

DRESSING THE PART: DISGUISE AS A FEMINIST MOTIF IN MARY SHELLEY'S
SHORT STORIES

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by
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Abstract

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This thesis examines how Mary Shelley implements the disguise motif in her short stories for two purposes. First, I argue that Shelley uses the disguise motif to covertly critique nineteenth-century patriarchal society and explore how female characters can gain agency through disguises. I also discuss how disguises draw attention to the female body. Through the disguise motif, Shelley writes several of the female characters' bodies as discourses that allow those characters to resist patriarchal oppression. Second, I contend that Shelley employs this motif to emphasize the importance of female education and the necessity of reason in the lives of women.

In this thesis, I analyze the following stories: "A Tale of the Passions" (1822), "The Bride of Modern Italy" (1824), "The Sisters of Albano" (1828), "Ferdinando Eboli: A Tale" (1828), "The Mourner" (1829), "The False Rhyme" (1829), "The Swiss Peasant" (1830), "Transformation" (1831), "The Brother and Sister: An Italian Story" (1832), "The Mortal Immortal" (1833), "The Pilgrims" (1837), and "Euphrasia: A Tale of Greece" (1838). I apply the postmodern, feminist approach of Hélène Cixous. Using her theory of *écriture féminine* or feminine writing, I read Shelley's female characters and their disguised bodies as

discourses. Additionally, I address the influence of Shelley's mother's proto-feminist polemic *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) on Shelley's disguise motif.

In the course of this thesis, I examine Shelley's disguised female characters, her disguised male characters, and finally, her female and male characters who disguise themselves in cooperation with one another. Concerning the disguised female characters, disguises provide agency for the women to enter into the public and political sphere, but disguises can allow other characters to censor the language of the female characters and their bodies. As a medium of feminine writing, the disguised female bodies are the embodied texts of the female characters. Concerning the disguised male characters, I read Shelley's disguise motif as her exploration of male social privilege. The disguised male bodies are the embodied texts of the male characters, and in this thesis, I juxtapose the embodied discourses of the female and male characters to highlight the marginalization of the female characters. Finally, I argue that Shelley incorporates the disguise motif to link disguised female and male characters and to suggest the possibility of equality between the sexes. Throughout my thesis, I address how Shelley uses the disguise motif to engage with Wollstonecraft's emphasis on the need for the proper education of women and men.

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Introduction

An Overview of Feminism and the Disguise Motif in Mary Shelley's Short Stories

Comparing Mary Shelley and her mother Mary Wollstonecraft, Joanna Russ asserts, “Mary Wollstonecraft was a feminist but her daughter was not” (124). Russ does not, however, explain what she means by “feminist.” Furthermore, she overlooks an entry from Shelley’s journal that indicates an engagement with feminist ideals. In one journal passage, Shelley writes, “If I have never written to vindicate the Rights of women, I have ever befriended women when oppressed—at every risk I have defended & supported victims to the social system” (2:557). This entry establishes that Shelley was invested in supporting oppressed women through her actions. For instance, Shelley came to the aid of her friends Mary Diana Dods and Isabella Robinson. In her book *Mary Diana Dods: A Gentleman and a Scholar*, Betty Bennett presents evidence that Shelley played a major role in helping Dods become a published author under the male pseudonym David Lyndsay so that Dods and her sister could earn money and “remain in London as accepted members of cosmopolitan society” (Bennett 206). Shelley also assisted Isabella Robinson when she became pregnant out of wedlock and faced social rejection. Shelley accomplished this by having Dods cross-dress as Walter Sholto Douglas and pose as Robinson’s spouse (Bennett 264-5). A.A. Markley writes, “No one familiar with Shelley’s history of having been almost entirely ostracized from ‘proper’ English society throughout her adult life would doubt her enthusiasm for shielding Isabella Robinson from the same fate, and her actions in this

undoubtedly strengthened her self-picture as a champion of her own sex” (“The Truth in Masquerade” 110). As evidenced by Shelley’s above journal entry and her actions, Shelley was a feminist. In her writing, including her short stories, she subtly explored the possibilities of equality between the sexes and highlighted the benefits of that equality. Mary Wollstonecraft was a more outspoken feminist, publishing explicit proto-feminist texts. Shelley tended to be more discreet due to her social situation and her need for the money she earned through writing, but she was a feminist nonetheless.

Because Shelley had to be subtle in her ideology, her stories are not blatantly feminist, but they contain motifs that can be read as feminist. This study examines how Mary Shelley employs disguise as a feminist motif in her short stories. While Shelley had published two stories with the disguise motif before her interaction with Dods, the majority of her stories that feature the disguise motif were published after the interaction. Markley suggests that her participation in this event may have had an influence on her short stories (“The Truth in Masquerade” 116). Because of Shelley’s role in Dods’ disguise, I decided to explore the implications of this interaction and the possible results it had upon Shelley’s short stories. I argue that the disguise motif represents Shelley’s critique of nineteenth-century English society’s oppressive treatment of women. Furthermore, the disguise motif allows characters to author themselves and to convey their messages, predominantly through their bodies. Other characters then read and interpret the characters’ disguises and bodies as signifiers of those messages. I address the disguised female and male characters’ bodies as texts, and I discuss how the stories contributed to the contemporaneous feminist discourse. Shelley’s often-anthologized stories “Transformation” (1831) and “The Mortal Immortal” (1833) feature disguises as do the following stories: “A Tale of the Passions” (1822), “The

Sisters of Albano” (1828), “Ferdinando Eboli: A Tale” (1828), “The Mourner” (1829), “The False Rhyme” (1829), “The Swiss Peasant” (1830), “The Brother and Sister: An Italian Story” (1832), “The Pilgrims,” (1837), “The Bride of Modern Italy” (1824), and “Euphrasia: A Tale of Greece” (1838). In several of the stories about disguised female characters, Shelley examines how disguises are more problematic for female characters than male characters due to the female characters’ subjugation by patriarchal societies. In contrast, Shelley uses the stories that feature disguised male characters to explore the often beneficial results of their disguises. Additionally, she conveys the capabilities and limitations of the characters’ bodies in public and private spaces in order to present the oppressive treatment of female characters versus the treatment of the male characters.

Disguise is any “altered fashion of dress and personal appearance intended to conceal the wearer’s identity” (“disguise”). In Shelley’s stories, characters usually disguise themselves with clothing, but there are a few instances that do not necessarily fit within the traditional definition. For example, one disguise involves characters trading bodies, and another disguise involves a character taking on a supposedly new identity. For this argument, disguise is any kind of concealment of information by which others might identify the disguised characters.

Concerning disguises in Shelley’s stories, the scholarship focuses on the oppressive relationship between the patriarchal society and the female characters. Markley’s article “‘The Truth in Masquerade’: Cross-dressing and Disguise in Mary Shelley’s Short Stories” interprets the disguise motif as Shelley’s response to her society’s attitude toward gender roles. Markley argues that Shelley uses disguised female characters to “[rework] both historical and contemporary literary traditions” of masquerade (109). He asserts that “her use

of the plot device of cross-dressing...calls attention to gender categories and markers of difference between the genders” (113). Moreover, he concludes that Shelley created her disguised female characters in order to question traditional gender and social roles within her culture. However, this questioning remained subtle enough for her to avoid censorship from the publishers of the gift books. Like many other scholars, Markley presents Shelley as a thoughtful negotiator of her patriarchal culture’s expectations of female characters.

My reading of Shelley’s stories expands on Markley’s argument, but I diverge from his reading by analyzing the disguise motif through the postmodern, feminist theory of Hélène Cixous rather than examining Shelley’s interaction with contemporaneous traditions of masquerade. Markley’s analysis of cross-dressing female characters is useful for its insight into the way that Shelley uses her characters to question gender roles. Additionally, his article is one of the few studies that focus on disguises in Shelley’s stories. I have defined cross-dressing as a disguise, and I incorporate Markley’s argument when I discuss the cross-dressing female characters. However, I analyze all of the disguised female characters and what the variety of disguises means for Shelley’s feminist critique of her patriarchal culture and her characters’ bodies as discourses. In my final chapter, I discuss two female characters who cross-dress in conjunction with two disguised male characters. Shelley examines gender roles through her cross-dressing female characters, as Markley argues, but she also employs these characters to suggest the possibility of equality between the sexes.

Cross-dressing and Disguises in the Early Nineteenth-Century

As Markley notes in his article, Shelley engaged with the cultural tradition of masquerade and conveyed her awareness of masquerade in her stories. Because the tradition

of masquerade precedes the practice of cross-dressing in the nineteenth century, I will discuss the tradition first and then nineteenth-century cross-dressing specifically.

The eighteenth century tended to be freer than the nineteenth century concerning masquerades and disguises. Terry Castle writes that the nineteenth century brought with it “the deinstitutionalization of the masquerade in English society...the closing of the public masquerade rooms...the gradual relegation of the costume party to the periphery of social life” (332). This change occurred in literature as well in which “carnival forms...like those of society, became increasingly marginal and reduced in scope” (Castle 333). The fading of masquerades in both English society and literature was connected to the conception of the modern self as fixed. Dror Wahrman states, “It suddenly became much harder for people to imagine identities as mutable, assumable, divisible, or actively malleable” (275). Shelley’s stories do not typically question the validity of this conception of identity. Shelley presents identity as stable. Several of her stories indicate that altering identity is nearly impossible, and if it is possible, the alteration is temporary. However, the stories do pinpoint how the female identity is treated differently than the male identity. Even the cross-dressing female characters face unfair treatment by the male characters and patriarchal institutions.

Cross-dressing had many cultural purposes, and in Shelley’s stories, the characters’ reasons for cross-dressing vary. The cross-dressing female characters disguise themselves as men in order to accomplish not only personal endeavors but also political goals. Vern and Bonnie Bullough write, “Many women...found the easiest way to escape their restrictive assigned role was to pass as a man rather than to fight what they believed to be an almost impossible battle against male prejudice” (157). Throughout Shelley’s stories, cross-dressing serves as a means for the female characters to combat male prejudice, but Shelley also

portrays how cross-dressing can fail to help a female character achieve her purpose. Occurring only once, male cross-dressing is much less prevalent in Shelley's stories. I assert that the disguised female characters outnumber the disguised male characters because the male characters do not need to disguise themselves in a patriarchal society. They have agency without disguises. The female characters do not have agency and need the disguises to help them gain that agency. Cross-dressing is not the only disguise in the stories, though. Shelley expands her motif of disguise to include characters wearing peasants' clothing, adopting new identities, and switching identities. Even concerning these types of disguises, female characters wear disguises more than male characters do. Through the disguise motif, Shelley implicitly questions and criticizes the patriarchal culture that forces women to disguise themselves in order to participate in the political and public sphere.

Feminism, Embodiment, and Education in Shelley's Stories

Although Shelley's female characters struggle to find a place within patriarchal society, many women participated in and contributed to English society in the nineteenth century. According to Anne Mellor, writing and social engagement allowed some women to participate just as much as men. She argues:

During the Romantic era women participated fully in the public sphere as Habermas defined it. They openly and frequently published their free and reasoned opinions on an enormous range of topics...Not only did women participate fully in the discursive public sphere, but their opinions had definable impact on the social movements, economic relationships, and state-regulated policies of the day. (2-3)

Mellor suggests that the binary of women in the private sphere and men in the public sphere is too reductive. Some women participated in political and/or public events during the Romantic era, but many women still felt patriarchal pressure to remain within their traditional social roles. Throughout Shelley's stories, female and male characters appear within both spheres, but the female characters have to disguise themselves to enter into the public sphere. Mellor's discussion of writing as a method of entering into the public sphere and Shelley's own participation in the public sphere through her writing demonstrates the importance of discourse for women. I argue that Shelley represents that discourse through the disguise motif and ultimately through the female characters' bodies because the disguise motif often calls attention to those bodies.

