

TRIPLE ECHO

At the Crossroads of the Sexes

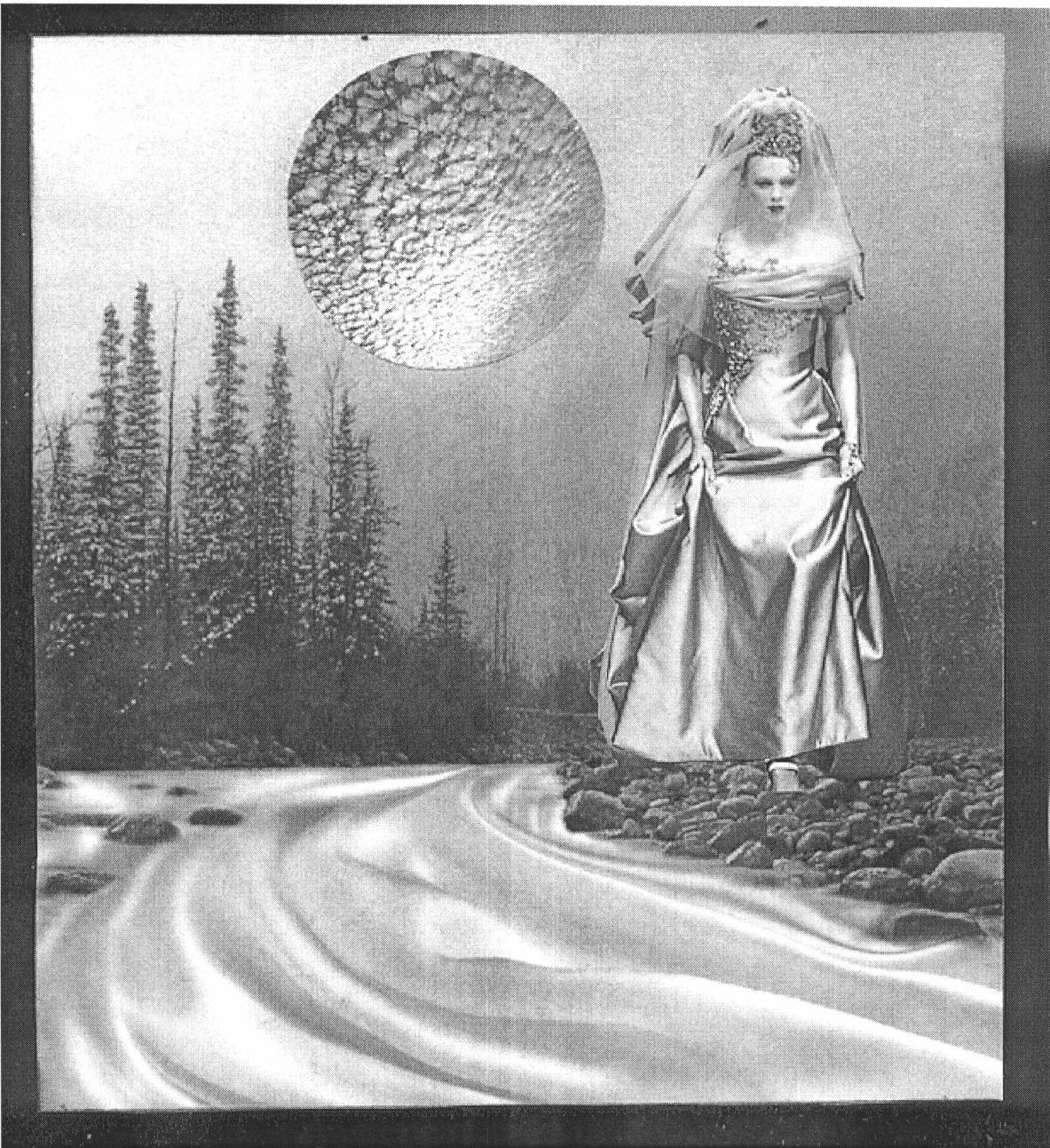
■ Volume 4 Number 1 2002



Trans on Stage: The Art & Politics of Cross-Gender Performance

The Marketing of Gender

Plus transgender erotica, liberating the transgendered
Christian, and the story of Rebecca Pine



