

# EARLY MODERN LITERARY STUDIES



## **Assembling Radigund and Artegall: Gender Identities in Spenser's *Faerie Queene***

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The story of Britomart, Spenser's famous cross-dressing lady knight, runs through Books III, IV, and V of *The Faerie Queene* (1590/1596).<sup>1</sup> Dressed in armour and therefore performing the functions of a presumably masculine knight, and disguised at times even from the reader, Britomart quickly adopts a subject that allows her to travel alone and to fight. At the same time, however, her body retains feminine gender markers that allow it to assert a feminine gender whenever it is revealed. Britomart is not alone in cross-dressing in the poem: other cross-dressed characters include the villainous Amazon Radigund, who uses her armour to subjugate men, and Britomart's destined husband Artegall, who is forced to cross-dress by Radigund. These three characters present a collective model of gender that is tightly tied to the physical objects associated with their bodies. Since Spenser's characters are allegorical, their clothing and other props serve as markers of a character's current state.<sup>2</sup> Thus, for instance, Artegall's sword, Chrysaor, broken by Radigund after his defeat, reappears apparently unharmed during his later battle with Grantorto. Spenser does not represent this object for its own sake, but in order to signify an aspect of its owner. As the allegorical manifestation of his characters' states, the physical objects within Spenser's gender model develop their own agency alongside those of the characters carrying them. Human and object are also sometimes fused into a

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<sup>1</sup> The first three books of *The Faerie Queene* were published in 1590, followed by an expanded six-book version in 1596. As cross-dressing permeates both halves of the poem, I am looking at the longer 1596 edition rather than the 1590 edition. All *Faerie Queene* quotations are from Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, 2nd ed., ed. by A.C. Hamilton, Hiroshi Yamashita, Toshiyuki Suzuki and Shohachi Fukuda (London: Pearson, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> At the same time, Spenser regularly calls attention to the gap between his characters' roles as fictional people and as allegorical representations, lending them a far richer inner life than we might otherwise expect to find in an allegory. For more, see Susanne Lindgren Wofford, 'Gendering Allegory: Spenser's Bold Reader and the Emergence of Character in *The Faerie Queene* III', *Criticism* 30 (1988), pp. 1-21.

single entity, amplifying the effects of what might otherwise be considered superficial physical changes into a new gender role.

To better theorize this object-related gender model, I turn to assemblage theory. Originating in the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, the term ‘assemblage’ describes a collection of agentive parts that together form a collective but not unified whole. As Deleuze and Guattari describe it, ‘an assemblage comprises two segments, one of content, the other of expression. On the one hand it is a *machinic assemblage* of bodies, of actions and passions, an intermingling of bodies reacting to one another; on the other hand it is a *collective assemblage of enunciation*, of acts and statements, of incorporeal transformations attributed to bodies.’<sup>3</sup> Assemblages are physical collections of objects but they are also the ways those objects are used and deployed. Objects and actions assemble a given identity in tandem. At the same time, however, assemblages are always temporally bounded: while they might, conceivably, given the right circumstances, endure forever, every assemblage carries within itself forces that seek to preserve the assemblage’s current configuration as well as forces that seek to break it. Deleuze and Guattari describe these forces as territorializing (i.e., stabilizing) and deterritorializing forces respectively.<sup>4</sup> In deploying a language of territorialization, that is to say, a language of staking out boundaries, Deleuze and Guattari posit that assemblages are not destroyed so much as reconfigured. Components may enter and expand an assemblage; alternately, components may also push against the boundaries of an assemblage and eventually break out of it again. Assemblages consequently possess a great potential for reconfiguration: ‘one of the chief traits of such wholes is that a component part of an assemblage may be detached from it and plugged into a different assemblage in which its interactions are different.’<sup>5</sup> Assemblages are not static but constantly being re-inscribed and modified by their components, which simultaneously push against and reinforce their current configuration.

Assemblage theory tends to focus on larger social institutions, which focus has, perhaps inadvertently, occasionally resulted in human individuals being viewed as little more than building blocks for such larger assemblages; while their own assembled nature is gestured at, it is also dismissed as being of comparatively little interest.<sup>6</sup> Drew Daniel’s recent work on melancholy as an assemblage has pushed against this approach by examining

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<sup>3</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), p. 88.

<sup>4</sup> See Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 88.

<sup>5</sup> Manuel DeLanda, *A New Philosophy of Society: Assemblage Theory and Social Complexity* (London: Continuum, 2006), p. 10.

<sup>6</sup> DeLanda, *A New Philosophy of Society*, p. 47.

social discourses in relation to the individual. Pointing out that ‘everything is an assemblage, but each assemblage is distinct from every other assemblage’,<sup>7</sup> Daniel emphasizes how large cultural discourses like that surrounding melancholy manifest themselves on the level of the individual human subject. Taking this work a little further, I argue that in applying assemblage theory to individual human subjects, we begin to see identity in terms of a collaborative project between different actors, only some of which are animate but all of which possess agency. Britomart, in putting on armour, enters into a partnership with the physical objects that make up her new gender assemblage together with her. It is not a case of clothes making the wo/man, but rather a question of what kind of wo/man a human subject can make in collaboration with the clothes. An assembled gender is determined neither by a physical body nor by a costume, but is instead defined by a collection of agentive parts, human and inanimate, that interact within a given network to produce a particular identity.<sup>8</sup> Inanimate though it may be, the clothing strives towards a particular kind of identity assemblage and limits the kind of actions that can be taken to inscribe a particular gender identity. Once that gender identity is in place, as it were, the clothes territorialize the assemblage, reinforcing the current gender identity against further changes, even changes that the assemblage’s human component may attempt to enact. The human subject is not in a privileged position within the assemblage, except perhaps in the sense that s/he is among most flexible of the components within the assemblage.

Renaissance writers articulate a similar collaborative interaction between human and object, albeit nervously and with a concern for how such an interaction may prove disastrous. In worrying about how actors on stage seem to slip in and out of different identities, Renaissance anti-theatricalists expressed concerns about object-related identities since such easy changing underscores the powerful effect that action could have upon physical bodies. As the anti-theatricalists’ arguments emphasize, an anatomically male body does not automatically mean a masculine gender without the corresponding behaviour.<sup>9</sup> Such arguments articulate a sense that human identity arises out of an

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<sup>7</sup> Drew Daniel, *The Melancholy Assemblage: Affect and Epistemology in the English Renaissance* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), p. 10.

<sup>8</sup> As a result of this interaction, conceptions of the ideal human body may reflect the clothing that it will wear: an era favouring corsets will imagine that even a nude female body looks as though it were wearing an invisible corset. Anne Hollander, *Seeing Through Clothes* (New York: The Viking Press, 1978), p. 98.