Numerous scholars have addressed the significance of the body in Shelley's stories, particularly those published in gift books, such as the *Keepsake*. Shelley's need for money after her husband's death compelled her to write stories for these gift books, but this relationship was often complicated by the limitations placed upon Shelley's writing. Sonia Hofkosh writes, "[Shelley] recognizes an economics of the marketplace, wherein production and consumption are compelled and constrained by publishers, editors, and readers" (205). Hofkosh describes Shelley's participation as "both dependent and resistant" (205). Additionally, Hofkosh connects nineteenth-century English society's commodification of gift books, which tended to be "gendered" and associated with women, to its treatment of the female body (207). Highlighting the poor treatment of the female body throughout Shelley's stories, Hofkosh writes, "Shelley depicts...how one woman's loss may be another's (a man's) gain, and how the losses women sustain uphold ideals of (intrinsic) beauty and truth, of authority, even as they imply the precarious foundation of those ideals" (210). Hofkosh

argues that Shelley's stories explore the relationship between the female characters' bodies and England's patriarchal society. Through an analysis of Shelley's female characters' bodies, Hofkosh concludes that Shelley's stories show her concern over women's suffering due to "the patrilinear economy" and the commodification of the female body as a possession that men aim to attain (215).

Although Hofkosh refers to "deception" in her analysis of several stories that feature disguises, she does not discuss the disguises specifically (209). She highlights the negative aspects of such deception, including how the "[female] body [is] the site" of mistreatment by other characters (210). While I agree that disguises can have negative implications, disguises can provide female characters with agency. I intend to read the bodies of Shelley's characters as the places upon which they can inscribe their own voices and/or write themselves into public and political spaces. The female characters' bodies are covertly feminist, and the lack of explicit feminism has much to do with Shelley's need for money and her main publisher as the conservative gift books.

Like Hofkosh, Charlotte Sussman addresses female characters and their bodies in Shelley's stories. In addition, she analyzes male characters and their bodies. Before comparing the characters' bodies, she discusses how the feminine content of the *Keepsake* was (and occasionally continues to be) compared negatively to "high art, associated with masculinity." Sussman writes:

The aesthetic attributes of the *Keepsake* are usually assumed to have appealed to middle-class female readers, who could display these tasteful objects in their parlors, as well as read them. Indeed, the association between the annuals and a kind of frivolous and feminine consumerism is responsible for much of

the abuse heaped upon them, both now and in their own day...The popular annuals, associated with women, [were divided] from high art, associated with masculinity. (165)

While the *Keepsake* tended to be criticized for its content, Sussman argues that writing for the gift books “gave [Shelley] a way of participating actively in polite society, which often otherwise shunned her due to her scandalous past” (Sussman 164). Besides her need for money, this inclusion is another reason that Shelley remains subtle in her feminist ideals. Concerning Shelley’s stories from the *Keepsake*, Sussman argues that disguise is a form of “economic exchange” that is often problematic for women but rarely for men (167). The female characters are devalued through their transformations, whereas the male character and his body are not devalued permanently by the exchange (170). I do not discuss disguises as economic exchanges because financial status as an identity category is outside of the scope of this project; however, Sussman’s assessment of the devalued female body supports my overall argument of bodies as discourses. The devaluing of women is what Shelley’s disguise motif critiques. I agree that disguises rarely affect the male characters negatively, and I will discuss how disguised male characters function in Shelley’s exploration of male social privilege and the female characters’ experiences.

While Marjean Purinton does not discuss disguises, she emphasizes the importance of the bodies of Shelley’s characters in her science fiction short stories. Purinton argues that Shelley’s “preoccupation with the body” in her stories is an examination of “corporeal limitations” (148). According to Purinton, this theme “conceals her negotiations with...feminism” because the limitations and expectations placed upon female characters and their bodies capture the struggles of women in patriarchal society (149). She discusses

language as a privilege that men have in dictating lived experiences. She writes, “Men’s experiences...become universal experiences, male-specific disguised as a gender-neutral” (159). She argues, “Somewhere in the spaces opened up between feminine forms and masculine language exists the possibility of existences other than those dictated by patriarchal...standards” (166). In her article, Purinton only analyzes “Transformation” and “The Mortal Immortal.” I apply her discussion of language and male privilege to all of Shelley’s stories involving disguised characters. I argue that the disguised body, particularly the disguised female body, is a place of discourse for the characters.

All of these scholars address the female characters’ bodies in Shelley’s stories, and while my thesis also addresses these bodies, I also read the bodies as speaking for the characters. Instead of the reading just the objectification of body, I address the treatment of the characters’ bodies as well as how the characters use their own bodies to resist this objectification.

Concerning the treatment of the body in society, Peta Bowden and Jane Mummery write, “The body is mostly described as something that needs to be overcome or transcended, something that stands in the way of people realizing themselves as properly human” (46). In the case of Shelley’s stories, the opposite is often true. The body is one way for the characters to recognize, appreciate, and understand their humanity. Because Shelley emphasizes the importance of her characters’ bodies, I read them as texts by which characters communicate. In order to read the bodies as discourses, I use Hélène Cixous’s theory of feminine writing (*écriture féminine*) from “The Laugh of the Medusa” (1975-6). In this text, Cixous argues that writing is phallogentric because language is inherently phallogentric. She asserts that women can overcome phallogentrism by writing more texts in their feminine

language. Cixous insists that this is possible because there is a “distinction between feminine and masculine writing” (1949). By writing in the feminine language, women subvert phallogocentric expectations of women (1954). Phallogocentrism is defined as “the psychoanalytic system in which sexual difference is defined as the difference between having and lacking the phallus; the term has come to refer to the patriarchal cultural system as a whole insofar as that system privileges the phallus as the symbol and source of power” (Leitch 1943). In Shelley’s stories, there is little explicit acknowledgement of the sexual difference between male and female bodies, but the narratives consistently show female characters suffering under patriarchal oppression. Shelley portrays male characters as not only holding positions of power but also having power over women. While phallogocentrism and patriarchy are not necessarily interchangeable, they are closely related, and I use both terms throughout my thesis.

Because language is phallogocentric and because language structures experience, many female bodies have been written as “lacking” the phallus rather than as a complete body that is not “lacking” anything. Patriarchal societies are founded upon men being associated with the phallus and women “lacking” such power. In the case of Shelley’s characters, the female characters disguise themselves in order to gain agency and power. Cixous asserts, “It is impossible to *define* a feminine practice of writing, and this is an impossibility that will remain, for this practice can never be theorized, enclosed, coded—which doesn’t mean that it doesn’t exist. But it will always surpass the discourse that regulates the phallogocentric system” (1949). Although Cixous asserts that the female language cannot be defined, she acknowledges that a woman “doesn’t ‘speak,’ she throws her trembling body forward...she physically materializes what she’s thinking; she signifies it with her body” (1947). Because

the body is a signifier of the feminine language, Cixous argues women writing their feminine experiences are able to take possession of their bodies again. Having a body provides them with agency (1947). Because bodies are tangible, their texts become tangible, and thus women can be heard. Bodies have social and political power: “Bodies and embodied relationships...count. They are fundamental, producing the basis for a healthier, less disconnected social world reconceived in relational terms, a world that does not denigrate everyday embodied life” (Bowden and Mummery 56). Shelley’s female characters use their bodies to engage with their social environments, and through their bodies, they challenge traditional expectations of women in patriarchal culture.

Although Cixous focuses on women writers, I want to expand her argument to address Shelley’s female characters as women who write with their bodies. The female characters write their political and public spaces with their disguised bodies that I refer to as “female-sexed texts” (Cixous 1944). Addressing these female characters’ bodies as “texts” allows me to discuss the female characters as “authors” of their actions and decisions. In some stories, other characters take control away from the female characters and become “authors” of the female characters’ bodies and actions. The disguise motif is a version of proto-feminine writing for the characters because it draws attention to the female characters’ bodies. Writing of the body, Cixous states, “A woman’s body, with its thousand and one thresholds of ardor—once, by smashing yokes and censors, she lets it articulate the profusion of meanings that run through it in every direction—will make the old single-grooved mother tongue reverberate with more than one language” (1952). For some of the disguised female characters, disguise can be a form of censorship in which they suppress parts of themselves or are repressed by other characters. Cixous uses “censor” and its various forms to refer to

repression, suppression, and/or oppression as a result of patriarchal pressures. Censorship carries with it connotations of writing and language, and because I am addressing bodies as discourse, I refer to repression, suppression, and/or oppression as censorship when appropriate.

In this thesis, I do not apply Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity to the cross-dressing characters, because I argue that Shelley does not view gender as fluid. Butler asserts that "the distinction between sex and gender serves the argument that whatever biological intractability sex appears to have, gender is culturally constructed: hence, gender is neither the causal result of sex nor as seemingly fixed as sex" (6). Shelley ensures that the characters' gender and sex are ultimately realigned with one another, even if the character temporarily presents herself as a man. Shelley's focus in the stories is on the "reconfiguration of traditional gender roles" rather than on the displacement of gender as a construct (Markley, "Mary Shelley's 'New Gothic'" 15). The cross-dressing characters maintain their innate identities as women and men, no matter their disguises. I acknowledge that feminine writing, as defined by Cixous, can lead to "the (essentialist) belief that there is a specifically female nature shared by all women, a nature entailed by the simple possession of a woman's body" (Bowden and Mummery 59). Although this theory can lead to essentialism, it does not negatively affect this particular reading. Shelley's female characters tend to be quite similar to one another—noble, passionate, and devoted. However, the narratives in which these characters appear are diverse. Some of the female characters live near or around royalty; others live in convents; and still others travel from place to place. Additionally, each of the characters has a different goal that she aims to achieve. Because of these various contexts, the characters' bodies as texts are distinct and nuanced.

Any feminist analysis of Shelley's writing requires acknowledgement of her mother, Mary Wollstonecraft. While the disguise motif interrogates patriarchal society, it also acts as an indication of Shelley's engagement with her mother's argument for proper female education. In order to address this influence, I apply the proto-feminist polemic of Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) to Shelley's disguised characters. Wollstonecraft was a major influence on Shelley, and her presence can be seen throughout the short stories. In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft argues that women had the right to the education that was often only provided for men during the eighteenth century. She delineates the issues that stem from the lack of female education, including women's fixation with marriage and women's lack of reasoning skills. Moreover, Wollstonecraft influenced Shelley's conception of feminism and the need to resist patriarchal repression. Although Wollstonecraft died ten days after her daughter was born, Shelley spent much time with her mother through Wollstonecraft's writings. Emily Sunstein writes, "[Shelley] devoured those of her mother's works...suitable for her age—textbooks, stories, her first novel, *Mary*. The daughter always signed her name in full...Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin" (37). Her adoration continued into adulthood. Sunstein states that women's rights became important to Shelley when she began to read the rest of her mother's writing, including *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (53). Shelley "worshiped [Wollstonecraft] both as a rational intellectual and romantic heroine who had defied injustice, custom, and prudence" (53). Shelley was not as outspoken as her mother about feminism, but her mother's feminism is present in Shelley's writing.

Overview of Argument

As this introduction argues, the disguise motif appears throughout Shelley's stories, and the attention that Shelley calls to the body has frequently been discussed in scholarship. Additionally, scholars agree that Shelley strikes a balance between her cultural constraints and her feminism. In my thesis, I address Shelley's use of disguise as a feminist motif. Her disguise motif engages with a variety of cultural practices, such as cross-dressing and masquerade, and highlights numerous social problems, such as the oppression of women and the importance of education for women. The rest of this thesis specifically analyzes disguised female characters, disguised male characters, and disguised female and male characters acting together. Shelley invents these characters for the purposes of entertaining her audience as well as critiquing her patriarchal society. Her female characters' bodies create discourses that address social and cultural problems. In addition, the disguise motif explores the theme of education for women. It does not explicitly advocate for educating women, but it provides examples of the benefits of education and the consequences of the lack of education.

