G. Russo (Alberta: The University of Alberta Press, 2013), p. 4. Other vital plot elements are *peripeteia* (i.e. reversal, turning point) and *pathos* (i.e. catastrophe). Although anagnorisis happens in both tragedy and comedy, it seems more basic to the former than to the latter. Characters in comedy, as David Mikics observes, are at times ‘so blithely resilient that they can remain unaffected by a knowledge that would wound and destroy them in a tragedy.’ (David Mikics, *A New Handbook of Literary Terms* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), p. 257-258)
5 Frye, p. 364.
In the sixteenth chapter of the *Poetics*, Aristotle distinguishes five different types of anagnorisis. The first – and the least artistic – kind of recognition is the one through visible signs. These signs are employed by the poet to prove a person’s identity and can either be congenital (e.g. birthmarks) or obtained after birth (e.g. bodily marks as scars and wounds, or external tokens as bracelets and rings). In *Cymbeline*, when the mantle of Arviragus has been considered insufficient evidence, Guiderius’ birthmark eventually proves the brother’s true identities as heirs to the throne. The second type of recognition is brought about by poetic contrivance. This means that the recognition does not naturally originate from the plot, but that it is manipulated through artificial intervention on the part of the poet. An example of this kind of recognition is when a character directly reveals his or her true identity. The third category is recognition through recollection. This type depends on the sight, the hearing, the smell and such of something, which leads to the recollection of a forgotten memory. Essential to this kind of recognition is repetition: “[t]his repetition brings to mind some former event that is at least in part repeated (if only by reference) as it is remembered, and is now understood with new awareness.” For example, in the final scene of *Cymbeline*, the king recognises his daughter by her voice.

The fourth type is recognition through the process of syllogismos (i.e. reasoning). This kind of recognition entails a character’s use of logical reasoning in identifying the meaning of something. This happens, for instance, when a character comes to knowledge after having combined the different pieces of information that he or she has obtained throughout the play’s action. This example illustrates that the division into categories is not clear-cut: all types of recognition employ reasoning to some extent. Nevertheless, the distinction remains valid if this type of recognition is defined as being primarily activated by reasoning (and only secondary by deductive reasoning). Parallel to this kind of recognition is another kind, called “synthetic” or “composite” recognition. This means that one character is recognised through the false inference on the part of another character. Such a recognition can also occur through a logical deceit performed by one character upon another. The final – and the most effective – form of recognition is the one that arises from the plot itself and is accompanied by

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9 Waldoff, p. 49.
10 This type has also been called “fictitious,” “fallacious,” “false,” and “concocted” recognition.
peripeteia, i.e. the turning point of the play. This type of recognition produces eleos (i.e. pity, mercy) and phobos (i.e. fear, terror), ‘which is the purpose of the mimesis inherent in tragedy,’ and arouses feelings of surprise and wonder. According to Aristotle, the less recognition is manipulated by the poet and the more it is related to the plot and its action, the more successful the recognition will be. In addition to Aristotle’s types of recognition, Piero Boitani points out four additional ones: ‘recognition “de facie,”’ without complicated processes behind it, ‘recognition “by instinct,”’ ‘recognition by “exchange of words,”’ and ‘recognition-revelation of gods.'

Umberto Eco starts from Aristotle’s definition, but expands on it by offering a distinction between double and simple anagnorisis. The former occurs when neither the character nor the reader (or the spectator) is expecting a particular revelation. In double recognition, ‘the reader [or the spectator] identifies with the character, sharing his joy and suffering as well as his surprises.’ Simple anagnorisis, on the other hand, happens when the character is totally taken aback by a specific disclosure, but the reader (or the spectator) is already aware of what is happening. In this case, ‘the reader [or the spectator] projects his own frustrations or hopes of revenge onto the character, whose secret he already knows or can guess, and anticipates the turn of events.’ In simple anagnorisis, the spectators’ recognition takes place first as they have been given some information that the character onstage does not have. R. Alan Culpepper adds yet another distinction, one between “disclosure” and “discovery.” In the case of the first, the recogniser is only given a passive role as the recognised reveals his identity himself. The initiative is taken by the revealer, who (verbally) declares his identity – e.g. “I am ...” – or provides some evidence or performs an act which can prove his identity. In the case of discovery, the recognised’s identity is discovered, instead of disclosed. As such, the initiative switches to the recogniser or discoverer, who is now ‘more astute and assertive.’

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12 In tragedy, the peripeteia indicates or causes the protagonist’s downfall. The reversal in the action is one turning downward and is called “catastrophe.” By contrast, in comedy, the peripeteia usually creates prosperity. The reversal in action is thus one turning upward and is called “anastrophe.”
13 Boitani, p. 4.
14 Boitani, p. 4-5.
16 Eco, p. 172.
17 Eco, p. 172.
19 Culpepper, p. 73.
I will analyse the concepts of recognition, partial recognition (i.e. only part of the true identity of something or someone is recognised) and misrecognition (i.e. negative or mistaken recognition) in Shakespeare’s *Cymbeline*. The thesis will look at various moments in the play where knowledge is at issue. Especially, the play’s final scene, which counts 486 lines and has been called ‘a recognition scene to end all recognition scenes’ by Mark Van Doren, will be analysed in great detail. Recognition here occurs after ‘twenty-four separate reversals’ and takes the form of a miraculous discovery. *Cymbeline* exhibits some of the key themes that Terence Cave connected to recognition plots: intergenerational conflict (Imogen and her father), mental disorder (the Queen’s madness at the end), the status of dreams (Imogen’s and Posthumus’ dreams), ghosts (Posthumus’ dead family), and prophecies and riddles (Jupiter’s prophecy and riddle).

Furthermore, the theme of recognition is closely tied to the idea of seeming. Seeming is a major thematic concern in *Cymbeline*. The play calls into question the difference between seeming and being, appearance and reality. Seeming and being are not in strict opposition as seeming does not simply mean non-being. Something can “seem” and simultaneously “be,” in which case something is true or real. By contrast, something that “seems” but “is not” (i.e. the opposite of being) is false, unreal, or imaginary. The idea of seeming might involve deception. The latter can be defined as one character purposely withholding or manipulating information so that another character is meant to believe something in order to serve the purpose of the first character. Deception can be either positive or negative, depending on the motive of the deceiver. The themes of seeming and deception recur throughout the work and play integral roles in the process of recognition.

1.2 Disguise and Cross-dressing

Recognition, misrecognition and partial recognition is fundamental in *Cymbeline*. A major plot device used to blur the boundaries between these concepts is disguise. Susan Baker distinguishes four types of disguise in Shakespearean drama: concealing disguise, substitutive disguise, task-oriented disguise and improvisational disguise. The first kind of disguise allows the character to conceal its identity without claiming another. In this case, props like cloaks,

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20 Both partial recognition and misrecognition rely on biased, partial, or incomplete understandings.
23 This definition makes clear that deception necessarily implies intentionality.
masks and veils are used to establish ‘the disguise of without asserting any particular disguise as.’ The second type of disguise substitutes the character’s identity for that of someone else. Substitution is the appropriation (whenever it seems relevant) of another character’s status, attributes, quirks, behaviour, gestures, and speech. In short, it requires ‘knowledge of which is shared in advance by both the disguisers and those they delude.’ As such, this category deals not with creation but with mimesis, from the Greek verb mimeisthai, to imitate – hence the term imitative disguise. In the case of the third category, the character creates a new identity for a particular and limited audience, serving a particular and limited purpose. This purpose can be either positive or negative, depending on the intentions of the character who assumes the disguise. Regarding the first, the temporal disguise is morally justified because of the conditions under which the disguise is undertaken; it is used to obtain good things and escape bad situations. By contrast, the temporal disguise adopted with evil intent falls into the category of deception and falsehood. It generates negative effects and consequences, and is intended to cause harm. Task-oriented disguise generally implies the adoption of ‘an “occupational” type, visually marked for a predetermined slot in a socioeconomic hierarchy: priest, page, peasant, lawyer’s clerk.’ The last category of disguise – that is, improvisational disguise – also entails the construction of a fictive identity, but here to be performed in various circumstances before diverse audiences. This section seeks to analyse the different types of disguise and their functions within Cymbeline. Since the first notion of disguise is not relevant to the play, it will not be discussed further.

1.2.1 Imitative Disguise

Cymbeline is one of the few plays in which Shakespeare used imitative disguise or substitution. By donning Posthumus’ clothes, Cloten assumes the identity of the former. Clothes, as Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass point out, ‘have the power to imprint their wearers because they are a form of material memory.’ Thus, costume is a significant visual extension of the character’s identity. In a conversation with Imogen at the beginning of the play, Cloten insults Posthumus, calling him ‘[a] hilding for a livery, a squire’s cloth / A pantler – not so eminent.’ Posthumus is to Cloten a good-for-nothing, only fit to wear a

26 Baker, p. 310.
28 Shakespeare, 2.3.120-121.
servant’s outfit. The comparison between clothes and character enables Cloten to underline the fact that Posthumus is unsuitable for kingship. Imogen’s response to this insult is telling: ‘His meanest garment / That ever hath but clipped his body is dearer / In my respect than all the heirs above thee.’ As Jones and Stallybrass remark, Imogen does not claim that Posthumus exceed his clothes. Alternately, she insists upon the value that Posthumus’ clothes represent to her, especially now that he is in exile. Cloten’s multiple repetitions of Imogen’s insult – which he interprets literally – not only indicate his humiliation, but also already hint at his subsequent plan of revenge.

Baker notes that imitative disguise in Shakespearean drama ‘is most often a sexual ploy, specifically designed either to evade or to enforce social sanctions on sexuality.’ In Cymbeline, Cloten’s motive for disguising as Posthumus is obvious: revenge. He intends to rape Imogen in the suit that Posthumus wore when he took leave of her: ‘With that suit upon my back will I ravish / her.’ Posthumus’ clothes are an important medium for Cloten to avenge the insult, because they embody special meaning for Imogen and, therefore, the planned rape would have been an even more painful experience to her. According to Jones and Stallybrass, Cloten adopts Posthumus’ clothes to remove and replace the latter. The way by which Cloten tries to do this is by changing the meaning of Posthumus’ clothes. Cloten wearing the garment would affect the meaning Imogen attributes to them: ‘she held the very garment of Posthumus in more respect than his [Cloten’s] noble and natural person.’ By donning Posthumus’ clothes, Cloten transforms them into the clothes of Imogen’s rapist. However, Cloten’s attempt to erase Posthumus fails and, in fact, results in the erasure of himself. To illustrate this, Jones and Stallybrass refer to act 4, scene 2, where Cloten in Posthumus’ clothes asks Guiderius: ‘Know’st me not by my clothes?’ In other words, “Do you not recognise my station?” Thus, Cloten demands respect for the court clothes that he is wearing. He soon realises, however, that the clothes are not his but those of Posthumus. Obviously, Posthumus’ garments require less respect than those of the Queen’s son.

In his soliloquy as he arrives disguised in Wales, Cloten emphasises the physical resemblance between him and Posthumus: ‘[T]he lines of / my body are as well drawn as his,’

29 Shakespeare, 2.3.130-132.
31 Shakespeare, 3.5.136-137.
32 Jones and Stallybrass, p. 200. “Remove” is to be taken as destroying Posthumus’ good reputation as well as killing him. “Replace” is to be understood as Cloten wanting to take the place of Posthumus as Imogen’s lover.
33 Shakespeare, 3.5.133-135.
34 Shakespeare, 4.2.83.
so that Posthumus’ clothes suit him perfectly. This quote, according to Sara E. Gorman, illustrates that the play devotes more attention to male than to female disguise. She claims that the former is more transgressive than the latter. Indeed, Imogen crossdresses to prove her chastity – and not, as is usually the case, to undertake a mission involving some sort of sexually improper and unlady-like behaviour, whereas Cloten does disguise himself with the intention of raping Imogen. Gorman argues that, although male disguise in Cymbeline is not cross-gender, the audience is intended to speculate on the male body. Imogen’s climactic speech in act 4, scene 2, further supports her argument since, Imogen, like Cloten, calls attention to the male body:

A headless man? The garments of Posthumus?
I know the shape of ‘s leg; this is his hand,
His foot Mercurial, his Martial thigh,
The brawns of Hercules; but his Jovial face –
Murder in heaven! How? ‘Tis gone.

Moreover, the quote also accentuates the similarity between Posthumus and Cloten. Upon seeing her husband’s clothes, Imogen wrongly assumes that the headless body is that of Posthumus. What is presented here is what one could call the anatomy of the body in the imagination. Amanda Berry notes that Imogen ‘figuratively dismembers the body, traversing a disordered map from leg to hand to foot to thigh to an allusive generalization of his build.’

Raphael Lyne indicates that Imogen’s misrecognition of Cloten is partly due to the ‘false dream premise that she has been with her husband.’ Before she sees the body, Imogen

35 Shakespeare, 4.1.8-9.
37 Shakespeare, 4.2.309-313. This is an example of the theatrical use of the blazon: ‘A poetic catalogue of a woman’s admirable physical features, common in Elizabethan lyric poetry [...] The Petrarchan conventions of the blazon include a listing of parts from the hair down and the use of hyperbole and simile in describing lips like coral, teeth like pearls, and so on.’ in The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms, ed. by Chris Baldick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 37. In fact, Imogen’s speech is an inversion of this convention of love poetry towards the grotesque. The traditional rhetorical balance of gender display is disturbed, since in this anti-blazon scene, the blazon is not only below the head, it is also presented to the audience from the woman’s point of view. Shakespeare is mocking this convention. As Imogen makes the identification of each body part, she emblematically associates them with those of gods and heroes. She idealises and praises every piece of the headless corpse, believing it is Posthumus, the hero, whilst it is actually Cloten, the villain.
is still waking from a dream in which she imagined that she was travelling with a ‘bedfellow,’ who is no longer there.\textsuperscript{40} She appears to be confused, presumably due to the effects of the sleeping potion. Her language in this soliloquy suggests her half-drugged state and demonstrates her difficulty in discerning the real and the dream-like. This blurred distinction between reality and imagination can be observed the moment Imogen sees Posthumus’ garments. She recognises her husband’s clothing (i.e. reality), but then \textit{imagines} recognising his body as well (i.e. imagination). Another reason for Imogen’s mistaken identification is her failing memory. Shortly after their marriage, husband and wife are separated, leaving room for speculation on how familiar Imogen is with Posthumus’ body. The fact that she is convinced that the body is Posthumus’, whilst it is, in reality, that of Cloten, proves that she cannot rely on her memory.

The significance of Imogen’s misrecognition may be that Posthumus, through his betrayal of Imogen, acts in a similar way as Cloten and therefore has to be reduced to a similar identity as Cloten. Berry observes that Imogen’s self-assured recognition demonstrates the truth of Posthumus’ words about him being a ‘counterfeit.’\textsuperscript{41} She explains that, in this play, marriage does not allow for unique identities; all men are counterfeits, and thereby interchangeable. ‘Marriage time,’ she continues, ‘subvents both a mutual illegibility between husband and wife,’ and an important bodily connection between husband and villain, or Posthumus and Cloten.\textsuperscript{42}

Cloten and Posthumus resemble each other not only physically, but to some extent in spirit as well. In the opening scene, the First Gentleman describes the two characters as being radically different: a man having ‘so fair an outward and such stuff within’ to ‘a thing / Too bad for bad report.’\textsuperscript{43} However, through the wager plot it becomes apparent that they have more in common than might have been expected initially. Warren focuses on the violent and humiliating language used by both characters when they talk about Imogen.\textsuperscript{44} Posthumus desires to hurt Imogen violently in front of her father: ‘O that I had her here to tear her limb-meal! / I will go there and do’t, i’th’ court, before / her father.’\textsuperscript{45} A similar violent and humiliating language appears in Cloten’s hate-filled monologue in which he plans to rape Imogen while wearing her husband’s clothes: ‘when my lust hath / dined – which, as I say, to

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{40} Shakespeare, 4.2.296.
\item \textsuperscript{41} Berry, p. 95 and Shakespeare, 2.4.158.
\item \textsuperscript{42} Berry, p. 95.
\item \textsuperscript{43} Shakespeare, 1.1.23-24 and 1.1.16-17.
\item \textsuperscript{44} Warren, p. 50-51.
\item \textsuperscript{45} Shakespeare, 2.4.147-149.
\end{itemize}
vex her I will execute in the / clothes that she so praised – to the court I’ll knock her / back, foot her home again.” Cloten continues this combination of violence and public humiliation in act 4, scene 1, in which he repeats the last threat: ‘all this done, spurn her / home to her father,’ making his language even closer to that of Posthumus by explicitly mentioning Imogen’s father as well. Additionally, the two characters also share a similar dual attitude towards Imogen, summed up rather nicely by Cloten in act 3, scene 5: ‘I love and hate her.’

