Introduction: prosthetic gender in early modern England

> With every tool, man is perfecting his own organs . . . by means of spectacles he corrects defects in the lens of his own eye; by means of the telescope he sees into the far distance . . .With the telephone he can hear at distances which would be unattainable even in a fairy tale. . . Man has, as it were, become a kind of prosthetic God. When he puts on all his auxiliary organs, he is truly magnificent; but those organs have not grown on to him and they still give him much trouble at times.
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> Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*[1]

DIL . . . a girl has her feelings.
FERGUS Thing is, Dil, you're not a girl.
DIL Details, baby, details.

Neil Jordan, *The Crying Game*[2]

In 1573, the French physician Ambroise Paré published *Monsters and Marvels*. Along with its descriptions of monstrous births and other portentous signs of nature, this book contains a section on "hermaphrodites" where Paré gives advice to his fellow medical practitioners about how to examine people and "discerne" whether they ought to be classified as the "male or female sexe." One thing that Paré recommends is that his colleagues inspect the individual's genitalia, and specifically "whether the female sex organ is of proper dimensions to receive the male rod and whether the menses flow through it," and "whether the male rod is well-proportioned in thickness and length, and whether it can [become] erect, and whether seed issues from it." In addition, Paré urges physicians to observe

> the face and . . . the hair, whether it is fine or coarse; whether the speech is virile or shrill; whether the teats are like those of men or of women; similarly whether the whole disposition of the body is robust and effeminate; whether they are bold or fearful, and other actions like those of males and females.

Finally, he suggests looking "to see whether there is a good deal of body hair on the groin and around the seat, for commonly and almost always woman have none on their seat."[3]

Paré's advice about how to "discerne" the "sexe" of a "hermaphrodite" was included in the 1632 English translation of his *Works*. Interestingly, the

features mentioned in the translation differ slightly from those in the original French version. The English text stipulates that the "signs" of gender are "most apparent in the privities and face." It also recommends that physicians ascertain whether "the haire of the head bee long, slender, and soft," whether the individual has "a timide and weake condition of the minde," and finally, whether the individual has "the *Perinaeum* and fundament full of haires" because "women are commonly without any."[4]

Paré's comments are discussed by Ruth Gilbert in *Early Modern Hermaphrodites* and by Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park in "The Hermaphrodite and the Orders of Nature." These scholars contend that Paré's advice marks an important shift in the juridical procedures that were used to deal with intersexed individuals. During the middle ages, they argue, the sex of these individuals was usually determined by a midwife or by the parents, though sometimes individuals were allowed to choose their own sex provided that they scrupulously maintained their chosen identity afterwards. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, however, these practices slowly began to change, and more and more frequently, physicians like Paré were called upon to make a "professional" or "objective" assessment.[5]

This history is of interest to me because it suggests that through the course of the early modern period, sexual difference was increasingly viewed as a fact of nature. But Paré's advice is also of interest because it tells us something about how an individual's gender identity was constituted in the early modern period – or about the range of parts and features that might have helped establish masculinity or femininity. When seen from this perspective, it is significant that Paré does not advise his colleagues to focus solely on the genitalia. Instead, he recommends examining a wide range of corporeal features including the tone of the person's voice, the length and texture of the hair, the shape of the breasts, and the presence or absence of hair on the "seat." Even more striking is the fact that Paré recommends considering other, non-corporeal, characteristics such as whether the persons are "bold or fearful" or whether they display "other actions like those of males and females."

The modern medical protocols for determining the sex of a "hermaphrodite" are very different from those outlined by Paré in his text. According to Alice Dreger's *Hermaphrodites and the Medical Invention of Sex*, doctors now begin by ascertaining the chromosome pattern of the person in question. While this plays an important part in their deliberations, they also place a lot of emphasis on the shape and size of the genitalia. If the individual has an XX chromosomal pattern, that individual is invariably classified as a female, but in the other cases, the individual is assigned a gender identity based entirely on genital morphology. This is true not only for individuals with an XY pattern, but also for those with an XXY pattern, or with some cells exhibiting

XX and others exhibiting XY. In practice, this means that whatever the chromosomal makeup, only infants who have penises that are at least two and a half centimeters long when stretched (this is about an inch) are categorized as male. If this criterion is not met, then the infant is usually declared a female and a vagina is surgically constructed. Dreger explains that the medical thinking is that people "must have acceptable penises if they are to be assigned the male gender."[6] Analogous thinking also lies behind the decision to classify all people with an XX chromosome pattern as female. That decision is not simply a testament to the underlying importance of genetic makeup of the individual, it also reflects the doctors' belief that it is easier surgically to construct a vagina than a penis. In this regard, it is worth pointing out that if a child is categorized as female, its genitalia are also "normalized." In practice, this means that if the clitoris exceeds one centimeter in length, it is surgically reduced so that the individual will not look or act "masculine" (183).