In Chapter 1, I analyze the disguised female characters and their bodies as texts. Shelley examines the problematic treatment of female characters within a patriarchal society. My thesis is two-fold in addressing the disguise motif as a mode of agency for female characters and a means through which Shelley explores the importance of female education. First, I argue that disguises provide the female characters with agency to enter into the public sphere and to resist oppression. Disguises permit other characters to oppress or censor the female characters and their bodies for malicious purposes. Disguises lead to a variety of results in these stories, and I explore those various results through a feminist lens that examines bodies as discourses. Second, I argue the disguise motif presents Shelley's

response to Wollstonecraft's argument for proper female education. Concerning Shelley's engagement with Wollstonecraft, I analyze two examples that specifically explore the influence of education on the characters' decisions to disguise themselves. One example portrays the consequences of the lack of proper education, and the other portrays the effects of proper education.

In Chapter 2, I argue that Shelley uses her disguised male characters to explore the social privilege provided to men within a patriarchal society. The male characters trade bodies and clothing, and while they may be disadvantaged for a short time by their disguises, they can return to their original identities and bodies without permanent detriment. Throughout this chapter, I compare and contrast the experiences and discourses of the disguised male and female characters. One difference between the male characters and the female characters is that the male characters never cross-dress as women. I argue that this lack of male cross-dressing has to do with the fact that women are disadvantaged in society. The male character would not desire to change places with a female character who does not have the social privilege he already possesses. Shelley continues to engage with Wollstonecraft's ideas about education and the importance of that education for both men and women in the stories that feature disguised male characters. The disguises are directly connected to education, and Shelley's stories provide two examples. The first example is that the lack of education leads to the use of disguise for revenge. The second example is that a disguise leads to the appreciation of education's benefits.

In Chapter 3, I assert that the female and male characters who are disguised for the same goal demonstrate the possibility of equality between women and men within society. The female characters fit within traditional gender roles, but I find this is due to Shelley's

cultural constraints. Despite this limitation, the female characters write with their bodies and through those discourses, the characters gain agency. Furthermore, the female characters use that agency to support the male characters. In turn, the male characters provide the female characters with the social privilege to write their bodies and to be heard. Shelley engages with Wollstonecraft once more. In this chapter, I argue that the disguise motif emphasizes Wollstonecraft's desire for balanced relationships between men and women. Of the three stories, I examine in depth two of the stories present two different versions of marriage that support Wollstonecraft's argument for balanced relationships.

Chapter One

Disguised Female Characters in Mary Shelley's Short Stories

This chapter focuses on the disguised female characters in Mary Shelley's short stories. The female characters wear disguises more often than male characters. As I noted in the introduction, I find this disparity to be a result of the patriarchal subjugation of the female characters. Concerning the female characters, I discuss their disguises and bodies as Shelley's exploration and critique of that subjugation. In this chapter, I address the following stories: "The Brother and Sister," "The Sisters of Albano," "A Tale of the Passions," "Ferdinando Eboli," "The Mourner," and "The Swiss Peasant." In these stories, the female characters disguise themselves for various purposes, and this chapter explores what those disguises represent as Shelley's subtle feminist motif. I argue that Shelley incorporates the disguise motif to examine the oppression of the female characters by patriarchal society. These disguises provide agency to the female characters and allow them to write with their bodies; in addition, disguises can be a form of censorship by which another character may oppress the female character and write her body for her. As many scholars have pointed out, Shelley's texts conform to patriarchal standards of the gift books,¹ but these stories also present the benefits of and problems with the female characters having agency in the public

¹ A.A. Markley, Charlotte Sussman, and Sonia Hofkosh agree that Shelley meets the patriarchal expectations as she challenges the legitimacy of those expectations.

and political sphere. In addition, through the disguise motif, Shelley endorses Wollstonecraft's demand for female education.

Disguise and Embodiment

"The Brother and Sister"

"The Brother and Sister" is centered on a female character who disguises herself in order to find her brother, and in the process of this mission, writes herself into the political sphere, reuniting two embittered families. After a conflict between Lorenzo and Count Fabian, Lorenzo is exiled and his sister Flora is placed with Fabian and his family. Five years later, Flora and Fabian have grown fond of one another. Both of them want to find Lorenzo before they marry. Flora and Fabian plan individual missions to find him. Of Flora's mission, Shelley writes, "Her scheme was easily formed. She possessed herself of the garb of a pilgrim, and resolved on the day following the completion of the fifth year to depart from Sienna, and bend her steps towards Lombardy, buoyed up by the hope that she should gain some tidings of the object of all her care" (184). Fabian does not disguise himself for his journey. One reason that he does not have to disguise himself is class status; Fabian has more resources at his disposal than Flora does. Although Flora's family was once wealthy, she does not have the same status within Fabian's family. Because of this, she does not have the resources to travel in anything but disguise.

The other plausible reason is that Flora has yet to enter into the political sphere. Fabian is already involved in the political sphere; therefore, he does not have to write himself into that space. Flora has to figuratively write herself into the conflict, and Shelley gives her a voice through the disguise motif and her body as discourse. The narrator says of Flora's disguise: "Her pilgrim's garb inspired some respect, and she rested at convents by the way"

(188). Even though she has fewer resources than Fabian, she utilizes her disguise to receive assistance from other characters and manages to make the same journey that he does. Her disguise masks the goal of her mission, but it does not censor her. Flora chooses her disguise and chooses what to disguise about herself. In other words, she chooses how she writes about herself. Shelley creates the opportunity for Flora to author her own body as a text. Flora's disguise enables her to work toward "the general good," particularly of or for her family (Wollstonecraft 193). She restores peace between her family and Fabian's family.

Flora's disguise is the main method by which she gains her independence in society. Before her journey, she is not significantly independent. For example, when Flora begs to go with Lorenzo, he responds, "Fate divides us, and we must submit." Shelley describes Flora's response: "She obeyed—for obedience to her brother was the first and dearest of her duties" (173). The mission to find her brother gives Flora the opportunity to make her own decisions. Cixous writes, "By writing her self, woman will return to the body which has been more than confiscated from her, which has been turned into the uncanny stranger on display" (1946). While Flora is not literally writing, Flora expresses her discourse through her body by disguising herself. Shelley places Flora at the center of the narrative and writes her as a woman who is entering the public and political sphere for the first time. Her body becomes the discourse between the two families. She writes herself into the conflict and unites Lorenzo and Fabian through her love for both of them. Her discourse also gives her a voice in her future, allowing her to reunite with Lorenzo and to marry Fabian.

"The Sisters of Albano"

While Flora's disguise does not censor her, not all of Shelley's female characters are as fortunate. "The Sisters of Albano" presents the negative consequences of disguise as

censorship, portraying two sisters who switch clothing and their identities.² Both female characters are first located within typically feminized spaces, Maria in the convent and Anina in the house. The French government captures Anina after she attempts to contact her banditti-lover. Because of her disobedience, she is sentenced to be executed. Maria attempts to intervene on her sister's behalf and negotiate with the French officers. She hopes that her attire as a nun will convince the government to let her sister go, but it does not (59). In order to save her sister, she goes to the prison and tells Anina: "I will—I can save you—quick—we must change dresses" (60). This plan allows Anina to escape from her prison in Maria's nun outfit. Anina and Maria trade places with one another, though Maria is sure that her status as a nun will protect her (60). However, after a few moments of reflection, Maria realizes that the government does not care about her vocation as a nun or her innocence. Shelley writes, "The nun fell on her knees... instinctively she feared: the French had shown small respect for the monastic character... Would they be merciful to her, and spare the innocent! Alas! was not Anina innocent also?" (60). In her disguise, Anina is mistaken by the banditti as an actual nun and by her father as Maria (61, 63). The government does not mistake the sisters; it just does not care to differentiate between the women. Once it becomes clear that Anina has escaped and Maria dies in her place, Anina joins the convent. She becomes her sister's replacement, much like her sister became hers (62-3). Markley notes, "Ironically, while Anina was originally willing to alter identities to escape danger, she now feels that she must permanently retain the identity that bought her freedom" ("The Truth in Masquerade" 117). In this story, Anina and Maria appear to switch identities, but they have not literally switched identities. They have only switched places. In response to that switch, the French government

² Markley notes that this story was one "[written] and published just after the height of [Shelley's] experience with Mary Diana Dods" ("The Truth in Masquerade" 116).

censors Anina and Maria. It “censor[s] the body” of a female character and as a result, “censor[s] breath and speech at the same time” (Cixous 1946). Even the female characters participate in this censorship. Anina censors herself by halting her life outside the convent for one inside the convent, and Maria censors herself by dying in place of her sister.

The French government not only censors the women but also authors the women’s bodies as examples of the results of disobedience. Although Maria has some agency in disguising herself, her agency is taken away from her through her execution. The government is not concerned with the women as individuals but with a woman as a recipient of punishment. Unlike “The Brother and Sister,” this narrative is critical of the political conflict. Shelley distinguishes between the two stories by portraying Lorenzo and Fabian as brash but ultimately good and portraying the French government as cruel. The female characters are the recipients of different treatment, and Shelley uses their stories to communicate the difference. Flora is not censored when she engages in the political sphere. In fact, by putting on her disguise, she gains agency. The opposite is true of Anina and Maria. By putting on their disguises, they allow themselves to be repressed by the patriarchal French government and authored as patriarchal victims.

“A Tale of the Passions” and “Ferdinando Eboli”

In the next two stories, I discuss two female characters who cross-dress in order to accomplish their goals. As I mentioned in the introduction, cross-dressing is a way for the female characters to gain the social privilege that is often only extended to the male characters. Although some women participated in public discourse in the nineteenth-century, men were predominantly given social privilege. Cixous writes of traditional “phallogocentric” society: “As a woman, I’ve been clouded over by the great shadow of the scepter [of the

phallus] and been told: idolize it, that which you cannot brandish” (1950). In the case of Despina and Adalinda, they manipulate their social contexts that idolize the scepter of the phallus in order to achieve their individual goals.

In “A Tale of the Passions,” Despina disguises herself a man in order to reach Lostendardo to convince him not to fight against Prince Corradino. This mission is complicated by the fact that Corradino is a replacement for the fallen king Manfred for whom Despina felt unrequited love and for whom Lostendardo felt jealousy because of his lust for Despina. Despina’s disguise as “Ricciardo de’ Rossini” provides her with agency, but it becomes the means by which Lostendardo censors her as a woman. The disguise provides Despina with two options for expressing her agency. First, she inhabits the position of a woman when she wants to, and second, she possesses the social privilege that men have and can employ it when she needs to. Markley argues:

Cross-dressing is central to this story...Despina defies contemporary Italian gender and social restrictions and disguises herself so as to become politically active, even though her means of doing so must include her reverting to a female’s role in order to play on Lostendardo’s attraction towards her. The character displays a remarkable facility in embodying or discarding conventional roles as needed. (“The Truth in Masquerade” 114)

Using Despina’s manipulation of gender roles, Shelley portrays the elasticity that disguises provide for the female characters within a patriarchal society. The disguise gives Despina the opportunity to choose the roles she wishes to fill and when she wants to do so. Up until she dies, Despina’s body is her text. Lostendardo recognizes that text as a “female-sexed [text]” at the end of the story (Cixous 1944). He laments his life of evil and ends his life

“murmuring the names of Corradino, Manfred, and Despina” (23). Lostendardo remembers Despina not as Ricciardo, but as Despina.