Cloten’s disguise functions as a crucial plot device, which eventually leads to the central crisis of the play, when Imogen awakes next to his headless body. Since it is Imogen’s insult that inspires Cloten to assume Posthumus’ clothes so as to aggravate the intended rape, Warren argues that, in this respect, Imogen brings the horrific experience upon herself. The importance of Cloten’s disguise (and death) to Posthumus’ rebirth will be discussed elaborately in 4.2 Posthumus Feigned Death and Rebirth, and therefore will not be addressed further in this section.

1.2.2 Task-Oriented Disguise

Convinced that his wife has betrayed him, Posthumus sends his servant a letter instructing him to kill Imogen at Milford Haven. However, Pisanio is unable to do his master’s bidding and instead advises Imogen to ‘disguise / That which t’appear itself must not yet be / But by self-danger.’ Imogen cannot reveal herself as a woman without putting herself in danger, hence she must adopt a new identity. Her disguise as Fidele corresponds with Baker’s definition of the task-oriented disguise, which one undertakes ‘for one specific purpose; […] for one limited and determinate audience and for a limited period of time.’ First, the main purpose of Imogen’s disguise is obviously the assertion of her chastity – in this case both the virginity of a maid and the fidelity of a wife. Second, Imogen’s audience includes all the main characters, among them Caius Lucius, who enlists Imogen as his page. And third, the temporality of her disguise is limited, because the moment her reputation is restored, Imogen can reassume her true identity.

The task-oriented disguise enables Imogen to assume a different class, nationality and gender: Imogen, the heiress to the British throne, becomes Fidele, a Roman page-boy. In

46 Shakespeare, 3.5.140-143.
47 Shakespeare, 4.1.17-18.
48 Shakespeare, 3.5.70-79.
49 Warren, p. 140.
50 Shakespeare, 3.4.145-147.
51 Baker, p. 308.
Shakespearean drama, the cross-dressing heroine usually becomes a boy of a lower status. In the case of *Cymbeline*, Imogen must ‘desire his service, tell him / Wherein you’re happy – which will make him know.’\(^{52}\) If she wants to be in Lucius’ service, Imogen needs to inform him what she is accomplished in so as to convince him to take her as his servant. Imogen’s disguise requires her to ‘change / Command into obedience:’ she needs to give up the power she holds as a princess and prepare herself for a page-like obedience.\(^{53}\) Baker argues that disguise and a change in rank and power are intricately related, but that Shakespearean characters seem to overrule that change. She notes: ‘The plays frequently represent disguised characters, despite the downward direction of their personations, either as relatively powerful or as compensated for their loss of status.’\(^{54}\) Indeed, despite the adoption of a different class, Imogen’s disguise as Fidele does grant her some power, for it enables her to manipulate her circumstances. Power in Fidele’s case is to be understood as a type of agency rather than the kind of authoritative power that Imogen enjoyed as a princess.

Imogen also changes her nationality when she adopts the identity of an Italian servant. After waking in Wales to find what she believes to be her husband’s headless body, Imogen decides to join the Roman army. She is taken into the service of the defeated Roman general Caius Lucius: ‘And leaving so his [Richard du Champ’s] service, follow you [Lucius], / So please you entertain me.’\(^{55}\) The decision to ally her to the Romans eventually results in the reconciliation between Britain and Rome as well as between herself and Posthumus. This reunion of husband and wife can be visually recognised by their clothing. Even though, at the end, her rank, gender and nationality are restored, Imogen does not reappear in her regal costume, but continues wearing the Roman attire. The significance of why Imogen is still dressed as a Roman page-boy may be that the disguise visually connects Imogen with Posthumus, because he, too, is still clothed as a Roman at the end of the play.

In *Cymbeline*, the task-oriented disguise also involves cross-dressing, where the male actor playing a female role must assume a male disguise.\(^{56}\) To become a male page, Imogen needs to:

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\(^{52}\) Shakespeare, 3.4.174-175.

\(^{53}\) Shakespeare, 3.5.155-156.

\(^{54}\) Baker, p. 313.

\(^{55}\) Shakespeare, 4.2.394-395.

\(^{56}\) In the 16th and 17th centuries, acting was not regarded as a respectable profession for women. Consequently, all female parts were played by boy actors. In the case of *Cymbeline*, this dramatic convention is complicated by the use of disguise, resulting in three identities: the boy actor, who is dressed as a woman, disguises as a boy.
Forget to be a woman: change
Command into obedience, fear and niceness—
The handmaids of all women, or more truly
Woman it pretty self—into a waggish courage
Ready in gibes, quick-answered, saucy and
As quarrelous as the weasel.\(^57\)

Pisanio is primarily concerned with gender-related behaviour. Imogen has to forget about her femininity and adopt more manly qualities, such as courage and bravery. In short, she must adjust her conduct ‘with what imitation [she] can borrow / From youth of such a season.’\(^58\) However, Imogen does not need to change much about her behaviour as she has already proven to be witty, saucy and quarrelsome in the conversations with her father and Cloten. Michael Shapiro observes that contrary to Shakespeare’s other cross-dressed heroines like ‘Julia, Portia, and Rosaline, who display or discover assertive strength only when they don male disguise, Imogen is a far more assertive presence before she puts on the page’s costume.’\(^59\) An example to illustrate this can be found in act 2, scene 3, where Imogen rejects the courtship of Cloten and says the following saucy words:

\[
\begin{align*}
&I, \text{ which know my heart, do here pronounce} \\
&\text{By th’ very truth of it, I care not for you,} \\
&\text{And am so near the lack of charity} \\
&\text{To accuse myself I hate you, which I had rather} \\
&\text{You felt than make ‘t my boast.} \end{align*}
\]

Imogen – like most of Shakespeare’s heroines – is active, powerful, assertive and dynamic, which are traits that are normally ascribed to the male gender construction. For this reason – and also for the fact that female roles were played by male actors – masculine traits had to be counterbalanced by reminders of the heroine’s femininity. In the case of cross-dressed heroines, these reminders become even more significant as their masculine clothes constantly confirm their male gender. According to Nicole Williams, ‘Imogen’s femininity is [...] more pronounced when she pretends to be Fidele.’\(^61\) For example, Imogen, the British princess, is

\(^{57}\) Shakespeare, 3.4.155-160.
\(^{58}\) Shakespeare, 3.4.172-173.
\(^{60}\) Shakespeare, 2.3.104-108.
\(^{61}\) Nicole Williams, “‘Who is’t can read a woman?’: Shakespeare’s Cymbeline and the Renaissance Woman,’ Honors Projects, Illinois Wesleyan University, 1998. DigitalCommons@IWU. p. 32.
connected with the court, whereas Fidele is brought within the sphere of domesticity: ‘For you must be our housewife.’

Furthermore, Marjorie Garber remarks that *Cymbeline* attempts at underlining the femininity of Fidele by focussing on the difference between Arviragus and Fidele; the former being a young man, the latter only pretending to be one. To illustrate this, Garber refers to act 4, scene 2, where Arviragus’ flower speech, in which he compares Fidele’s beauty to the flowers, is interrupted by his older brother: ‘Prithee have done, / And do not play in wench-like words with that / Which is so serious.’ Garber suggests that the “wench-like words” – words appropriate to women – not only might have reminded a Jacobean audience that such long flower passages are usually expressed by female characters, but that it also, more importantly, emphasises the contrast between Arviragus, a male character, and Fidele, a female character posing as a boy. Her argument is further supported by Guiderius’ subsequent comment on their broken voices, which again highlights the difference: ‘And let us, Polydore, though now our voices / Have got the mannish crack, sing him to th’ ground.’

Lastly, the actual name also plays a role in the depiction of Fidele’s femininity. Jodi Mikalachki indicates that *fidele* is the feminine form of the Latin adjective *fidelis*. Therefore, he believes that – despite its femininity – the name *Fidele* should be placed alongside *Cymbeline*’s other Latinate names like Belarius, Guiderius, Arviragus and Posthumus, and not alongside the French name, Richard du Champ (another name invented by Imogen), as has been suggested by James Mansfield Nosworthy. Because of its feminine association and inscription, the name might seem an unusual choice for a male character, were it not for the play’s theme of (mis)recognition. Indeed, Mikalachki remarks that ‘the display of explicitly feminine virtues is central to the gender confusion of the identity Imogen assumes under the name of Fidele.’

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62 Shakespeare, 4.2.45.
64 Shakespeare, 4.2.230-232.
65 Shakespeare, 3.4.236-237.
68 Mikalachki, p. 174.
In spite of the masculine clothes – ‘doublet, hat, hose’— that Imogen is wearing, her brothers seem to notice her femininity through her disguise. They do not explicitly recognise that Fidele is a girl, but they do recognise the fresh complexion – ‘fairest lily’— and the timorousness. Guiderius tells Fidele: ‘Were you a woman, youth, / I should woo hard but be your groom in honesty.’ Arviragus subsequently says: ‘I’ll make’t my comfort / He is a man, I’ll love him as my brother.’ On the one hand, these quotations pose a possible threat to Imogen’s disguise because of their sexual connotation. On the other hand, the quotations also show that the brothers are drawn to their sister. They feel recognition and kinship, that is, they are able to unconsciously recognise their familial bonds. This partial recognition is, as Lyne explains, ascribable to something ‘providential and moving, [...] deep-set, instinctive and beneath-instinctive, in human interactions.’ This something might be defined as the experience of wonder, of encountering something that cannot simply be rationalised or explained. A good example to illustrate this sense of wonder is Arviragus’ utterance to Belarius:

If it be sin to say so, sir, I yoke me  
In my good brother’s fault. I know not why  
I love this youth [Imogen/Fidele], and I have heard you say  
Love’s reason’s without reason. The bier at door  
And a demand who is’t shall die, I’d say  
‘My father, not this youth.’

This quotation demonstrates that what happens between the siblings is not meant to merely imitate conscious human behaviour. Arviragus is unable to explain why he loves Fidele. Moreover, his love is so intense that, if he were in a situation that would force him to choose between the lives of his father and Fidele, he would save the latter, whom he barely knows. Guiderius and Arviragus’ implicit recognition of Imogen as their sister is quite powerful and establishes the basis of a deep connection between the siblings. Imogen is drawn to them too, or at least is led to think of her lost brothers: ‘Mongst friends / If brothers. (Aside) Would it

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69 Shakespeare, 3.4.170.  
70 Shakespeare, 4.2.202.  
71 Shakespeare, 3.6.66-67.  
72 Shakespeare, 3.6.68-69.  
73 Lyne, p. 65.  
74 Shakespeare, 4.2.19-24.
had been so that they / Had been my father’s sons, then had my price / Been less, and so more equal ballasting.\textsuperscript{75}

In the final scene, Imogen’s double identity – princess and page, Briton and Roman, woman and boy – is finally discovered by the other characters. Lucius, who has been taken prisoner, asks Cymbeline to spare the life of his ‘Briton born’ page-boy.\textsuperscript{76} He pleads, ‘Never master had / A page so kind, so duteous, diligent, / So tender over his occasions, true, / So feat, so nurse-like.’\textsuperscript{77} Like Imogen’s brothers, Lucius, too, seems to perceive the feminine virtues through the disguise of Fidele. Cymbeline replies, ‘I have surely seen him; / His favour is familiar to me.’\textsuperscript{78} The King fails to recognise that Fidele is his daughter, but he does find that the boy’s face looks kind of familiar. Cymbeline, just as the princes, partly recognises Imogen, but whereas the brothers’ recognition was based on \textit{instinct}, Cymbeline’s recognition of his daughter is established through \textit{memory}. By contrast, Posthumus does not recognise his wife at all. Following Iachimo’s confession which proves Imogen’s innocence, Posthumus, who has been hiding in disguise, comes forward, declares his identity and openly repents his supposed murder. However, when Imogen – still disguised as Fidele – approaches, Posthumus misreads her for the ‘scornful page’ and strikes her down.\textsuperscript{79} Pisanio, then, intervenes and reveals Imogen’s true identity. It is his declaration and the sound of her voice – ‘The tune of Imogen’ – that finally enables Cymbeline to fully recognise his daughter.\textsuperscript{80} Following this is the revelation of the true identities of the princes and the reunion of the siblings.\textsuperscript{81} The brothers have learned that Fidele, whom they presumed dead, is still alive, and more importantly that he is, in fact, their sister. Imogen, struck by a sense of wonder and joy, says what they have known unconsciously from the beginning:

\begin{quote}
O my gentle brothers, 
Have we thus met? O never say hereafter 
But I am truest speaker. You called me brother 
When I was but your sister, I you brothers 
When ye were so indeed.\textsuperscript{82}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{75} Shakespeare, 3.6.72-73.  
\textsuperscript{76} Shakespeare, 5.4.84.  
\textsuperscript{77} Shakespeare, 5.4.85-88.  
\textsuperscript{78} Shakespeare, 5.4.92-93.  
\textsuperscript{79} Shakespeare, 5.4.228.  
\textsuperscript{80} Shakespeare, 5.4.239.  
\textsuperscript{81} For the recognition scene of the princes, see below: 1.2.3 Improvisational Disguise.  
\textsuperscript{82} Shakespeare, 5.4.375-379.
Finally, it might be useful to consider why Imogen is the only Shakespearean heroine whom cross-dressing as a device for handling her circumstances has been suggested by another character rather than constructed by herself. According to Bonnie Lander, ‘[t]his suggestion [cross-dressing] must come from Pisanio because he, like Imogen’s innocent brothers, is not bound by identification with authority, as Imogen is.’83 Lander argues that Imogen is fully aware of the external forces – social norms and rules – which shape both her refusal and acceptance of a selfhood influenced by those forces. When Imogen learns that she is falsely accused of infidelity, she exclaims:

Poor I am stale, a garment out of fashion,
And for I am richer than to be hang by th’ walls,
I must be ripped. To pieces with me!84

Since Imogen is princess of Britain, she is too valuable to just be dismissed. Thus, Posthumus must tear her reputation to pieces. Imogen accepts these social realities and is convinced that the only way to escape her predicament is death. The comparison of herself with her court clothes demonstrates not only that clothing is ‘closely bound up with questions of role and rank,’ but also, more importantly, that Imogen conflates role with self, ‘social death’ with ‘death to the self.’85 Being a servant, Pisanio is able to question the social forms and their influence on the self from a hierarchical distance. It is not surprising, then, that it is Pisanio who provides Imogen with a solution away from the British court. Lander indicates that Imogen’s reply – ‘There’s livers out of Britain’86 – ‘is her first comprehension that she may be something other than the product of complex social and national forms.’87

1.2.3 Improvisational Disguise

Belarius has been falsely accused of treason – ‘My fault being nothing’88 – and, therefore, has been banished from the court. To avenge his unjust banishment, he has abducted the King’s infant sons Guiderius and Arviragus: ‘At three and two years old I stole these babes, / Thinking to bar thee [Cymbeline] of succession as / Thou reft’st me of my

84 Shakespeare, 3.4.51-53.
86 Shakespeare, 3.4.140-141.
87 Lander, p. 177.
88 Shakespeare, 3.3.65.
lands.' Belarius, as Garber points out, is a character developed from two classical pastoral types. He is both the old man who leaves the corrupt court to live in the pure and innocent countryside, and the shepherd father who either steals or adopts a child – 'a child who inevitably in romance, and usually in pastoral, turns out to be of royal blood.' Belarius and his ‘adopted’ sons now live in a rural cave and bear the Welsh names Morgan, Polydore and Cadwal. Each of them assumes the disguise of a Welshman, though Belarius is the only one who does so consciously. Their disguise is improvisational in terms of its indefinite audience and its indefinite duration. This means that, at the moment Belarius – and with him, the princes – undertook this disguise, one could not predict the audience nor the period of time of its adoption.

In taking on the Welsh disguise, Belarius and his foster-children also adopt some of the Renaissance stereotypes of the Welsh. For example, the Welsh were often associated with music and singing. In Cymbeline, Arviragus, in particular, embodies this stereotype. It is he who remarks ‘[h]ow angel-like he [Fidele] sings!’ When Fidele is presumed dead, and Belarius hears his ‘ingenious instrument,’ it is Arviragus who ‘give[s] it motion.’ Arviragus also wants to ‘sing him [Fidele] to the ground,’ but Guiderius ‘cannot sing,’ and therefore Arviragus proposes to ‘speak it then.’ On the other hand, the Welsh were also associated with rebellion. Jaecheol Kim points out that the typical beastly metaphor for the Irish rebels against Elizabeth was the wolf, thereby arguing that Guiderius, Arviragus and Belarius’ characteristic – ‘warlike as the wolf’ – suggests that they live ‘rebel-like exile lives.’ Kim further points to Guiderius’ Celticised identities as ‘runagate,’ ‘outlaws,’ ‘mountaineer,’ ‘robber,’ ‘law-breaker,’ ‘villain,’ and ‘thief.’ The Welsh are portrayed negatively by Cloten, using epithets to enhance the idea of them resembling ‘peasant or Irish rebels.’ However, Sarah Ann Brown notes that the depiction of the Welsh in Cymbeline does not conform to the stereotypical dual image of the Welshman: the Welsh here are generally depicted as noble and

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89 Shakespeare, 3.3. 101-103.
90 Garber, p. 810.
91 Garber, p. 810.
92 It is important to note that the Renaissance portrayal of the Welsh was highly ambivalent, incorporating both positive and negative attributes.
93 Shakespeare, 4.2.49.
94 Shakespeare, 4.2.187 and 4.2.189.
95 Shakespeare, 4.2.237, 4.2.241 and 4.2.243.
96 Shakespeare, 3.3.41.
98 Shakespeare, 4.2.64-77.
99 Kim, p. 184.
courageous characters. The play also devotes attention to the Welshman’s valour and military expertise. Belarius and his sons are presented as being of historical significance, because they inspired Britain to victory: ‘Two boys, an old man – twice a boy – a lane, / Preserved the Britons, was the Romans’ bane.’

