

with dry wit by Suheil Haddad, is a non-practicing doctor, here a fighter. Into this Lost Patrol mixture is plunged the Israeli captive, played with slightly overdrawn common-man homeliness by Moshe Ivgi. The leader of the Palestinians is done by Muhamad Bakri, who looks like a younger Raf Vallone. He and the Israeli find a bond between them—their interest in the World Cup football tourney at that moment being played in Spain, and their enthusiasm for the Italian team. Inevitably, and not too painfully, flare-ups of hatred between the two men, flare-ups of killing along the way, are laced with radio reports, even an occasional TV glimpse in someone's house, of the football matches.

The Palestinians want to get Ivgi to Beirut, where, for some reason, he will be worth money to them, which they need. Like all good Lost Patrol films, it is symbolic; and some of its symbolism is in the dwindling of principals along the way as various people get killed off.

But the whole film is made insistent and telling by the director, Eran Riklis

(whose original idea was turned into a screenplay by Eyad Halfon). Riklis, born in Jerusalem in 1954, had much of his education abroad and graduated from an English film school in 1981. He has worked as a cinematographer, has made a number of documentaries and one previous fiction feature. *Cup Final*, done in 1991, has been shown at more than a dozen festivals around the world and has won some prizes. Prominent in the comment about it has been the recognition, deserved, of the even-handed treatment of all the characters. As a director of actors, this is Riklis's best achievement.

And with his editor, Anat Lubarsky, he has kept his film concise and fluid, making the most of the landscape of battle—including ruined buildings—without crude emphasis, treating the sudden deaths that punctuate the story with a bitter combination of the expected and the surprising. If Riklis can free himself from reliance on trite screenplay patterns, he could become Israel's first filmmaker to win serious world recognition. •

inspector general of the Medical Department of the British army, who, after serving for more than forty years as a physician and surgeon, was discovered to be a woman on her death in 1865.

The term "cross-dressing," a recent word coined to replace "transvestism" with something more respectable-sounding and also to enlarge its scope, certainly does well for such a study as this, which wants to link together Boy George, Shakespeare's boy-heroines, Madonna, Lawrence of Arabia, Jan Morris, Lucy Snow in Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*, Peter Pan, George Sand, and the 350 transvestite members of the Tiffany Club of Waltham, Massachusetts—"mostly male, middle class, and 90 percent married." A single new subject has been created out of various broad and ancient strands in civilized life. It has been isolated for theoretical scrutiny, sometimes in spite of the variegated textures from which its threads have been plucked. Since the subject involves sex at its most visible—that is, in clothes—the result is naturally sensational, and this large book, filled with startling lore and vivid anecdotes, carefully tries to make it even more so.

In behalf of her protagonist, Garber makes both a plea and a claim. The plea is that the transvestite be looked directly at as a separate phenomenon, a complete figure, and not looked through, as a fleeting circumstance in an ordinary female or male existence. The claim is that this distinct figure fills an important role in collective emotional life, and hence in all of cultural life—that it does creative work in direct proportion to its disturbing power. Garber finds her personage appearing in art as a signal of what she calls a "category crisis," a moment in a given "text" when established cultural boundaries of any kind, not only sexual, are being crossed or put in doubt. The transvestite thus stands for, or "marks," any transgressive leap that creates culture itself; or as she puts it, "Transvestism is a space of possibility structuring and confounding culture; the disruptive element that intervenes, not just a category of male and female, but the crisis of category itself. . . . The transvestite is the figure of and for that crisis, the uncanny supplement that marks the place of desire."

Garber reiterates to clarify her terms:

By "category crisis" I mean a failure of definitional distinction, a borderline that becomes permeable, that permits of border crossing from one (apparently distinct) category to another: black/white . . . noble/bourgeois . . . master/slave. The binarism male/female . . . is itself put in question or under erasure in transvestism, and a transvestite figure, or a transvestite mode, will always function as a sign of overdetermination—a mechanism of displacement from one blurred boundary to another.