While the disguise allows Despina to participate in her mission, it becomes an opportunity for Lostendardo to censor Despina and her discourse. After Despina’s death, he exhibits her corpse:

Lostendardo ordered the curtains to be withdrawn, the white hand that hung inanimate from the side was thin as a winter leaf and her fair face, pillowed by the thick knots of her dark hair, was sunken and ashy pale...She was still in the attire in which she had presented herself at the house of Cincolo: perhaps her tormentor thought that her appearance as a youth would attract less compassion than if a lovely woman were thus dragged to so unnatural a scene.

(23)

Lostendardo censors Despina’s body by writing her into the public scene as a male page rather than as a woman. Shelley presents this censorship to critique the patriarchal culture that crushes and oppresses the female characters. Despina writes her body into the political sphere by placing herself between Lostendardo and Corradino, but once she dies, Lostendardo assumes the power to rewrite Despina, and he authors her as a man.

“Ferdinando Eboli” also features a cross-dressing female character. Adalinda uses her disguise to resist the patriarchal culture and create a voice for herself within that culture.³ In “Ferdinando Eboli,” the misguided brother Ludovico kidnaps his brother Ferdinand and replaces him, taking Ferdinand’s fiancée Adalinda as his betrothed. Adalinda cannot tell that Ludovico has replaced Ferdinand until he imprisons her in her own home. After Ludovico

³ Markley connects this story to Shelley’s interaction with Dods as well (““The Truth in Masquerade”” 116).

imprisons her, she attempts to escape by reasoning with Ludovico. When her reasoning does not work, she decides that she needs to escape through other means, and her decision leads her to cross-dress as a male page. Shelley writes:

One hour's deliberation suggested to her a method of escape from her terrible situation. In a wardrobe at the castle lay in their pristine gloss the habiliments of a page of her mother, who had died suddenly, leaving these unworn relics at his station. Dressing herself in these, she tied up her dark shining hair, and even, with a somewhat bitter feeling, girded on the slight sword that appertained to the costume. (76)

The choice to disguise herself is one that Adalinda takes on reluctantly. The text does not specify why she is reluctant. She disguises herself because Ludovico makes her home a prison. Having to flee in disguise from her home may be one reason for her unwillingness. Her home is no longer her space, but rather it becomes a phallogentric space. In spite of her hesitancy, she makes the decision to disguise herself. This disguise acts as Adalinda writing herself as a resistance to Ludovico. Cixous writes, "Every woman has known the torment of getting up to speak...her words fall almost always upon the deaf male ear, which hears in language only that which speaks in the masculine" (1947). In response to Ludovico's refusal to acknowledge Adalinda's plea, she uses her body to write her plea and escape. Even though she dresses as a man, she gets "within" the language of her body to express herself as a woman (Cixous 1955). Moreover, Ludovico recognizes her disappearance as a resistance to his plans. She is "the pledge of his safety and success," and without her, he is vulnerable to being revealed as an imposter (79). Unlike Despina, Adalinda is not censored by her disguise. One reason for this difference is that Despina is entering into a phallogentric space,

and Adalinda is leaving one. The prison is phallogentric because it is a space created for Ludovico's purposes and a space in which Adalinda's desires are ignored. When she chooses to dress as a male page, she leaves her role as a restricted woman to become a woman disguised as man who can escape the prison without question.

The conclusions of the narratives are different because Shelley knows the difference between submitting to patriarchal society in order to enter into it and resisting that patriarchal society and its demands. Her narratives for the gift books had to be covertly feminist if she was to avoid censorship. She entered into the patriarchal culture and submitted to certain demands in order to publish her stories, but she did not sacrifice her feminism completely. Adalinda is one example of Shelley's implicit questioning of her culture because Adalinda speaks through her body in resistance. Furthermore, she survives the incident and provides Ludovico the opportunity to be forgiven and redeemed for his mistreatment of her and Ferdinando. Additionally, neither Ferdinand nor Ludovico censors Adalinda in the narrative, even if Ludovico had wanted to do so at one point. In "A Tale of the Passions," Lostendardo is not as fortunate. He ends up suffering the consequences of censoring Despina. Shelley shows the marginalization of women by patriarchal individuals, and she shows the negative effects it has on both male and female characters.

Cross-dressing calls Cixous's notion of "female-sexed texts" into question (1944). I argue that the characters write with male bodies until they find the appropriate context within which they can write with their female bodies. These female characters are writing their discourses within certain spaces, but they are doing so disguised as men. Cixous writes, "Women should break out of the snare of silence... She doesn't 'speak,' she throws her trembling body forward... it's with her body that she vitally supports the 'logic' of her

speech” (1947). Both of these characters choose to use their bodies to convey their individual messages. By wearing the disguises, the characters choose to speak, even if it is not always with their spoken words. Yet their bodies do express a language, and it is a language that the male characters recognize as definitively female. (As I have mentioned previously, one example of this is that Lostendardo remembers Despina as a woman rather than a man). Thus, even though the characters cross-dress, they are recognized as women. Cixous argues that “writing is precisely the *very possibility of change*, the space that can serve as a springboard for subversive thought, the precursory movement of a transformation of social and cultural structures” (1946). These female characters change their cultural and social environments through their female bodily discourses.

“The Mourner”

Previously to this point, the characters have worn clothing to alter their identities and present new ones. Most of the characters hold onto their two identities and employ the identity most appropriate for the situation. In “The Mourner,” the female character represses one identity for another. Clarice believes that she caused her father’s death, and in response, she ostracizes herself from society. She disguises herself as Ellen. As Ellen, she takes on supposedly new identity: name, location, and class; however, she maintains the same gender. This disguise becomes a censorship of herself, and Shelley uses this disguise motif to convey the negative results of a woman who internalizes the patriarchal oppression that she is interchangeable with another woman. Clarice creates a paradox within herself. She sees herself as interchangeable with Ellen, but she also sees herself as completely distinct from Ellen. Even so, she has attempted to replace one self for another.

In “The Mourner,” Henry recounts his interactions with the woman he has come to know as Ellen and how he comes to discover that she has a hidden past. Henry describes his first interaction with Ellen and even then, he recognizes that she has a mismatched but unexplainable appearance: “When I awoke, the first object that met my opening eyes was a little foot, delicately clad in silk and soft kid. I looked up in dismay, expecting to behold some gaily dressed appendage to this indication of high-bred elegance; but I saw a girl, perhaps seventeen, simply clad in a dark cotton dress” (87). When he visits her secluded home, he realizes that Ellen is disguising herself:

Yet it was the dwelling of my lovely guide, whose little white hand, delicately gloved, contrasted with her unadorned attire, as did her gentle self with the clumsy appurtenances of her too humble dwelling. Poor child! she had meant entirely to hide her origin, to degrade herself to a peasant’s state, and little thought that she for ever betrayed herself by the strangest incongruities. Thus, the arrangements of her table were mean, her fare meager for a hermit; but the linen was matchlessly fine, and wax lights stood in the candlesticks which a beggar would almost have disdained to own. (88)

Henry later learns that she is not simply wearing her disguise. She is her disguise. Ellen is the disguise for Clarice who is attempting to hide her past as a perceived “parricide.” Because of her perceived wrongdoing, she fixates on “self-destruction” (89). This notion of “self-destruction” works in two ways within the story. First, she wishes to die physically. This kind of self-destruction is literal in that she wishes to commit suicide. She never does commit suicide, but her desire to do so fits the first accepted meaning of “self-destruction.” The second kind of self-destruction is more abstract. She has committed “self-destruction” in

another way because she leaves behind her life as Clarice and begins a life as Ellen. She has censored her body and desires to literally censor her breath as Ellen (Cixous 1945). She has already done as much with Clarice by leaving her existence as Clarice behind.

Henry eventually meets Lewis, Clarice's fiancé, by coincidence. Lewis shares a "miniature" of Clarice, and Henry recognizes Clarice as Ellen (96). To see if they might be able to locate her, they return to Ellen's cottage in the woods. All that is left is a letter. Ellen confirms in her letter that she has left behind one self for another: "Describe your poor Ellen to [Lewis], and he will speedily see that *she* died on the waves of the murderous Atlantic. Ellen had nothing in common with *her*, save love for, and interest in him" (98). Ellen acknowledges Clarice, but she disassociates herself from her. Concerning the modern identity, Wahrman writes, "Just as it became harder to imagine a person's gender roaming away from his or her sex (without severe consequences), or civilization from race, or political behavior from class, so it became harder to imagine...that personhood, or the self, could roam away from the man [sic]" (278). In "The Mourner," Shelley explores what happens when a female character attempts to "[roam] away from" certain portions of her identity by taking on a disguise (Wahrman 278). Ultimately, nothing is inherently different about Ellen. She suppresses one self for another. Instead of outward pressures from society, the pressure is inward. Ellen treats herself as interchangeable with Clarice. She attempts to appreciate the difference between herself and Clarice, but she cannot, hence her overwhelming desire to die. If she truly believed that she was not Clarice, she would see Ellen as innocent. Shelley creates a character who has internalized the pressure that many of the other characters have faced outwardly.

Disguise and Education

“The Mourner” continued

At first, Ellen appears to be the author of her own identity, but one characteristic from her past seems to prevent her from engaging with her body as an author. Before her father died, he gave Ellen an education, yet Ellen’s education is one of “entire dependence” upon her father (92). This dependence leads her to disguise herself as Ellen and to censor Clarice because Clarice is not a whole person without her father. Her disguise is authored partially by her father, even if he is absent for her disguise as Ellen. Shelley is not blatantly critical of Clarice’s education because the problem is not the education itself but the unhealthy dependence of daughter on father. The influence of Wollstonecraft on Shelley’s writing suggests that she is aware of the issues that stem from overwhelming devotion to men (92). Wollstonecraft writes about the necessity of providing women and men with similar educations:

Reason offers [women] sober light...let them not be treated like slaves; or, like the brutes who are dependent on the reason of man, when they associate with him; but cultivate their minds, give them the salutary sublime curb of principle, and let them attain conscious dignity of feeling themselves dependent only on God. Teach them in common with man, to submit to necessity, instead of giving, to render them more pleasing, a sex to morals.

(40)

Even if Shelley is not overtly critical of Clarice’s education, “The Mourner” indicates that the education fails to provide her with the necessary reason and stability to live her life as Clarice without her father. She has found herself completely “dependent on the reason of

man” (38). She is the victim of obsessional guilt. The consequences of Clarice’s defective education affirm Wollstonecraft’s argument that women need strong educations. In contrast, in “The Brother and Sister,” Flora is not wholly dependent upon Lorenzo. Although Flora has obeyed him for most of her life, she learns to develop her own voice.

In the previous stories, Wollstonecraft’s emphasis on the importance of female reason appears. In “The Sisters of Albano,” Anina enters the political sphere to contact her lover. Her decision is based on passion rather than on reason. In “A Tale of the Passions,” Despina also makes her decisions based on passion, and her unreasonable devotion is one of the contributing factors to the failure of her mission to convince Lostendardo not to fight Corradino.⁴ Despina’s “passion for her political agenda is not easily distinguishable from her sexual passion for her political leader [Manfred]” (Markley, ““The Truth in Masquerade”” 116). Lostendardo recognizes that passion, and when he sees that it motivates her actions, the narrator says of him: “From the moment that she had rejected him, the fire of rage had burned in his heart” (16). Despina’s passion for Manfred pushes her to take up a disguise, and that disguise fails her in the end because of her passion. Wollstonecraft writes, “Women...have no other scheme to sharpen their faculties...no, their thoughts are not employed in rearing such noble structures [outside of marriage]” (64). Shelley echoes her mother in her concern for women who are guided solely by passion and lack the ability to reason carefully. Wollstonecraft also writes, “I love man as my fellow; but his scepter, real or usurped, extends not to me, unless the reason of an individual demands my homage; and

⁴ Shelley’s novel *The Last Man* (1826) features a female character who cross-dresses as a man and enters into the public and political sphere because of her passion for a man who has discarded her. In this novel, the narrator writes of the disguised female character: “The dress of this person was that of a soldier, but the bared neck and arms, and the continued shrieks discovered a female thus disguised” (131).

even then the submission is to reason, and not to man” (40). These stories reflect Shelley’s engagement with Wollstonecraft’s argument about the necessity of reason for women.