It is only when Polydore and Cadwal return to the court in Lud’s Town that their identities as princes are restored. When Cymbeline, in the final scene, condemns Guiderius to death for killing the nobleman Cloten, Belarius is compelled to reveal his true identity: ‘I, old Morgan, / Am that Belarius whom you sometime banished.’ To convince the King that Polydore and Cadwal are, in fact, his long-lost sons, Belarius produces ‘a most curious mantle,’ which once lapped Arviragus and which was ‘wrought by th’ hand / Of his queen mother.’ This piece of evidence is insufficient and Cymbeline demands more proof: ‘Guiderius had / Upon his neck a mole, a sanguine star; / It was a mark of wonder.’ Belarius’ statement that the birthmark is still there confirms the revelation of their true status as princes. He comments: ‘It was wise nature’s end in the donation, / To be his evidence now.’ It seems that Providence has given Guiderius this mark to serve as evidence of his true identity.

Lyne notes that the mole, through its distinctiveness and because it has been demanded by Cymbeline, functions as a valid sign of identification. Nevertheless, he adds that this moment of recognition is, in fact, fragile, because of the earlier recognition scene involving Imogen’s ‘mole cinque-spotted.’ When Iachimo tries to convince Posthumus that his wife has been unfaithful, the latter – like Cymbeline – demands ‘some corporal sign,’ which will be ‘more evident’ than the bracelet Iachimo had already produced – cf. Belarius’ mantle.

Sarah Ann Brown, Welsh Characters in Renaissance Drama. Diss. Texas Tech University, 2000. Ann Arbor: UMI, 2000, p. 40. The dual depiction (dual in the sense of both positive and negative) includes elements like music, magic, miracles, folklore on the one hand and rebellion, trouble, fierceness, fickleness, pride on the other. The reason why the Welsh are predominantly depicted as positive characters in Cymbeline is that the English wanted to include early British history in the history of England.
Because of the signs, i.e. the jewel and the birthmark, Posthumus believes his wife to be guilty of adultery. Ted Motohashi argues that in Guiderius’ case ‘the mole [has been] translated from evidence into a symbol.’

Thus, whereas Imogen’s birthmark is read as evidence or conclusive proof of her infidelity, Guiderius’ mole should be read as a symbol, whereby the rightful heir is restored to the throne.

1.2.4 Task-Oriented and Improvisational Disguise

Throughout the play, Posthumus crosses national borders, either forced to do so or out of free-will. He travels from Lud’s town to Rome and back via Milford Haven, thereby changing his clothes thrice. In act 5, scene 1, the Briton is dressed as an Italian, having joined the Roman invasion of Britain: ‘I am brought hither / Among th’ Italian gentry, to fight / Against my lady’s kingdom.’ In this soliloquy, it is made clear that Posthumus has forgiven Imogen, even though he still believes that she has been unfaithful. Moreover, he feels remorse over having ordered her death which is presumably the reason why he changes his mind – he wants to ‘give no wound to’ Britain. Instead, he chooses to ‘disrobe [him] / Of these Italian weeds, and suit [himself] / As does a Briton peasant,’ in order to ‘fight / Against the part [he] come with,’ i.e. the Roman army. Posthumus seeks forgiveness and expiation through battle, and desires to die ‘For thee, O Imogen.’

Posthumus reassumes his British identity, but is still in disguise as he is now an “unknown” peasant. This impersonation exemplifies that the division into task-oriented and improvisational disguises is not clear-cut. As Baker points out, it is irrelevant how long Posthumus pretends to be a peasant. His disguise is both improvisational and task-oriented: improvisational, because of the imitated action of the play, and task-oriented in its brevity and limited audience. Posthumus’ change of costume visually connotes not only a shift in national allegiance but also a shift in social status. Clothed in the lowly garments of a peasant, Posthumus declares: ‘To shame the guise o’th’ world, I will begin / The fashion: less without and more within.’ In other words, he wants to start a new fashion, thereby showing less on

110 Ted Motohashi, “A voucher stronger than ever law could make” Writing and Media Literacy in Cymbeline in Shakespeare in Culture, ed. by Bi-qi Beatrice Lei and Ching-Hsi Perng (Taiwan: National Taiwan University Press, 2012), p. 102.
111 Shakespeare, 5.1.17-19.
112 Shakespeare, 5.1.21.
113 Shakespeare, 5.1.22-25.
115 Baker, p. 308.
116 Shakespeare, 5.1.32-33.
the outside (i.e. his peasant outfit) and more on the inside (i.e. his innate valour). Posthumus 
dons the peasant’s garbs as a gesture of humility. It demonstrates his transformation from ‘showy arrogance’ as an Italian to ‘plain humility’ as a Briton. This change can also be 
observed in the stage direction of the subsequent scene: Enter Lucius, Iachimo, and the 
Roman army at one door, and the Briton army at another, Leonatus Posthumus following like 
a poor soldier.

Disguised as a British peasant, Posthumus first vanquishes and disarms Iachimo, and then seconds the Britons. He joins Belarius, Guiderius and Arviragus – the ‘fresh supplies’ or reinforcements – and together, they are able to rescue Cymbeline, who had fallen into the hands of the Romans. After Britain’s victory over Rome, Posthumus determines to surrender himself to the British army, thereby reasserting his Roman identity: ‘For being now a favourer to the Briton, / No more a Briton, I have resumed again / The part I came in.’

When a British captain asks Posthumus to identify himself, he says he is ‘a Roman,’ in order to be taken prisoner and be executed. Or, put differently, to die the purgative death he has been longing for. ‘I am merrier to die than thou art to live,’ he says to the jailer who is to escort him to the place of execution.

Posthumus’ true British identity is made complicated by three aspects. The first is the notion of ‘national cross-dressing,’ that is, the use of clothing as a means to convey one’s shifting national allegiance. As mentioned above, Posthumus first dons the clothes of an Italian gentleman, then changes into the habits of a Briton peasant, and finally, redresses as a Roman. Ralf Hertel observes that ‘[n]ationality is presented here not as an essential given but as something outward, superficial.’ It is through his clothes that Posthumus’ different identities are visualised. Furthermore, the fact that he claims his identity – ‘I am Posthumus, / That killed thy daughter’ – whilst still wearing the outfit of a Roman soldier demonstrates that

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118 Shakespeare, stage direction 5.2.
119 Shakespeare, 5.2.16.
120 Shakespeare, 5.3.74-76.
121 Shakespeare, 5.3.89.
122 Shakespeare, 5.3.265.
a distinction between his British and his Italian identity is not easily made. A second aspect that complicates Posthumus’ national identity is Philario’s reference to him. Philario calls Posthumus ‘the Briton,’ rather than “the Englishman.” Finally, Posthumus’ roots also obscure his national identity. Posthumus is the son of Sicilius, which is, as Monica Matei-Chesnoiu points out, ‘an oddly Roman name for a British fighter, in an age that had barely yet encountered Roman culture.’ Sicilius ‘gained’ another Roman name, that of ‘Leonatus,’ because ‘[h]e served with glory and admired success,’ during the Roman wars. Furthermore, the Roman, Philario, tells Iachimo that Sicilius was a comrade-in-arms with him, to whom he has been ‘often bound for no less than [his] life.’ All this demonstrates that Posthumus’ identity is flexible rather than fixed, uniting both British and Roman values in himself.

125 Shakespeare, 5.4.217-218.
126 Shakespeare, 1.4.25.
127 Monica Matei-Chesnoiu, ‘Romances and Theatrical Geography,’ in Early Modern Drama and the Eastern European Elsewhere: Representations of Liminal Locality in Shakespeare and his Contemporaries (Cranbury: Rosemont Publishing & Printing Group, 2009), p. 186. Sicilius is not the only character with a name causing confusion concerning the nature of his national identity. Ralf Hertel points out that the servant Pisanio has an Italian name, that Posthumus and Fidele (Imogen’s adopted identity) both have Latinate names, and that Guiderus and Arviragus, also known as Belarius’ (or Morgan’s) sons Polydore and Cadwal, have names onomastically incorporating their British-Roman roots (i.e. their Latinate names), their Celtic origins (i.e. Cadwal after Cadwallader, the last Celtic King of Britain), and Renaissance Italy (i.e. Polydore after Polydore Vergil, the Italian historiographer). Hertel concludes: ‘The onomastic confusion in Cymbeline runs counter to a construction of identity along clear national divisions and more towards flexible identities negotiating various cultural influences.’ (Hertel, p. 52)
128 Shakespeare, 1.1.32-33.
129 Shakespeare, 1.4.24.
2 **Inversion of Gender Roles**

This section focuses on the aspect of gender politics in *Cymbeline*. It will discuss the Renaissance gender stereotypes and how the binary opposition of gender roles is deconstructed by a reversal in power relations between husband and wife. The first part of this chapter explores the relationship of Cymbeline and the Queen. I will demonstrate that the traditional gender roles are reversed at first: Cymbeline assumes female gender characteristics and the Queen takes on attributes of the male character. Furthermore, I will illustrate that, even though, in the end, the patriarchal order is reinstated and Cymbeline has re-established his masculine authority, the patriarchal society undergoes a revision, leading to a more “feminised patriarchy,” governed by a “maternal” Cymbeline. In addition, I will look at Cymbeline’s misrecognition of the Queen. The second part addresses the relationship of Posthumus and Imogen. First, I will look at the reversal of the marriage convention. Then, I will analyse the gender identities of Posthumus and Imogen in the light of the theoretical framework of Ruth Kelso, who argues that the ideal Renaissance woman adheres to Christian values and the ideal Renaissance man to pagan principles. I will demonstrate that the ideal version of marriage is violated here as Imogen, through her social and moral superiority, rebels against the submissive model for womanhood promoted by Christian ideology.

2.1 **Cymbeline and the Queen**

Besides Imogen’s cross-dressed disguise, a reversal of gender roles can also implicitly be observed in the characters of Cymbeline, King of Britain, and his wife, the (unnamed) Queen. At the beginning of the play, Cymbeline is represented as a weak and rather foolish figure, whereas his wife appears to be strong, asserting both political authority and domestic power. The Queen’s dominance over Cymbeline is at odds with the traditional discourses of gender in the Renaissance. Culture, in late sixteenth century England, was male-dominated and highly hierarchical. In this patriarchal society, ‘[m]en and women were first and foremost described as dominant and subservient, perfect and less perfect, fit for rule and unfit for rule.’ In *Cymbeline*, however, traditional gender roles are reversed, at least at first, whereby the Queen (deliberately) adopts male gender characteristics and the King (unconsciously) attributes of the female character. Cymbeline is politically and domestically inept, “unfit for rule,” depending on advice from his wife, which makes him neither a great king, nor a great

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130 For Imogen’s cross-dressing, see above: 1.2.2 Task-oriented Disguise.
father. The Queen’s many interruptions in the conversation between Cymbeline and Caius Lucius in act 3, scene 1, clearly show that it is under her influence that the King defies Rome and refuses to pay the tribute to Augustus Caesar. In fact, it is the Queen who governs Britain. Thus, at first, ‘[t]he British body politic is [...] figuratively without a head,’ and it only ‘regains its head when Cymbeline begins to rule on his own’ in the final scene.\footnote{Constance Jordan, ‘Chapter 3: Cymbeline,’ in Shakespeare’s Monarchies: Ruler and Subject in the Romances (New York: Cornell University Press, 1997), p. 71.} Furthermore, the Queen poses a threat to the stability of the royal family as she has only one desire and that is ‘to work / Her son into th’adoption of the crown.’\footnote{Shakespeare, 5.4.55-56.} Her manipulation of Cymbeline is therefore also visible in the latter’s rejection of his daughter’s marriage to Posthumus, and his wish for her to marry his stepson, Cloten.

That the Queen is evil is ‘a “given” in the play’s world rather than a gradually perceived psychological effect.’\footnote{Garber, p. 808.} All the characters, except for Cymbeline, see right through her deception. For example, Imogen is not taken in by the Queen’s seeming solicitude. Her very first words immediately inform the audience that her stepmother is wicked: ‘O dissembling courtesy! How fine this tyrant / Can tickle where she wounds!’\footnote{Shakespeare, 1.1.85-86.} Similarly, Cornelius, the court physician, says: ‘I do not like her [the Queen].’\footnote{Shakespeare, 1.5.33.} He ‘know[s] her spirit’ and therefore disobey her order to give her poison.\footnote{Shakespeare, 1.5.34.} Her own statements also give evidence of her evilness. When they learn about Imogen’s flight, the Queen says: ‘Gone she [Imogen] is / To death or to dishonour, and my end / Can make good use of either. She being down, / I have the placing of the British crown.’\footnote{Shakespeare, 3.5.62-65.} She does not care about her stepdaughter, the only thing that she cares about is for her son Cloten to become heir to the throne. In her last (onstage) words, the Queen even wishes for Cymbeline’s death: ‘may / This night forestall him of the coming day.’\footnote{Shakespeare, 3.5.69-70.}

Her deathbed confession could be taken as the height of her evilness. She admits to Cornelius that she never loved Cymbeline – she ‘[a]bhorred your person,’ – and that she only longed for status and power through him.\footnote{Shakespeare, 5.4.40.} When the doctor tells about her attempt to kill...
Imogen, Cymbeline cries out: ‘O most delicate fiend!’ The word delicate is used here in the sense of both beautiful and crafty. ‘Who is’t can read a woman?’, Cymbeline asks, commenting on his own inability to read the Queen’s character. What follows is an explanation of why he was misled by her:

Mine eyes
Were not in fault for she was beautiful,
Mine ears that heard her flattery, nor my heart
That thought her like her seeming. It had been vicious
To have mistrusted her. Yet, O my daughter,
That it was folly in me thou mayst say,
And prove it in thy feeling.

Cymbeline defends himself and says that, as a husband, it would have been wrong to have doubted her. He believed the Queen to be like her seeming. This passage refers again to the above discussed theme of seeming, i.e. the difference between appearance and reality, deception and truth. Susanne Collier claims that Cymbeline’s unquestionable belief in ‘the falsehood that the Queen’ designs is rooted in the fact that this woman is ‘sexually experienced.’ Indeed, the King was deceived by her beauty as well as by her flattery. Cymbeline misreads the outside for the inside, and this misperception leads to a misrecognition of the Queen’s real value. Only in the final scene, he realises that ‘she was naught.’

By the end of the play, the Queen is not only revealed as a fraud, but she is also exposed as ‘politically incompetent and emotionally unstable for she goes mad and dies.’ When Cymbeline asks Cornelius how the Queen ‘ended,’ the doctor replies: ‘With horror, madly dying, like her life, / Which being cruel to the world, concluded / Most cruel to herself.’ Strong, independent women were considered a threat to the social order, leading to the destruction of the nation. This has been illustrated in Cymbeline through the Queen’s domination over her husband, which resulted in war between Rome and Britain.