## The professor, the transvestite, and the meaning of clothes.

### Dragtime

BY ANNE HOLLANDER

Early in her fat book, Marjorie Garber poses the question that clearly inspired it: "Why have cultural observers today been so preoccupied with cross-dressing? Why is it virtually impossible to pick up a newspaper or turn on the television or go to the movies without encountering, in some guise, the question of sartorial gender-bending?" She then offers some evidence: "In the last two years, Phil Donahue has broadcast at least sixteen programs on cross-dressing and transsexualism and Geraldo Rivera more than seven." She points to movies of the 1980s based on the theme (*Tootsie*, *Yentl*, *Victor/Victoria*), along with many others that refer to it in passing, and goes on to sketch a recent rise in transvestism and transsexuality as subjects of intense academic interest. "What are we to make," she wants to know, "of this evidence of what Freud might have called an 'overestimation' of cross-

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dressing, in high culture and low, as a phenomenon of our time?"

In case her theme doesn't strike everyone as quite so salient as she finds it, Garber, a professor of English at Harvard, makes it loom especially large by stretching the term "The Transvestite," the name of her main character, to mean the creature who comes into existence whenever any person of one sex is clad in any

*Vested Interests:  
Cross-Dressing & Cultural Anxiety*  
by Marjorie Garber  
(Routledge, 443 pp., \$35)

form or any part of the other's dress, in life or in art, for any length of time, and under any circumstances. Since something of this kind has been happening fairly often in the long history of culture high and low, Garber can make much of her central character not just as a current preoccupation, but as a recurrent presence. The figure can be both Cary Grant momentarily wearing a frilly negligee in *Bringing up Baby* and also Dr. James Barry,



She further specifies, a little more comprehensibly, the larger goal of her enterprise:

One of the most important aspects of cross-dressing is the way it offers a challenge to easy notions of binary, putting into question the categories of "female" and "male" whether they are considered essential or constructed, biological or cultural. The current popularity of cross-dressing as a theme in art and criticism represents, I think, an undertheorized recognition of the necessary critique of binary thinking, whether particularized as male and female, black and white, yes and no, Republican and Democrat, self and other, or in any other way.

With this book, Garber clearly aims to "theorize" that "recognition" properly, although she never once explains why a "critique of binary thinking" is necessary. I wonder what she makes of night and day?

Garber sees a persistent uneasiness, the "cultural anxiety" of the subtitle, clouding the true perception of the transvestite's significance, and repeatedly causing this powerful figure to be explained away or otherwise made to disappear. Authors or screenwriters, for example, who make a character put on garments meant for the other sex will also make the effect entirely provisional, whether it's absurdly comic or tactically necessary, and they will be sure to reverse it by the end of the story, so that the character's original sex is restored and the ephemeral "transvestite" seems never to have existed.

The point of the book is made through citing uneasy responses to transvestism. This often means, however, that Garber must spot transvestism when it is posing as something else, or is suggested only in partial effects. Since the figure of the transvestite has been thus isolated on purpose to illustrate how desperate people are to preserve all the boundaries that transvestism allegedly challenges, more has to be firmly called transvestism than firmly is in order to support the idea of a general blindness to it and denial of it, along with its importance. By the end of the book she is calling the recurrence of the transvestite figure a return of the repressed.

Any time a woman in history, literature, or cinema has cut off her hair or

momentarily put on pants, or a man has put on an apron, painted his face, or hidden his male identity in a kerchief and skirt, Garber sees this huge personage coming to life, pregnant with crisis, especially when any practical reasons for the other-sex costume are being insisted on. Her section called "The Transvestite's Progress" is laden with stories, true and fictional, of transvestites who say that they only did it to get the job, or to make an escape or a journey, or to survive in a hostile environment—to "make progress" of some kind. Garber



LAURENCE OLIVIER AS KATHERINA IN *THE TAMING OF THE SHREW*

sees all explanations, not just some of them, as denials. She also rejects the idea that a provisional transvestite condition might be a liberating, enlightening, or creative phase of a distinctly male or female life, or a comic moment with a delicate rather than a thundering resonance.

Linked to this claim for the power of the transvestite is another appeal, a brief for the right understanding of gay culture. She observes that transvestite displays have been linked by the public, sometimes wrongly, to homosexual life, and also that they have been ghettoized, marginalized, medicalized, sociologized,

explained out of existence, or actively persecuted even while that same public finds them perpetually fascinating. Her aim is also to sort out the truth of transvestism's role in gay life, restate its meaning, and reclaim its true cultural function for the whole of society.