Collage by Rachel Steen

Triple Echo

Volume 4 Number 1 August-October 2002

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Books

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No rest in the room

What bathroom do you use?" We've heard the question so many times, it almost induces an involuntary sigh. The answer, more often than not, is that we use the bathroom we can get away with using.

It's hardly an acceptable solution to this most basic human bodily requirement, but the bathroom issue is yet another of the innumerable ways in which the world is decidedly trans unfriendly. If this were a problem solved easily by education, which theoretically it could be, then it wouldn't be so bad. But the truth is, conventionally gendered people often use the bathroom issue like a stick they can beat us up with whenever it suits them.

This observation is prompted by the news item out of British Columbia last March in which a group of parents was pressuring the Nanaimo-Ladysmith school board to prevent a pre-op transsexual teen from using the girls' washroom at school. The student had asked permission last December to use the girls' washroom, and after consulting with the school board, legal and human-rights experts, the school superintendent approved the request. It's the kind of response you hope for as a trans person: calm, reasonable and informed.

But, oh no, here come the parents! While none of the students expressed any concern over the decision, Vicki Podetz, chairwoman of the school's parent advisory council, said, "This is happening way too fast." She added that the council has concerns about "the comfort level of the female students".

Sorry, but I don't buy it. This is not about the comfort level of students. How could it be, when none of them complained? It's about society's comfort level with trans people. Many people don't like us, but because we live in a civil society and they can't come out and say so directly, they need to come at it in another way. And the bathroom issue is this great, big, fat opportunity they have to torment us, while all the while maintaining their lily-white appearance of being nice, reasonable people.

Okay, I can understand how some women might feel threatened when a not entirely convincing woman uses their bathroom. There are, after all, many genuine perverts out there. How

can women tell on the spot whether our motives are genuine? As a 6'3" woman myself, this suspicion women have of me is a cross I have to bear. (I always feel sad that, because I have this male body, women think I don't understand. But when I use the supposedly correct male washroom, I feel threatened too.)

But surely when everyone in the school knows about this trans girl, what in heaven's name do they think she's going to be doing in there? It's not as if her behaviour won't be policed.

Clearly the only threat here is a specifically trans one. We violate conventionally gendered people's concept of a world divided into sex segregated spaces where the only true measure of sex is the existence of a certain set of genitals. It's a classification issue, basically. We complicate their world too much, and they would much rather we didn't. For that, they make our lives miserable. And when you have to go the washroom but can't, that's as miserable as it gets.

It's an issue that will never go away for us. All it takes is one complaint. One mean spirited person can send us to jail for using the bathroom. Our needs are entirely at the whim of anyone who happens to be in the washroom at the time we're in it. And people wonder why we take such great pains to pass!

Not only that, all it takes is one peeping tom in drag and - boom! - years of education go out the window. We're reduced to pleading to use a washroom again. It's the perfect set of circumstances for a tormentor to justify continuing his or her torment. And let's face it, the bathroom question, no matter how we may tire of it, plays no small part in ensuring that trans people are mostly invisible in our society.

There are no easy solutions to our dilemma. You can apply through the approved channels or you can go on the hunch that you'll be able to get away with it without being beaten up or hauled away to jail. Either way, our choices more or less ensure that for trans people there's no rest in the rest room.

Teddy Michaels

Movies

Another Britney sighted!