<sup>9</sup> For more on anti-theatrical cross-dressing concerns in the period, see Michael Shapiro, *Gender in Play on the Shakespearean Stage: Boy Heroines and Female Pages* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994); Jean E. Howard, *The Stage and Social Struggle in Early Modern England* (London: Routledge, 1994); Stephen Orgel, *Impersonations: The Performance of Gender in Shakespeare’s England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

interaction between props and human bodies. Renaissance writers' fears about the potential permanence of such assemblages suggest a view of identity assemblages as palimpsests that can be endlessly rewritten but always shows signs of their previous identity or identities. Assemblages can develop an ontological inertia not merely in the sense that their territorializing effects can cause them to be self-perpetuating, but additionally because an assemblage's identity carries on beyond its initial assembly, potentially even after its components have been reconfigured. Within an allegory like *The Faerie Queene*, such assembled identities become particularly visible since the characters in questions are not merely characters but also representations (of, for instance, virtues). Like assemblage theory, allegory moves the human individual out of his/her position of primacy and to being merely one of several symbols used to convey a given idea.

My chief focus in the following paper will be upon Radigund and Artegall, characters whose interactions explore the ramifications of undesirable gender assemblages. To lay a baseline for how Spenser models cross-dressed gender in *The Faerie Queene*, I first outline the ways that the theory maps onto Britomart. While Britomart's cross-dressing is shown in a largely positive light, enabling her to perform the role of a knight-errant and rescue various characters in distress, Radigund and Artegall's cross-dressing emphasizes that such temporary gender disguises might easily become permanent and affect not merely a character's outward social role but also their fundamental self. In closing up the gap between human and identity-forming objects, assemblage theory not only helps us model how gender is shaped by objects, but also invites us to consider how traces of those assemblages may remain after the objects in question have been removed.

## 1. Britomart: Assembling Gender

In a medieval romance world, where a woman's options are usually limited to being a temptation along the way, a mentor in a castle or a damsel in distress,<sup>10</sup> Britomart's armour allows her to assume a masculine identity.<sup>11</sup> At first glance, Britomart represents a textbook case of performative gender: by pretending to be a man, she becomes a man, socially speaking, underscoring Judith Butler's argument in *Gender Trouble* that 'the

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<sup>10</sup> Sheila Cavanagh notes that women in *The Faerie Queene* are 'perpetually iconic, demonic, in disguise, or in flight,' and thus are kept at a distance, an observation that admittedly loses its force in later books, particularly Book VI, but is particularly apt early on. Sheila T. Cavanagh, *Wanton Eyes and Chaste Desires: Female Sexuality in The Faerie Queen* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. 26.

<sup>11</sup> Parallel figures include Virgil's Camilla, Tasso's Clorinda, and Ariosto's Marfisa and Bradamante. For more on this, see Caroline McManus, *Spenser's 'Faerie Queene' and the Reading of Women* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2002), p. 144.

original identity after which gender fashions itself is an imitation without an origin.’<sup>12</sup> All that appears to be necessary to be male is to successfully imitate the clothing and social gestures of maleness; when Britomart puts on male clothing and male behaviors, she becomes socially male as well.<sup>13</sup> At the same time, however, Britomart’s male gender does not remain stable but is constantly assembled and re-assembled. For Britomart, gender does not reside solely in appearance or clothing but in the actions and choices rendered possible by that appearance or clothing. She is not simply, as Cavanagh suggests, ‘an anatomical female, whose ‘gender’ typically is determined by her apparel rather than her genitals’<sup>14</sup> but is rather a figure whose gender is determined at each turn to suit the needs of the situation, initially clumsily and then with increasing skill.<sup>15</sup>

Britomart’s disguise is intended to free her from a traditionally coded feminine passivity so that she may search for Artegall, but it is a disguise that she is initially hesitant to accept. When Britomart’s nurse Glauce suggests wearing armour, she assures Britomart that once she puts on armour, ‘Ne ought ye want, but skill, which practize small / Will bring, and shortly make you a mayd Martiall.’<sup>16</sup> Glauce’s optimism proves to be justified and when we first meet Britomart, Spenser tells us that ‘At last as through an open plaine they yode, / They spide a knight, that towards pricked faire.’<sup>17</sup> Spenser here uses language that is reminiscent of the Redcrosse Knight’s first appearance, emphasizing the similarities between the two allegorical figures representing Holiness and Chastity but also the concealing properties of full armour.<sup>18</sup> As Judith Anderson has observed, once Britomart puts on armour, she ‘is no longer the merely frustrated and enclosed pubescent child, the sheltered girl, of the second canto, but suddenly a female knight.’<sup>19</sup> Before she puts on the armour, Britomart seems timid and uncertain, always asking for advice,

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<sup>12</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1999), p. 175.

<sup>13</sup> Martial femininity does not immediately correspond to masculinity, as the classical examples of Athena and Artemis show, but Britomart crucially *looks* male to the characters who encounter her and does so deliberately. She is typically presented as male whenever she returns to the narrative after a prolonged absence and engages with other people as a knight rather than a martial lady, as Belphœbe does.

<sup>14</sup> Cavanagh, *Wanton Eyes*, p. 1.

<sup>15</sup> For more on Britomart’s increasing proficiency at suiting her gender to each occasion, see Donald Stump, ‘Fashioning Gender: Cross-Dressing in Spenser’s Legend of Britomart and Artegall’, *Spenser Studies* 15 (2001), pp. 95-119.

<sup>16</sup> *The Faerie Queene*, III. 3. 53.8-9.

<sup>17</sup> *The Faerie Queene*, III. 1. 4.1-2.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. *The Faerie Queene*, I. 1. 1.1: ‘A Gentle Knight was pricking on the plaine’.

<sup>19</sup> Judith H. Anderson, ‘Britomart’s Armor in Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*: Reopening Cultural Matters of Gender and Figuration,’ *English Literary Renaissance* 39 (2009), 74-96 (p. 76).

whether from her nurse Glauce or the magician Merlin. Once she has put it on, however, she becomes decisive and Glauce largely fades out of the poem.

The armour's concealment of Britomart's sex even from the audience is a recurring theme in the poem: whenever Britomart is left out of the plot for a prolonged period of time, she is generally reintroduced as a strange knight complete with male pronouns. Any new unidentified knight could conceivably be Britomart; that is to say, any unidentified knight could be a woman.<sup>20</sup> Her ability to carry out other knightly prerogatives — fighting villains and rescuing damsels in distress — is equally effective so that so long as Britomart has access to her armour or even just her weapons, she is capable of responding to situations in a knightly fashion. Through her knightly equipment, Britomart can become active rather than passive: the equipment re-assembles her into a masculine figure capable of travel and combat.

Spenser's favoured method of revealing Britomart's femininity is through the removal of her helmet, which reveals her long hair. As a rule, her hair then dramatically unfurls for several lines of poetry.<sup>21</sup> Britomart's hair as described by the poet could lead the reader to wonder how exactly such a surfeit could be restrained by any regular-sized helmet. Britomart's hair is not merely beautiful but almost incredibly long, extending down to her heels and completely surrounding her body. This great length is not solely due to Spenser's love of spectacle: hair length was often gendered to the point where the greater length of women's hair was considered to be natural even as it was required to be so in accordance with I Corinthians 11.14-15, where Paul asserts that it is shameful for men to have long hair and for women to have short hair.<sup>22</sup> Her hair and the way that it can so abruptly reappear from under her helmet allow Britomart to quickly reassert her femininity, which is easily attested by this marker but not by others. In emphasizing the length as well as the beauty of Britomart's hair, Spenser places Britomart's femininity beyond dispute as no man would allow his hair to grow so long. Her gender assemblage is reconfigured, the feminine components moving to the visible forefront.