“The Swiss Peasant”

Shelley provides one example of how the disguise motif can allow a woman to write her space into a political and public sphere and still maintain her ability to reason. “The Swiss Peasant” is a story about Fanny’s life with her adoptive family during the time of a conflict between peasants and the aristocracy in which her adoptive family participates. In “The Swiss Peasant,” the female characters make a conscious effort to disguise class status. Other stories have more transformative disguises. For example, in “A Tale of the Passions,” Despina adopts a new name and gender, and in “The Mourner,” Ellen adopts a disguise of not only class but also of name, location, and history. The disguise of class is not as transformative as these other disguises, yet it does not need to be for Fanny. Her ability to successfully negotiate with the peasants has little to do with the influence of the disguise; however, the disguise is the motif by which Shelley highlights the benefits of a proper education for women.

The female characters Madame Marville and Fanny disguise themselves in peasants’ clothes. Even though the peasants know Madame Marville’s identity, her class is disguised so as not to draw attention to herself. The narrator says of this choice:

In consequence of the disturbed state of the district through which they were to pass,—where the appearance of one of the upper classes excited the fiercest enmity, and frightful insult, if not death, was their sure welcome,—Madame and her friend assumed a peasant’s garb... They passed a peasant or two, who uttered a malediction or imprecation on them as they went. (146-7)

The text suggests that this disguise of class is their attempt to protect themselves from the peasants who eventually discover Madame Marville's son Henry in their carriage. The mob intends to take Henry away, but Fanny is able to negotiate for Henry's life, and the family leaves the town unharmed. What saves Fanny and her family is not her disguise but her intellect. Fanny successfully negotiates for Henry's life because of "courage and forethought in [her] more energetic mind" (146). Although Madame Marville encourages Fanny to find a husband, she makes provisions for Fanny to receive "a bourgeois education [in her youth], which would raise her from the hardships of a peasant's life" (140). In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft writes:

Females...denied all political privileges, and not allowed as married women, excepting in criminal cases, a civil existence, have their attention naturally drawn from the interest of the whole community to that of the minute parts, though the private duty of any member of society must be very imperfectly performed when not connected with the general good. The mighty business of female life is to please, and restrained from entering in to more important concerns by political and civil oppression, sentiments become events, and reflection deepens what it should, and would have effaced, if the understanding had been allowed to take a wider range. (193)

Fanny enters the political sphere in order to protect her family. Her focus is not on marriage but on "the general good" of her family. She enters into the political sphere to rescue Henry from death. She writes herself as a capable, courageous, and intelligent woman into a dangerous political sphere. She speaks with her body and her mind to convey the significance

of her message. Her message is to protect her family from harm, and through her body, she does so.⁵

Shelley's disguise motif serves two feminist functions: embodiment and education. Although these stories have often been overlooked by scholars, they shed light on these two important points. First, Shelley uses disguise as a feminist motif to write female characters' bodies as texts. This motif demonstrates the agency that those bodies as texts possess. Shelley examines how patriarchal culture disregards female identity; however, she does not stop there. Her stories subtly suggest that women resist such patriarchal writing of their places into public and political spaces. Second, the stories engage with Wollstonecraft and her theories about female education, particularly with her demand for reason. Disguises can censor female characters' bodies and identities, but disguises do not have to censor the female characters' ability to reason. Proper education develops the ability to reason and help the female characters decide how to thoughtfully disguise themselves. To call these stories explicitly feminist overlooks the nuances of Shelley's situation as a writer in patriarchal society. To call these stories covertly feminist is more accurate. Shelley writes her stories to

⁵ I will mention two of Shelley's stories that hint at disguises. "The Bride of Modern Italy" does not contain a description of the disguise; it is not worn in the narrative at any point. It serves a purpose as the suggested method of Clorinda's possible escape from the convent (38). In this satirical story, Clorinda expresses the desire to leave, and once she believes that Alleyn will help her escape, she tells him of the ready and waiting disguise (38). Even though her parents overrule her choice, Clorinda's plan to escape from the convent suggests that she is willing to resist the patriarchal structure of her society, though she never actually does. All of her discussion of escape is for nothing. This story does not fit into this analysis because the tone is quite different from that of the other stories. Much like "The Bride of Modern Italy," "Euphrasia" does not offer a detailed description of the disguise. Constantine tells the story of the kidnapping and death of his sister Euphrasia. When he locates her, he says, "No disguise can hide thee, dressed as a Turkish bride crowned with flowers, thy lovely face, the seat of unutterable woe" (304). The engraving that appears with the narrative offers a picture of Constantine carrying Euphrasia "dressed as a Turkish bride." Beyond this line, there is no more description. Essentially, the disguise is only mentioned to further Constantine's narrative.

entertain without antagonizing her nineteenth-century audience, yet she uses the disguise motif as a way to question her society's treatment of women. Furthermore, she implicitly engages with feminist concerns about patriarchal repression of her female characters and the importance of female education.

Chapter Two

Disguised Male Characters in Mary Shelley's Short Stories

As I noted in the introduction, Anne Mellor argues, "During the Romantic era, women participated fully in the public sphere" (2). In Shelley's stories, many of her female characters participate in the public sphere, but this participation does not negate the patriarchal culture into which these female characters are writing themselves. Even though most of the female characters participate, the structure of the communities in Shelley's stories and her society in England were centered on male discourse. Shelley's use of the disguise motif examines the social and bodily privilege of male characters' abilities to retain and/or regain their individuality and bodies within a social and personal context. Many of the male characters are forgiven and readmitted into society. Furthermore, the male characters do not have to suffer permanently for wearing disguises. This privilege is rarely extended to the female characters. This chapter addresses how Shelley writes disguise as a feminist motif to present both the male characters as possessors of social privilege and the female characters as devalued by patriarchal society. Throughout these stories, Shelley continues to engage with Wollstonecraft's polemic of the importance of proper education for both men and women.

In this chapter, I analyze the stories "Transformation," "Ferdinando Eboli," and "The Pilgrims." Masculinity and male social privilege are the main characteristics for conveying the difference between the male and female characters in the stories. John Tosh writes about masculinity and nineteenth-century literature as follows:

[A] problem with manliness is its cerebral and bloodless quality... While manliness can in theory be defined as a mingling of the ethical and the physiological, a great deal of the literature of the day left the overwhelming impression that masculine identification resided in the life of the mind (heavily overlaid by conscience) rather than the body. (32)

Shelley's stories portray masculinity as a mental and physical quality, and the masculine identity is conveyed both through the mind and the body. Recognition of male characters and differentiating between two male characters is challenging for some of the characters at first, but none of the narratives mistake one male character for another permanently. This treatment is not extended to the female characters. In "The Mourner," the narrative does not differentiate between Ellen and Clarice until Henry and Lewis have compared their stories. Even though readers know that Ellen is Clarice, Ellen is insistent that one woman has been replaced with another. The male characters in this chapter are not considered "replaceable" or "interchangeable."

Disguise and Embodiment

"Transformation"

Likely the most anthologized of Shelley's stories, "Transformation" is a definitive and dramatic example of this male social privilege. The protagonist Guido trades bodies with a malign dwarf, but he soon finds that the dwarf takes over his life, and Guido must take his body back through force. This confiscation of the body suggests a connection with the "woman's disempowered body" in patriarchal society (Hofkosh 215). Because of this connection, "Transformation" has often been read through a feminist lens. Both Scott Simpkins and Charlotte Sussman assert that "Transformation" is a revision of patriarchal

Romanticism. Simpkins states, “In Romantic literature, women are...commonly denied the use of direct discourse in works in which they appear but are relegated through a male narrator to a position of auditor rather than speaker” (9). Because Shelley is a woman using a male narrator to convey the way that Juliet is objectified and marginalized, she uses her text to “[prompt] male-oriented readers to mouth her discourse with the dumb acquiescence of a marionette” (Simpkins 12). In her article, Sussman writes of “Transformation” as follows: “Shelley’s story can...be read as a feminine revision of Romantic ideology, a revision that assimilates the Faust myth to the values of the annuals [in which Shelley published]” (169). I agree with their assessment, and I read this story as a feminist tale, particularly through the disguise motif. While Shelley does not necessarily produce strict feminine writing as Cixous describes it because her narrator is a man, she writes “Transformation” and uses it for her the purpose of covertly criticizing phallogocentrism. She utilizes the language of patriarchal discourse “to make it hers, containing it, taking it in her own mouth, biting that tongue with her very own teeth to invent for herself a language to get inside of” (Cixous 1953). The disguise motif allows Shelley to covertly communicate her exploration of male privilege.

In “Transformation,” Guido is carefree and prodigal with his inheritance after his father’s death. When Guido states his desire to marry his childhood love, Juliet, her father agrees, but only if Guido restricts his spending and behavior. He refuses such restraints and leaves. His anger stems from the fact that he cannot have Juliet when he wants her. Sonia Hofkosh suggests that Juliet represents much more than a woman to him and also much less. She writes, “Juliet...embodies [Guido’s] place and his possessions in the line of the fathers” (213). Juliet is more than a woman; she is a representation of his possessions. Juliet is also less than a woman because she is objectified. The restraints upon Guido are more than just a

barrier to his independence. They are a barrier to his social and class status. To mull over his situation, he wanders to the ocean. When he is there, he meets “a misshapen dwarf” (127). This dwarf appears either to be the devil or to possess a relationship with the devil. Guido tells the dwarf: “Had I gold, much could I achieve; but, poor and single, I am powerless” (128). Offering his help, the dwarf suggests the following plan of trading bodies. Guido responds:

“As nothing is my sole inheritance, what besides nothing would you have?”

“Your comely face and well-made limbs.”

I shivered. Would this all-powerful monster murder me? I had no dagger. I forgot to pray—but I grew pale.

“I ask for a loan, not a gift,” said the frightful thing: “lend me your body for three days—you shall have mine to cage your soul the while, and, in payment, my chest. What say you to the bargain?—Three short days.”

(129)

When the dwarf does not return after three days, Guido rejects the treasure he has been given. He says, “I will not blacken these pages with demoniac ravings. All too terrible were the thoughts, the raging tumult of ideas that filled my soul” (130). Guido’s negative personality traits have not changed, and this lack of change confirms that Shelley has given Guido an inner core that cannot be changed as easily as his outer self can be. Markley notes that this story presents Guido as “mirrored by his horrific double...Mary Shelley here creates a pair of doubles whose outward forms are extreme opposites, and by doing so reiterates questions regarding outer appearance versus inner virtues” (“Mary Shelley’s ‘New Gothic’” 19). Guido finds himself in a situation in which his body represents his inner depravity. In the

chapter on female characters, I showed that the women do not take on disguises that match their personalities. They take disguises that provide them with agency. Guido's trade leads his inner qualities to be expressed on his body through his new body as a dwarf. Like the female characters, he has become part of a marginalized group. Guido's experience is still a man's, but he is part of a marginalized group that lacks social privilege within a traditionally patriarchal society.