Be on the lookout for *Britney Baby: One More Time*, an unusual little cinematic offering that made its debut at the Sundance Film Festival, Midnight Series last January and is expected to be out in limited release. *Britney Baby: One More Time* - the title is a takeoff of one of Britney's songs - had its genesis in a Britney Spears lookalike contest in California. The trouble began when the contest was won by a then 24-year old crossdresser named Robert Stephens, a professional dancer in the *Mulan* stage show at Disneyworld. When he turned up to enjoy his prize, an evening with the pop princess herself, her handlers blew a fuse and threw him out. "The only people who showed me any kindness were girls from her dance troupe...her publicist came running, shrieking like a mad woman. I told them I was a prize winner...and they said I needed a shrink. I felt like bursting into tears." A spokeswoman for Jive Records said they were not aware of a lookalike contest and that Stephens had been in a restricted area.

Not to worry. When Britney got wind of the affair, she patched things up and the Britney double got to meet her idol before a concert in New Orleans. Apparently it turned out "to be really nice."

Well, this piece of melodrama was too intriguing to let slip and has been turned into a road movie featuring Mark Borchardt, who was the subject of the 1999 award winning documentary *American Movie* and is a struggling film director in real life. Robert Stephens reprises his Britney role. Borchardt essentially plays himself, a struggling film director from Wisconsin, who is hoping to interview Britney Spears, but instead finds himself on a manic road trip with a trannie Britney.

Periodicals

One more issue!

Don't forget. Triple Echo will cease publishing with the next issue. We have made a few changes to our contact information to minimize our expenses while we wind down. Please note that our fax number is no longer in operation. Our new address is:

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c/o Gender Mosaic of Ottawa
PO Box 7421
Vanier, ON K1L 8E4

E-mail is still good! We're at sappers@cyberus.ca

Triple Echo

AT THE CROSSROADS OF THE SEXES

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The principal aims of Triple Echo are to tell trans people's stories; provide informed comment on issues of gender as they may relate to trans identified persons and to facilitate awareness of trans people's lives.

Submissions and letters to the editor are welcome. The editor reserves the right to edit or refuse any submission. Submissions will not be returned. Please do not send originals or self addressed envelopes. Views expressed or implied are those of the individual contributors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the publisher.

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News

Cult of trans priests

In the town of Catterick in England's Yorkshire, archaeologists have uncovered the existence of a cult of trans Roman priests who worshipped an exotic goddess by howling in the streets on an annual "Day of Blood". A third-century male skeleton unearthed close to the town, once a Roman fort called Cataractonium, has been identified as a "gallus", a transvestite follower of the goddess Cybele.

The skeleton, unearthed in 1981, was originally assumed to be a woman due to its slight build and the array of feminine jewellery she was wearing. New analysis of the bones, however, has determined conclusively that the remains are of a male. The results of the investigation have been published by the scientists of English Heritage in *Cataractonium: A Roman Town and its Hinterland*.

"Followers of the cult, known as galli, dressed in women's clothes and castrated themselves in honour of the goddess during a festival in April called the Day of Blood," said Pete Wilson, a senior archaeologist with English Heritage.

On the Day of Blood, priests of Cybele would run through the streets howling, then take part in the castration ceremony. New recruits became eunuchs with the help of special ornamental clamps, one of which was discovered in the Thames near London Bridge. It is now in the British Museum. The ceremony was designed to follow the example of Atys, the lover of Cybele, who castrated himself out of remorse for infidelity.

Once inducted in the cult, the followers dressed and lived as women, wearing elaborate jewelry, colourful female robes,

with turbans and tiaras over women's hairstyles.

Cybele was a goddess from Asia Minor who became popular in the Roman Empire from the third century B.C. There is an altar dedicated to her at Corbridge, on Hadrian's Wall.

Sex change costs job

Another Canadian trans person is about to present her case before another human rights commission.

Lisa Amber Hardy of Edmonton, who had just been promoted and who had earned an employee of the month award four months ago, has been fired from her job at the Travelodge hotel.