This is not to suggest, however, that since Britomart's disguise does not include a haircut, she is essentially female underneath her armour and that the outer shell, as it were, is mere show. Instead, her representation resists being both fully performative or a complete physical gender transformation as might have been found in Ovid's 'Iphis and Ianthe' in

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<sup>20</sup> See *The Faerie Queene*, III. 9. 12.2 and IV. 4. 44.8.

<sup>21</sup> See *The Faerie Queene*, III. 9. 20, IV. 1. 13 and IV. 6. 20.

<sup>22</sup> Will Fisher, *Materializing Gender in Early Modern English Literature and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 18.

the *Metamorphoses* or medieval romances exploring similar motifs.<sup>23</sup> Britomart's masculine qualities do not vanish when her hair is shown. Our first sight of her hair is in the house of Malecasta, where Britomart, although revealed 'al in her snow-white smocke, with locks vnbownd,' is still seen 'threatning the point of her auenging blade.'<sup>24</sup> Similarly, in her fight with Artegall, when her helmet is damaged and her hair released, Britomart's own ability to continue the fight is not impaired, although her femaleness is now on open display. Throughout the poem, Britomart assembles her gender through action as well as through attire: her weapons are necessary to her gender assemblage not merely as costume but as tools that permit particular actions, actions which enunciate a gender identity.

Britomart's clothing acts on its own as well to assemble a male identity for her, occasionally allowing her to act within two genders simultaneously. Early in Book IV, travelling as a knight in the company of Amoret, Britomart encounters a castle which only those knights accompanied by ladies may enter. Britomart is attacked by a lady-less knight who wishes to claim Amoret as his lady so that he may enter the castle. Having defeated him and made a peace, Britomart decides to gain access to the castle for him as well as Amoret and herself:

The Seneschall was cal'd to deeme the right,  
Whom she requir'd, that first fayre Amoret  
Might be to her allow'd, as to a Knight,  
That did her win and free from challenge set:  
Which straight to her was yeelded without let.  
Then since that strange Knights loue from him was quitted,  
She claim'd that to her selfe, as Ladies det,  
He as a Knight might iustly be admitted  
So none should be outshut, sith all of loues were fitted.<sup>25</sup>

Britomart then proceeds to prove that she can fulfill the functions of a lady by removing her helmet and revealing her hair, at which point she enters the castle with both Amoret and the knight. Notable about the scene is the way in which neither the narrator nor any character questions Britomart's ability to be both a knight and a lady at the same time, even after she has demonstrated her femininity by revealing her hair. Rather than

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<sup>23</sup> For more on the medieval reception of Ovid and subsequent romances with gender-changing heroines, see Valerie Hotchkiss, *Clothes Make The Man*, pp. 105ff.

<sup>24</sup> *The Faerie Queene*, III. 1. 63.7-8.

<sup>25</sup> *The Faerie Queene*, IV. 1. 12.

contradictory identities, the scene presents an instrumental gender model where gender identity is based on whether someone has the requisite props to enact a social role. At this moment, I suggest, Britomart's assemblage contains components from different gender identities: her long hair and feminine body work to assemble an identity for her as a lady while her armour and martial prowess work towards a masculine identity as a knight. Rather than one of the two identities overwhelming the other or the two identities cancelling each other out, both identities are assimilated into the same assemblage. Britomart can be both male and female at the same time because neither part of the assembled whole is replaced: both gender-marking components remain in play. Further, Britomart's feminine sex in the form of her hair does not replace her masculine gender in the form of her armour, but supplements it, suggesting a possible permanence to seemingly replaceable identity characteristics: the armour remains an active part of Britomart's assemblage in spite of her hair being revealed.

For the Elizabethan reader, the image of Britomart acting in both male and female genders would naturally evoke Queen Elizabeth, particularly since Spenser includes Elizabeth among Britomart's descendants. Mary Villeponteaux notes that in his Letter to Raleigh, Spenser specifically identifies only Belphebe and Gloriana with Elizabeth, probably to minimize opportunities for offence, but Britomart's role as the knight of Chastity makes such an identification difficult to escape, particularly given her dual gender roles.<sup>26</sup> Elizabeth herself occupied a liminal position as both male and female, being male in her capacity as English monarch but female anatomically speaking. The two genders were bridged by the theory of the king's two bodies: a mortal body natural and the far more important body politic, embodiment of the monarchy as an institution. The body politic, initially conceived as a way to overcome infirmities caused by disease, extreme youth or age on the part of the king, was pressed into service in order to compensate for her femininity.<sup>27</sup> Through it, Elizabeth was to be re-assembled from fallible woman into infallible monarch, merely one in the long line of kings. Whether this assemblage was viable — i.e., whether the male role of kingship was even compatible with a female body — was a point of considerable debate and even Elizabeth's supporters justified her role chiefly by figuring her as an exception by virtue of divine appointment.<sup>28</sup> Perhaps the

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<sup>26</sup> Mary Villeponteaux, "'Not as women wonted be': Spenser's Amazon Queen," in *Dissing Elizabeth: Negative Representations of Gloriana*, ed. by Julia M. Walker (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), pp. 207-25 (p. 207).

<sup>27</sup> Villeponteaux, 'Spenser's Amazon Queen,' pp. 209-10.

<sup>28</sup> Susanne Woods, 'Spenser and the Problem of Women's Rule', *Huntington Library Quarterly* 48 (1985), 140-58 (pp. 142-44). See also Louis Montrose, 'The Elizabethan Subject and the Spenserian Text' in *Literary Theory/Renaissance Texts*, ed. by Patricia Parker and David Quint (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), pp. 303-40 (p. 309).



clearest expression of this argument was Elizabeth's own when addressing her troops gathered at Tilbury to resist the expected Spanish invasion: 'I know I have the bodie, but of a weak and feeble woman, but I have the heart and Stomach of a King, and a King of *England* too.'<sup>29</sup> In her declaration that she is both woman and king, Elizabeth asserted a role much like the one that Britomart takes up in the *Faerie Queene*, assembling herself to be capable of occupying several gender roles at once. As Stephen Cohen observes, Elizabeth did not merely use the body politic to justify her rule, but 'also *exploited* the supposed essentiality of her feminine self and its privileged private status when the invocation of political power would not suffice.'<sup>30</sup> When Elizabeth excused her reluctance to execute Mary, Queen of Scots, and her unwillingness to marry by presenting herself as a hesitant woman rather than a determined monarch, she reconfigured her gender assemblage to suit the situation.