A dream of the dwarf disguised as the handsome Guido wooing Juliet inspires Guido to sneak back into town. At this point, he finds his dwarf-disguise quite useful: "[The town] had not exiled the foul limbs I wore; I might with these enter, without fear of incurring the threatened penalty of death, my own, my native city" (131). Upon his return, he finds that many people, including Juliet and her father, have forgiven the dwarf disguised as Guido for his bad behavior. He has been accepted back into the community. The dwarf is now in good standing to marry Juliet and earn the possessions attached to the marriage. When Guido believes that the dwarf plans to seduce Juliet, he stabs the dwarf. This action allows Guido to transform back into his original body. He survives and marries Juliet. He says to the reader, "Before you too much condemn me, permit me to say that no one better knows than I the value of his own body; no one, probably, except myself, ever having had it stolen from him" (135). His dwarf body prevents him from engaging with many people, and in his marginalized state, he experiences Juliet's experience of being a woman whose body is overlooked discourse (131).

This story is different from the other stories discussed because of the method of disguise. The body is often the disguised object. In the other stories, the body is not traded as a form of disguise; the disguise represents the means of achieving what a character wants. In

the case of “Transformation,” the body is the disguise. Marjean Purinton argues, “Shelley decenters notions of sexually-coded bodies, coherent selfhoods, and fixed identities” (154). I argue that the characters’ bodies remain “sexually-coded” because gender swapping does not occur. Guido is always a man, even in his switch with the dwarf. Juliet is always a woman, always objectified by three of the male characters. She does not possess the agency that Guido does to make a trade for bodies because her body is not hers to begin with. She belongs to her father, then to Guido, then to the dwarf as Guido, and then to Guido once more. “Transformation” brings up the issue of male privilege. Unlike the disguises in the last chapter, this trade between the male bodies or these disguises is “magical” or “supernatural.” This switch suggests the privilege that men have because they can transcend their earthly bodies and those expectations, even if it is through magic. Purinton asserts that this story focuses on how “[Guido can] overcome corporeal limitations” (148). Guido is able to transcend his body, enter the body of another person, and return to his own body once more. I do not agree that the transformation itself is a privilege. However, I argue that the return to his original body is his social, bodily privilege. Most of the female characters do not have that privilege. Sussman writes of Guido’s body: “The male body, furthermore, retains its coherence through these exchanges—even after Guido trades it away, he can get it back” (170). He stabs himself, and he is able to return to his body and the dwarf to the other body.

Unlike many of the female characters, none of the disguised male characters in these stories have to maintain their disguises. Despina, Maria, and Ellen remain in disguise to the time of their deaths, and in the case of Anina, for the remainder of her life. This is not the case for Guido because he returns as the author of his own body. He is not permanently censored. His body is stolen from him, but he knows of a way to get it back. At the beginning

of their deal, the dwarf provides him with a spell on how he can get his body back “did [the dwarf] wish to play [him] false” (129). Several of the female characters do not have that option. Their disguises are permanent, and that inability to change disguise is censorship rather than agency. Shelley portrays the social and personal privilege that the male characters have and how that privilege is not extended to the female characters.

“Ferdinando Eboli”

The next story I discuss is “Ferdinando Eboli.” This story shares a similar method of disguise with “The Sisters of Albano.” However, in “Ferdinando Eboli,” the imposter brother Ludovico kidnaps Ferdinand and forcibly switches clothing with him. Throughout the rest of the story, Ferdinand attempts to regain his identity and to prove that his brother is, in fact, the imposter. During a mission with the army, Ferdinand is captured and forced to wear peasant’s clothes. Shelley writes, “With extreme care and celerity, yet in the utmost silence, he was stripped of his clothes, and two rings he wore, drawn from his fingers; other habiliments were thrown over him” (68). Shelley further elaborates upon Ferdinand’s appearance: “He looked at the dress which had been given him in exchange for that which he had worn. It was of the plainest and meanest description” (69). Ludovico’s new and richer apparel allows him to present himself as Ferdinand. When Ferdinand tries to show that he is the real Ferdinand, he finds that his outer appearance and Ludovico’s rich outer appearance makes it difficult. Shelley writes about the difference between their appearances and how it prevents Ferdinand from being accepted as the real Ferdinand:

As Ferdinand stood beside the king, his eye glanced at a large and splendid mirror. His matted hair, his blood-shot eyes, his haggard looks, and torn and mean dress, derogated from the nobility of his appearance; and still less did he

appear like the magnificent Count Eboli, when, to his utter confusion and astonishment, his counterfeit stood beside him. (69)

Even Adalinda does not recognize the correct Ferdinand due to his outward appearance, but later, Ludovico's outward appearance becomes the clue by which Adalinda recognizes that he is an imposter. Ludovico's cruelty and lack of propriety show through on his face. The narrator describes how Adalinda realizes that Ludovico is not Ferdinand:

It is impossible to say what first awakened her suspicions concerning the deception put upon her...A few questions relative to scenes that had passed between poor Ferdinand and herself sufficed for [resolving her doubts]. They were asked so suddenly and pointedly that the pretender was thrown off his guard; he looked confused, and stammered his replies. Their eyes met, he felt that he was detected...A look such as is peculiar to an imposter, a glance that deformed, and filled his usually noble countenance with the hideous lines of cunning and cruel triumph, completed [Adalinda's] faith in her own discernment. (75)

His body convinces Adalinda first that he is Ferdinand and then convinces her that he cannot possibly be Ferdinand. Although Adalinda's inability to recognize them suggests that the brothers are interchangeable, she ultimately comes to the conclusion that they are two separate individuals. At first, they do not appear to be individuals, but they are eventually recognized and accepted as two people who cannot replace one another. Instead of being interchangeable like Maria and Anina in "The Sisters of Albano," Ferdinand and Ludovico are individuals.

After Adalinda escapes, Ludovico and his men go out to look for her. When Ferdinand and Adalinda find one another and hide away in a cave, a group of robbers arrive with Ludovico. Shelley describes how his disguise leads him to be captured:

[T]he robbers brought in a prisoner—it was the imposter. Missing on the morrow [Adalinda] who was the pledge of his safety and success, but assured that she could not have wandered far, he despatched emissaries in all directions to seek her; and [the imposter], joining in the pursuit, followed the road she had taken, and was captured by these lawless men, who expected rich ransom from one whose appearance denoted rank and wealth. (79)

Ludovico's disguise causes him to be mistaken for and to be captured as a possible rich prisoner. Once the robbers realize their mistake, they hand Ludovico over to Ferdinand without resistance. In comparison to "The Sisters of Albano," the robbers treat the brothers differently than the French government treats the sisters. This difference in treatment suggests that the male/masculine identity is essential and easier to recognize while the female/feminine identity is not. Certainly, one could discuss the differences between the robbers and the French government, but I want to focus more on the gendered aspects of this narrative. Interchanging the identities of two female characters does not disrupt the proceedings of the government. One woman has to die; the text suggests that it does not matter which one. Anina's lover acknowledges, "We know the French; one victim is to them as good as another" (62). In "Ferdinando Eboli," recognizing the male identity is important so that the correct Ferdinand can be restored to the position of count. This difference between the treatment of the characters in the stories leads to the question of why the difference exists

or even matters and why the situation turns out differently for the sisters than it does the brothers. There are two possible reasons for this difference.

One reason could be, as Markley notes, that “Adalinda manages to set them back to their proper identities” (“Mary Shelley’s ‘New Gothic’” 18). In “Ferdinando Eboli,” Adalinda acts as a mediator. She is the only character who can set them right because she knows that they are two different people. In “The Sisters of Albano,” there is no character to act as mediator on behalf of both women. I argue that these stories make it clear that the male characters possess social privilege and the female characters do not possess that same kind of privilege. A comparison of these two stories shows that there is a marked difference between the treatment of the male characters and the treatment of the female characters. At the core of this treatment, the male characters are not replaceable and the female characters are. The French government does not care to differentiate between the two sisters. In “Ferdinando Eboli,” the government cannot accept the possibility of two men who are the same. The Marchese has Adalinda decide which man is the correct Ferdinand because he cannot tell the difference but knows that one must be an imposter (72). They are individuals and must be treated as individuals. Shelley creates two similar narratives, but she gives them two different endings. “Ferdinando Eboli” ends well because Adalinda employs her disguise to resist patriarchal hierarchies and phallogocentric spaces and creates a voice for herself through her disguise. Shelley writes Adalinda’s body as discourse that counters the discourse of patriarchal domination and oppression of Ludovico’s discourse.

“The Pilgrims”

The next story, “The Pilgrims,” features a disguised male character who is able to unite two opposing families. Burkhardt has been in conflict with the Duke of Zähringen and

Rupert. When his daughter elopes with Rupert's son, he becomes embittered toward the Duke, Rupert, and his daughter. Years later, two pilgrims, Hermann and Ida, locate Burkhardt and realize that he is their grandfather. Burkhardt is remorseful for rejecting his daughter, but he is happy to reconcile with his grandchildren. Soon after the reconciliation, a knight arrives at his home. Burkhardt welcomes the knight, who introduces himself: "My name...is Walter de Blumfeldt; though humble, it has never been disgraced" (289). Walter romances Ida, and Burkhardt encourages their affections. Because he believes that Walter is a blessing to the family, he encourages the young knight to continue to stay with him.

One day, Ida says that she wishes to be made a duchess, and at this point, Walter declares that he can grant such a request. He reveals that he is the new Duke of Zähringen, and his company joins him in celebration. He then tells Burkhardt: "But when I learnt whose child my Ida was, and your sad story, I resolved ere I would make her mine, to win not only her love, but also your favour and esteem" (294). In order to establish a romantic relationship with Ida and to reconcile the families, Walter withholds information about himself to integrate into the family. The disguise of identity is not harmful to Walter. In fact, the disguise allows him to achieve an impossible task and ensure a happy ending for the other characters.

This story makes for a good comparison with "The Brother and Sister" and Flora's mission to reunite two families. Flora's mission succeeds, and she is able to write her text; in comparison with her, the new Duke has social privilege. Flora sheds her possessions and leaves to find her brother. She takes on a simple disguise. The Duke withholds information. He does not necessarily give up anything or his social role. He does not reveal that information to begin with. Flora must start with nothing and write her bodily discourse

because she does not yet have a place within the political discourse. The Duke has a place within the political discourse. Shelley is not critical of the Duke. His mission is a noble one, but a comparison between the two stories shows that the male characters have the privilege to withhold information and succeed. Flora must start with nothing and move to write herself into the discourse, a much more challenging task.

Disguise and Education

Although this chapter has focused predominantly upon society's different treatment of the male and female characters, these stories also display Shelley's engagement with Wollstonecraft. One characteristic that connects "Transformation" and "Ferdinando Eboli" is education. This education is a necessary influence in the lives of Ludovico and Guido. The lack of education creates problems for the characters. Of Ludovico in "Ferdinando Eboli," Shelley writes, "He was the elder brother of Ferdinand, a natural son of the old Count Eboli...His education was rude; but he had an Italian's subtle talents, swiftness of perception, and guileful arts" (76). Ludovico's "subtle talents" substitute for his lack of education, and these subtle arts help him to take on his disguise. In "Transformation," Guido learns "wisdom" from his father-in-law, and this wisdom begins his path to "mental reform" (135). His transformation-disguise helps him learn that he needs to be educated in his moral behavior. During his convalescence stage, Guido begins to listen to Juliet's father's advice, and as he heals, "the work of my bodily cure and mental reform went together" (135). The response to his transformation is education. Even though these characters are men, Shelley emphasizes the same principle of education that Wollstonecraft does in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Wollstonecraft writes of the importance of reason for society:

From the education, which [women] receive from society, the love of pleasure may be said to govern them all; but does this prove that there is a sex in souls?