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141 Shakespeare, 5.4.47.
142 Shakespeare, 5.4.48.
143 Shakespeare, 5.4.62-68.
145 Shakespeare, 5.4.271.
147 Shakespeare, 5.4.30-33.
Consequently, there is no place for women in this patriarchal society, except when they are excluded from the public sphere (i.e. confined within the home or family) or when they are in a state of ‘subversion or madness wherein they have to be tamed or killed.’\textsuperscript{148} The Queen cannot be tamed and must therefore be “removed” off-stage. She is, however, not the only strong female character who is politically displaced at the end of the play. When her long-lost brothers are restored to their true identity, an act that ‘[p]romises Britain peace and plenty,’ Imogen is no longer heir apparent as she ‘hast lost by this a kingdom.’\textsuperscript{149}

Williams observes that even though the patriarchal order has now been reinstated, Cymbeline, motivated by his daughter, does introduce an alteration in this structure.\textsuperscript{150} This revision will lead to a more ‘feminised patriarchy,’ ruled by a ‘maternal Cymbeline,’ who calls himself ‘mother to the birth of three’ and declares that ‘[n]e’er mother / Rejoiced deliverance more.’\textsuperscript{151} Britain has won the war against Rome, but Cymbeline nonetheless ‘submit[s] to Caesar / And to the Roman empire,’ and promises to pay the ‘wonted tribute.’\textsuperscript{152} Cymbeline also pleads for peace and says that his own generosity has been inspired by the ‘freeness of a son-in-law,’ who has forgiven Iachimo.\textsuperscript{153} These gestures, as Cynthia Lewis notes, ‘transcend the strictures [...] of rational systems,’ found in a traditional paternalistic society.\textsuperscript{154}

2.2 Posthumus and Imogen

Contrary to the majority of Shakespeare’s (comic) plays, \textit{Cymbeline} does not end, but starts with a marriage. The effect of reversing such a convention – that of a marriage at the end of a play – is, according to Williams, that it concentrates on ‘the foundations of this religious and social institution’ and that it exhibits the difficulties and problems that might arise from matrimony.\textsuperscript{155} At the beginning of the play, the newly-wedded Imogen finds herself in a problematic situation, having to cope with ‘[a] father cruel and a stepdame false, / A foolish suitor to a wedded lady / That hath her husband banished.’\textsuperscript{156} Imogen and Posthumus secretly married; their clandestine marriage was contracted \textit{per verba de futuro},

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{148} Frénée-Hutchins, p. 206.
\item \textsuperscript{149} Shakespeare, 5.4.459 and 5.4.374.
\item \textsuperscript{150} Williams, p. 39.
\item \textsuperscript{151} Williams, p. 39 and Shakespeare, 5.370-371.
\item \textsuperscript{152} Shakespeare, 5.4.461-463.
\item \textsuperscript{153} Shakespeare, 5.4. 422.
\item \textsuperscript{154} Cynthia Lewis, “‘With Similar Proof Enough’: Modes of Misperception in Cymbeline,’ in \textit{Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900}, 31.2 (1991), p. 361.
\item \textsuperscript{155} Williams, p. 6-7.
\item \textsuperscript{156} Shakespeare, 1.6.1-3.
\end{itemize}
that is, characterised by a mutual (verbal) agreement only.\footnote{Jordan, p. 75-76. Contrary to a contract per verba de futuro (words of future consent), a contract per verba de praesenti (words of present consent) at once established a valid marriage.} Such a marriage was generally chosen by individuals who either possessed but little wealth or wanted to “constrain” the parental authority over their marriage. Obviously, it is the latter reason that is of significance here. Imogen married the lower-born Posthumus without parental consent. This ‘self-figured knot’ is called into question by Cloten, who says that ‘it is no contract none.’\footnote{Shakespeare, 2.3.116 and 2.3.112.} He states that while commoners are “permitted” to form such a contract simply by making a verbal declaration, a princess is not. Furthermore, a clandestine marriage was only considered truly legally binding after sexual consummation. In exile in Rome, Posthumus, insists upon Imogen’s virginity, claiming that she is ‘[a]s chaste as unsunned snow.’\footnote{Shakespeare, 2.4.165.} In this manner, he reveals that their marriage is yet to be consummated and that Imogen is consequently not his yet. Imogen’s chastity was most likely known by the courtiers. In act 1, scene 1, the First Gentleman talks about Posthumus as ‘he that hath her [Imogen] – / I mean that married her.’\footnote{Shakespeare, 1.1.17-18.} The gentleman corrects himself, realising that to say “hath her” of a married couple might be too sexually suggestive. Thus, by correcting himself, he indicates that one should not interpret the “hath her” in sexual terms. The presumption of the court being aware of Imogen’s virginity is made more likely when one takes into account Cloten’s persistence in his love-suit.

Not only the convention of the marriage, but also the traditional gender roles within that marriage are reversed. According to Ruth Kelso, gender roles in the Renaissance were construed on the basis of two opposing ideologies: Christianity and paganism. She claims that ‘the ideal set up for the lady is essentially Christian in character, and the ideal for the gentleman is essential pagan.’\footnote{Ruth Kelso, Doctrine for the Lady of the Renaissance (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1956), p. 25, quoted from Nicole Williams, “‘Who is’t can read a woman?’: Shakespeare’s Cymbeline and the Renaissance Woman,” Honors Projects Illinois Wesleyan University, 1998. DigitalCommons@IWU. p.5.} Thus, female moral qualities were constructed on Christian principles, whereas male ones were characterised by pagan values. Men were expected to actively pursue power and to pay attention to ‘self-expansion and realisation.’\footnote{Kelso, p. 36, quoted from Williams, p. 5.} This is observable in the marriage of Imogen and Posthumus, since the latter betters himself by marrying a Princess: through the marriage, Posthumus acquires a higher social position. The following remark of Iachimo is a comment on Posthumus’ promotion: ‘This matter of
marrying his king’s daughter, / wherein he must be weighed rather by her value than / his own, words him, I doubt not, a great deal from the / matter.¹⁶³ Posthumus’ reputation is amplified by his marriage to the heiress of the British throne.

Renaissance women, on the other hand, had to concentrate on ‘the inner life of the individual’ and were admired for ‘the suppression and negation of self.’¹⁶⁴ This idea is also reflected in the marriage of Imogen to Posthumus, ‘a poor but worthy gentleman.’¹⁶⁵ Imogen’s marriage is a romantic marriage: she realises that Posthumus is her social inferior, but weds him anyway. By marrying someone whose social status is lower than hers, Imogen “loses” her own rank and value – or, this is at least the point of view of the men in the play. Imogen, however, does not believe that her worth is reduced by this marriage, because ‘[s]he does not determine a human being’s worth in terms of wealth or social authority.’¹⁶⁶ This is in contrast with the male characters, who do hold this idea. Cymbeline and Cloten, for example, use abusive epithets to refer to Posthumus’ lower social rank. Cymbeline calls him ‘basest thing’ and Cloten refers to Posthumus as a ‘base wretch,’ and ‘a base slave, / A hilding for a livery, a squire’s clo / A pantler.’¹⁶⁷ Posthumus, too, focuses on the material value (i.e. wealth and position) to determine someone’s worth. At the beginning of the play, he grants Imogen a higher value than his own when he says: ‘As I my poor self did exchange for you / To your so infinite loss, so in our trifles / I still win of you.’¹⁶⁸ Posthumus emphasises Imogen’s material worth, by using the language of commerce (exchange, loss, win).

By contrast, Imogen judges someone’s value on the basis of that person’s ‘inner virtue and intellect.’¹⁶⁹ She claims that Posthumus is ‘[a] man worth any woman, over-buys me / Almost the sum he pays.’¹⁷⁰ Imogen underrates her own worth and at the same time enhances that of her husband. Posthumus suffers much under the circumstances; if his sufferings were to be rated and a price was set upon them, the total sum would indicate that Posthumus would have paid almost too high a price to purchase Imogen. Thus, Imogen defends her husband by emphasising Posthumus’ devotion and commitment to their marriage: ‘his worth is demonstrated by his willingness to sacrifice for their love and to suffer through Cymbeline’s

¹⁶³ Shakespeare, 1.4.12-15.
¹⁶⁴ Kelso, p. 24 and 36, quoted from Williams, p. 5.
¹⁶⁵ Shakespeare, 1.1.7.
¹⁶⁶ Williams, p. 13.
¹⁶⁷ Shakespeare, 1.1.126, 2.3.110 and 2.3.119-121.
¹⁶⁸ Shakespeare, 1.1.120-122.
¹⁶⁹ Williams, p. 13.
¹⁷⁰ Shakespeare, 1.1.147-148.
punishment.'¹⁷¹ What is remarkable here is that Imogen, although praising Posthumus’ inner value and not his material value, uses the same language as her husband, namely the language of commerce (over-buys, sum, pays). The significance of them using a similar kind of language to describe each other’s worth might be to highlight the idea that they are meant to be together.

Furthermore, Imogen longs for a simple rural life away from the court’s obligations and pressures: ‘Would I were / A neatherd’s daughter, and my Leonatus / Our neighbour shepherd’s son.’¹⁷² Imogen would gladly sacrifice her nobility, her status as princess and heiress of Britain, to be with the man she loves. Posthumus, on the contrary, regards his marriage as a ‘material transaction’ and does not want to ‘sacrifice his own physical and social well-being’ for the sake of his wife.¹⁷³ In act 1, scene 4, Posthumus tells Iachimo that he ‘esteem[s]’ Imogen’s worth at ‘[m]ore than the world enjoys.’¹⁷⁴ Imogen is more than all the wealth of the world; she is beyond price. Posthumus also says that Imogen is ‘not a thing for sale.’¹⁷⁵ However, later that same scene, he agrees to Iachimo’s wager on Imogen’s virtue. In fact, Posthumus takes the initiative in the bet when he says: ‘I dare you to this match.’¹⁷⁶ Subsequently, Iachimo describes the conditions under which Posthumus will win the wager: ‘[I]f I come off and leave her in such / honour as you have trust in, she your jewel, this your / jewel, and my gold are yours.’¹⁷⁷ Imogen is materialised here: she is Posthumus’ “jewel.” By describing Imogen in monetary terms, Iachimo continues to display the language of commerce and trade previously used by both Posthumus and Imogen. Back in Rome after visiting Imogen, Iachimo is able to convince Posthumus that he has ‘enjoyed the dearest bodily part of [his] mistress.’¹⁷⁸ Imogen’s assumed infidelity puts Posthumus in an uncomfortable position which he would rather escape than endure. He is not willing to suffer through the indignity, humiliation and disgrace, and therefore forsakes his wedding vows by commanding Pisanio to kill Imogen in Milford Haven.

This demonstrates that Imogen is not only socially, but also morally superior to Posthumus. Her supremacy is at odds with the Christian ideology of the subservient wife:

¹⁷¹ Williams, p. 13.
¹⁷² Shakespeare, 1.1.149-151.
¹⁷³ Williams, p.14.
¹⁷⁴ Shakespeare, 1.4.74 and 1.4.75.
¹⁷⁵ Shakespeare, 1.4.80.
¹⁷⁶ Shakespeare, 1.4.140.
¹⁷⁷ Shakespeare, 1.4.146-149.
¹⁷⁸ Shakespeare, 1.5.144.
women were supposed to assume a position of inferiority. The design is reversed here, since it is not Posthumus, but his wife, Imogen, who resembles ‘Christ as the spiritual leader and saviour within the marriage.’¹⁷⁹ That she is portrayed in angelic-divine terms might further support this idea as the imagery draws attention to Imogen being the ideal of integrity. Pisanio tells the audience that Imogen is ‘[m]ore goddess-like than wife-like.’¹⁸⁰ When Belarius first meets Imogen, disguised as Fidele, he says: ‘By Jupiter, an angel – or if not, / An earthy paragon. Behold divineness / No elder than a boy.’¹⁸¹ Later, Arviragus mentions that Imogen sings ‘angel-like.’¹⁸² As Williams concludes, by presenting Imogen as the head and guardian of their marriage, Shakespeare calls into question ‘the basic structure of the “regular” Renaissance version of marriage,’ because the wife here is no longer subject to her husband’s authority.¹⁸³

¹⁷⁹ Williams, p. 19.
¹⁸⁰ Shakespeare, 3.2.8.
¹⁸¹ Shakespeare, 3.6.42-44.
¹⁸² Shakespeare, 4.2.49.
¹⁸³ Williams, p. 19.
3 Humble Birth and Noble Birth

The play displays the contrasting theme of humble birth and noble birth—a juxtaposition found in the characters of Guiderius and Arviragus. Although being of humble means, the brothers are, in fact, of noble birth, as they are the sons of the King of Britain. They seem like peasants, but they are not. In spite of their rural surroundings, the youths are not simply barbaric, but rather possess a rough civility. As such, they can be linked to the pastoral tradition of the noble savage. Garber defines the noble savage as ‘[t]he man who, lacking nurture, has an innate nobility that does not need to be taught,’ and is regarded as having “natural” manners and graces, uncorrupted by the venality of court or city life. The following section deals with how this convention of the noble savage relates to Cymbeline. It includes a discussion of the attitudes towards the court (i.e. the inside) and the country (i.e. the outside) as well as an analysis of the princes’ nobility, thereby taking into account the notions of natural or innate nobility and learned nobility. I will illustrate that the princes do not completely fit the category of the noble savage as their nobility is both natural and learned.

In Cymbeline, the royal court is set against the Welsh countryside, whereby the former is marked by lust, foolishness and violence and the latter by virtue, gentleness and honesty. Peggy Munoz Simonds notes that the play opens with an assault on the court: ‘You do not meet a man but frowns. Our bloods / No more obey the heavens than our courtiers / Still seem as does the King.’ The First Gentleman laments the inability of the courtiers to reveal their true feelings about Posthumus’ worthiness, Cloten’s baseness and the Queen’s wickedness. At the royal court, everyone must pretend to disapprove of the union between Posthumus and Imogen, Belarius says: ‘Think us no churls, nor measure our good minds / By this rude place we live in.’ (Shakespeare, 3.6.62-63) In this recognition scene, everything is discovered—they are not uncivilised or churlish—but at the same time nothing is recognised—they still do not know that they are princes.

184 This is, for instance, dramatised in act 3, scene 6. When they first meet Imogen, Belarius says: ‘Think us no churls, nor measure our good minds / By this rude place we live in.’ (Shakespeare, 3.6.62-63) In this recognition scene, everything is discovered—they are not uncivilised or churlish—but at the same time nothing is recognised—they still do not know that they are princes.

185 Garber, p. 809.

186 In the Renaissance, nobility was related to wealth, status, power, and most importantly to noble blood and descent. The nobility in early modern England was a socially and politically privileged class, which included ‘some old aristocratic families, [...] middling nobles and wealthy members of the gentry.’ (Sukanya Dasgupta, ‘Chapter 10: “Of polish’d pillars, or a roofe of gold”: Authority and Affluence in the English Country-House Poem,’ in Contested Spaces of Nobility in Early Modern Europe, ed. by Matthew P. Romaniello and Charles Lipp (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2011), p. 194-195) The following features were associated with nobility: noble birth, lineage, rank, titles, coat-of-arms, clothes, wealth, military prowess, honour and respect. In the Middle Ages, besides the notion of nobility through noble blood, another notion of nobility developed: natural nobility. Natural or innate nobility can be defined as the quality of being virtuous and having high moral principles; learned nobility is the acquisition of good and noble qualities through learning.

Imogen and, although they all recognise that the Queen is evil, they do not have the courage to inform Cymbeline of this. This is in sharp contrast with the outside, the natural environment, where men freely express their opinion about anybody as they are ‘unaffected by desires for the wealth a king may bestow upon his flatterers.’

Among the people living at court, it is particularly the Queen, ‘[a] thing more made of malice than of duty,’ who embodies absolute evil. She usurps the power to decide in political affairs – not paying the tribute – as well as in domestic matters – forcing Imogen to marry Cloten. Moreover, the Queen longs for magical power: she wants to satisfy her ingrained curiosity about life and death, and aspires to use “nature” in order to take life. It is through the Queen’s character that the court’s wickedness is dramatised. In addition, Belarius’ anti-court speeches also inform the audience of the injustice of the court. Belarius himself is a victim of the court’s corruption as he, a former soldier of the King, has been wrongly banished for supposed treachery. In act 3, scene 3, he talks about ‘the city’s usuries’ (i.e. financial transactions) and ‘the art o’th’ court’ (i.e. unnaturalness):

As hard to leave as keep, whose top to climb  
Is certain falling, or so slipp’ry that  
The fear’s as bad as falling.

At court, people are treated the way Belarius was treated: he was set up and blamed for something that he did not do. In another speech, Belarius lectures the princes on the nobility of country life in contrast with the falseness of court life. He says that this quiet life in the Welsh mountains is ‘nobler than attending for a check’ (i.e. waiting on a lord only to be taunted), ‘[r]icher than doing nothing for a bauble,’ (i.e. a worthless reward), and ‘[p]rouder than rustling in unpaid-for silk.’ He praises the country in which he has ‘lived at honest freedom, paid / More pious debts to heaven than in all / The fore-end of my time.’

However, when Belarius “escaped” the court’s wickedness, he simultaneously broke his oath to his sovereign by stealing Cymbeline’s sons. In fact, Belarius persuaded the nurse to commit this “seemingly” sinful act: ‘Their nurse Euriphile, / Whom for the theft I wedded,

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188 Simonds, p. 171.  
189 Shakespeare, 3.5.33.  
190 The figure of the Queen has been discussed in 2.1 Cymbeline and the Queen, and therefore will not be addressed further in this section.  
191 Shakespeare, 3.3.45-49.  
192 Shakespeare, 3.3.22-24.  
193 Shakespeare, 3.3.71-73.
stole these children / Upon my banishment.” What seems evil is in fact noble because Euriphile saves the boys from the vicious manners and practices of the court. In the rustic environment of Wales, the princes are reared, ignorant of their true parentage. Instead, they take Euriphile ‘for their mother’ and Belarius ‘for [their] natural father.’ The boys are in a liminal state, away from the court, where they are being prepared to return to the court as better princes.