While Elizabeth could be empowered through invocations of her (male) body politic, such invocations carried the demeaning suggestion that it (i.e., that body) served to overcome the inferiorities of her female 'body natural'. Bishop Aylmer's 1559 defense of Elizabeth asserts that Elizabeth would rule successfully by the grace of God *in spite of* her feminine qualities: 'Placeth he [God] a woman weake in nature, feable in bodie, softe in courage, unskilfull in practise, not terrible to the enemy, no Shilde to the frynde, well, *Virtua mea* (saith he) *In infirmitate perficitur*... It is as easy for him to saue by fewe as by many, by weake as by strong, by a woman as by a man.'<sup>31</sup> The gender of the queen is ostensibly rendered immaterial by God's aid, that is to say, agency is vested entirely in a male God. As Katherine Eggert points out, we should not readily assume that such attempts to preserve a wholly masculine kingship were successful: rather, Elizabeth managed to carve out a space for a female body politic.<sup>32</sup> At the same time, however, as a female monarch, Elizabeth was in a no-win situation: if she failed as a ruler, then the realm would suffer,

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<sup>29</sup> Louis Montrose, *The Subject of Elizabeth: Authority, Gender, and Representation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), p. 149. For a discussion of the authenticity of the Tilbury speech, see Frances Teague, 'Queen Elizabeth in Her Speeches' in *Gloriana's Face: Women, Public and Private, in the English Renaissance*, ed. by S.P. Cerasano and Marion Wynne-Davies (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), pp. 63-78 (p. 68).

<sup>30</sup> Stephen Cohen, '(Post)modern Elizabeth: Gender, Politics, and the Emergence of Modern Subjectivity', in *Shakespeare and Modernity: Early Modern to Millennium*, ed. by Hugh Grady (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 20-39 (p. 25).

<sup>31</sup> John Aylmer, *An Harborowe For Faithfull and Trewe Subiects* (1559), sig. B2v-B3r. Here as elsewhere I have standardized the long *s*, expanded abbreviations, and replaced *vv* with *w*.

<sup>32</sup> Katherine Eggert, *Showing Like A Queen: Female Authority and Literary Experiment in Spenser, Shakespeare and Milton* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), pp. 4-5.

but if she succeeded, then she threatened the stability of the gender hierarchy.<sup>33</sup> This uncertainty about the legitimacy of Elizabeth and Britomart's gender assemblages anticipates the threat posed in the 1596 *Faerie Queene* by Radigund and her Amazons, who threaten gendered social roles not merely through their own cross-dressing but by compelling men to cross-dress as well, forcibly deterritorializing men's gender assemblages by taking away their male clothing.

## 2. Radigund: Trapped in an Assemblage

Radigund stands as Britomart's darker half, the dialectical opposite of the wholesome cross-dresser. Both women take up arms because of an unrequited love; both women wear armour and display martial prowess; both women wear dual-purpose riding tunics that can be let down to function as dresses; both women defeat Artegall because he is unable to continue to fight either of them after seeing their beauty.<sup>34</sup> Radigund mirrors Britomart but always in a negative sense: where Britomart is chaste, Radigund is sensual; where Britomart seeks a husband, Radigund has declared war on the male gender and forces men to fulfill housewifely tasks in a perverse mockery of marriage. In so doing, Radigund underscores the cross-dressing knight's unsettling potential to turn the social order upside down and reminds us that as a woman in armour, Britomart is, after all, assembling a potentially transgressive identity. Radigund functions to call attention to cultural anxieties surrounding cross-dressing in the period and with Queen Elizabeth in particular. As Mihoko Suzuki observes, where Britomart offered Spenser an opportunity to praise his queen, by the time he was writing Book V, he appears to have become disillusioned with her.<sup>35</sup> Spenser was not the only one: during what John Guy has referred to as the 'second reign' of Queen Elizabeth, writers throughout England were becoming disillusioned with the myth of Elizabeth as the Virgin Queen, particularly as concerns about what might happen after her death became ever more pressing.<sup>36</sup> Radigund thus represents a deliberate problematization of the assembled gender presented by Britomart: Radigund consistently occupies both a male and female gender identity but unlike Britomart, Radigund is openly destructive. Radigund does not waylay damsels, as an evil knight

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<sup>33</sup> Stephen Cohen, '(Post)modern Elizabeth: Gender, Politics, and the Emergence of Modern Subjectivity', p. 24.

<sup>34</sup> See *The Faerie Queene*, III.ii and V. 4. 30; V. 5. 2 and III. 9. 21; IV. 6. 19 and V. 5. 12. For more on the confusing similarity between the two women, see Katherine Eggert, *Showing Like A Queen*, p. 41.

<sup>35</sup> Mihoko Suzuki, 'Scapegoating Radigund', in *Critical Essays on Edmund Spenser*, ed. by Mihoko Suzuki (New York: G.K. Hall & Co., 1996), pp. 183-98 (p. 191).

<sup>36</sup> See John Guy, 'The 1590s: the second reign of Elizabeth I?' in *The Reign of Elizabeth I: Court and Culture in the Last Decade*, ed. by John Guy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 1-19.

might; she instead waylays knights and converts them into damsels. She thus goes one step farther than Britomart does: where Britomart assembles a identity only for herself, Radigund additionally disassembles other people's identities.

Radigund is characterized from the start as 'a proud Amazon', a term worth pausing over.<sup>37</sup> While Winfried Schleiner and Gabriele Jackson present a list of positively viewed Amazons during the period, the word appears to have carried a more generally negative charge.<sup>38</sup> In a marginal gloss to his misogynist pamphlet, *The First Blast of the Trumpet Against The Monstrous Regiment of Women* (1558), John Knox helpfully defines Amazons in a marginal gloss as 'monstrouse women, that could not abide the regiment of men, and therefore killed their husbandes.'<sup>39</sup> Polemical as Knox's text is, his deployment of the Amazon trope underscores how frightening Amazons could be. Kathryn Schwarz suggests that amidst Renaissance fantasies about bizarre Amazon sexual practices — 'mating anonymously in the dark, killing men by exhausting them sexually, refraining from marriage until they have killed a man in war' — the term becomes a distinct (if imaginary) sexual identity, one dedicated to destroying all traces of men from their society.<sup>40</sup> As such, the Amazon represents Renaissance moralists' worst nightmare: the aggressive woman who seeks not merely to basely imitate but to destroy men. Queen Elizabeth seems to have been painfully aware of the dangers inherent in being associated with Amazons, deliberately avoiding using rhetoric of herself as an Amazon. While this may be, as Winfried Schleiner suggests, a result of Elizabeth preferring to emphasize herself as a peace-time ruler, the absence of the metaphor from Elizabeth's speeches is striking.<sup>41</sup> Joan Curbet notes that instead of presenting herself as an Amazon, 'Elizabeth would rather tend... to turn to cross-dressing and to present herself as male in specific critical moments.'<sup>42</sup> Elizabeth's preference for a dual-gender assemblage over the specifically Amazonian gender model speaks to the danger of such a metaphor.

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<sup>37</sup> *The Faerie Queene*, V. 4. 29.5.

<sup>38</sup> See Winfried Schleiner, "'Divina virago': Queen Elizabeth as an Amazon", *Studies in Philology* 75 (1978), 163-80, and Gabriele Bernhard Jackson, 'Topical Ideology: Witches, Amazons, and Shakespeare's Joan of Arc', *English Literary Renaissance* 18 (1988), 40-65.

<sup>39</sup> John Knox, *The First Blast of the Trumpet Against The Monstrous Regiment of Women* (1588), sig. B3r.