I begin by contrasting the early modern procedures used to determine the sex of a "hermaphrodite" with the modern ones because I think this contrast suggests that masculinity and femininity may have been materialized in a slightly different way in the earlier periods. In broadest terms, this is a book about the discourses and practices of gender in England in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. I approach this topic by focusing on a series of gendered features or "parts" – handkerchiefs, codpieces, beards, and hair. It is my contention that all of these items played fundamental roles in forming masculine and feminine identity.[7]

Some might say that this continues to be true in our own time. In the 1960s, for example, the hair of the head became an important source of generational conflict and gender identity. The tonsorial norms of the nineteen fifties were challenged by long-haired men wearing styles such as the "mop top" popularized by the Beatles, and by short-haired women wearing styles such as the bob and the "boyish cut." It is therefore hardly surprising to find that one of the defining cultural productions of the era was the musical *Hair*. Similarly, in the 1970s, the moustache became a crucial component of the exaggerated, class-inflected masculinity that was dominant at the time.[8] While codpieces and handkerchiefs have not been part of the physical portrait for some time, there are certainly other articles of clothing that continue to have profound gendered significance. Recent studies of the "power suit" and stiletto heels, to take just two examples, argue that these items are crucial elements in the formation of masculinity and femininity.[9]

Nevertheless, I would argue that the details of dress and bearing were even more fundamental in English culture during the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Indeed, Paré's advice to his fellow physicians begins to suggest this. As further evidence of this historical shift, I would point to

the fact that none of the parts under scrutiny here is now classified as "primary" – facial hair is considered a "secondary sexual characteristic" and the rest are generally considered elements of gender, and are sometimes labeled "tertiary characteristics."[10] This hierarchized classificatory schema does not seem to have been fully in place during the Renaissance. The features that Paré says will help physicians determine the "sexe" of a "hermaphrodite" are certainly not organized according to such a schema. For Paré, the "primary" features are the genitals and the face, though the term "primary" is not entirely appropriate since he simply says that they are the sites where gender is "most evident." Furthermore, Paré does not distinguish at all between "secondary" and "tertiary" features: he mentions "secondary" characteristics such as the form of the individual's "teats" alongside "tertiary" characteristics such as the length and texture of their hair or the way in which they behave.

If Paré's advice thus suggests that the modern taxonomy of primary, secondary, and tertiary characteristics was not fully in effect in the earlier period, this is not to say that there was an alternative hierarchy in place at that time. In other words, I don't mean to say that beards, hair, codpieces and handkerchiefs were themselves *the* primary characteristics. The parts at the center of this study are not extraordinary, but are instead meant to be exemplary: they are simply some of the items that actively worked to constitute gender identity during this period. A more complete list would have to include all of the things mentioned by Paré, as well as things like swords, thighs, daggers, wigs, hands, cosmetics, and farthingales.[11]

My rationale for focusing on these four particular "parts" is largely theoretical. I wanted to combine some items that are natural parts of the body (beards and hair) with others that are culturally constructed elements of gender (handkerchiefs and codpieces) because the conceptual division of "nature" and "culture" – and by extension "sex" and "gender" – lies at the heart of our modern theorizations of masculinity and femininity. Today, gender formation is typically imagined as a developmental process in which a person begins with a set of natural biological characteristics (sex) that are then modified, or "constructed," by society and experience through the course of a lifetime (gender). Accordingly, any particular characteristic or feature tends to be seen as either primarily natural or cultural, essential or constructed.[12]

Feminists have begun the process of revising or rethinking this schema, but it still tends to dominate our understanding of gender formation. This was not the case during the Renaissance. Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park maintain that while the theoretical "opposition of nature versus culture" has proved to be quite "illuminating for us in our attempts to sort out the humanly universal from the culturally local," it is "deeply misleading when

imposed upon earlier periods." As they explain, "Renaissance conceptions of 'nature' could embrace considerations as familiar to modern ears as anatomy and as unfamiliar as 'complexion', 'character', or 'conduct'." Likewise, "the social constructs of gender seemed to early modern medical writers as fully 'natural' as the anatomical signs of sex."[13] Daston and Park's point here is that the modern distinction between "nature" and "culture" (or "sex" and "gender") was a consequence of the Enlightenment and scientific revolution and that before that time, the terms themselves had a different range of meanings.