Although Guiderius and Arviragus are not reared at court, or rather because of it, they possess the natural courteousness of a “civilised” person. Both Imogen and Belarius repeatedly praise their prince-like qualities, including their royalty, honour, elegant behaviour and natural nobility. For example, Imogen is wonderstruck when she discovers that these cavemen embody natural generosity and Belarius, in act 3, scene 3, says the following about the King’s sons:

I’th’ cave wherein they bow, their thoughts do hit The roofs of palaces, and nature prompts them In simple and low things to prince it much Beyond the trick of others.

Such a remark, as Baker notes, can be read ‘as evidence of [a] Renaissance [...] belief that innate superiority of those born to high rank will shine through the most humble clothing.’ ‘The princely blood [that] flows in [their] cheek’ becomes visible even when they are confined in their rural surroundings, and excites them to honourable and courageous actions. Yet, Baker argues that this idea – that of the play promoting the concept of innate

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194 Shakespeare, 5.4.341-343.
195 Shakespeare, 3.3.104 and 3.3.107.
196 The concept of liminality was first introduced by Arnold Van Gennep and further expanded by Victor Turner. Liminality can be defined as the social position of an individual who undergoes a role transformation; it is a midpoint between the old identity that the individual has left behind and the new identity that the individual will assume. The liminal state is therefore a temporary state, during which the individual is “betwixt and between” social roles – meaning that he or she has no well-defined role in society as yet. Wales is presented here as a liminal space, a threshold, a place between two worlds. In Cymbeline, Wales is both a place of non-differentiation (masculine and feminine, high-born and low-born) and potential transformation, and a place of danger (violence and murder). Arnold Van Gennep, The Rites of Passage, translated by Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961) and Victor Turner, The Ritual Process (Chicago: Aldine, 1969).
197 To emphasise their natural valour, Belarius evokes a sense of wonder, telling the audience: ‘’Tis wonder / That an invisible instinct should frame them / To royalty unlearned, honour untaught, / Civility not seen from other, valour / That wildly grows in them.’ (Shakespeare, 4.2.177-180) The princes are blessed with an inborn civility that is unlearned, untaught and unimitated.
198 Shakespeare, 3.3.83-86.
199 Baker, p. 311.
200 Shakespeare, 3.3.93.
nobility – can easily be counterbalanced by another view, i.e. the promotion of learned nobility. Belarius, who has always known that they are royal, has taught them, through his tales, the conduct of princes. He has instructed his foster-sons in the qualities associated with graciousness, honour, and greatness. An example of this is their disdain for gold and silver. It is only ‘those / Who worship dirty gods,’ those living at court, who regard money as better than dirt.\textsuperscript{201} For this reason, Baker concludes that \textit{Cymbeline} argues as much for nobility as learned as it does for nobility as being innate. Furthermore, the princes’ natural (and learned) nobility is combined with actual nobility as they turn out to be high-born after all. On the one hand, the play presents the pastoral ideology of the countryside, where the men are more gently and generous, because they are untainted by the court’s practices. On the other hand, all the characters living in the country actually belong at court. Thus, what seems as the encouragement of nature over nurture comes down to redundancy rather than opposition as nature and nurture merge together here.

Mary Floyd-Wilson observes that there is a dialectical unity of opposing characteristics – ‘hardy and gentle, civil and barbaric’ – inherent in the princes, which is constructed from both the inside and the outside, that is, the unity is made up of both unlearned or natural qualities and qualities determined by environmental factors: ‘both internal valour and Britain’s harsh climate “enchafes” their blood.’\textsuperscript{202} The boys’ personal traits are partly innate and partly influenced by the conditions of their physical environment. Their secluded raising, away from the wicked court, strengthens the nobility that the youths already possess. By contrast, natural factors, such as landscape and climate, also shape their identity. Guiderius and Arviragus have to endure physical hardship, particularly, in ‘[t]he freezing hours’ of ‘dark December,’ when ‘[t]he rain and wind’ batter on their ‘pinching cave.’\textsuperscript{203} These external conditions are reflected in their characters for their blood is ‘enchafed’ or angered just like ‘the rud’st wind.’\textsuperscript{204} The use of the nature imagery (i.e. the wild growth and the harsh winter weather) suggests ‘a harmonious convergence between the princes’ natures and the natural elements that belies the passage of time.’\textsuperscript{205}

Wales is depicted as the ideal environment to raise the King’s sons. This topography, though very different from the idyllic pastoral landscape, as Marisa R. Cull states, is intended

\textsuperscript{201} Shakespeare, 3.6.53-54.
\textsuperscript{203} Shakespeare, 3.3.37-39.
\textsuperscript{204} Shakespeare, 4.2.175.
\textsuperscript{205} Floyd-Wilson, p. 168.
as a beneficial, albeit temporary, residence for the princes, which will encourage the development of their heroic bravery. Nevertheless, the brothers feel restricted and discontented here. Guiderius describes the rural world as ‘[a] cell of ignorance’ and ‘[a] prison.’ Arviragus equally complains: ‘We have seen nothing.’ He asks Belarius: ‘What pleasure, sir, find we in life to lock it / From action and adventure?’ According to George Ian Duthie, the reason for the boys’ desire to leave their protected home is that, as heirs to the throne (though unaware of this), they are instinctively drawn to the lives that princes should lead. The youths long to escape the protection from the world of the court and get back into that world, and they do so, by means of the war, but also, in the case of Guiderius, by means of killing Cloten.

If Guiderius and Arviragus are read as noble savages, Cloten can be considered ‘the opposite, a savage noble.’ Although brought up at court, Cloten does not behave in a princely way. The intended rape of Imogen is certainly in contradiction with the chivalric code valued in the ideal courtier. At the same time, Cloten appears to embody some of the ideals of chivalrous conduct as he performs the beautiful song ‘Hark, hark, the lark’ and expresses a sincere admiration for Imogen:

For she’s fair and royal,
And that she hath all courtly parts more exquisite
Than lady, ladies, woman – from every one

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207 Shakespeare, 3.3.33-34.
208 Shakespeare, 3.3.39.
209 Shakespeare, 4.3.2-3.
211 Garber, p.809. Hoxie Neale Fairchild defines the notion of the noble savage as ‘any free and wild being who draws directly from nature virtues which raise doubts as to the value of civilisation.’ (Fairchild, Hoxie Neale, The Noble Savage: a Study in Romantic Naturalism (New York: Columbia University Press, 1928), p. 2) The noble savage is an idealised primitive figure, who is assumed to be less constrained by the restrictions brought forth by civilisation (e.g. strict behavioural codes, formal rules, and traditional social roles). The idea of the noble savage is related to the pastoral conventions of rural simplicity, purity, and honesty. Literary pastoral includes a romanticised rural setting, inhabited by individuals who lead a quiet, genteel life away from the city or the court. Guiderius and Arviragus represent some of the characteristics of the noble savage (e.g. simple, rural life, innate nobility, and physical and emotional freedom in comparison to those at court). However, the fact that the princes’ nobility is not strictly natural, but also learned, indicates that they do not entirely fit into the category of the noble savage. Furthermore, Guiderius’ killing of Cloten is at odds with the idea of the noble savage as the notion does, by no means, involve “ferocious” acts of violence. Lastly, the play’s description of the inhospitable climate is in opposition with the idealised rural land of the pastoral, which is a further indication that the boys do not completely agree with the romantic image of the noble savage.
The best she hath, and she, of all compounded,
Outsells them all – I love her therefore.\textsuperscript{212}

Nevertheless, the depiction of Cloten is predominantly negative. He is presented as a foolish character with dubious principles. In act 1, scene 2, the two Lords attending Cloten are mocking him. The Second Lord does this explicitly in his asides, telling the audience that Cloten is a ‘fool’ and an ‘ass.’\textsuperscript{213} The First Lord is more subtle, using his wit to simultaneously flatter and make fun of Cloten. The shortness of this scene (which counts only 37 lines) made Bevington claim that the scene has been intended to function as the direct opposite of the beginning of scene 1 (i.e. the first 55 lines), which was dedicated to praise the virtuous Posthumus.\textsuperscript{214} It emphasises Cloten’s oafishness by comparing him to ‘a poor but worthy gentleman.’\textsuperscript{215} The portrayal of the prince as a scornful and spiteful character could be read as a parody on the idea that noble birth is inextricably bound with a sense of honour and superiority over others.

In act 4, scene 2, Guiderius encounters Cloten, who, believing that ‘all’s savage but at court,’ challenges him for a fight.\textsuperscript{216} Although Guiderius knows that Cloten is ‘son to th’ Queen’ and consequently his social superior, he is not afraid to take on the fight.\textsuperscript{217} Moreover, he mocks Cloten and says: ‘At fools I laugh, not fear them,’ which demonstrates that Guiderius also knows that he is Cloten’s moral superior.\textsuperscript{218} After further taunting, the “noble savage” and the “savage noble” leave the stage, fighting hand-to-hand. A few seconds later, Guiderius re-enters carrying Cloten’s head. The theme of seeming is dramatised here: Cloten, who took the outside for the inside, now learned ‘not to take the rustic appearance of Guiderius at face value.’\textsuperscript{219} The man whom he had spurned for a ‘rustic mountaineer’ is the man who eventually cuts of his head and throws it in the stream flowing down to Lud’s Town.\textsuperscript{220}

\begin{thebibliography}{999}
\bibitem{212} Shakespeare, 3.5.70-74.
\bibitem{213} Shakespeare, 1.2.21 and 1.2.33.
\bibitem{214} Bevington, p. 227.
\bibitem{215} Shakespeare, 1.1.7.
\bibitem{216} Shakespeare, 4.2.33 and 4.2.73.
\bibitem{217} Shakespeare, 4.2.95.
\bibitem{218} Shakespeare, 4.2.98.
\bibitem{219} Garber, p. 820.
\bibitem{220} Shakespeare, 4.2.102.
\end{thebibliography}
After killing Cloten, Guiderius defends himself by stating the following:

The law
Protects not us, then why should we be tender
To let an arrogant piece of flesh threat us,
Play judge and executioner all himself,
For we do fear the law?²²¹

Guiderius is aware that he and his family are not equally protected by the law. Marie Theresa O’Connor indicates that Guiderius’ defense for killing Cloten is constructed not ‘on a counterargument within law, such as a right to self-defense, but on a right to dismiss “the law” altogether if does not offer equal protection.’²²² Guiderius believes that if there is no equal application of the law, the use of physical force is permitted, even against an “arrogant piece of flesh,” who is his (supposed) social superior. Thus, he is convinced that Cloten’s unjust behaviour towards him legitimises his murder, regardless of Cloten’s (seemingly) higher social status. Guiderius states that Cloten was:

A most incivil one [prince]. The wrong he did me
Were nothing prince-like, for he did provoke me
With language that would make me spurn the sea
If it could so roar to me. I cut off’s head,
And am right glad he is not standing here
To tell this tale of mine.²²³

Guiderius justifies his actions and shows no repentance or remorse for the sin that he has committed. He questions Cloten’s rank by emphasising that Cloten did not behave in a prince-like manner. The theme of seeming and being is continued here: Cloten’s appearance does not equal his inner self. Cloten stresses the importance of the outside being a reflection of the inside, which is noticeable, for instance, when he asks Guiderius: ‘Know’st me not by my clothes?’²²⁴ Cloten suggests that Guiderius should recognise his status by the look of his clothes. Guiderius’ response to Cloten’s declaration of his rank – ‘I am sorry for’t, not seeming / So worthy as thy birth’ – is a remark not only on the outside, i.e. the fact that Cloten is actually wearing Posthumus’ clothes, but also on the inside, i.e. the fact that Cloten is

²²¹ Shakespeare, 4.2.126-130.
²²³ Shakespeare, 5.4.293-298.
²²⁴ Shakespeare, 4.2.83.
morally unworthy of his high rank. Cymbeline responds to Cloten’s killing by sentencing Guiderius to death, for he believes that nothing can justify the murder of a prince: ‘[T]hou art condemned, and must / Endure our law. Thou’rt dead.’ However, he pardons Guiderius once he discovers the latter’s true identity and the law that ought to have punished him is thereby overturned.

The discovery of the brother’s noble birth only takes place after they have played a crucial role in the British victory over Rome. The princes have left their rustic existence and gone to war. On the battlefield, the British army at first fights ineptly, is overpowered and Cymbeline himself is taken prisoner. The court’s intrigues and corruption are probably one of the reasons why Cymbeline’s soldiers are unwilling to fight and flee. This changes when Guiderius and Arviragus arrive as they are able to convince the army to ‘[s]tand, stand, and fight.’ Eventually, Rome proves unable to match the princes’ martial heroism. Their courage and dedication lead to the British triumph and the rescue of Cymbeline. Later, a Briton Lord simply describes the victory as: ‘This was strange chance: A narrow lane, an old man, and two boys.’ This mythic reduction articulates a sense of wonder for, after all, it is a “miracle” that Britain won the war. Moreover, it is a miracle achieved not by flatterers, but by loyalists.

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225 Shakespeare, 4.2.95-96.
226 Shakespeare, 5.4.299-300.
227 The recognition scene of Cymbeline and his sons has been discussed in 1.2.3 Improvisational Disguise, and therefore will not be addressed further in this section.
228 Shakespeare, 5.2.13.
229 Shakespeare, 5.3.51-52.
4  **Death, Resurrection and Rebirth**

The plot of *Cymbeline* dramatises the idea of Christian resurrection, rebirth and regeneration as both Imogen and Posthumus experience a kind of feigned death followed by a feigned resurrection and rebirth.\(^{230}\) The counterfeit death is a plot device which involves a character seeming to be or being presumed dead by other characters.\(^{231}\) It can take different forms, including false reports as well as on-stage and off-stage mock deaths. The notion of feigned death might be followed by a feigned resurrection and rebirth.\(^{232}\) In general, the hero or heroine, who was reported or supposed dead, finally reappears on stage. In *Cymbeline*, Imogen’s counterfeit death comprises both a false report and an on-stage mock death. Pisanio tells her: ‘I’ll give but notice you are dead, and send him [Posthumus]/ Some bloody sign of it, for ’tis commanded / I should do so.’\(^{233}\) The false report is then followed by her on-stage mock death. The audience witnesses how Imogen takes a sleeping potion which causes her to appear death. After her on-stage resurrection, Imogen finds herself next to a headless corpse she believes to be her husband’s. From that moment onwards, Imogen is convinced her husband is dead. Thus, Posthumus’ feigned death also takes place on-stage. In the final scene, both characters are effectively reborn: Posthumus to his wife, and Imogen to her husband, her brothers and her father. This chapter seeks to analyse the feigned death and rebirth of Imogen and Posthumus and their functions within *Cymbeline*.

4.1  **Imogen’s Feigned Death and Rebirth**

This section examines the notions of counterfeit death, resurrection and rebirth with regard to the character of Imogen. First, I will argue that Imogen’s feigned death is brought about by Posthumus’ questioning of her sexual purity. To support my statement, I will look at Imogen’s individual interpretation of the sexual construct of female chastity: she violates the conventional notion of chastity, leading to her social death, which results in a limitation of her

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\(^{230}\) Guiderius and Arviragus are restored to their positions as princes, and consequently also reborn to Cymbeline, who, at the end, exclaims: ‘O what am I, / A mother to the birth of three? Ne’er mother / Rejoiced deliverance more.’ (Shakespeare, 5.4.369-371)

\(^{231}\) A character may purposely feign death in order to achieve a certain objective. The objective can be either positive or negative, depending on the intentions of the character adopting the counterfeit death. Feigned death can be morally justified, but it can also be adopted to deceive others and manipulate the circumstances for personal gain.

\(^{232}\) Rebirth has an essentially religious connotation. In dramatising the idea of (sacrificial) death and (spiritual) rebirth, Christian knowledge is engendered on the stage. In the Renaissance, the Church generally considered drama as sinful, because it confounds truth and falsehood: “performance” is not genuine, it misrepresents reality. Nevertheless, the ideas of feigning death, resurrection and rebirth, which were overall considered negative, are used here to create something positive.

\(^{233}\) Shakespeare, 3.4.125-127.
agency. I will illustrate that Imogen’s reduced agency will be, at least partly, restored by her feigned death. Second, I will examine Imogen’s (feigned) burial, focusing on the pre-Christian burial rituals. Third, I will discuss Imogen’s feigned resurrection and her restored belief in the goodness of her husband. I will take into account the way in which Shakespeare attempts at including the audience in the heroine’s experiences. Finally, I will examine Imogen’s rebirth, paying close attention to the language of wonder and forgiveness. I will also look at the rituals which formally reunite Imogen with her husband and father.