She had approached her bosses at the hotel, where she managed the front desk, with a letter from her psychiatrist explaining her gender change. Initially the response to her transition was positive. She was given a woman's uniform and staff was instructed to call her Lisa. But five days later, she said, two managers called her into an office and told her customers and co-workers were complaining. She was asked to write her own resignation, which she did after 45 minutes behind closed doors. Ms. Hardy said she was willing to be reassigned to a less public job, but her employer declined. Toronto Travelodge spokesman Bruce Macdonald said the company won't comment on employee issues.

Queen greets Transsexual MP

On the second leg of her three nation Golden Jubilee tour down under, the Queen of England

found herself being introduced on the tarmac at Wellington airport in New Zealand to Georgina Beyer, believed to be the world's only transsexual Member of Parliament.

Ms. Beyer has had something of a colourful life, having worked before her transition as a stripper, erotic dancer, and male prostitute. The transition has been a happy one, however, as she entered politics, became a mayor and then an MP. She described her journey this way: "I began as a stallion, then became a gelding and then a mare and now I'm a full member again."

New Zealand has a high proportion of women in powerful roles, including Governor General Dame Silvia Cartwright and Prime Minister Helen Clark.

Kudos

Congratulations to the LGBT folks in Israel for continuing to hold the first and only Pride celebrations in the Middle East. Jerusalem Pride, which has been going on since 1997, was recently featured in a news item on the CBC. Not surprisingly, there were no small number of hecklers, from religious types condemning them to hell to war hawks who disagreed with their policy of reaching out to Palestinians. The active Israeli LGBT community may come as something of a surprise for people in North America bombarded with news of intolerance in the Middle East. The brave LGBT folks in Isreal deserve a lot of credit.

For more on the LGBT scene in Israel, check out www.pridepage.com.

News

Discrimination made me do it, says transsexual bandit

A transsexual bandit who robbed an "almost staggering number" of banks from Vancouver to Montreal and eluded the police by disguising herself as a man was sentenced in Whitby, Ontario in June to 11 years in prison.

Christine White, known as Anatoli Misura before undergoing a sex change about six years ago, was credited with three years pre-trial custody for the year of harsh conditions she endured in segregation. Jail officials placed her in segregation because of her transgender status.

"She wouldn't be welcome in the general inmate population," said Judge Ted Minden. Ontario's recent public service strike delayed White's trial.

Judge Minden rejected White's suggestion that she was forced into a life of crime because she was discriminated against as a transgendered person and couldn't get a job.

Ms. White had a brief career as an Edmonton prostitute and beauty salon operator. Afterwards she never settled in one city long enough to obtain social assistance. Instead, she moved from city to city plotting holdups. She mapped out escape routes, wore subtle disguises, kept her holdup notes and researched banks - some of which she robbed on several occasions.

In May Ms. White, who Judge Minden described as intelligent and articulate, pleaded guilty to 39 offences, admitting she committed 27 bank holdups and collected more than \$70,000. Ms. White was dubbed the Unisex Bandit when police believed the thief was male. During the robberies she dressed as a man and concealed her breast implants with baggy clothing. Her crime spree started with two robberies in Edmonton in May 1997 and ended when she crashed her car into a ditch outside of Bellville, Ontario, culminating a seven-minute, high-speed police chase and takedown. (*Canadian Press*)

Historical voyage marred by controversy

A voyage marking the 200th anniversary of the first circumnavigation of Australia by Matthew Flinders is floundering due to appalling conditions and, some believe, the choice of Capt. Sarah Parry to lead the expedition.

The Windeward Bound, a replica 18th century brigantine, set out in March to retrace the British explorer's 1802 expedition, which produced the first detailed maps of Australia. But while the expedition has been plagued by broken lavatories, dwindling supplies of fresh food and cramped accommodation for the passengers paying \$250 a day to be part of the experience, most of the media concentrated on Capt. Parry, a retired navy diver and commando who is undergoing hormone treatment as part of her desire to become a woman.