<sup>40</sup> Kathryn Schwarz, *Tough Love: Amazon Encounters in the English Renaissance* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), p. 5.

<sup>41</sup> Schleiner, "'Divina virago,'" pp. 179-80.

<sup>42</sup> Joan Curbet, 'Repressing the Amazon: Cross-Dressing and Militarism in Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*', in *Dressing Up For War: Transformations of Gender and Genre in the Discourse and Literature of War*, ed. by Aránzazu Usandizaga and Andrew Monnickendam (Amsterdam: Rodopi B.V., 2001), pp. 157-72 (pp. 158-59).

Spenser never refers to Britomart as an Amazon and presents the Amazonian gender as not just an imitation of a male gender but a corrupted overturning of the perceived natural order, where women rule and men are subservient. Captured men are stripped of their armour and dressed ‘in womens weedes: And then with threat / [Radigund] doth them compel to worke, to earne their meat, / To spin, to card, to sew, to wash, to wring.’<sup>43</sup> The full horror of this — Terpine prefers to be hanged rather than submit to it — lies in the way that Radigund re-assembles male gender identity, leaving her captives unable to act in a non-female way. Spenser informs us as Artegall is carted off to face his grisly fate that

Such is the crueltie of womenkynd,  
When they haue shaken off the shamefast band,  
With which wise Nature did them strongly bynd,  
T’obay the heasts of mans well ruling hand,  
That then to all rule and reason they withstand,  
To purchase a licentious libertie.  
But virtuous women wisely vnderstand,  
That they were borne to base humilitie,  
Vnlesse the heauens them lift to lawfull soueraintie.<sup>44</sup>

Spenser affirms a natural superiority of men to women and yet allows for exceptional women like Elizabeth and Britomart, who might otherwise come under suspicion of being Amazons. Further, in linking the cruelty with specifically rebellious women, Spenser is able to avoid accusations of casting aspersions upon women generally and instead provides instructions on how women can assemble a suitable gender for themselves. Their subordination is figured not merely as natural but something that requires a conscious choice: much like the Amazons’ gender, a properly feminine gender must be chosen. The apparently natural subordination of women to men, Spenser suggests, requires compliance rather than being innate. Spenser emphasizes the need for women to assemble and maintain a proper gender identity for themselves, so that cross-dressing becomes notable not as a unique gender construction but as a deviant anomaly.

Radigund’s assembled gender differs from Britomart’s not in having different components — like Britomart, she uses clothes and weapons — but in the different permanence and deployment of these parts. Whereas Britomart’s armour appears fully masculine, Radigund’s armour is far more sensually characterized: its description begins

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<sup>43</sup> *The Faerie Queene*, V. 4. 31.4-7.

<sup>44</sup> *The Faerie Queene*, V. 5. 25.

with the shirt or tunic she wears underneath, ‘short tucked for light motion / Vp to her ham,’ followed by golden buskins and a scimitar tied ‘Vppon her thigh,’ repeating the emphasis on the body underneath her armour.<sup>45</sup> This armour is less a disguise than a means of display, highlighting the composite nature of Radigund’s gender as being neither fully masculine nor fully feminine. Her battle with Artegall parallels his encounter with Britomart in Book IV: in both cases, Artegall is disarmed by seeing his opponent’s face. Whereas Britomart merely loses the visor of her helmet, Radigund is knocked fully unconscious and Artegall ‘to her lefpt with deadly dreadfull looke, / And her sunshynie helmet soone vnaced, / Thinking at once both head and helmet to haue raced.’<sup>46</sup> Artegall seems fully bent on killing Radigund until he sees her face, which stays his hand in spite of being ‘bath’d in bloud and sweat.’<sup>47</sup> It is not merely Radigund’s beauty that stops him — given her revealing attire, that was evident during the fight — but additionally the fact that she has been deprived of consciousness. Her assemblage is altered by the removal of some of her armour but also, and more significantly, by her ceasing to act. Spenser’s description focuses on Radigund’s face, leaving the armour out of frame, as it were, and thus strips the situation of its original context. What Artegall and the reader of the poem sees is a beautiful woman: her anatomy becomes the chief component of her assemblage. Her gender becomes briefly feminine in a traditional sense.

Upon regaining consciousness, Radigund immediately reasserts her Amazonian gender and proceeds to defeat and imprison Artegall. The emphasis shifts from her face to her actions, how ‘huge redoubled strokes she on him layd’ and ‘with her sword on him she flatling stroke, / In signe of true subiection to her power, / And as her vassal him to thraldome tooke.’<sup>48</sup> This contrasts sharply with Britomart’s behaviour in the parallel scene not merely in the outcome but also in the way that Britomart, unlike Radigund, speaks as well as attacking, demanding that Artegall continue the fight rather than simply pressing her advantage. Where Britomart allows a transition into courtship and assumes a feminine role, Radigund remains a violent Amazon. The only time that Radigund *can* perform a traditionally female gender is when she is unconscious and her armour is unseen. Her anatomy takes on a primary position in the assemblage only when she is inactive. Later, while Artegall is in captivity, she falls in love with him, and needs to ask her maid for advice on how to seduce him, an enterprise that fails in part because of the maid’s duplicity and in part because of Artegall’s faithfulness to Britomart. Even before her attempted courting of Artegall, however, Radigund seems unable to act as a

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<sup>45</sup> *The Faerie Queene*, V. 5. 2.6-7 and V. 5. 3.4

<sup>46</sup> *The Faerie Queene*, V. 5. 11.7-9.

<sup>47</sup> *The Faerie Queene*, V. 5. 12.5.

<sup>48</sup> *The Faerie Queene*, V. 5. 14.6 and V. 5. 18.1-3.

conventional woman, so that in Terpine's account of Radigund's scorning by Bellodant, she sounds more like a knight than a lady: 'And wooed him by all the waies she could: / But when she saw at last, that he ne would / For ought or nought be wonne vnto her will.'<sup>49</sup> Radigund's behaviour is characterized by initiative and aggression from the start, traits typically associated with male figures. We find here a character who cannot perform the fully feminine gender she wishes to— at least not deliberately. Artegall, though struck by her beauty during their fight, pays little attention to it afterwards. Her time as an Amazon appears to have destroyed her ability to be a genuine romantic prospect or interact with male society except in a hostile way.<sup>50</sup> She has become trapped in an assemblage that was once empowering, illustrating the pervasive Renaissance fear that a deviant gender performance, once adopted, might become permanent. There seems to be no chance of redemption for her: her entire influence must be eradicated by Britomart.