Imogen’s feigned death and rebirth is a consequence of female chastity. The ideal Renaissance woman was supposed to possess the Christian female virtues of silence, obedience and chastity. The character of Imogen is fashioned in the light of this ideal woman as she is ‘fair, virtuous, / wise, chaste, constant, qualified and less attemptable,’ or susceptible to seduction. However, she does not fit the description entirely. The three virtues – silence, obedience and chastity – were inextricably linked, in the sense that if one virtue was violated, another could be questioned. This model applies to Imogen as she violates against obedience, thereby arousing suspicion about her own chastity.

The disobedience has taken place before the play’s action begins: Imogen, the heir apparent of Britain, has entered a marriage out of love as she ‘chose an eagle / And did avoid a puttock.’ She abandoned her duty as a daughter by marrying Posthumus against her father’s will. With Posthumus exiled in Rome, Cloten tries, albeit in vain, to convince Imogen to marry him by reminding her of her daughterly obligation: ‘You sin against / Obedience which you owe your father.’

Bonnie Lander states that Imogen has been compelled to violate a basic principle of both conventional chastity – i.e. passivity – and of patrilineal descent – i.e.

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234 Chastity can be defined as “virginity in the maid” and “fidelity in the wife.” In the Renaissance, chastity was considered the greatest female virtue: ‘Let a woman have chastity, she has all. Let her lack chastity and she has nothing.’ (Kelso, p. 24) The worst thing that a genuinely chaste woman could do was to give occasion for suspicion of her wifely chastity for “[i]t was little use to her to be chaste, [...] if men thought her otherwise.” (Kelso, p. 173) Ruth Kelso, Doctrine for the Lady of the Renaissance (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1978), p. 24, 97, 173, and 273.

235 Cheryl A. Kirk-Duggan and Karen Jo Torjesen, ‘Introduction,’ in Women and Christianity, ed. by Cheryl A. Kirk-Duggan and Karen Jo Torjesen (California: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2010), p. xii; Ruth Kelso, p. 108. The trinity of female virtues (silence, obedience and chastity) is in line with the biblical portrayal of the woman as man’s suitable helper on the grounds of having been made from the rib of his body: Genesis, 2:18 – 2:23.

236 Shakespeare, 1.4.56-57.

237 Imogen also sins against silence when she tries to discourage Cloten in his courtship of her. She herself comments on this: ‘You [Cloten] put me to forget a lady’s manners / By being so verbal.’ in Shakespeare, 2.3.102-103.

238 Shakespeare, 1.1.140-141.

239 Shakespeare, 2.3.108-109.
her daughterly duty – so as to ‘maintain a more sophisticated form of chastity.’ Imogen’s choice of marrying Posthumus is morally justified as he is a virtuous gentleman. Nonetheless, it will cause her temporary distress and inconvenience which she might have circumvented if she had adhered to the passive role expected of a woman of conventional chastity. Not only the Renaissance ideals for women were passive, but also the way in which these ideals were tested. Harriet Walter comments that ‘[f]emale virtue is tested passively. Female virtue is a state of being, not doing: a woman is good. She doesn’t have to do anything, but she has to be unsoiled.’ Thus, Imogen’s active way of demonstrating her virtue, her chastity is central to her problems.

Confident in his wife’s loyalty, Posthumus agrees to Iachimo’s wager on Imogen’s chastity. Iachimo produces some details about Imogen’s bedroom and, more importantly, about her body – the mole under her breast – which become the false evidence of her infidelity. A wife’s infidelity generally brings disgrace, shame, and dishonour on the husband, and because honour represents a key aspect of a man’s masculine identity, the adultery also threatens the husband’s masculinity. Thus, when Iachimo professes himself ‘the winner of her honour,’ he ruins Posthumus’ reputation. To reclaim his good reputation (and his masculinity), Posthumus commands his servant to kill his wife.

When Imogen has read Posthumus’ letter to Pisanio in which the former accuses her of unchastity and orders her death, she expresses her indignation:

False to his bed? What is it to be false?
To lie in watch there and to think on him?
To weep ‘twixt clock and clock? If sleep charge nature,
To break it with a fearful dream of him
And cry myself awake? That’s false to’s bed, is it?

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241 The typical Renaissance ideals for women were: ‘chastity, modesty, humility, sweetness, simplicity, peaceableness, kindness, piety, temperance, beauty, sometimes learning, and always patience, charity, constancy, and obedience.’ in Pearl Hogrefe, ‘Advice to be Passive,’ in Tudor Women: Commoners and Queens (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1975), p. 3.
243 Kelso, p. 90.
244 Shakespeare, 2.4.53.
245 Shakespeare, 3.4.40-44.
The effect of using rhetorical questions here is twofold. First, the questions function to convey Imogen’s righteous anger and to arouse such a feeling in the listener – both the other onstage character, Pisanio, and the audience. This leads to the second function: the rhetorical questions are a means to include the audience in Imogen’s experience. A rhetorical question always implies an “opposition” between its literal purpose (a question) and its function (a statement). This means that even though a rhetorical question is a question – and thereby demanding information – it needs not to be answered, for the answer to the question is already known by both the speaker and the listener. In the case of Imogen, the “implied” answer to her questions – No, that is not false to his bed. – is known by Imogen as well as by the audience. Thus, the rhetorical questions are effective in that they make the audience participants in Imogen’s experience.

Following her state of indignation, Imogen is willing to take on the role of sacrificial victim. She says to Pisanio: ‘When thou seest him [Posthumus], / A little witness my obedience. Look, / I draw the sword myself.’ Janet Adelman regards Imogen’s shift from indignation to self-sacrifice as a crucial moment in the process of her submission. She argues that, up until this moment, Imogen has been the agent of her own life: she could make her own decisions and act independently. In the first half of the play, Imogen is ‘a wonderfully vivid presence, shrewd, impetuous, passionate, and very much the proprietress of her own will.’ Her self-determination is evident, for example, in her decision to marry Posthumus against her father’s wish, in her discernment of Iachimo’s attempt at seducing her, and in her earlier angry response to her husband’s accusations. However, her self-assertion changes into self-abnegation: Imogen tells Pisanio that her heart is ‘obedient as the scabbard;’ that her heart is as willing to receive the sword as the sword’s own sheath would be. Moreover, Imogen would commit suicide, were it not that ‘[a]gainst self-slaughter / There is a prohibition so divine.’ This not only demonstrates that Imogen is willing to sacrifice herself, but also that, although she is socially dead, she still abides by the rules set forth by the society she lives in.

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246 Shakespeare, 3.4.65-67.
249 Shakespeare, 3.4.80.
250 Shakespeare, 3.4.76-77.
251 A woman’s chastity is inextricably bound up with her worth and honour. Women who have lost their honour “inappropriately” are condemned to social death: they are excluded from and rejected by the society.
does not permit her to. Imogen is convinced that she must die, because she confuses social death with physical death.  

Pisanio does not want to ‘take away her life,’ and instead, proposes that Imogen disguises herself as a male page. This disguise, which entails a change in gender, status, nationality and age, will allow Imogen to “restore” her agency. It is through her impersonation of a page-boy that Imogen will be able to prove her innocence. Nevertheless, the fact that cross-dressing is suggested by another character demonstrates that the terms of Imogen’s agency have been redefined: her self-determination has been weakened. Instead of taking an active role in the decision-making process, she allows decisions to happen. Imogen dresses as a boy and serves Lucius as a page, because she was told to do so by Pisanio. She does no longer make the decisions herself, but allows others decide for her.

Her counterfeit death further supports this reading – that of her reduced agency – as Imogen herself is entirely unaware of it until she revives. It is Pisanio who gives Imogen the sleeping potion – a potion which was originally poisonous, but altered into a harmless drug by the court’s physician Cornelius. Were it not for the doctor, who suspected the Queen of falsity, Imogen would have been dead. Pisanio, though unaware of the drug’s effect – for he believes that there is nothing ‘more cordial,’ or restorative than the potion – nonetheless also plays a key role in Imogen’s apparent death as he gives her the drug that was actually intended for him. While Cornelius and Pisanio are active participants, Imogen is relegated a passive role in her seeming death. Imogen feigns death unknowingly and without agreement or permission – unlike, for instance, Juliet in Romeo and Juliet, who demonstrates great agency as she wilfully and determinately undertakes the counterfeit death in order to marry the one she loves.

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252 I have discussed “role” and “self,” “social death” and “death to the self” in 1.2.2 Task-oriented Disguise.
253 Shakespeare, 3.4.27.
254 Imogen’s disguise has been discussed in 1.2.2 Task-oriented Disguise, therefore it will not be addressed further in this section.
255 Shakespeare, 1.5.64.
Before she drinks the potion, Imogen says: ‘Pisanio, I’ll now taste off thy drug,’ thereby reminding the audience of the transference of the drug.\textsuperscript{256} In act 1, scene 5, Cornelius has told the audience that he has replaced the Queen’s poison with a harmless drug which would only ‘stupefy and dull the sense a while.’\textsuperscript{257} The Queen then gives the potion to Pisanio, who, in his turn, gives it to Imogen. Thus, only an instant before Imogen will appear dead, she reminds the audience that the drug is only a sleeping potion. At the same time, the moment that Arviragus enters with Fidele in his arms, the audience seems to forget that Fidele is actually Imogen, and that Imogen is not dead, but only sleeping.\textsuperscript{258} The stage direction in the First Folio text captures the effect of this moment on the audience: *Enter from the cave Arviragus with Imogen, dead, bearing her in his arms.*\textsuperscript{259} It reads “dead” and not “as dead” which would be literally more correct, since the audience knows (but suppresses) that Imogen is only asleep.\textsuperscript{260} However, “dead” seems to be more appropriate as the intention of the scene is to let the audience experience the pathos of the moment.

Keverne Smith notes that, before the *seemingly* dead body of the *seeming* boy is brought on stage, Shakespeare has been preparing the audience for Fidele’s death in the first part of act 4, scene 2, ‘creating an imaginative world of death and grief.’\textsuperscript{261} At the beginning of this mourning scene, Imogen/Fidele says:

So man and man should be,
But clay and clay differs in dignity,
Whose dust is both alike. I am very sick.\textsuperscript{262}

A very ill Fidele is talking about *clay* and *dust*, words which, in biblical idiom, are emblems of mortality.\textsuperscript{263} “Clay and clay” is the material out of which “man” is made; and “dust” is the

\textsuperscript{256} Shakespeare, 4.2.37-38. The possessive pronoun “thy” is important here as it somewhat anticipates Imogen’s reaction at her “resurrection.” When Imogen awakes, she finds herself next to what she assumes is her husband’s decapitated body. She believes that Cloten and Pisanio are responsible for the killing. Both Cloten’s ‘malice’ against Posthumus and Pisanio’s ‘lucre’ (or financial gain) in Cloten’s service are mentioned as motives for committing their crime. To further support her argument, Imogen refers to Pisanio’s drug: ‘The drug he gave me, which he said was precious / And cordial to me, have I not found it / Murd’rous to th’ senses?’ (Shakespeare, 4.2.325-329). Because Imogen thinks the potion came from Pisanio, she is convinced that Pisanio is to blame for the failed attempt at murdering her and for the murder of her husband.

\textsuperscript{257} Shakespeare, 1.5.37.

\textsuperscript{258} Warren, p. 45. He comments: ‘And yet the reaction of an audience, in all the productions I have seen or been involved in, has been the same: a hushed, tense stillness in which, so to speak, they seem to suppress that factual knowledge.’ However, it should be noted that this is a modern interpretation and not one based on historical data.

\textsuperscript{259} Shakespeare, stage direction 4.2. (emphasis added) It must be acknowledge, though, that the First Folio is a printed text – hence, very few spectators would have known this information.

\textsuperscript{260} The Folio’s “dead” has been emended to “as dead” by Edward Capell, an eighteenth-century editor.


\textsuperscript{262} Shakespeare, 4.2.3-5.
substance to which “man” returns at death. The “dust” presumably refers to a part of The Committal in The Book of Common Prayer: ‘earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust.’ Smith also mentions Belarius’ utterance – “‘Tis the ninth hour o’th’morn’ – suggesting that it might refer to the moment when Christ cried: ‘My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?’ and then passed away. Lastly, Smith points out the passage where Belarius suggests that it is time to go hunting: ‘It is great morning,’ meaning it is broad daylight. However, morning is also the homophone for mourning, which is what the audience is expected to feel when Arviragus enters the stage, bearing the “dead” Fidele in his arms. To these examples, one could add Arviragus’ utterance about grief, the stinking elder: ‘Grow patience, / And let the stinking elder, grief, untwine / His perishing root with the increasing vine.’ In other words, let grief untwine its root from patience, whereupon grief will die (or perish) and patience increase. Patience must eventually overgrow grief. The elder is thus used as a symbol of woe, an emblem of grief. Perhaps, these lines are anticipating the grief that the boys are about to experience after Fidele’s death. Furthermore, the elder is modified by the adjective “stinking,” which indicates it’s evil reputation. The elder owes its sinister reputation to the tradition that Judas Iscariot had hanged himself on an elder tree after betraying Christ. Moreover, some legends say that Christ’s cross was made of elder wood. The elder then could be read as an allusion to Christ’s imminent death and resurrection, which, in its turn, might be an allusion to Fidele’s approaching death and resurrection.

In Cymbeline, the religious practices are pre-Christian. When the brothers are preparing to honour the “dead” Fidele, Guiderius first instructs Arviragus to ‘lay his [Fidele’s] head to th’east.’ The position of the body gives an indication of the religion of the deceased. Christian burials usually have a west-east orientation, with the head lying to the west. The underlying symbolism in this west-east direction is dual. First, according to

264 Compare Genesis 3:19: ‘Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.’
266 Shakespeare, 4.2.30 and Matthew 27:46 and Mark 15:34.
267 Shakespeare, 4.2.63.
268 Shakespeare, 4.2.61.
270 In England and Scotland, among other regions of Britain, it was believed that Christ was crucified on a cross made from “Elder” or “Bour.” in Gerald Massey, The Natural Genesis (Two Volumes in One) (New York: Cosimo Classics, 2011), p. 434; John-Paul Patton, The Poet’s Ogam: A Living Magical Tradition (Belfast: Lulu, 2010), p. 399-400.
271 Shakespeare, 4.2.256.
Matthew, Christ would return from heaven to earth in the clouds from the East. At Judgment Day, the person would first be facing Christ. Second, as the sun sets in the west, the head facing the west might symbolise the end of life. Thus, by insisting on burying Fidele with his head “to th’east,” Shakespeare presumably wanted to underline the pagan setting of the play. Once Fidele’s body has been placed in the right direction, the brothers perform the following burial song:

Fear no more the heat o’th’ sun,
Nor the furious winter’s rages.
Thou thy worldly task hast done,
Home art gone and ta’en thy wages.
Golden lads and girls all must,
As chimney-sweepers, come to dust.

Fear no more the frown o’th’ great,
Thou art past the tyrant’s stroke.
Care no more to clothe and eat,
To thee the reed is as the oak.
The sceptre, learning, physic, must
All follow this and come to dust.

Fear no more the lightning flash,
Nor th’all-dreaded thunder-stone.
Fear not slander, censure rash.
Thou hast finished joy and moan.
All lovers young, all lovers must
Consign to thee and come to dust.

This lyric further reinforces the pre-Christian aspects of the play, as it does not mention any god. Warren notes that the power of the song is partly ascribable to the fact that it is ‘at once specifically relevant to Imogen herself in its detail [...] and yet expressed in general terms which make it seem applicable to everyone.’ If Imogen were dead, she would indeed be “past the tyrant’s stroke.” According to Warren, Imogen’s tyrant is her father, Cymbeline. However, one could also argue that the tyrant is the Queen, that is, if one takes into account Imogen’s remark on her stepmother’s hypocrisy: ‘How fine this tyrant / Can tickle where she

272 Compare Matthew 24:27 and 24:30: ‘For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be’ and ‘And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.’
273 Shakespeare, 4.2.259-276.
274 Warren, p. 45.
wounds!" If dead, Imogen would also be free of “slander, censure rash.” The slander comes from Iachimo, who, in his soliloquy at the start of act 5, scene 2, says that he has ‘belied a lady,’ i.e. that he has told lies about Imogen. Iachimo’ defamation is then followed by Posthumus’ rash censure. The universal aspects of the language, on the other hand, communicate emotions and feelings deeply rooted in human nature, which presumably makes it easier for the audience to share in the brother’s grief for Imogen. Thus, Warren argues that, because of its simultaneous specificity and universality, ‘the language lures the audience further into the experience of apparent death and funeral ritual.’