Garber tells us a great deal about the details of life led in gay and lesbian gear of different sorts, and writes fully about the inside politics of clothing among homosexuals, often in somewhat impenetrable language. She describes the minutiae of the drag world, and has a

long section on the ultimate and irreversible transvestites, the transsexuals. Homosexuality and transvestism are rightly shown to be separate though related subjects; but the two are obviously connected in the public mind, which not only wants to know how to tell male from female, but how to tell straight from gay. Garber has wished to show at great length how small-minded and unworthy are both those desires, along with the desire to determine anyone's "real gender."

Belief in the illusory quality of "gender categories" is fundamental to this study. Such a belief seems natural enough in a time when the model for existence is a flickering screen where apparently solid objects are known to be made only of tiny, soluble, and quickly reformable streaks of light, and perception follows the same pattern. The notion has easily arisen that there "is" nothing, that we "see" and "know" nothing, that our vision and knowledge have been put together, just like existence itself, out of easily

dispersed and reassembled bits. Maleness and femaleness are no exception. The current suspicion is that we may not only wear temporary masks, or even life-long ones, but that we all are masks, deceptively solid shapes of concocted imagery easily reconcocted like everything else. According to that notion, our bodies are certainly no more authentic than our clothes.

Thus, for Garber, it is hopelessly wrong, or lamentably insufficient, to go on insisting that most people are either male or female, however they may dress or otherwise behave. If we look at the transvestite as Garber wants us to, we



must see something neither male nor female, we must see a theoretical "third." Garber says: "The third is that which questions binary thinking and introduces crisis ... a mode of articulation, a way of describing a space of possibility. Three puts in question the idea of one: of identity, self-sufficiency, self-knowledge." Later on: "The transvestite makes culture possible ... there can be no culture without the transvestite because the transvestite marks the entrance into the Symbolic" (which is Lacan's definition of the "third").

Although Garber goes devotedly to the movies and concentrates on aspects of the theater, she apparently looks carefully at very few pictures, and her illustrations are offered with insulting disrespect. Since they are unnumbered, with no numerical reference to them in the text, no reference to the text in their captions, and no list, it is very hard to make use of them. She even describes some of her own illustrations inaccurately. Although her whole subject is founded on the theme of dress and its manifold power over the inner and outer eye, she seems to flout its actual character and history by being careless of its visual representation, where its meaning has been so consistently expounded.

This study seems to be based on its own kind of blindness. Throughout her book Garber holds to a theoretical apparatus that sheds a rather unenlightening glare, devoid of color, texture, or any trace of warmth, despite her very jokey prose. In all her formulations about transvestism, Western culture seems deprived of its richly uneven and messy continuity, and sexuality seems to have lost its connection with other variable layers of human experience, most especially with visual memory. The most noticeable thing about the dense web of this big book is that it was spun by a literary scholar and theorist: by someone who reads rather than sees, sees mainly to read, and prefers decoding to either reading or seeing.

To study transvestism, I would have thought, you would need a fairly subtle grasp of the flux of fashion through time. Fashion has in fact dealt profoundly with sex since the Middle Ages, creating a fluid system of references and allusions that preserves and recycles much more than it discards or adopts. The changing look of clothes, famous for reflecting the spirit of the moment, is nevertheless built on its own history, most of it dealing with aspects of sexuality. Surely transvestism only means something against this background, which is to say, against a larger background of

visual expression. Fashion does not co-opt transvestism from time to time, as Garber suggests. It has always contained it; indeed, it has largely invented it for the modern world.

Moreover, Garber's central notion that male and female sartorial exchange is an image of crisis does not work very well for actual vestimentary expressions in history. Rather than a vision of binary categories being perpetually destabilized by the "realm of the Symbolic," I think that the model of a spectrum or a palimpsest is more fitting for "cross-dressing," as I believe it is for actual sexuality. Male and female clothing has certainly been discussed and described and proscribed and proscribed in fairly rigid and anxious terms, in laws, rules, sermons, and memoranda, in the Old Testament and the New, in letters, satires, and various fictions, some of which are quoted here. But in wear, it has been more complex, and it has behaved much more imaginatively, than any writings reveal.