Assemblage theory suggests that we must view all identity as situated at a particular moment in time (as, that is, temporal), but not that those changes are necessarily only temporary. Radigund, like Britomart, has an explicitly and temporally assembled gender but she also illustrates how that assemblage, once created, never fully disappears. She may share celestial beauty with Britomart, but her beauty is fading: where Britomart's revealed face is 'like to the ruddie morne appeared in sight, / Deawed with siluer drops, through sweating sore', Radigund, 'Like as the Moone in foggie winters night, / Doth seeme to be her selfe, though darkned be her light'.<sup>51</sup> Radigund's Amazon-ness can be only temporarily dispelled and requires not only that she should stop wearing armour but that she should stop acting altogether: she appears at her most feminine when she is unconscious, her assemblage dictated solely by her physical body rather than by her choices. In Radigund's case, clothes make the woman because they force her to act in a particular way; as allegorical aspects of her character, they additionally signal her current state of mind. Radigund serves to highlight the real danger in which Britomart has placed herself as well as the potential danger she poses to Renaissance society, namely that she may disrupt the gender hierarchy. Radigund's example asks whether Britomart will actually be able to abandon her armour after her marriage or whether she will be perpetually slipping back into it. A threateningly dual gender identity, once assembled, is apparently not so easily disassembled.

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<sup>49</sup> *The Faerie Queene*, V. 4. 30.4-6.

<sup>50</sup> This does not prevent Britomart and Radigund from perceiving one another as romantic rivals but Artegall himself never seems to even entertain the notion of changing his affections. See, for instance, Mary R. Bowman, "'She there as Princess rained": Spenser's Figure of Elizabeth', *Renaissance Quarterly* 43 (1990), 509-28.

<sup>51</sup> *The Faerie Queene*, IV. 6. 19.6-7 and V. 5. 12.8-9.

The fight between Radigund and Britomart is presented not so much as a clash of opposites but instead as a clash of similarities. We are told that their encounter is ‘As when a Tygre and a Lionesse / Are met at spoyling of some hungry pray, / Both challenge it with equall greedinesse.’<sup>52</sup> Both women are predatory animals laying claim to Artegall, who is figured as a helpless prey-animal, continuing the inversion of expected gender roles. In killing Radigund and overturning the Amazonian regime, Britomart re-establishes the social gender hierarchy by aggressively asserting her identity as Artegall’s lady rather than as a knight in her own right. Having freed all of the knights, she also reintroduces the state of liberty that allows for a re-assembling of traditional masculinity. This re-assembly of Artegall includes the renewed services of Talus, the iron squire who had, following Artegall’s imprisonment, gone to incorporate himself into Britomart’s own assemblage. Re-assembling Artegall thus represents a partial re-assembly of Britomart herself: in response to the threat of Radigund’s dangerous cross-dressing, Britomart becomes associated only with the most clearly female parts of her gendered self. She may still be in armour, but she functions to return the poem to masculine rule.

In defusing the potential threat posed by Britomart’s cross-dressing in favour of restoring men to power, Spenser re-asserts that Britomart — and Queen Elizabeth with her — is not an Amazon herself. As Cora Fox suggests, Elizabeth walked a tightrope in constructing her gender, using it alternately to reinforce and to undermine expectations.<sup>53</sup> To move too far in either direction was to court disaster: if Elizabeth was too feminine, she would appear weak; if she was too masculine, she was a threatening Amazon. Even when Elizabeth presents herself as a martial figure, as at Tilbury, she is always leading an army of men, not women.<sup>54</sup> Rather than seeking to destroy the men around her, Elizabeth is figured as inspiring them, so that as Mary R. Bowman notes, ‘Elizabeth is both like and unlike an Amazon. She is an independent and powerful ruler, but she chooses to project an image not violent but loving, not sexually predatory but celestial and virginal.’<sup>55</sup> For Britomart to be purged of her Amazonian potential, she must become inspirational rather than violent: rather than defeating Artegall, as both she and Radigund have done, she must do what Radigund could not do, namely establish Artegall as fully masculine and cede her masculine rights over to him.

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<sup>52</sup> *The Faerie Queene*, V. 7. 30.1-3

<sup>53</sup> Cora Fox, *Ovid and the Politics of Emotion in Elizabethan England* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), p. 33.

<sup>54</sup> Montrose, *The Subject of Elizabeth*, p. 157.

<sup>55</sup> Bowman, ‘she there as Princess rained’, 521.

### 3. Artegall: Returning to an Old Assemblage

In a poem that presents us with several cross-dressing women — Britomart, Radigund and the lady knight, Sophia — Artegall is the only named male cross-dresser, and a forced cross-dresser at that. Artegall opens up the prospect of an assembled identity being forced upon someone rather than being chosen in the way that Britomart and Radigund choose to wear masculine armour. The assemblage is constructed around Artegall and in spite of him, constraining and shaping his actions without giving him a chance to shape them himself. His association with Radigund, a woman trapped in an inappropriate gender assemblage, taps into Renaissance concerns about the potential permanence of gendered costumes. Such costumes and gender changes do not merely allow people to subvert social hierarchies but might additionally become permanent.<sup>56</sup> The use of gendered tools can contaminate the essential self underneath, changing the assembled gender even after the performed gender has been discarded and the original gender re-assembled. Such concerns, acute on the stage, are necessarily strong within an allegory, where identity changes could manifest in physical transformations, as they do in the case of Malbecco who becomes a monstrous embodiment of his own jealousy. If Artegall has once been assembled into a feminine gender role, can he be re-assembled into a fully masculine one?

When we first meet Artegall, his masculine gender is characterized by extreme aggression. We find him not rescuing damsels or even on a quest but on the tournament field, where violence provides entertainment. Given his prowess, the other knights ‘each of other gan inquire his name. / But when they could not learne it by no wize, / Most answerable to his wyld disguise / It seemed, him to terme the saluage knight.’<sup>57</sup> Spenser helpfully tells us Artegall’s real name shortly afterwards, but the title of ‘saluage’ knight seems oddly and uncomfortably appropriate for Artegall. Particularly early in the book, Artegall tends to immediately deal with problems by martial means rather than investigating further. His behaviour is partially explained by what we learn of his upbringing by Astræa, goddess of justice in Book V: Astræa’s educational programme for her adopted son revolves largely around learning ‘to weigh both right and wrong / In equall balance with due recompence’ and fighting ‘wyld beasts, which she in woods did find, / With wrongfull power oppressing others of their kind.’<sup>58</sup> Artegall is thus trained to kill wild things — i.e., curb and punish excessive passion — in order to institute order,

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<sup>56</sup> See for instance Laura Levine, *Men in Women’s Clothing: Anti-Theatricality and Effeminization, 1579-1642* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994) and Howard, *The Stage and Social Struggle in Early Modern England*.

<sup>57</sup> *The Faerie Queene*, IV. 4. 42.3-6.