The song is about the fear of death and how one must overcome it, for after all, death comes to all of us, whether one is well-born or low-born, royal or poor, *golden* or *dusty*. The idea of death as the great leveller is also manifest on the level of the plot as Cloten, the attempted rapist and murderer, is laid down next to his intended victim, Imogen. Regardless of rank or worth, death reduces each of us to “dust.” However, Imogen is not really dead and her rebirth is already foreshadowed in the following quotation: ‘Golden lads and girls all must / As chimney-sweepers, come to dust.” In English folklore, “golden lad” and “chimney-sweeper” are names used to designate the different phases of the dandelion; the first is the bloom in which the plant produces yellow-golden flowers, and the second, the reproduction in which the flowers wither and the seed heads emerge. The wind, then, scatters these seeds (cf. dust), and when they land, the life cycle begins all over again. Thus, this extract also addresses, albeit implicitly, the theme of rebirth.

After the funeral rites, the audience witnesses Imogen’s seeming resurrection. Imogen, as Garber notes, ‘ha[...s] been laid out as a tragic sacrifice on the ground,’ and now revives to an “altered” world in which dream and reality coincide. Imogen says: ‘The dream’s here still. Even when I wake it is / Without me as within me; not imagined, felt.’ Imogen finds herself next to a headless man, whom she believes to be her husband, and subsequently mourns his death. Posthumus, which is Latin for “after dead,” was given his name because he

275 Shakespeare, 1.1.85-86 (emphasis added)
276 Shakespeare, 5.2.2.
277 Warren, p. 45.
278 Shakespeare, 4.2.63-64.
280 Garber, p. 826.
281 Shakespeare, 4.2.307-308.
was born after the death of his father, Sicilius Leonatus. However, the name, as Adam Max Cohen notes, evokes, from this moment onward, a secondary meaning as Posthumus is supposed dead.282 Thus, Imogen is convinced that her husband is inevitably lost and when Caius Lucius asks her: ‘What art thou?’, she expresses her feeling of total nihilility without him: ‘I am nothing; or if not, / Nothing to be were better.’283 Imogen, then, describes her husband in the following elevated terms:

A very valiant Briton and a good [...] 
There is no more such masters. I may wander 
From east to occident, cry out for service, 
Try many, all good; serve truly; never 
Find such another master.284

This description of the unparalleled implies that Imogen has restored her earlier feelings of esteem for her husband. Imogen’s reinstated trust in and respect for Posthumus actually prove to be justified for, shortly following this scene, Posthumus will tell the audience that he has forgiven his wife despite his conviction of her infidelity.

Imogen, subsequently, agrees to serve Lucius as his page: ‘And leaving so his service, follow you.’285 Warren notes that this moment is the turning point of the play.286 Imogen does not succumb to despair and hopelessness, but rather resolves to live, thereby reasserting control over her own life.287 Imogen chooses life over death, a decision which will eventually lead to the restoration of her marriage. Furthermore, by entering the service of Lucius, Imogen allies herself with the Romans and hence initiates the reconciliation of Britain and Rome.

At the end of the play, the audience witnesses the miraculous rebirth of the “dead” Imogen. Disguised as Fidele, she is first recognised by her brothers and Belarius. The latter expresses his wonder at seeing the youth alive: ‘Is not this boy revived from death?’288 In spite of the physical resemblance, Belarius thinks it is more advisable to observe and verify, and to refrain from rash conclusions: ‘Peace, peace, see further; he eyes us not, forbear. /
Creatures may be alike. Guiderius articulates his wonder as an epistemological contradiction: ‘The same dead thing alive.’ He repeats his astonishment in a similar contradictory remark: ‘But we see him dead.’ Guiderius avoids the past tense, for he does not say “But we saw him dead” nor “But we see him, who was dead, alive.” The use of the present tense evokes the theme of living dead which is so pervasive in this play. Gillian Woods comments: ‘Leaving the past tense unspoken [...] gives space in the utterance to the bizarre.’ It underlines the sense of wonder at this miraculous rebirth, at the discovery of what was thought to be dead is actually not dead.

When Imogen, as a boon from Cymbeline, demands how Iachimo got the diamond that she had given to Posthumus at the opening of the play, she starts off the final phase in the process of recognition, restoration and reunion. ‘By villainy / I got this ring; ‘twas Leonatus’ jewel,’ Iachimo confesses. After Iachimo has elucidated matters whereby Imogen’s chastity and loyalty have been proven, Posthumus, disguised as a Roman prisoner, steps forward and confesses that he has killed Imogen, or more precisely, that he ordered Pisano, ‘[a] sacrilegious thief, to do’t.’ He ends his speech of contrition with the iterance of Imogen’s name: ‘O Imogen! / My queen, my life, my wife! O Imogen / Imogen, Imogen.’ Posthumus’ repetition of the name signifies both the death of Fidele and the subsequent rebirth of Imogen’s true (female) identity. Upon hearing her name, Imogen runs towards Posthumus, who fails to recognise his disguised wife and strikes her down. Pisano, who did recognise his mistress, rushes to Imogen, who lies seemingly dead on the ground. He

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289 Shakespeare, 5.4.124-125.
290 Shakespeare, 5.4.123.
291 Shakespeare, 5.4.126.
292 See is also an archaic past tense.
293 There are several characters who are “living deads,” including Imogen/Fidele, Guiderius, Arviragus, Posthumus, and the latter’s (dead) relatives. The present tense is also used in the first scene, when Cymbeline threatens Posthumus not to come back to court or else: '[T]hou diest.' (Shakespeare, 1.1.128) In presenting the “future situation” as a present one, Cymbeline intensifies the threat; something he would not have been able to if he used the future tense (i.e. “Thou willst die”) which simply predicts what will or might happen in the future. The use of the present tense is even more striking in the final scene, when Cymbeline pronounces Guiderius’ death sentence: ‘Thou’rt dead.’ (Shakespeare, 5.4.300) The present tense is significant here for it suggests that the enactment of the event (i.e. the execution of the death penalty) falls together with the moment of speaking (i.e. the pronouncement of the death penalty). The theme of the living dead is also dramatised in act 5, scene 3, where the really dead, that is Posthumus’ family, are brought back to life in his dream.
295 More about recognition in 2.2 Task-oriented Disguise.
296 Shakespeare, 5.4.142-143.
297 Shakespeare, 5.4.220.
298 Shakespeare, 5.4.225-227.
exclaims: ‘O my lord Posthumus, / You ne’er killed Imogen till now.’

Imogen then awakes and affirms the miracle of her own resurrection: ‘I was dead.’

Pisanio has now revealed Imogen’s true identity, upon which Cymbeline cries out: ‘If this be so, the gods do mean to strike me / To death with mortal joy.’

Cymbeline believes that, if it is indeed Imogen, the joy will be so overpowering that he might die of it. According to Cohen, the wonder of Cymbeline’s response is heightened by the fact that he is the last one to recognise his daughter. When Cymbeline eventually addresses Imogen, he expresses his disapproval of having been excluded from the dialogue before: ‘What, mak’st thou me a dullard in this act?’

Cohen remarks that it is actually Cymbeline himself who made him a dullard earlier on as his wonder prevented him from talking to Imogen. His first words to his kneeling daughter are framed in the context of baptismal language: ‘My tears that fall / Prove holy water on thee!’

This baptismal ritual, which formally enacts the rebirth of Imogen is followed by another, i.e. the marriage ritual of exchanging jewels. When Iachimo gives back the ring and ‘the bracelet of the truest princess / That ever swore her faith,’ Imogen is officially reunited with Posthumus. This act not only signifies the formal reunion of husband and wife, but also the formal restoration of Imogen’s chastity.

4.2 Posthumus’ Feigned Death and Rebirth

This section deals with Posthumus’ feigned death and rebirth. I will argue that Posthumus’ counterfeit death is an indirect consequence of his wish to purify his (inner) self from “the woman’s part” – i.e. dangerous female attributes that threaten his masculinity. First, I will analyse Posthumus’ misogynist speech as the expression of his ontological concerns. The speech conveys the medieval notion of the female (sexual) body as something dangerous

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299 Shakespeare, 5.4.230-231.
300 Shakespeare, 5.4.259.
301 Shakespeare, 5.4.234-235.
303 Shakespeare, 5.4.265.
304 Shakespeare, 5.4.268-269.
305 Shakespeare, 5.4.416-418.
and demanding control.306 Exploring the interrelationship of the concepts of female chastity, procreation and illegitimacy, I will demonstrate that Posthumus’ recognition of being woman-born endangers his masculine identity. Second, I will show how Posthumus “overpowers” the feminine contamination through displacement: Posthumus’ repressed sexual feelings are displaced onto his substitutes, Iachimo and Cloten, who give vent to these feelings. In this way, the play manages to manifest Posthumus’ sexual aggression without exposing the protagonist to its ill consequences. I will argue that Cloten, who personifies “the woman’s part,” has to die in Posthumus’ place: Cloten is the sacrifice by which all traces of (feminine) impurity are repelled. Third, I will examine Posthumus’ three rebirths – two private and one public. The first private rebirth has taken place offstage, but Posthumus’ spiritual change is nonetheless made visible for the audience through the onstage costume change, which symbolises the complete eradication of Posthumus’ former sinful self and the beginning of a new changed self. The second private rebirth involves the recovery of his lost roots (i.e. the reunification with his dead family), and enables him to regain a sense of inner wholeness. The third and public rebirth includes a public confession and a public display of repentance, which allows him to be “fully” reborn and to reunite with his wife. Finally, I will show that Posthumus’ forgiveness of Iachimo (though influenced by Imogen’s earlier forgiveness of him) inspires the rebirth of Britain.

In act 2, scene 4, Posthumus finds out about Imogen’s presumed adultery. He concludes the scene with a general attack on women, commenting on their frailty and articulating his disgust for them. His misogynist speech opens with a question: ‘Is there no way for men to be, but women / Must be half-workers?’307 Posthumus wonders whether there could be a world in which men could be – i.e. come into being as well as exist – without the involvement of women in the procreative act. He wishes for a purely male world without the threat of female sexuality and without dependence on the female counterpart for procreation.

306 A more misogynist representation of women emerged during the Middle Ages. This misogynist view considered women as naturally sinful: ‘As the daughters of Eve, all women were held to be guilty by association of the same moral failings of disobedience, garrulity, and pride that Eve had displayed in seducing her husband into eating the forbidden fruit.’ (Brown-Grant, p. 82.) Women were viewed as inherently inferior to men in all regards – intellectually, morally, and physically. They were depicted as weak, talkative, greedy, disobedient, untrustworthy, desirous, dangerous and inclined toward carnal and lascivious pleasures. (Rosalind Brown-Grant, ‘6: Christine de Pizan as a Defender of Women: Medieval Misogyny,’ in Christine de Pizan: A Casebook, ed. by Barbara K. Altmann, and Deborah L. McGrady (New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 81-82; Mary Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski, ‘Introduction,’ in Women and Power in the Middle Ages, ed. by Mary Erler, Maryanne Kowaleski (Georgia: Georgia Press, 1988), p. 1; Margaret Schaus, ‘Body in Literature and Religion,’ in Women and Gender in Medieval Europe: An Encyclopedia, ed. by Margaret Schaus (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 79-80.)
307 Shakespeare, 2.4.153-154.
The inevitability of female participation in the reproductive act brings Posthumus to the conclusion that "[w]e are all bastards." Thus, following his reasoning, illegitimacy is not so much determined by the woman’s unchastity as by her involvement in the process of procreation. Female sexual nature, whether legitimate or not, always equals illegitimacy. In other words, legitimacy can be achieved solely through a pure male lineage. However, as men cannot reproduce without a woman’s womb, the son is always “infected,” since ‘through her participation in the procreative act, the mother makes the son in her own image.’

Posthumus desperately wants to eradicate this “woman’s part” within himself. He says:

Could I find out
The woman’s part in me – for there’s no motion
That tends to vice in man but I affirm
It is the woman’s part.

The woman’s part consists of ‘[a]ll faults that man can name, nay, that hell knows:’ ‘lying,’ ‘flattering,’ ‘deceiving,’ ‘lust and rank thoughts,’ ‘revenges,’ ‘ambitions, covetings, change of prides, disdain, / Nice longing, slanders, mutability.’ By listing these vices, Posthumus devalues women as well as himself, for although these faults are supposedly typical of women, men have them too, because they, as Posthumus himself has indicated, inherit the woman’s part through reproduction. With this enumeration, Posthumus tries to destroy the woman’s part within himself in order to cleanse his masculine identity of feminine influence.

However, the attempt is unsuccessful; it is only through Posthumus’ substitutes, Iachimo and Cloten, who articulate and enact his darker feelings towards Imogen, that ‘the woman’s part in Posthumus is ritually defined and exorcised.’ According to Adelman, the woman’s part is above all associated with female sexuality, i.e. sexual fault and desires. Posthumus’ sexual feelings are first projected onto Iachimo, whose intrusion into Imogen’s bedchamber and whose voyeuristic examination and description of her body can be interpreted as a substitute for the act that Posthumus would like to commit. Iachimo represents a surrogate for the hero, “performing” the latter’s sexual desires, thereby both emasculating himself – ‘takes off my manhood’ – and preserving Posthumus’ virtue and honour.

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308 Shakespeare, 2.4.154.
309 Adelman, p. 212.
310 Shakespeare, 2.4.171-174.
311 Shakespeare, 2.4.174-179. Posthumus conveys the idea that all faults, all negative features and qualities, are inherently feminine, no matter who, male or female, gives expression to these characteristics.
312 Adelman, p. 215.
313 Shakespeare, 5.2.2.
Iachimo’s bedroom scene, Cloten takes over the role of substitute for Posthumus. Through his
death, Posthumus’ masculinity will be entirely purged of female influence. As mentioned
above, in the exposition, Cloten and Posthumus are described as opposites. The First
Gentleman calls Cloten ‘a thing / Too bad for bad report.’ He does not mention Cloten’s
name, but instead refers to him as “a thing” not worth talking about. Cloten is considered to
be undeserving of any report, even a bad one. Posthumus, on the other hand, is described as
follows:

\[
a\text{ creature such}
\]

As to seek through the regions of the earth
For one his like, there would be something failing
In him that should compare, I do not think
So fair an outward and such stuff within
Endows a man but he.  

The Second Gentleman answers: ‘You speak him far,’ implying that he praises Posthumus too
highly. The First Gentleman does not agree and argues: ‘I do extend him, sir, within
himself, / Crush him together rather than unfold / His measure duly.’ He claims that he only
praises Posthumus as far as he deserves it. In fact, he says that he minimises Posthumus’
worth for even the highest praise would not do him justice. Language cannot adequately
represent how virtuous Posthumus is. His greatness infinitely surpasses all that one’s tongue
can express. Nevertheless, the gentleman’s judgment of Posthumus’ value is in conflict with
the majority of the play’s action, because of which the opposition between Cloten and
Posthumus seems to break down.

Cloten serves as a substitute and scapegoat for Posthumus: while the latter remains
offstage from act 2, scene 4 until act 5, scene 1, the focus is set on Cloten so as to protect the
hero’s virtues and purity. Adelman notes that Cloten is the false son; he is the mother’s son,
‘the Queen’s son,’ the son ‘whose traces Posthumus feared in himself.’ She argues that as
Cloten becomes the substitute for Posthumus’ sexualised body – the male sexual body being a
derivative of the woman’s part – he becomes the woman’s part that Posthumus would like to
find and eradicate within himself. Cloten has to die in Posthumus’ place in order to purge the

\[ 314 \text{ Adelman, p. 215.} \]
\[ 315 \text{ Shakespeare, 1.1.16-17.} \]
\[ 316 \text{ Shakespeare, 1.1.19-24.} \]
\[ 317 \text{ Shakespeare, 1.1.24.} \]
\[ 318 \text{ Shakespeare, 1.1.25-27.} \]
\[ 319 \text{ Adelman, p. 216 and Shakespeare, 4.2.154.} \]
latter of the woman’s part or the vicious female aspects of his personality. When Cloten (dressed as Posthumus) tells the audience about his plan of rape and murder, he oddly enough predicts his own faith. He says: ‘Posthumus, thy head, / which now is growing upon thy shoulders, shall within / this hour be off.’ Cloten confirms his status as a substitute when his head, instead of Posthumus’, is severed from his body. Posthumus’ violent sexual desires have been reflected upon Cloten and followed by a fitting correction: Cloten is rightly punished as the play’s scapegoat by being beheaded. His beheading satisfies the audience’s wish for poetic justice, for vice to be punished (and virtue to be rewarded). It is logical that Cloten assumes Posthumus’ clothes when he attempts to rape Imogen and it is similarly logical that Imogen mistakes Cloten’s headless body for Posthumus. ‘For Cloten is Posthumus’s body, Posthumus’s body without its head: through him, the play constructs the male sexual body itself as the woman’s part that must be excised.’