This fact shows up in pictures, where a stylistic unity, reflecting current visual tolerance, knits together the jarring elements that might appear in whatever current bargain is being struck between male and female bodies and their clothes. Such balance is ignored by writers concentrating on what Garber calls "dissonance." Vested interests have been more discernible in polemical utterances about clothes than on the actual backs of men and women; but it is in such writing, of course, that evidence of "cultural anxiety" can easily be found. In dress itself, contradictory suggestions on several different levels about sexual boldness, common taste, and personal quirk have always been made at one time, some stronger than others. What gets written about is the one thing that pleases or offends, and the writing is what indicates crisis, not the clothes themselves. Everything else about clothes fails to get described or perhaps even noticed, including the harmonizing principle, the gestalt. Much that Garber says about what she calls "transvestite effects" leaves that out, too.

All her examples are accompanied by a great amount of extra lore that thickens the book and captivates the reader without necessarily supporting the theory, so that the cumulative impact comes more from the anecdotes themselves than from their supportive function. Their purpose seems to be an exercise in consciousness-raising, and as such may be welcome; but meanwhile tendentious examples slide by on rhetorical skates. One of these is the figure of Captain Hook in *Peter Pan*, the pirate

villain whose seventeenth-century curls and lace collar Garber wants to see as transvestoid gear. But Hook is, in fact, a reminder that references to the other sex are, in dress, perpetually complicated by often independent references to other epochs. Since this book omits the whole dimension of historical allusion in dress, Garber misses Captain Hook as a reference to Charles II, a notorious womanizer and not a transvestish figure at all. Hook is a case of what I would call plain Historical Drag.

Garber's book overflows with the fascinating life stories of individual transvestites from many different periods in the past, but she has omitted most of the visual context of their different historical moments. Before the late eighteenth century, for example, elegant people of both sexes wore scent, rouge, high heels, and wigs, along with lace and brocade, and artificial arrangements to enhance physical shape. Male transvestites such as the famous Chevalier d'Eon looked no more bedizened in their female clothes than respectable gentlemen did in their male ones. Transvestism did not lurk disturbingly in small surface matters, as it has come to do since, and people did not worry about the sexuality of men in lace, spangles, and embroidery. For this reason there was less excitement about actual transvestism, especially for men.

Since the Middle Ages European fashion, like clothes all over the world, has always differentiated between the sexes, but even more sharply among the classes. Though different in shape, the dress of men and women was once made out of the same stuff, constructed according to the same principles by the same craftsmen, and it had the same degree of richness or plainness, which differed according to rank and region, not sex. Beginning in the late seventeenth century and culminating in the late eighteenth century, however, the elegant clothing of men and women came to be increasingly divided. With the ascendancy of the Romantic movement, elegant feminine dress became fantasized and theatricalized, literary and legendary, full of historical and mythological allusion; it was made by female dressmakers and milliners out of a wholly feminine repertoire of delicate materials and embellishments following rules of design that concentrated on variable surface effects.

Men's tailoring, still in the hands of male craftsmen, continued to evolve constantly as it had always done, but it began to change in the direction of simplification, concentrating less on the



ornamental breaking up of surface and more on the subtle relations of basic form, using matte textures in simple planes, as if to imitate fundamental natural structure and morphology, the character of earth and rock, the way practical architecture did. Women preferred, by contrast, to fill the role of fanciful statuary and ornamental water, of leaves and clouds, of shifting visions and dreams. "Natural man" was thus fully created in clothes by the end of the eighteenth century, along with "fictional woman," or Woman, as she came to be styled. These changes obviously had a great effect on general notions of theater, and of the expressive gear proper to the two sexes in modern life and art.

Garber has declined to look at the dramatic continuum of fashion history. Instead she talks of fashion mainly as something that contemporary designers think up—and so she has missed the way women's clothes for the entire period have engaged in every sort of transvestism, not just sexual. It is true that male elements have been what modern women's clothes have most often imitated, but that has meant male dress of all kinds, classes, occupations, and historical periods, not just current male counterparts. Female dress has also imitated all sorts of animals, machines, extraterrestrials, bric-a-brac, furniture, ships, plants, and little children—and, of course, all sorts of foreigners, theatrical performers, and historical characters of both sexes. During that same 200-year period, male fashion has made no such moves at all, and has stuck firmly to a first-order, evolutionary, "natural" development. And I would emphasize that the developments in fashion I have described did not reflect intellectual, economic, and political developments, but tended to precede them.