<sup>58</sup> *The Faerie Queene*, V. 1. 7.1-2 and V. 1. 8-9.



but in the process he himself is associated with wildness and violence. His behaviour is unusually aggressive in part because he is overperforming his masculinity to an almost absurd extent: while violence is a male prerogative, the poem suggests that it needs to be moderated if it is to be virtuous, just as justice must be tempered with mercy.<sup>59</sup>

This focus on Artegall as a martial man is emphasized by the way he is characterized in terms of the armour he wears, which is inscribed as being '*Achilles armes, which Arthogall did win.*'<sup>60</sup> Artegall gained his armour through martial prowess and he continues to use his strength of arms to define himself. In focusing on the armour, Spenser elaborates on the trick that allows Britomart to present herself as male, namely that anybody who wears armour is coded male or quasi-male.<sup>61</sup> Conversely, anybody wearing 'womans weeds' is coded female; just as Britomart re-codes herself as male by taking on knightly arms, so Artegall has been stripped of his male armour and forcibly re-coded as a female figure. The objects in his new assemblage assert a dependent identity for their wearer, one that within the cruel Amazonian system leaves him completely at others' mercy. He may be physically recognizable as male but socially — and thus in every sense that matters in terms of what he can or cannot do — Artegall has been degendered, or, re-gendered female.<sup>62</sup> Neither his actions nor his body are sufficient to let him be masculine: like Britomart's armour, Artegall's apron and spindle establish his identity for him by mediating all other characters responses to him.<sup>63</sup> In having Artegall's gender forcibly assembled by someone other than himself, Spenser presents a model of gender identity outside a person's control and what the long-term ramifications of such an identity might be.

Donald Stump argues that Artegall's defeat is an essential part of his education: his aggression is moderated through his successive defeats at the hands of Britomart and Radigund.<sup>64</sup> Radigund's defeat of Artegall is a particularly extreme one and one with interesting ramifications for the portrayal of gender. When she captures him, we are told that she

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<sup>59</sup> Here as elsewhere in my reading of Artegall's masculinity I am indebted to Donald Stump's article 'Fashioning Gender'.

<sup>60</sup> *The Faerie Queene*, III. 2. 25.6.

<sup>61</sup> Anderson, 'Britomart's Armor', p. 76.

<sup>62</sup> See Eggert, *Showing Like A Queen*, p. 24.

<sup>63</sup> For more on classical precedents for Artegall's spindle, see Mihoko Suzuki, *Metamorphoses of Helen: Authority, Difference, and the Epic* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), p. 180.

<sup>64</sup> Stump, 'Fashioning Gender', 107. See also John D. Staines, 'Pity and the Authority of Feminine Passions in Books Five and Six of *The Faerie Queene*,' *Spenser Studies* 25 (2010), 129-61 for a further reading of the poem as critiquing Artegall's pitiless model of masculinity.

caused him to be disarmed quight,  
Of all the ornaments of knightly name,  
With which whylome he gotten had great fame:  
In stead whereof she made him be dight  
In womans weedes, that is to manhood shame,  
And put before his lap a napron white,  
In stead of Curiets and bases fit for fight.<sup>65</sup>

Just as Radigund's gender was changed when she was stripped of her ornaments, so too is Artegall's: he is here stripped out of the assemblage of his male gender while Radigund orders that 'his warlike armes / Be hang'd on high, that mote his shame bewray; / And broke his sword, for feare of further harmes.'<sup>66</sup> Just as Britomart can be identified by the feats she performed with her spear, so Artegall's identity is taken from him here, a condition he cannot free himself from because the tools that he might use to do so have been taken from him, replaced by a distaff with which he can only 'spin both flax and tow; / A sordid office for a mind so braue.'<sup>67</sup> The breaking of his sword underscores Artegall's sudden loss of his tools, those crucial parts of his identity: he can no longer enact his usual role as knight and judge. Although the sword returns apparently undamaged afterwards, Artegall's identity assemblage seems fundamentally changed after his cross-dressing, as evidenced by his relationship with his companion Talus afterwards.

Artegall's squire Talus is a man made literally of iron with an accordingly stern demeanour: 'Immoueable, resistlesse, without end. / Who in his hand an yron flale did hold, / With which he thresht out of falshood, and did truth vnfold.'<sup>68</sup> Technically speaking, Talus is an automaton, both in constitution and action, showing little sign of initiative on his own beyond acting to support Artegall in his battles.<sup>69</sup> He most resembles not a squire but a piece of equipment, a part of Artegall's assemblage like his sword or armour, existing to allow Artegall to perform his knightly identity more adequately.<sup>70</sup> In

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<sup>65</sup> *The Faerie Queene*, V. 5. 21.3-9.

<sup>66</sup> *The Faerie Queene*, V. 5. 12 and V. 5. 22.6-8.

<sup>67</sup> *The Faerie Queene*, V. 5. 23.2-3.

<sup>68</sup> *The Faerie Queene*, V. 1. 12.7-9.

<sup>69</sup> For more on Talus as an automaton and the potentially dehumanizing effects of gentlemanly fashioning, see Jessica Wolfe, *Humanism, Machinery, and Renaissance Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 203-35.

<sup>70</sup> Hulse, Weiner and Streier, indeed, characterize him as one of 'the two weapons that Sir Artegall has at his disposal, his sword Chrysaor and his sidekick Talus. Both are iron and irresistible, and Artegall's

this respect, to a greater extent than the other knights' companions, Talus becomes an allegorical extension of his master. Talus makes possible a kind of behaviour that Artegall must learn to transcend: his mechanical destructiveness and invulnerability allow Artegall to exact an unthinking justice that lets him forget the need to moderate and control his behavior in accordance with a proper Renaissance masculinity. In a way, Talus represents the opposite of the gender-bending that Radigund imposes upon Artegall: where she limited his behaviour choices to a female role, Talus' lack of restraint drives Artegall beyond the bounds of properly masculine moderation. He is the most unruly part of Artegall's assembled masculinity.

The only exception to Talus' lack of initiative is, significantly, when Artegall is captured by Radigund. While Talus does not interfere — he kills the Amazons that attempt to lay hands on him but 'would not once assay, / To reskew his owne Lord, but thought it iust t'obay' — he does eventually leave the field where Artegall has been captured and goes to find Britomart and report what has happened.<sup>71</sup> Britomart, having returned home and laid aside her armour after she finds Artegall, assumes a male gender once more. Talus meanwhile attaches himself to Britomart, fulfilling much the same role as he did with Artegall and sinking once more back into the role of an instrument. In assimilating Talus into her assemblage, Britomart becomes a replacement Artegall, a new knight of Justice while Artegall is imprisoned.<sup>72</sup> Linda Gregerson suggests that at this moment, 'she plays the part of Justice better than Justice himself, and she does so for several crucial cantos in the book that bears his name.'<sup>73</sup> Britomart succeeds where Artegall fails, defeating Radigund and returning the captured men to their former and rightful positions at the top of the hierarchy: 'them restoring / To mens subiection, did true Iustice deale: / That all they as a Goddesse her adoring, / Her wisdom did admire, and hearkned to her loring.'<sup>74</sup> Moreover, Britomart demonstrates a level of control over Talus that Artegall has not established thus far: after Radigund is slain, Talus proceeds to attack her fleeing subjects, much as he might have under Artegall, but is restrained by Britomart: 'she his fury willed

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opponents are no sooner known than they are punished.' Clark Hulse, Andrew D. Weiner and Richard Strier, 'Spenser: Myth, Politics, Poetry,' *Studies in Philology* 85 (1998), pp. 378-411 (p. 386).

<sup>71</sup> *The Faerie Queene*, V. 5. 19.8-9.