Paré's advice to his fellow physicians illustrates this point quite nicely. Although he claims to be advising his colleagues about how to determine the "sexe" of the individual in question, many of the things that he mentions would not today be considered part of the apparatus of sex. This is perhaps clearest in the original French version where Paré recommends examining whether the person is "bold or fearful," and whether that person displays other "*actions* like those of males or females." These would today be considered gendered characteristics rather than sexual ones. So in the end, Paré expands the category of "sexe" along precisely the lines that Daston and Park indicate by including things like "character" or "conduct" in his discussion.

If the sex/gender conceptual model was not firmly in place in the earlier period, then this also helps to explain why physical features like beards, hair, codpieces, and handkerchiefs would have been less peripheral. In order to understand this connection, we first need to recognize that the sex/gender schema not only encourages us to distinguish between sex and gender, nature and culture, it also encourages us to privilege sex/nature over gender/culture. Hence, we tend to view natural sexual characteristics such as genital morphology or genetic makeup as somehow more constitutive or essential than culturally constructed gender characteristics such as behavior or clothing. The privileging of sex over gender, and nature over culture, is encoded in the hierarchized taxonomy of primary, secondary, and tertiary characteristics that I mentioned earlier: natural sexual characteristics are given precedence by being classified as either primary or secondary, whereas gendered characteristics are diminished by being classified as tertiary. If these conceptual rubrics were not entirely operative before the Enlightenment, then parts like the ones under scrutiny here would not have been relegated to "secondary" or "tertiary" status.

Stephen J. Gould goes so far as to question the usefulness of the nature/culture dichotomy altogether, though his critique is articulated from a scientific rather than an historical perspective. He writes:

> Of all the baleful false dichotomies that stymie our understanding of the world's complexity, nature vs nurture must rank among the top two or three . . . We will not

get this issue straight until we realize that the "interactionism" we all accept does not permit such statements as "Trait x is 29 percent environmental and 71 percent genetic." When causative factors . . . interact so complexly, and throughout growth, to produce an intricate adult being, we cannot, in principle, parse that being's behavior into quantitative percentages of remote root causes.

Gould doesn't simply criticize our reliance upon the nature/nurture dichotomy, he also offers an alternative. He says that instead of trying to ascertain whether certain behaviors or identities are formed primarily by nature or culture, we should try to determine to what extent those behaviors or identities are malleable. As he puts it, the "truly salient issues are malleability and flexibility, not fallacious parsing by percentages . . . A twenty-dollar pair of eyeglasses from the local pharmacy may fully correct a defect of vision that is 100 percent heritable."[14]

The second major argument of this book is an historically inflected version of Gould's point. While it would be impossible to determine the extent to which gender identity was actually malleable during the early modern period, or even to determine whether it was seen as being more malleable than it is today, what I do hope to show is that masculinity and femininity were often conceptualized as being malleable. By contrast, in contemporary western culture, gender identity is generally imagined to be "fixed" by biology.[15] This is yet another side-effect of the sex/gender schema. According to Diana Fuss's *Essentially Speaking*, the sex/gender schema encourages us to think of sexual characteristics as things which are natural, "hardwired," and therefore largely immutable: as she puts it, we tend to assume that "nature and fixity . . . go together."[16]

In sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century England, biological sexual features were certainly considered to be "natural" or essential, but they were not therefore imagined to be fixed or immutable. In fact, it was proverbial in the period to say that what "God makes . . . man shapes."[17] One reason why "sex" and the body were understood in this way was the influence of the Galenic medical tradition. Within this tradition, male and female bodies were not understood to be two discrete entities that were fundamentally different from one another; instead, they were viewed along a continuum. Moreover, on account of the homology between male and female bodies, it was always possible for individuals to move in one direction or the other along this gradated continuum, and even, in some cases, to be transformed from one sex to the other.[18] In *Making Sex*, Thomas Laqueur illustrates this point by discussing early modern medical accounts of women who were spontaneously transformed into men.[19] According to Laqueur, the notion that "sex" was (at least potentially) malleable went hand-in-hand with the notion that male and female bodies were structurally homologous: since both males and females

were thought to have the same underlying corporeal structure (males had their private parts on the outside, and females had theirs on the inside), changes in humoral makeup and/or corporeal structure could move an individual along the gendered continuum.