**T**he large topic that Garber repeatedly considers is that of the alleged "construction" of femininity through the agglomeration of artificial parts—makeup, coiffure, dress accessories, corsetting, falsies, and high heels. Modern male-to-female transvestism creates its illusions by these means, forever suggesting, says Garber, that a real woman is actually made of nothing else, prompting some feminists to say that women have been female impersonators for years. "Construction," however, has always been the whole point of fashion for both sexes. Dress works as any visual art does: it draws on unconscious fantasy to create material projections that sustain imaginative health. The very function of clothing is figurative and representational, so the plain forms of

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modern men's clothes are no less the invention of fantasy than the complexities of the women's version. But the opposing sexual imagery displayed by male and female dress in the last two centuries has indicated that only women should actually *seem* invented, or perhaps conjured like so many apparitions. So we have arrived at simple bodily envelopes for men and the showy accoutrements for women that modern male transvestites have so energetically seized on.

Complete drag even further suggests—with the help of reference to the stylized Japanese theater in which all the exquisitely garnished women are really male actors—that only men can be perfect females. Dustin Hoffman in *Tootsie* continued the theme that was brilliantly adumbrated by Jack Lemmon's Daphne ("Nobody's perfect!") in *Some Like It Hot*. The implication is that only men are truly imaginative and universal, both natural and naturally creative; and that the scope of their creativity includes Woman, who can only be perfect if men invent her, even out of their own living selves.

Modern women seeking to escape from such false conceptions of femininity have understandably sought the opposing look of natural existence by adopting (not coyly imitating) male dress, which, since the French Revolution, has seemed to stand for Not-Fashion, for Integrity, for Nature—much more for these things, certainly, than for masculine sexuality. Women have consequently failed to look very kinkily sexy in most modern men's clothes, especially in all the masculine informal wear—pants and shirts, boots and sneakers, sweaters and jackets—that now is the staple of female wardrobes. Only truly fetishistic male gear has given a spicy forbidden look to modern women's male borrowings. For a large portion of the contemporary public, transvestism seems to go only one way. It does not mean a woman in a tuxedo: that's not transvestism, that's just fashion or show business. Transvestism means a man in elaborate drag, an imitation high-style sexy woman with a real penis under the sequins; and at this phenomenon people obviously love to look, to stare and to marvel and to feel the intense power of fetishism, and the force of a redoubled erotic appeal.

There is a long tradition in the history of feminine fashion that does mock

male gear in the same erotic spirit, though with different effects. The male evening dress famously worn from time to time by notable stage and screen women is a latter-day example of this practice. The costume has become associated with both sexual license and cultural decadence in this century, mainly because of its flavor of strictly upper-class wickedness. Marlene Dietrich and Josephine Baker wore it; Julie Andrews, imitating them, wore it; Madonna sometimes wears it, always obliged to look licentious in various ways. Now wait-

Women adopting masculine dress or parts of it ever since Joan of Arc in the fifteenth century have arranged to look extra erotic in it by implying that the scope of their own sexual fantasies is much larger than the ideas expressed by standard feminine attire, whatever that has been. For many centuries women's clothes combined a great deal of traditional modesty in the form of long gowns and veiled hair with a few grams of allure in the form of restrained décolletage. This mixture reflected the view that women don't really have sexual fantasies; they cannily lend themselves to those men have about them. We may remember that men made the clothes for both sexes until 1675.

When Joan the Maid adopted her scandalous knightly costume, masculine fashion had just developed an extremely erotic style that showed the legs and modeled the figure, permitted flamboyant hats, remarkable shoes, and expressive coiffures. These vigorous reflections of sexual fantasy were not believed to be an appropriate or naturally expressive mode for women, and certainly not for virgin Joan; but ever since then, whatever the form of general fashion, adventurous women have naturally enjoyed laying claim to some or all of the male visual image, now and then letting it be known that demure allure is not the only thing on their minds. Dietrich's modern male evening dress of 1930 had the same thrilling look of libertine dandyism, something not possible in the soft, clinging feminine modes of the moment, even though they were short, free-moving, and easy-fitting; it was the look of the erotic imagination that initiates sexual experiment, that can be aggressive and even cruel, not the look of masculinity itself but of an erotically enterprising femininity.