<sup>72</sup> David Lee Miller argues that Britomart should be seen as a counterpart to Artegall even earlier, when she sets out to find him: 'The girl has lost her swagger. She regains it by putting on armor, a disguise that allows her to *be* Arthegall while questing to have him.' David Lee Miller, 'Gender, justice and the gods in *The Faerie Queene*, Book 5' in *Reading Renaissance Ethics*, ed. by Marshall Grossman (New York: Routledge, 2007), pp. 19-37 (p. 28).

<sup>73</sup> Linda Gregerson, *The Reformation of the Subject: Spenser, Milton and the English Protestant Epic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 43.

<sup>74</sup> *The Faerie Queene*, V. 7. 42.6-9.

him to slake: / For else he sure had left not one aliue, / But all in his reuenge of spirite would dipriue.<sup>75</sup> Britomart, as an alternate knight of Justice, possesses the moderation that Artegall lacks, in part, perhaps, because she has been out in the world longer than he has and is thus further along in her education. Artegall himself will show similar mercy at the end of the book, calling Talus back when he goes to slaughter a troop of peasants.<sup>76</sup>

As an allegorical part of Artegall himself, Talus' behaviour reflects on Artegall's state of being. Artegall's greater degree of control over Talus after his cross-dressing suggests a change within the knight that goes far beyond having been beaten in battle: he is generally more restrained and less overtly aggressive, calling Talus back from destroying the peasants who are threatening Sir Burbon and his lady, and later when the hags Envy and Detraction revile him.<sup>77</sup> Artegall's time as a feminized victim helps teach him mercy, a virtue that the 'salvage knight' earlier in the poem lacked. Artegall now tempers the inflexible judgment that Talus embodied, using his iron squire but not allowing him free rein anymore. The change is beneficial rather than detrimental because it represents a moderation of Artegall's previous extremism and allows him to find a balance between the two extremes of masculinity and femininity he has occupied over the course of the poem. Artegall thus emerges from his imposed cross-dressing not merely unscathed but even improved, a state that emphasizes how the effects of that cross-dressing remain tangible after his escape and return to masculine dress. Forced upon him though his cross-dressing was, Artegall remains marked by it.

#### **4. Conclusion: Assemblage Theory and Renaissance Identity Formation**

For both Artegall and Radigund, cross-dressing constitutes a potential identity trap that presents gender as assembled into a whole which is paradoxically both permanent and temporary. Neither is able to re-assemble a more traditional gender identity without outside force: Radigund has to be knocked unconscious and partially stripped of her armour and Artegall must be rescued and given his equipment back by Britomart. While Artegall seems fully restored to a traditionally masculine gender and even profits from his brief experience with using female tools, there is no similarly redemptive moment for

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<sup>75</sup> *The Faerie Queene*, V. 7. 36.7-9.

Nathaniel Wallace suggests that Britomart's restraint of Talus represents a restraint of anger, which 'is implicated in many of the crimes and at least some of the judgments in Book V'; Artegall's initial inability to control his own anger is responsible for his defeat. Nathaniel Wallace, 'Talus: Spenser's Iron Man', *Spenser Studies* 10 (1992), 277-79 (p. 278).

<sup>76</sup> *The Faerie Queene*, V. 11. 65.

<sup>77</sup> *The Faerie Queene*, V. 11. 65 and V. 12. 43.

Radigund, who must be killed and the effects of her presence brutally purged from the poem. Her fate testifies to the threat inherent in her illicit behaviour. Following Radigund's death, Britomart herself withdraws from the poem, suggesting that the two opposites in Spenser's dialectical allegory have met and annihilated one another. Britomart returns to a feminized state, waiting for Artegall to finish his quest and return for her, in much the same way as she did after meeting Artegall in Book IV. Given that this is not Britomart's first withdrawal from masculine behaviour, the reader may well have doubts as to whether this one will be permanent either. All three cross-dressers are coloured by their previous gender assemblages even when the more socially troublesome parts of the whole have been rendered inert.

Assemblage theory dissects identity — gendered or otherwise — into different components that can be added, reconfigured, or discarded to produce new identities. In the writings of the Renaissance, this paradigm is modified by a sense that old assemblages can haunt the present. On the one hand, identity is presented as protean, easily manipulated through clothing and other prosthetics. Britomart, Radigund, and Artegall are gendered based on a complex interaction between the clothing that they wear, the tools they use, and the actions that those objects permit: their physical bodies, while always present and visible, take a secondary rather than primary role in determining who they are. While gender identities are thus shown to be mutable, those identities are not perfectly erasable. They are instead quite 'clingly', remaining integrated within the character's assemblage even after the clothes in question have been removed. Radigund is only able to be fully feminine when she is unconscious, otherwise imprisoned in a monstrous Amazon gender. Britomart's escape from such a fate is due not to an essential difference between the two lady knights' actions but to their different motivations for cross-dressing. Artegall, meanwhile, escapes his female gender assemblage but remains altered by his feminized time, moderating his aggression afterwards. Past assemblages, particularly assemblages that exist for prolonged periods, haunt newer assemblages, even when their component parts have been removed.

Spenser's evident concern with cross-dressing as it is practiced by Radigund and Artegall explores and makes manifest the problematic nature not merely of cross-dressing earlier in the poem but of identity formation throughout the poem. The Redcrosse Knight, according to the Letter to Raleigh, was merely 'a tall, clownishe younge man' before he put on his armour, at which point he suddenly becomes 'the goodliest man in al that company'. Even though he is thus improved and made able to perform a knightly role, he remains ignorant and error-prone. Britomart, even in full armour, retains her long feminine hair; even out of her armour, she retains the ability to fight off Malecasta's henchmen. The knight Terpine's horror at the thought of being subjugated by the

Amazons emphasizes the irrevocability of such a transformation, a transformation that Artegall weathers but by which he remains nevertheless affected: his return to masculinity is not a return to the same masculinity with which he began. His re-assembly in a moderated — and thus improved — masculinity emphasizes the manner in which an allegorical character, and by extension a human subject, can be transformed through re-assembly. Spenser's self-conscious allegory allows for an awareness about gender as assembled and re-assembled, not merely within Spenser's poem but also in the world around it.

Running throughout such a model of identity is the question of where agency is centred. As Drew Daniel notes in *The Melancholy Assemblage* generally and in his discussion of court portraits more particularly, identities are often assembled very deliberately, bodies and objects placed in specific postures and positions in order to exploit pre-existing models of melancholy.<sup>78</sup> This deliberate quality is important as it places a great deal of agency in the hands of the person being assembled, but once an assemblage has been produced, we are no longer speaking of an individual who can shape his or her assemblage with impunity but instead about a collaborative hybrid with a staying power of its own. Britomart, Radigund, and Artegall may have some say about how they are assembled, but once they have been assembled, their assemblage takes on a life of its own outside their control. Objects, actions, human subjects, and pre-existing social conditions blur together into a whole, out of which the assemblage emerges. Agency is de-centred not merely from the human subject but also from the other objects, each of which shapes the identity being produced. Moreover, assemblages are remembered even when they are no longer current. The possibility remains that alternate versions will resurface and that a cross-dressing phase, even if it is only a phase, will leave its mark on subsequent assemblages, as on the assemblages of Radigund and Artegall.

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<sup>78</sup> Daniel, *Melancholy Assemblage*, p. 51.