It would be just as rational to declare that the courtiers in France, when a destructive system of despotism had formed their character, were not men, because liberty, virtue, and humanity, were sacrificed to pleasure and vanity.

Fatal passions, which have ever domineered over the *whole* race! (65)

The lack of education is a problem for both men and women, and Shelley aligns herself with her mother in emphasizing the importance of educating men and women with the ability to reason.⁶

An important distinction between the male characters and the female characters in their choice of disguises is that two of the female characters cross-dress and none of the male characters do. As I noted in Chapter 1, female characters disguise themselves as the male characters in order to access male privilege. Looking at the reverse, it could be interpreted that female characters do not possess that privilege. It would be impractical for the male characters to take on disguises as women. If they were to do so, they would join a marginalized group. Many of these disguises, even concerning the men, are about gaining agency and/or possessions. Cross-dressing as a woman would in some way limit the agency that the men possess. At the very least, it would make it possible for the patriarchal society to censor them.

⁶ “The Swiss Peasant” contains a mention of a disguise worn by Monsieur Marville, but the disguise is not discussed in detail. The narrator says of Monsieur Marville, “Accordingly, in a base disguise, he quitted at midnight the walls he was unable to defend” (145). In this political conflict, Marville flees after his home is attacked due to his aristocratic class status. Marville’s disguise is worth acknowledging, but it does not play a major role within the narrative.

The stories address the ability for male characters to disguise themselves without permanent detriment to their social or personal selves. Moreover, the patriarchal society treats the male characters as distinct individuals, whereas the female characters are interchangeable. Additionally, the male characters do not suffer extremely harmful consequences for disguising themselves. For instance, Guido says, "I have never, indeed, wholly recovered my strength...my person [is] a little bent"; however, he benefits from his wound in being able to marry Juliet (135). Furthermore, he does not die as a result like several of the female characters do. The stories suggest that the male discourse is not only more worthy of recognition than the female discourse but also demands to be distinguished from other male bodies as texts in patriarchal societies. In "Transformation," no one knows that Guido and the dwarf have switched bodies, but Guido emphasizes that he cannot be permanently replaced by the dwarf. In "The Sisters of Albano," one sister has to die. It does not eventually matter much which one because Anina and Maria replace one another in the prison and in the convent. Ferdinand and Ludovico are two distinct men with two distinct functions within the patriarchal society. Additionally, the young Duke from "The Pilgrims" does not face any negative repercussions for disguising himself. The female characters and their covert missions often do not end well for those women. Shelley's use of disguise expresses the oppressive treatment that female characters receive versus the treatment that the male characters receive. Through these stories, Shelley covertly criticizes the patriarchal structures that value men and devalue women.

Chapter Three

Disguised Female and Male Characters Together in Mary Shelley's Short Stories

In the previous two chapters, I have discussed disguised female characters and disguised male characters. For this chapter, I analyze female and male characters who wear disguises together. I discuss the following stories: "The False Rhyme," "The Pilgrims," and "The Mortal Immortal." In these stories, disguise as a feminist motif provides the opportunity for male and female characters to come into an equal relationship if the disguise is taken on equally. This motif hints at a leveling of hierarchies between men and women. Except for "The Mortal Immortal," the disguised male and female characters use the female body to write their spaces within social and political environments for the purposes of establishing equal relationships between men and women. While her focus on education is not quite as strong in these stories, Shelley still affirms her mother's ideas, particularly about marriage.

These three stories feature the female body in a significant role as their bodies convey how the female characters can overcome censorship if given support from the socially-privileged male characters. These stories continue to reinforce the idea that male characters are important to recognize and know, but the female characters are also able to find a similar kind of recognition in these stories. What is different about these stories is that the education of the female characters is never specified, yet two out of the three disguised female characters, not including Bertha from "The Mortal Immortal," gain agency through disguises and do not suffer permanently as a result. I propose that this success has much to do with the fact that they have a male advocate. Because he has social privilege, the male character

guarantees the success of the female character's mission and provides her with the opportunity to write with her body and to make her voice heard in public and political spheres without permanent detriment. In addition, these two female characters wear disguises in order to write their bodies and voices into the public and political sphere. Both of their disguises grant them agency rather than suppressing or censoring them. The lone woman who does not succeed in her attempt to disguise herself is Bertha in "The Mortal Immortal."

Disguise and Embodiment

"The False Rhyme" and "The Pilgrims"

The next stories feature the disguise of cross-dressing. Like Despina and Adalinda, these female characters use the male disguise to gain agency so that they can write their discourses into the public and political sphere. As in "A Tale of the Passions" and "Ferdinando Eboli," these stories do not question gender stability. In fact, "The False Rhyme" is predicated on the gender binary and requires that Emilie use her body as a "female-sexed [text]" (Cixous 1944). While the women's genders are blurred, the female characters ultimately identify as women within the narratives.

Although "The False Rhyme" is relatively short, the narrative tackles the issue of female and male cross-dressing. In this story, a female character and a male character cross-dress in order to reestablish the female character's husband as a trusted knight. The story opens with a pair of royal siblings, King Francis and Queen Margaret, discussing the faithfulness and loyalty of women. Francis believes them to be deceitful, but Margaret counters that it is men who are deceitful. Francis mentions Margaret's former friend Emilia de Lagny who is believed to have cheated on her husband, Sire de Lagny, after he is imprisoned. Sire de Lagny is imprisoned for "traitorously yielding to the emperor a fortress

under his command” (119). The text suggests that he fails to maintain courage and/or loyalty in the face of conflict. Although the story does not elaborate upon Sire de Lagny’s decision to submit in battle, the context of battle suggests that his submission is a reflection upon his character as a man. The narrator states about Emilie’s response to her husband’s imprisonment:

For some time Emilie seemed inconsolable, often visiting the miserable dungeon of her husband, and suffering on her return, from witnessing his wretchedness...Suddenly, in the midst of her sorrow, she disappeared; and inquiry only divulged the disgraceful fact, that she had escaped from France, bearing her jewels with her, and accompanied by her page, Robinet Leroux. It was whispered that, during their journey, the lady and the stripling often occupied one chamber. (119)

Because of Emilie’s apparent unfaithfulness, Margaret is hurt to have lost her friend to disgrace, but she insists that Emilie is innocent. The brother and sister place a bet to see if they can prove if Emilie is innocent. However, Margaret finds little evidence of her friend. The supposed Sire de Lagny in prison sends a request to see Francis and Margaret. Francis grants this request because he is in a good mood. Prior to the request, a knight who is the disguised Sire de Lagny appears to bring news of the victory for Francis’s military troops. This knight is said to have “a vow that prevented the soldier from raising his visor or declaring his name” (120). Then the supposed Sire de Lagny arrives. He removes his helmet to reveal that the prisoner is actually Emilie. Francis berates the jailor, but Emilie replies,

Sire, blame him not...wiser men than he have been deceived by woman...There was but one mode to save [Sire de Lagny]:—I assumed his

chains—he escaped with poor Robinet Leroux in my attire—he joined your army: the young and gallant cavalier who delivered the despatches to your grace, whom you overwhelmed with honours and reward, is my own Enguerrard de Lagny. (120)

Both Sire de Lagny and Emilie are restored as beloved friends of King Francis; the story closes with a celebration called “Triumph of Ladies.” Margaret has won the bet. Ironically, Francis and Margaret are both correct in finding both men and women deceitful. Hofkosh continues, “[“The False Rhyme”] turns on the potential of appearance at once to mask and to manufacture the truth. Deception, falsehood, inconstancy are treason, but they are also the means by which the integrity and authority of the sire—father, husband, brother, king—can be redeemed” (209). The cross-dressing disguises are an act of deceit, but it is one that accomplishes a difficult task. Like the young Duke in “The Pilgrims,” the disguise is not simply a method of accomplishing the task but necessary to ensure the success of the mission. In this story, Emilie and a young page cross-dress. As Vern and Bonnie Bullough note, women and men had many different reasons for masquerading as the opposite sex, but the decision to disguise gender was often influenced by constricting cultural and social expectations (194). Of women who dressed as men in the nineteenth century, the Bulloughs write, “Many women...found the easiest way to escape their restrictive assigned role was to pass as a man rather than to fight what they believed to be an almost impossible battle against male prejudice” (159). Emilie does not originally intend to combat male privilege and prejudice. Her goal is to save her husband from prison, but in her decision to cross-dress, she combats the male prejudice of Francis.

Robinet's cross-dressing also has its own purposes. His cross-dressing as Emilie allows for Sire de Lagny to escape and to rejoin King Francis's army. The Bulloughs write that "war has been judged to be the ultimate test of manliness" (179). His return to the army allows him to return to the status of a brave and trustworthy knight. Cixous asserts, "Woman must write woman; and man, man" (1944). While both characters appear to be writing for men, the long term effects are that Emilie is writing her place as a woman and Sire de Lagny is writing his place as a man. Emilie creates her own discourse in the form of her resistance to her husband's imprisonment. By taking his spot, she writes herself into the political sphere.

Emilie survives her ordeal, much like Adalinda from "Ferdinando Eboli." Emilie's survival can be attributed (partially) to her husband's cooperation with her in disguising himself. The story concludes with the male and female characters becoming a bit more equal through Emilie's triumph over male prejudice. At the beginning of the story, Francis is sure that women are not to be trusted. By the end of the story, Francis holds a public festival that celebrates, rather than discredits, women. Emilie is the one who brings this event around. Through her body, Emilie "[seizes] the occasion *to speak*, hence her shattering entry into history, which has always been based *on her suppression*. To write and thus to forge for herself the antilogos weapon. To become *at will* the taker and initiator, for her own right, in every symbolic system, in every political process" (Cixous 1947). Emilie expresses herself through her body and thus, her discourse that conveys her support for her husband. She breaks her silence in prison in order to write herself publicly into the political conflict. Prior to this point, she has been covertly involved in the political conflict, and her revelation is a declaration of that participation. This story is not overtly feminist because Emilie often acts

on behalf of her husband's success, but I attribute Shelley's lack of direct feminism to the context of the gift books and the social demands placed upon her writing.

"The Pilgrims" is another story that includes a cross-dressing female character. This narrative presents a brother and sister in disguises who aim to find their grandfather in order to reconnect with him. The narrator says of them: "Burkhardt advancing, beheld...Pilgrims, clothed in the usual coarse and sombre garb, with their broad hats drawn over their brows" (275). This disguise marks them as travelers, and hoping to receive rest, the brother Hermann says to Burkhardt: "We have been forced during the heat of the day to climb the steep mountain paths; and the strength of my brother, whose youth but ill befits him for such fatigues, began to fail" (276). Hermann chooses to refer to his sister as his brother, though it is unclear why he does so. The text does not reveal the reasoning behind this choice. In "The False Rhyme," "A Tale of the Passions," and "Ferdinando Eboli," the cross-dressing female characters choose to disguise themselves as men. Ida is one of the only cross-dressing female characters who does not choose to present herself as male. (Despina is the other character.) Because Hermann brings up the issue of gender, it is important to determine why he does so and what it conveys about male privilege when it is extended to a female character. One reason is likely for the effect of surprise. Readers do not know that Hermann's brother is his sister Ida. Like Burkhardt, the revelation of Ida's actual gender identity as a woman is unexpected and dramatic. Another explanation is that he wants to protect his sister. However, the reason is much less important than what Hermann's choice conveys.