The 1924 portrait by Romaine Brooks of the lesbian Una, Lady Troubridge, which Garber inadequately describes as showing her "in male attire," is actually another example of creative female adaptation. With her tailored jacket and striped pants (the picture cuts her off at the hips; it might even be a skirt) she wears an old-fashioned stock and collar obsolete by that date, thus availing herself of Historical Drag rather than current male usage, and she has a feminine hairstyle and earrings along with her male monocle. She looks thrilling, even menacing, with her two dogs as



UNA, LADY TROUBRIDGE BY ROMAINE BROOKS (1924)

Collection of the National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution

resses wear it, too, and a host of mediocre female performers. I propose that this outfit, a centerpiece for Garber's idea of transvestism, is actually entirely feminine. It has been seen so often as a suit for sexually daring women that it doesn't suggest real transvestism at all, and the actual men now wearing it are mostly visible in symphony orchestras. In its white-tie-and-tails version on women, therefore, it has some of the same flavor as Historical Drag, with the additional connotation of feminine sexuality in its more challenging styles, which have always been offered in bits of male gear.



accessories, but she does not look like a man.

Garber's favorite "crossover" theme, the idea of "crisis" in any such displays, seems wrong in view of the way dress really works. Despite those who frame sumptuary laws, the forbidden is never all that forbidden under the unwritten laws of Western dress, which have been there to question even the very forming of boundaries since the beginning of fashion. To focus on a theory of anxiety, Garber is setting up a stronger tension than is really there. All the flashing signs tend to obscure the landscape and form their own exciting pattern.

Not only has modern women's fashion since 1800 seized on the privilege of ignoring the boundaries of sex, history, species, age, class, and even material category, it has also retained the exclusive right to gaudy embellishment, a habit given up by men once they agreed to be "natural." Now most men can only wear lavish trimmings and makeup on the stage and screen, unless, of course, they are serious transvestites; and one component in the male impulse toward transvestism can't help being the pure desire to benefit from the beauty of brilliant adornment, still comprehensively offered only by feminine dress.

I believe that some of the spectacular trappings that Garber sees as transvestite effects in the clothes of male performers such as Elvis Presley, or the even more flamboyant Liberace and Michael Jackson, do not primarily work as disturbing feminizations or gender confusions, as she reads them. All these performers insist on trousers and masculine hair, including the uniquely male sideburns; and they borrow the details of their gorgeous plumage not from women at all, but from the lost heritage of the glorious masculine past: the huge pearl-laden sleeves, the splendid embroidered coats with diamond buttons, the plumed hats, the lace frills, the sparkling uniforms in vivid colors, and the sweeping, fur-lined velvet capes sported by the powerful males of centuries ago. Liberace and the rock stars recall the fact that display was once a serious function for men—not a questionable feminine wile, not a crude show of wealth, but something truly magnificent, designed to show a link with divinity.

The beauty of serious finery is its capacity to render the wearer dazzling, whatever sexual modulations are at work. It is a primary instrument of attraction. To focus the rays of God's sunlight on the royal person and rightly illuminate his kingship, diamonds and cloth of silver were essential. The

descriptions and pictures of Henry VIII and Francis I, both of them unappealingly fat-faced and paunchy monarchs, show how they were made into fabulous, compelling icons by such means. Now rhinestones and sequins will do the trick under a follow-spot. But Liberace, Elvis, and Michael Jackson have invented their images in a world hostile to male display, and have had to support their masculine glitter with the extra erotic charge carried by the flavor of narcissism, now most keenly expressed in personal qualities that need not owe anything to ornamental dress.

In this sexually and morally nervous

country, often called puritanical, ordinary men from the beginning of independent American history obviously had a hard time righteously forcing themselves to give up finery, firmly extinguishing the impulse to shine, forever telling themselves that all such effects are trivial, artificial, sinful, characteristically feminine or unspeakably foreign and somehow dishonorable, associated either with the aristocratic tyranny of the Old World or with primitive barbarism. Ordinary Americans still can't allow themselves much of it, though times are changing, partly under the influence of rock performers, and of drag performers, and especially of

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women. Male earrings and remarkable hair are back to stay, now often worn with business suits.