So within this schema, it is as if gender was viewed as a kind of balance or scale, and as if masculine and feminine features were like "weights" that were placed on one side or the other. The configuration of these weights was not entirely fixed: they could be altered spontaneously or through human intervention. And if enough of the weights were shifted, then the overall balance of the scales would tip. Moreover, although some physical features undoubtedly "weighed" more than others, they all "weighed" something and had an impact on the equilibrium. It therefore makes sense to say they were constitutive.

Masculinity and femininity tend to be viewed quite differently in the post-Enlightenment world. Male and female bodies are usually seen as structurally dimorphic – this is what Laqueur calls "the two sex model" – and this dimorphism is imagined to be to some extent "hardwired" by nature. In practice, moreover, corporeal form tends to be equated with genital form so that genital morphology effectively becomes *the* "primary sexual characteristic" rather than simply *a* "primary sexual characteristic." This is suggested by the largely genito-centric procedures I discussed above that are used to "determine" whether an intersexed individual should be male or female. In this modern conceptual schema, "secondary" or "tertiary" features tend to be regarded as little more than peripheral "signs" that point to the underlying genital "truth." Fergus's quip about Dil in Neil Jordan's *The Crying Game* exemplifies this modern thinking. After having seen Dil's penis, Fergus insists that she is "not a girl." For her part, Dil refuses to accept this phallocentric logic, replying – "Details, baby, details." Dil's repartee works on two levels. On the one hand, she suggests that her penis is nothing more than a "detail" and she therefore implicitly mocks Fergus for placing so much emphasis on it. On the other hand, she calls attention to the "details" that materialize her femininity such as her hair, her clothes, her voice, and her fingernails. But despite the wonderful élan of Dil's response, it is ultimately Fergus's view that is dominant.[20]

The differences between modern and early modern notions of gender identity can be further clarified by looking at how "sex change" is understood in the two periods. Today, since male and female bodies are imagined to be dimorphic, "sex change" is often understood as a radical and decisive shift from one state of being to another. Moreover, given the cultural centrality of the genitalia, it is hardly surprising to find that "sex change" is frequently conflated in the popular imaginary with the surgical procedure

that alters the genitalia. This operation is assumed to act as a "switch" that moves the individual from one distinct category of being to the other, and until the genital morphology is transformed, the sex change is not "really" effected.[21]

During the Renaissance, sexual transformations were understood quite differently. First, they were often said to occur spontaneously or "naturally" – while the individual was jumping over a ditch or playing with a sexual partner. Even more important for my purposes is the fact that they were often said to involve a range of physical transformations. Indeed, early modern accounts of sexual metamorphosis frequently include information about changes in the person's non-genital features as well as information about changes in their "privities." Take the well-known case of the French peasant Marie/Germain as an example. This case was discussed by writers like Michel de Montaigne, Ambroise Paré, and others during the Renaissance; it has also been analyzed by modern critics like Thomas Laqueur and Stephen Greenblatt.[22] The story goes something like this: in France, a fifteen-year-old girl named Marie was chasing after her swine in a wheat field one day. In mid-pursuit, she leapt over a ditch only to find that the sudden exertion had caused a set of male genitals to pop out of her body. Marie was subsequently examined by a group of physicians who concluded that she had become a man, and she was eventually rebaptized as Germain.

If this is the version of events that has circulated in contemporary criticism, it omits what I take to be a crucial detail of the story: namely, the fact that Marie was, before her metamorphosis, "remarkable for having a little more hair about her chin than the other girls; they called her bearded Marie." Moreover, after the genital transformation, Germain is said to have developed "a big, very thick beard."[23] Almost all the early modern writers who discuss this case make some sort of reference to Marie/Germain's facial hair (although Montaigne is the only one who notes that Marie had a beard *before* her genitals were altered). Paré, for example, indicates that Germain had "a thicke and red beard," and also describes how he was brought before an assembly called by the bishop and "he received the name and habite of a man."[24] Similarly, the seventeenth-century Italian monk Francesco Maria Guazzo states that a "beard grew upon her chin."[25] Finally, in England, George Sandys mentions this case in his commentary on the story of Iphis and Ianthe in his translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and he also says that Germain "ha[d] a long beard."[26]

The growth of Marie/Germain's beard is not simply a superfluous detail in these accounts, as is implied by its omission by modern historians and literary critics; instead, it was part of Marie's transformation. In fact, the growth of facial hair on women was commonly thought to be the opening stage of a sexual metamorphosis. The English anatomist Helkiah Crooke points out that

many people believe that "women whose voyces turne strong or have beards and grow hairy do presently also change their parts of generation."[27] The thinking that Crooke describes here is of interest because it implies that the alterations of the beard, voice, and genitalia were believed to go together – they were all components of the "sex change."