His decision shows that Hermann has the privilege to choose to disguise his sister's gender and to reveal it when the time is right. In "A Tale of the Passions," Lostendardo uses Despina's disguise as a male page to "attract less compassion" for Despina at the public

execution (23). While Lostendardo chooses to leave Despina in disguise to prevent compassion for her, Hermann's choice is not malicious. He cares for his sister, so his decision to write Ida's "female-sexed [text]" or her body as male is not to humiliate her. Hermann is able to disguise Ida's gender, and he is also able to restore it (Cixous 1944). After hearing Burkhardt's life story, the siblings realize that he is their grandfather. The narrator says of Hermann: "The elder Pilgrim in vain attempted to answer; the excess of his feelings overpowered his utterance. At length, throwing himself at the feet of Burkhardt, and casting off his Pilgrim's habits, he, with difficulty exclaimed, 'See here, thine Ida's son! and behold in my youthful companion, thine Ida's daughter'" (285). Hermann uses his male privilege to assist his sister in writing her space into the mission to reunite with their grandfather. This disguise of gender by the male character would seem to negate Ida's body as a "female-sexed [text]." Ida's body is a "female-sexed [text]" in much the same way that Despina's, Adalinda's, and Emilie's bodies are "female-sexed texts" (Cixous 1944). All of these cross-dressing characters are remembered as women by the end of the narratives, no matter their temporary disguises as men. Additionally, these female characters disguise themselves for a purpose that benefits "the general good" (Wollstonecraft 201). The female characters disguise themselves and write their discourses, and their male counterparts are largely responsible for providing the opportunity for the female characters to be heard and not to suffer permanent damage from speaking their feminine discourses publicly.

"The Mortal Immortal"

"The Mortal Immortal" is a story about a man who drinks the Elixir of Immortality and lives with the consequences of his decision. On one hand, the story conveys how humorous disguises can be; on the other hand, it expresses how ridiculous disguises can

appear if the male and female characters do not participate in disguises together as willing partners. The disguises aim to alter the ages of the characters so as to erase the disparity between Winzy's and Bertha's ages. In the beginning of "The Mortal Immortal," Winzy takes up an apprenticeship with Cornelius Agrippa. His love interest Bertha pressures him to marry her. When he fails to show up for a rendezvous with her, she rejects him and pursues another young man. When one of Cornelius Agrippa's experiments is said to be able "to cure love," Winzy drinks it and believes that he has been cured of his love for Bertha (222). Eventually, the couple is reunited, and Winzy realizes, "I no longer loved—Oh! No, I adored—worshipped—idolized her!" (223). After five years, Cornelius Agrippa has Winzy visit him. Cornelius Agrippa reminisces about his long ago experiment with Winzy. The interaction is as follows with Cornelius saying:

"Behold...the vanity of human wishes! a second time my hopes are about to be crowned, a second time they are destroyed. Look at that liquor—you remember five years ago I had prepared the same, with the same success;—then, as now, my thirsting lips expected to taste the immortal elixir—you dashed it from me! and at present it is too late."

He spoke with difficulty, and fell back on his pillow. I could not help saying,—

"How, revered master, can a cure for love restore you to live?"

A faint smile gleamed across his face as I listened earnestly to his scarcely intelligible answer.

"A cure for love and for all things—the Elixir of Immortality. Ah! if now I might drink, I should live for ever!" (224).

Once Winzy realizes that he is immortal, he becomes even more aware of Bertha's mortality. This issue causes tension between them as well as in the community in which they live.

Winzy says of this experience:

At last our situation become intolerable: Bertha was fifty—I twenty years of age...I no longer mingled in the dance among the young and gay...But before the time I mention, things were altered—we were universally shunned; we were—at least, I was—reported to have kept up an iniquitous acquaintance with some of my former master's supposed friends. Poor Bertha was pitied, but deserted. I was regarded with horror and detestation. (227)

In response, he attempts to separate himself from her so that she can have a normal social life. She refuses to let him to leave unless she can go with him. They leave their home and move (228). She takes it upon herself to join the new community by wearing a disguise.

Winzy says of Bertha's disguise, "She sought to decrease the apparent disparity of our ages by a thousand feminine arts—rouge, youthful dress, and assumed juvenility of manner" (228). When Bertha becomes jealous of the attention paid to her husband by "the belle of the village," she forces Winzy to wear a disguise, too (228). He is reluctant to hide the disparity of their ages, and moreover, the disguises do not work. Bertha is eventually confined to home as she ages. Winzy's own aging process becomes troublesome to him. In her article, Marjean Purinton draws many comparisons between "Transformation" and "The Mortal Immortal" and highlights their similarities. One similarity is that "the protagonists attempt to overcome corporeal limitations" (148). Winzy is able to overcome his body's limitations through alchemy, but this alchemy also binds him to a longer existence than he imagined.

While both of their bodies suffer the consequences of aging and lack of aging, Bertha's and Winzy's bodies are also the main differences between them. Diane Long Hoeveler writes, "The body of the male in Mary Shelley's fiction is always a commodity of worth, an object to be valued, reconstructed, reassembled, and salvaged, while the bodies of the women in her texts are always devalued, compromised, flawed, and inherently worthless" (153). The disparity of treatment of the male and female bodies may suggest that this story is not a feminist text. However, this story presents the poor treatment of women in a patriarchal society, and while it may not be explicitly feminist, Shelley does grapple with feminist issues.

According to Hoeveler, "The Mortal Immortal" is an example of Shelley's Gothic feminism. Hoeveler argues that Shelley engages with Gothic feminism in which "a blameless female victim [triumphs] through a variety of passive-aggressive strategies over a male-created system of oppression and corruption" (150). In the case of "The Mortal Immortal," disguises are Bertha's "passive-aggressive strategies." Winzy is not exactly an explicitly oppressive character. His inner thoughts express his regret toward Bertha's aging. He says, "I grieved deeply when I remembered that this was my Bertha...the dark-eyed, dark-haired girl, with smiles of enchanting archness and a step like a fawn—this mincing, simpering, jealous old woman. I should have revered her gray locks and withered cheeks...It was my work, I knew; but I did not less deplore this type of human weakness" (228). Although he takes responsibility for the trouble between them, he still criticizes Bertha based on her appearance. Her disguises are an attempt to bring the couple to an equal relationship, even if they fail to accomplish their purpose. Additionally, Bertha's aging is not unnatural. It is Winzy's lack of aging that is unnatural. Bertha's body becomes old and frail, and she finally

dies. Cixous writes of the absent female body as such: “A woman without a body, dumb, blind, can’t possibly be a good fighter. She is reduced to being the servant of the militant male, his shadow” (1947). Once she loses her body, she loses her discourse. Comparing Bertha with Guido from “Transformation,” I argue that she experiences Guido’s trouble in not having a “normal” body by which to engage in society. Guido is able to return to his body, but Bertha’s body continues to wither, and she cannot author her body as her text.

One important distinction to make between Bertha and Emilie is their marriages. Both women are devoted to their husbands; however, Bertha’s devotion to her husband is not social or political in nature. The ultimate influence of the disguise has nothing to do with larger social or political issues. Emilie’s marriage has a larger impact on the state of the country and the way that women are treated. She engages in the public sphere in a way that has larger benefits for the community.

Disguise and Education

“The Mortal Immortal” continued

“The Mortal Immortal” does not specifically address education, but it does present the problems of female characters fixating on marriage. This point is reflective of Wollstonecraft’s influence on Shelley. In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft argues, “In the middle rank of life, to continue the comparison, men, in their youth, are prepared for professions, and marriage is not considered as the grand feature in their lives; whilst women, on the contrary, have no other scheme to sharpen their faculties. . . .no, their thoughts are not employed in rearing such noble structures” (64). Bertha’s focus on marriage causes her to burn with jealousy over Winzy’s young appearance. In the case of the other two female characters in this chapter, both of them want to reconcile

political differences between families. One reason for their success is due to the fact that their goals are much higher than marriage. In these stories, Shelley presents views on marriage that are similar to Wollstonecraft's argument for equal relationships between women and men. The important point from her polemic is the way in which Shelley incorporates Wollstonecraft's views on marriage and the glorification that society places on it for women and the lack of emphasis on the ability to reason.

In these stories, the female and male characters need one another in order to succeed. As seen in "The Mortal Immortal," if both characters are not aiming for the same goal with the use of disguise, the disguise fails its purpose. Purinton remarks, "Shelley's stories...demonstrate the difficulty of women's self-representation in a culture that allows them to exist only as objects and commodities" (166). The stories act as a critique of a culture that "idolizes the scepter" of the phallus, but it also reinforces that idolization by giving the female characters success through male privilege (Cixous 1950). This issue has much to do with the cultural constraints that Mary Shelley was under. The gift books required her to meet patriarchal expectations for her stories, so explicit criticism would not have been acceptable. However, through her characters, she provides a covert critique that conveyed her message and still appeased many nineteenth-century readers and publishers. In these stories, the combined effort of male and female characters leads to success. While the female characters need the male characters, they are able to accomplish their own tasks along the way. For example, Emilie overcomes Francis's prejudice against women. She is only one woman, but she defends the honor of all women in her use of disguise. In "The Pilgrims," Ida travels with her brother, and they both help to reconcile the family. Additionally, both of them marry well and bring happiness to their grandfather. The siblings take equal part in

bringing the family together once more, and because they supported one another, they are successful. Shelley disguises her male and female characters in cooperation with one another. Furthermore, she suggests that equality between the relationships is possible if female and male characters work with one another to support one another.

Conclusion

In the course of this thesis, I have analyzed the disguise motif in twelve of Shelley's short stories, including several stories that have often been overlooked in scholarship. I have also provided an overview of the patriarchal context within which Shelley wrote her stories, the same cultural context that she interrogates with her stories. Previous scholarship on disguises in her stories has focused on specific types of disguises, such as cross-dressing. To address the full range of Shelley's disguise motif, I have expanded my argument to include almost all of the disguises and what each one of those means for Shelley's female and male characters. Concerning the disguised female characters, Shelley's use of disguise provides the potential opportunity for agency for the female characters or the potential trap of censorship of the female characters. Concerning the disguised male characters, the disguise motif highlights male social and bodily privilege. Comparing and contrasting the disguised female and male characters, I discussed the difference in treatment between the bodily discourses of the characters and the results of the different treatment. Finally, the female and male characters who disguise themselves together have the opportunity to create fair and balanced relationships between the characters. Throughout all of these stories, Shelley pinpoints the importance of proper education for women and men as previously expressed by Wollstonecraft.

Ultimately, this project conveys that Mary Shelley's feminism, as subtle as it may be, is present in her stories. Moreover, Shelley's disguise motif can be read as a critique of her patriarchal culture. In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft writes, "I do not

wish [women] to have power over men; but over themselves” (67). Shelley follows that same principle in her short stories by writing the female body as discourse. Although her female characters are interchangeable to the patriarchal societies in the narratives, Shelley gives them each a distinct voice and text to write. Furthermore, she uses this interchangeability to critique the patriarchal society that treats women poorly. Shelley uses the disguise motif to examine how and why men possess social privilege that is not extended to women. She explores this privilege by having the disguised male characters temporarily experience the ordeals of women in a patriarchal society. As scholars have noted, Shelley restores order to her narratives, ensuring that the patriarchal standards of the gift books are met. However, her disguise motif allows for her to engage with her version of feminism as well as her mother’s version without being censored. In several of these stories, including “The False Rhyme,” she even ventures to directly suggest that there is an opportunity for equality if men and women work together to support each other. The disguise motif culminates in Shelley’s examination of how women can gain mastery and agency over themselves, their actions, and their bodies.

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Vita

Morgan Pruitt is from Winston-Salem, North Carolina. She graduated from East Carolina University in 2008 with a B.A. in English with a concentration in creative writing and a minor in film studies. In August 2015, she received her M.A. in English from Appalachian State University. She is excited to be plunging into the unknown of the “real world.” As long as there is French toast and friendship, random acts of kindness and lots of hugs to receive and give, she is sure that this next step is going to be an amazing adventure.