Cloten’s sacrifice is purgatorial. At the beginning of the play, Cloten’s sacrifice is already being anticipated as the First Lord advises him to change his shirt, because the ‘[v]iolence of action hath made [him] reek as a sacrifice.’ In act 4, scene 2, Cloten’s head is cut off by Guiderius, who says that he will ‘throw’t into the creek / [...] and let it to the sea.’ This might recall the tale of Orpheus as described in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, Book XI. Orpheus, the divine musician and poet, was dismembered by Thracian Maenads; his head and lyre were thrown into the River Hebrus and washed down to the sea. David Armitrage proposes to interpret Cloten as an ironic Orpheus and the mountaineers (i.e. Guiderius and Arviragus) as ironic Maenads for although Guiderius and Arviragus live a rustic existence in the Welsh mountains, they are more civilised and less barbarous than Cloten. Guiderius’ beheading of Cloten is the act that restores the stability of the royal family: the false heir (and mother’s son) is killed by the true heir (and father’s son). Guiderius once more refers to Orpheus’ death, when he confirms his deed: ‘I have sent Cloten’s clotpoll down the stream / In embassy to his mother.’ His utterance is directly followed by *Solemn music* which, as Armitrage notes, might allude to Orpheus’ head being cast into the river together with his

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320 Shakespeare, 4.1.14-16.
321 Adelman, p. 216.
322 Shakespeare, 1.2.2.
323 Shakespeare, 4.2.152-153.
325 Innate nobility has been discussed in 3 Humble Birth and Noble Birth.
326 Shakespeare, 4.2.185-186.
The allusions to the myth of Orpheus contribute to the (Christian) themes of sacrifice, death and rebirth. Cloten’s Orphic death foretells Imogen’s death and rebirth and allows for the rebirth of Posthumus’ purified identity.

Glenn C. Arbery points out that, within the Christian context of death and rebirth, Cloten’s headless body could be interpreted as the old man of St. Paul’s Epistle to the Ephesians. He explains that Cloten’s assumption of Posthumus’ garments is a literalisation of the metaphor of clothing underlying the notion of “putting off the old man” and “putting on the new man.” With Cloten’s death, a different Posthumus reappears onstage. Having seriously damaged his virtuous reputation, Posthumus now tries to make amends. In act 5, scene 1, he re-enters the stage, dressed as a Roman and carrying a piece of cloth seemingly steeped in Imogen’s blood. The bloody cloth serves as false proof of Imogen’s death for it conceals rather than represents reality. Posthumus opens his soliloquy with the following forgiving words:

Yea, bloody cloth, I’ll keep thee, for I once wished
Thou shouldst be coloured thus. You married ones,
If each of you should take this course, how many
Must murder wives much better than themselves
For wrying but a little!

After addressing the bloody cloth, Posthumus addresses the audience, or at least a part of it – “You married ones” – which presumably helps to include the spectators in his purgatorial experience. The lines make clear that he has forgiven Imogen before learning that she is innocent of adultery. Posthumus’ psychological change from revenge – ‘O that I had here to tear her limb-meal!’ – to forgiveness – Imogen ‘wry[ed] but a little’ – and repentance makes possible the renewal of his love for Imogen. His change of mind is also visualised: ‘I’ll disrobe me / Of these Italian weeds, and suit myself / As does a Briton peasant.’ This change of clothes once again evokes St. Paul, who instructs:

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327 Armitrage, p. 132.
329 Ephesians 4:21-24. There is, however, a more striking allusion to St. Paul’s old man, later on in the play (see below).
330 Shakespeare, 5.1.2-5.
331 Shakespeare, 2.4.147 and 5.1.5.
332 Shakespeare, 5.1.22-24.
That ye put off, concerning the former conversation, the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; [...] And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.333

After putting to death the old man, one can become the new (reborn) man. Posthumus’ change of clothing symbolises that he has completely eradicated his old sinful nature which was corrupted by lust and deception (caused by the woman’s part within him). Given his repentance, Posthumus is already well down the road towards his spiritual rebirth. Following his costume change, Posthumus declares to be willing to offer himself as a sacrificial atonement for his sins: ‘[S]o I’ll die / For thee, O Imogen, even for whom my life / Is every breath a death; and thus unknown, / Pitied nor hated, to the face of peril / Myself I’ll dedicate.’334 Posthumus is prepared for the ultimate act of sacrifice and atonement for his past actions: he seeks to die a humble, anonymous death in battle.

In act 5, scene 3, after Britain’s victory over Rome, Posthumus disguises himself as a Roman soldier in order to be captured and imprisoned. In jail, awaiting his execution, Posthumus delivers another speech of repentance, once more declaring that he is willing to sacrifice his own life in recompense for Imogen’s death: ‘For Imogen’s dear life take mine, and though / ‘Tis not so dear, yet ‘tis a life; you coined it.’335 Immediately after the speech, Posthumus falls asleep and has a dream in which he is visited by the ghosts of his parents and brothers, whom he never knew in life. The dream is vital to Posthumus’ rebirth: ‘[I]t is the recovery of his loving brothers and parents, the recovery of a childhood literally lost, that enables him to reintegrate himself as a man and reunite with Imogen.’336 Just as the change of clothes, the speech and the following dream articulate the process of spiritual death and rebirth – a process both instructive and purgatorial – promised by Christian sacrifice. The scenes hint at the Christian baptismal service, which itself symbolises the beginning of a new life. Like in the baptismal service, in these scenes one can observe a symbolic death through which one must pass in order to arise from it anew, to be reborn. However, the change of clothes and the dream, though witnessed by the audience, are both privately experienced rebirths. Thus, Posthumus is yet to have another, public rebirth, which will allow him to be “fully” reborn.

334 Shakespeare, 5.1.25-29.
335 Shakespeare, 5.3.116-117.
In the final scene, a penitent Iachimo recounts the story of the wager on Imogen’s chastity. However, his account is inaccurate as he assumes all the blame and excuses Posthumus’ behaviour, claiming that the latter was ‘as calm as virtue,’ which he obviously was not considering his unreasoning jealousy, and that he was ‘not dispraising whom [Imogen] we praised,’ whereas he did dispraise Imogen, and with her all women.\footnote{Shakespeare, 5.4.173-174.} At the end of his speech, Iachimo recognises Posthumus, who now steps out of the background and curses himself for his rash command for his wife’s death:

\begin{quote}
O give me cord, or knife, or poison,  
Some upright justicer! Thou King, send out  
For torturers ingenious. It is I  
That all th’abhorre’d things o’th’ earth amend  
By being worse than they.\footnote{Shakespeare, 5.4.213-217.}
\end{quote}

This self-incrimination might seem redundant or inaccurate given Posthumus’ rebirth(s) in the previous scenes. Nevertheless, it is necessary because the two earlier experiences of rebirth were both strictly personal. Cynthia Marshall, who focuses on this rebirth and that of the dream, explains it as follows: ‘Posthumus has been reconciled with one family, who exist only inside his memory, and now must seek reconciliation with his second family, who exist in the public arena.’\footnote{Cynthia Marshall, ‘2: Advent and Apocalypse in Cymbeline,’ in Last Things and Last Plays: Shakespearean Eschatology (Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991), p. 30.}

In his anger and despair, believing that Imogen has died for no reason, he strikes down whom he believes to be the pageboy Fidele, but who is really his wife in male disguise. When Posthumus comprehends that he has struck Imogen, his wonder at seeing her alive is articulated in words reflecting his own unsteady physical movement: ‘How comes these staggers on me?’\footnote{Shakespeare, 5.4.233.} At the moment of their reunion, Imogen embraces Posthumus, who tells her: ‘Hang there like fruit, my soul, / Till the tree die’ – words with particular overtones of growth and fertility.\footnote{Shakespeare, 5.4.263-264.} Husband and wife are then officially reunited by the exchange of jewels. Posthumus subsequently forgives Iachimo: ‘The power that I have on you is to spare you, / The malice towards you to forgive you. Live, / And deal with others better.’\footnote{Shakespeare, 5.4.219-221.}
Cymbeline follows Posthumus’ example and declares: ‘Pardon’s the word to all.’\(^{343}\) He forgives not only the Romans, who invaded Britain, but also Posthumus, who married Imogen, Belarius, who stole his sons, and Guiderius, who murdered the nobleman, Cloten. In this way, Posthumus’ forgiveness (though inspired by Imogen) serves as the harbinger of the rebirth of Britain.\(^ {344}\) Under the influence of his Queen, who advocated national independence, Cymbeline at first refused to pay the three thousand-pound tribute, which caused war between Rome and Britain. Now, however, even though he has won the war, Cymbeline is willing to pay the tax, thereby following the biblical precept: ‘Render [...] tribute to whom tribute is due.’\(^ {345}\) Because Cymbeline pays the tribute again, the peace between Britain and Rome is restored and Britain is effectively reborn. Thus, it is Posthumus’ forgiveness that inspires ‘Britain’s baptism as a nation at the end of the play in its incorporation into Rome and into the peace that ushered in the birth of Christ.’\(^ {346}\)

\(^{343}\) Shakespeare, 5.4.223.

\(^{344}\) Although Cymbeline claims to have been inspired by the ‘freeness of a son-in-law,’ it is in fact Imogen, who first commended a Christian sense of forgiveness by pardoning Posthumus for doubting her fidelity and ordering her murder. (Shakespeare, 5.4.422) Imogen functions as an important agent in the restoration of the alliance between Britain and Rome by taking on Lucius’ service as well as by promoting forgiveness.

\(^{345}\) Romans 13:7. Compare to Luke 20:22 and 20:25: When the Pharisees ask Christ: ‘Is it lawful for us to give tribute unto Caesar, or no?’ he replies: ‘Render [...] unto Caesar the things which be Caesar’s, and unto God the things which be God’s.’

\(^{346}\) Kirsch, p. 167.
Conclusion

The main purpose of this thesis has been the exploration of the concepts of recognition, misrecognition and partial recognition in Shakespeare’s play *Cymbeline*. In the first chapter, I have illustrated that disguise functions as a major plot device in complicating the recognition of a character’s true identity. I have shown that identity markers such as dress, performance and self-presentation are used as instruments of disguise. In the case of Cloten, clothing, in particular, has a direct impact on the character’s identity. By donning Posthumus’ clothes, Cloten tries to eliminate the former, but actually causes his own elimination as he gets killed by Guiderius. The substitutive disguise obstructs Imogen’s recognition of Cloten’s dead body: since the body’s head is missing, Imogen focuses too much on the clothes (and the body which, as has been made clear, resembles that of Posthumus), resulting in the misreading and the subsequent misrecognition of Cloten’s corpse. The misrecognition, as Erika T. Lin observes, is due to the fact that ‘[b]oth clothes and body parts here fail to function properly as markers of identity.’³⁴⁷ In the second part, I have shown that Imogen’s task-oriented disguise is a means for her to escape her predicament and a way to reclaim her identity as a chaste wife. Her cross-gender disguise involves a change of clothes and a change in character; Imogen’s femininity, as I have illustrated, becomes more pronounced when she pretends to be the page-boy, Fidele. Even though her disguise is convincing (no one onstage really recognises her), Imogen’s feminine identity is nonetheless partly recognised by her brothers, father and Lucius. Yet, it is only when Pisanio reveals Imogen’s true identity that the other characters fully recognise her. The third part has shown that Belarius (and with him Guiderius and Arviragus, though they are unaware of it) has adopted a Welsh disguise in order to conceal his own true identity and those of the princes. I have illustrated that the Welsh characters in this play are overall portrayed as noble and brave, which is at odds with the stereotypical dual depiction of the Welshman. The princes’ true identities are eventually revealed by Belarius and supported by external tokens (Arviragus’ mantle and Guiderius’ birthmark), leading to Cymbeline’s recognition of them as his long-lost sons. In the final part, I have shown that Posthumus’ task-oriented and improvisational disguise takes the form of national cross-dressing, whereby Posthumus’ changes of clothes coincide with his changes in national allegiance. I have also demonstrated that Posthumus’ costume changes are a visualisation of his flexible national identity, which combines British with Roman elements.

A second consideration of this thesis has been the aspect of gender politics in *Cymbeline*. I have analysed the gender roles of husband and wife in the light of the Renaissance gender stereotypes. The analyses have shown that a changed power relation leads to a deconstruction of the binary opposition of gender roles. The first part of the second chapter has explored the reversal of the traditional gender roles in the marriage of Cymbeline and the Queen. I have shown that the reversal is only temporary as the Queen is removed at the end of the play; she dies (which symbolises the cleansing of Britain) so as to allow the other characters (and Britain) to be reborn. I have illustrated that the patriarchal hierarchy undergoes a transformation, leading to a more “feminised patriarchy,” with at its head a “maternal” king. I have also examined Cymbeline’s misrecognition of the Queen’s evil character. The second part has examined the relationship between Posthumus and Imogen. I have demonstrated that the reversal of the marriage convention enables Shakespeare to dramatise the problems that can occur in marriage. I have analysed the gender identities of Posthumus and Imogen for which I used the theoretical framework of Ruth Kelso. The analysis has shown that the ideal (Renaissance) model for marriage is called into question here as Imogen, by being socially and morally superior to her husband, challenges the submissive model for women supported by Christian ideology.

A third consideration has been that of the seeming contrast between humble and noble birth in *Cymbeline*. First, I have analysed the play’s attitudes towards the court and the country. The analysis has shown that the court is characterised by wickedness, flattery, and corruption, and that these characteristics are primarily dramatised through the character of the Queen, whereas the country is portrayed as the ideal place for the king’s stolen sons to grow up. Second, I have examined the princes’ nobility in light of the notions of innate and learned nobility. The examination has demonstrated that the princes, though not brought up at court, possess a natural nobility fitting a civilised person, but that they, at the same time, have been taught to behave prince-like by the ex-courtier, Belarius. The combination of natural and learned nobility is precisely the reason why the boys do not completely belong to the category of the noble savage. I have illustrated that the play seems to encourage nature over nurture, but that this binary opposition turns out to be redundant: *Cymbeline* argues as much for nobility as being innate as it does for nobility as learned.

A fourth major concern has been the concepts of counterfeit death and rebirth and their functions within *Cymbeline*. The first part of the fourth chapter has analysed Imogen’s feigned death, which, as has been illustrated, is caused by Posthumus’ questioning of her
chastity (i.e. her purity, virginity and fidelity). I have shown that Imogen’s own interpretation of female chastity – her active demonstration of her virtue – results in her social death and that, through her social death, Imogen loses the freedom and power that she enjoyed before. I have illustrated that Imogen’s reduced agency is restored (albeit only partly) by her counterfeit death (and cross-dressing). I have looked at Imogen’s feigned burial and explained that the pre-Christian burial practices are a way for Shakespeare to remind the audience of the pagan setting of Cymbeline. I have discussed the moment of Imogen’s feigned resurrection as the turning point of the play: Imogen does not give way to despair and despondency, but decides to live – a decision which allows her to reassert control over her own life. I have also looked at elements (e.g. rhetorical questions) which Shakespeare employs as means to include the audience in Imogen’s experiences. I have examined Imogen’s rebirth, which, as has been demonstrated, takes the form of a miraculous event: the language of wonder expressed by both Imogen’s brothers and Cymbeline emphasises the miraculousness of the discovery. I have looked at the rituals which formally reunite Imogen with her father and husband: (the enactment through language of) the baptismal ritual and the marriage ritual (through the symbolic exchange of jewels). The latter ritual also formally restores Imogen’s reputation as a chaste woman.

The second part of the fourth chapter has discussed Posthumus’ feigned death and rebirth. I have argued that Posthumus’ counterfeit death is a consequence of his desire to purge his personality of the woman’s part – i.e. “deadly” and dangerous female characteristics, especially the female sexual body, which threaten his masculinity. First, I have analysed Posthumus’ misogynist speech, which reflects his ontological concerns. Looking at the interrelationship of the concepts of female chastity, procreation, and illegitimacy, I have demonstrated that Posthumus’ recognition of his maternal origin endangers his masculine identity. Second, I have shown how Posthumus “overcomes” the feminine contamination through displacement: the play displaces Posthumus’ sexual aggression onto Iachimo and Cloten, and hence allows for the fulfilment of Posthumus’ brutal sexual desires as well as for his protection from its damaging effects. I have illustrated that Cloten, who personifies the woman’s part, has to die so that Posthumus might (re)gain his purified manhood. Third, I have analysed Posthumus’ rebirths – it takes two private and one public rebirth for Posthumus to be fully reborn. The first private rebirth has occurred offstage, yet the play visualises Posthumus’ spiritual change through his change of clothes. I have argued that when Posthumus takes off his “Italian weeds” and puts on “the Briton peasant clothes,” he dies to
his old, sinful self and rises to a new, changed one. Posthumus’ second private rebirth enables him to recover his lost roots (i.e. reunion with his dead family) and to regain a coherent sense of identity. Posthumus experiences a complete rebirth after a public confession and a public display of repentance, allowing him to reunite with his wife. Lastly, I have argued that it is Posthumus’ forgiveness – though encouraged by Imogen’s earlier forgiveness – that inspires Britain’s rebirth.
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