But in comic movies of the 1940s, such as *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* or *Kiss Me Kate*, much joking about homosexuality had to accompany the temporary appearance of the actors in beautiful Renaissance doublets. Heaven forbid they should simply like wearing them. And Garber shows that in anxious America, much joking about homosexuality naturally had to accompany Liberace's gorgeous stage appearances. He was, in fact, gay; but he seems to have rightly wished to dissociate that fact from his enormous glamour. He avowedly loved wearing his magnificent garments, and he looked beautiful in them, rather like Kings Henry and Francis.

But Garber wants Liberace for her "category crisis" theory. What she sees as his transvestism marks the crossover between classical and popular music. She wants Jackson and Elvis as transvestites for the same purpose, to mark the crossover between black and white music. But I think that the independent power of glitter has had a lot

to do with the appeal of these performers, a magic working separately from the strong erotic charge of their personalities and their music. Placido Domingo and Luciano Pavarotti, by contrast, can be actual Renaissance princes and Baroque noblemen, dressed in the great sumptuous male trappings of the past that match their great living male voices, with no suggestions of transvestism whatsoever, since the original clothes had none. The old "constructed," non-natural character of the straight male of the past is made wonderfully explicit in operatic dress, as it is in much cinematic dress for serious historical epics. Errol Flynn and Charlton Heston have taken full advantage of it.

In her many discussions of theater as a transvestite arena, Garber seems to have missed a striking 1970s example of the modern actress's sartorial flexibility: Joan Plowright played Portia in Jonathan Miller's production of *The Merchant of Venice*, set in the 1880s with all the men in frock coats (including Laurence Olivier as Shylock, whom Garber does mention in her section on the feminized Jew). Between her early

scenes played in corset, curls, and bustle with train, and her courtroom scene played in legal robes and wig, Plowright played the short complicated scene with Nerissa in perfect drag, wearing a Victorian gentleman's tweed suit with a neat cravat, homburg on clipped head, umbrella and gladstone bag in gloved hand, the image of a young barrister coming to town from his country house. Male costume is not at all necessary to the plot in this scene; Portia is alone with her maid. But it was a stunning way to establish Portia for the audience as finally escaping from the feminine prison of her father's infernal caskets by convincing *herself* that right now she is a creative and resourceful young man, fully able to be a Daniel come to judgment and to save her lover's life. Garber would say that she had been transformed into a creative transvestite to do the job, and that the robe and wig of her triumphant scene were still

too feminized to make the point.

On the modern realistic stage only women still seem to be such perfectly changeable presences, able to shift sexes as most male actors do not. The perfect youth or boy may indeed be played by a woman, as in the case of Peter Pan—Garber has a long essay on why; and we are now convinced that the complete actress may certainly play Prospero or Lear as well as Ophelia or Cordelia, just as Sarah Bernhardt played Hamlet as well as Lady Macbeth. Women can be boys or sprites or heroes at will; but despite the great rage for drag performers of all sorts these days, we still do not hear of a serious production of Ibsen, Shaw, or Shakespeare with Dustin Hoffman playing Hedda Gabler, Candida, or Cleopatra.

With the modern feminization of all dress-ups, everything obviously became very complicated, especially on the stage. Garber doesn't point out, for example, that the transvestite women in traditional "breeches" parts are usually wearing male garb from the eighteenth century and before, most of which now registers much more strongly as fancy-historical than as masculine. In fact, on modern female performers, it seems more feminine than not, since women's clothing has been borrowing so much historical male dress for so long. The Shakespearean females, all originally boys, often play boys; but the women who play them now in doublet and hose look entirely female throughout. There is nothing transvestite about the effect, and nothing very disturbing or threatening to boundaries. Even the woman playing Peter Pan always wears a sort of "Ye Olde" Robin Hood outfit, not real boys' clothes.