There is another story of sexual metamorphosis that suggests that changes in the length of the hair on the head could also be considered part of the "sex change." This is an instance of a girl who was transformed into a boy, and during her transformation, her "curles" supposedly "shorten[ed]" to the point where they "scarce h[u]ng beneath her eares."[28] Another version of the same story simply stipulates that the girl's "heare grew shorter."[29] In both of these texts, the length of the girl's hair changes spontaneously during her sex change. It would therefore appear that just as the growth of Marie's beard was considered to be a part of her metamorphosis, the "shortening" of this girl's hair was also considered to be a part of hers.

By calling attention to the role of the beard and the hair in these sexual transformations, I do not mean to downplay the importance of the genitalia or to imply more generally that they were not crucial for determining an individual's gender. On the contrary, if we think of physical features as "weights" on a scale, then genital morphology was clearly a massive weight, and may even have been "heavier" than all of the other features combined. Nonetheless, features like beard growth and hair length did matter. They not only helped to tip the overall balance of the gender scales in one direction or the other, they also helped to move an individual along the gender continuum after the balance had been tipped. In other words, these parts might make a female who had been transformed into a male more or less masculine, or a male who had been transformed into a female more or less feminine. The case of the Portuguese woman Maria Pachero illustrates this point. When "she was at the age when a woman's monthly courses usually begin, instead of a fluid excretion there broke or otherwise grew from those parts a virile member; and so, from being a girl, she suddenly became a public young man endowed with virility." At the same time, however, "he remained unbearded and with a feminine cast of countenance, these being indications of imperfect virility." Although facial hair again features prominently in this account, it works in a negative way: the lack of facial hair pulls the gender of this newly minted "public young man" toward the feminine side of the continuum, and thus he is said to have only an "imperfect virility."[30]

A similar logic seems to inform the cases of spontaneous sexual transformation described by the Spanish physician Juan Huarte in his *Examinations of Men's Wits* (a text which was translated into English in 1594 and went through three more editions in England by the mid seventeenth century). Huarte's text is of interest for several reasons. First, he discusses sex changes

that occur while the individual is still in the womb as opposed to those that occur after birth. Moreover, he contends that sex changes can take place in directions – from female to male and male to female. For my purposes, however, the crucial thing to note is that he indicates that the individuals who undergo these metamorphoses may be inconsistently gendered. First, he recounts how "divers times . . . nature hath made a female child, and she hath so remained in her mothers belly for the space of one or two months: and afterwards, plentie of heat growing in the genitall members, upon some occasion they have issued forth, and she become a male." He goes on to note, however, that "To whom this transformation hath befallen . . . is afterwards plainly discovered, by certain motions they retaine, unfitting for the masculine sex, being altogither womanish, & their voice shrill & sweet." Conversely, he talks about how "nature hath sundrie times made a male with his geneotries outward, and cold growing on, they have turned inward, and it became female." But again, he maintains that "This is knowen after she is borne, for she retaineth a mannish fashion, as well in her words, as in all her motions and workings."[31] Thus, according to Huarte, although in each of these cases the gender scales have shifted, some parts or features remain that continue to pull in the opposite direction and as a result the individual's gender identity is somewhat mixed: the female who has been reconstituted as a male still has, for instance, a "shrill & sweet" voice, while the male who has been reconstituted as a female has "a mannish fashion . . . in her words," "motions," and " workings."

If the influence of the Galenic medicine helps to explain why "secondary" corporeal features like beards and hair might have been considered more essential in the early modern period, it also helps to explain why accessories of dress like codpieces and handkerchiefs might have been accorded a similar status. Interestingly, clothing features prominently in many of the cases of sexual transformation mentioned above. For example, when Marie/Germain appeared before an assembly called by the bishop, s/he was given both "the name *and habite* of a man." Paré also records a similar action taking place in another case – that of a fourteen-year-old girl named Joane. Her male "members started forth and unfolded themselves" while she was "lay[ing] in the same bed" as a maid and "play[ing] somewhat wantonly with her." Joane's parents recognized the change and "by helpe of the Ecclesiasticke power," they "changed his name from *Joane* to *John*, *and put him in mans apparell*."[32]

Even more complex is the case of Thomas(ine) Hall, an indentured servant born in England but who lived in Virginia during the early seventeenth century. Although Hall came to the colonies as a man, his/her gender identity subsequently came into question and the issue ultimately had to be decided by a judicial inquiry. The court ruled that Hall was both a "man and a woeman"