**T**he idea that an artificial femininity is created by assuming artificial elements of dress is very current, masking the fact that all adult humanity is created that way. Men and women join the fallen and imperfect human race by putting on awkward, ridiculous, and demanding clothes, just as Adam and Eve did; and of course, our first parents' garments were exactly alike. When it comes to sexual awareness, we have all really been transvested from the start. Plainly male and female dress have the same function, to create a fictional body that is the right image of a state of mind, and that perpetually tells its story to its owner, even when only God is present. Getting dressed is something done to satisfy an inward desire to be rightly *completed* by clothes. It is certainly pertinent to the issue of

## Meditating Virtues

Let us meditate the virtue of slogans.  
Let us declare onomastic solutions  
to difficulties largely unnameable,  
and by the mottoes

of euphemism contract verbal righteousness.  
Let's indite bulletins to tell everyone  
The Jargon of Things, to name Lifestyles, to learn  
The Tongue of High Coy:

*Do you Desire to Purchase a Beverage?  
We Thank You for Not Smoking. Have a Nice Day.  
May we Share these Suggestions with You?* Let us  
praise exaltation,

never calling a route salesman a milkman,  
nor an officer of the law a cop, nor  
a senior citizen old, nor a starving  
freezing bagwoman

poor. When we can't alter ills that upset us,  
we will change their names to prevent compassion  
from disturbing our ungulate composure:  
words to deny worlds.

Vocabulary deletes original  
sin; cavalry of the lie reach Calvary  
just in time, to bugle Christ down from the cross.  
But: no nails, no Christ.

DONALD HALL



transvestism, since people are fully aware that clothes create selves, rather than sitting on top of them.

A person choosing to wear the clothes of the other sex right away suggests a person for whom sexuality is of the first importance, someone who feels complete (at least on this or that occasion) in clothes that draw constant attention to sex in general, and all its possibilities, not just to personal attractiveness. And this alarms many, since sex is alarming. Garber describes the fear, expressed by certain seventeenth-century Puritans, that allowing boys to dress up as women for the stage would arouse their sexual feelings and even perniciously turn them into girls, perhaps make them feel feminine desires of other kinds. The same kind of idea persists in ordinary modern life, although the understanding that the way we dress creates us now goes well beyond sex. The whole subject is alarming to people who think that it is right and good to deny, or at least to despise, the creative power of clothes.

**C**lothes seek their own ways to contradict what they mainly purport to mean, even while illuminating and elaborating that meaning. The body blends with the other components, often lending its separate parts to a variety of conflicting visual transformations. Clothes can suggest the felon in the churchgoer, or the other way around. They often suggest that the truly completed body has a basic shape quite different from the unfinished naked form. All of these effects are essentially erotic, since the body is their first element, even if sexuality is not their theme.

In this realm, "the place of desire," as Garber puts it, has always been everywhere. The figure of the transvestite does not need to return; it never really left. Clothes have consistently shown how deeply a sense of sexual interchangeability and fluidity is ingrained in our civilization, just like the sense of all other permutations. The tensions evoked by dress are serious rather than urgent, the product of long accretions rather than strategic deployments of conflicting force. In Garber's compendium of theories and stories of transvestism, I don't find the one from Ovid about Zeus dressing in the body of Diana, the better to seduce her nymph Callisto, nor any other tales from that ancient master of love and metamorphosis. And no mention of Tiresias, our old prophet of these imponderables, whose sagacity I sorely miss in these pages. •

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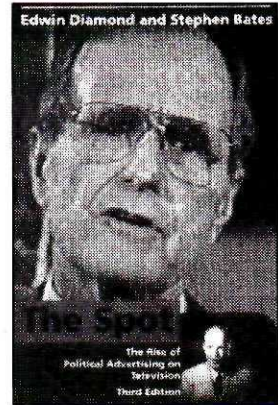
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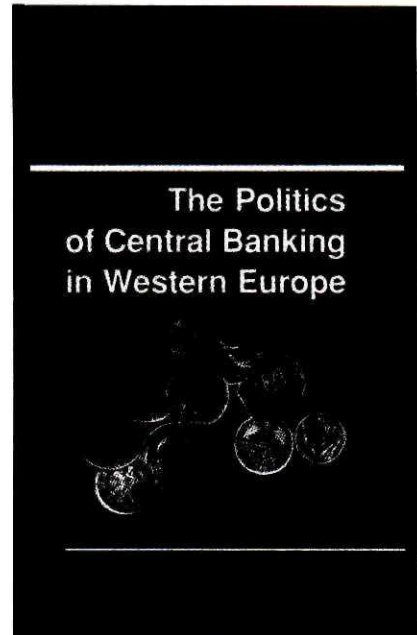
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