One crew member said that Capt. Parry was a combination of a "small-breasted dusky Tahitian Maid" and an autocratic deep-voiced masculine sea captain. "It can be a bit confusing for the ship's crew." The twice married Capt. Parry has made no secret of her life, saying that coming out as a woman has been as challenging as anything she faced during the Vietnam War. Contrary to her own expectations, former navy comrades welcomed her into the Vietnam Veteran's Association as Sarah.

Good news

Transwoman can marry man: EU Court of Human Rights

The European Court of Human Rights has ruled that transsexuals must be allowed to marry in their new gender. The judgement was a victory for Christine Goodwin, 65, a former bus driver in Britain who had gender reassignment surgery in 1990.

A year ago, the Court of Appeal dismissed a case brought by another male-to-female transsexual, Elizabeth Bellinger, who wanted her 20 year old "marriage" recognized.

In Ms. Goodwin's case, the Strasbourg judges found a breach of Article 12 of the Human Rights Convention, which says: "Men and women have a right to marry and to found a family."

OVERTURNING previous rulings in the light of changing conditions, they said the terms "men and women" could no longer be defined by purely biological criteria. It was "artificial" to assert that transsexuals could marry someone of their former opposite sex.

"The applicant in this case lives as a woman, is in a relationship with a man and would only wish to marry a man. She has no possibility of doing so. In the court's view, she may therefore claim that the very essence of her right to marry has been infringed."

Come out!

Visiting Ottawa in August? Come enjoy Rock City Women's Fest in the Gatineau Hills August 16th to 18th. As the largest LGBT camping festival in Canada, Rock City features women musicians and artists and welcomes all queer folk. For more info, check out www.rockcitywomensfest.com.

Images of Gender Perfection

Advertising plays a huge role in perpetuating gender difference and in creating anxieties in us that we are somehow not measuring up.

Rules that govern our appearance and behaviour as men and women are powerful and persuasive, and much of what we learn in the Western world we absorb through advertising. Advertising is a complex medium, for not only does it play on our insecurities and fears, it lures us with our own desires. It shapes who we are at the same time as it reflects society's perception of whom we should be.

Since women do most of the buying in our society, most advertising is aimed at women. This role of woman as consumer evolved from her role as the principal homemaker. As late as Victorian times, the home was the exclusive domain of woman and it was her job to make it look good and function well. The look of the home was the result of feminine taste. Although she was undoubtedly influenced by outside forces, nevertheless she decided how the home would look and she was largely responsible, through feminine crafts like sewing, flower preserving and arranging, for its creation.

With the advent of mass production and the rise of masculine values like technology and produc-

tivity, women's contribution to the creation of the home as a spiritual place were compromised. While she was still largely responsible for its decoration, she became more a cog in the emerging consumer culture than the creative crafts person she had been before. It became her responsibility to buy for the house.

Early department stores recognized this role by recreating feminine taste and interests in their stores as a way to lure women. Shopping became an important part of feminine culture, and advertising and women's identity grew hand in hand. Although in one sense woman became a passive receptor of consumer values, nevertheless she also expanded her authority beyond her domestic sphere through her purchasing power.

By the 1950s, the feminine aesthetic dominated the world of commerce. Household appliances were designed with the woman in mind, and advertised with such stereotypically feminine epithets as "graceful", "sleek" and "sensuously styled." The range of colours and decoration available grew exponentially. Even in the male world of automobiles, two-tone and pastel colours dominated. In fact, all three major U.S.



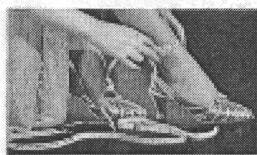
The man who knows all about Hosiery

What conferring with an expert means in greater hosiery economy and satisfaction

Below: Realtile Representative. Look for him. Realtile is instrumental in creating and developing of your new community.

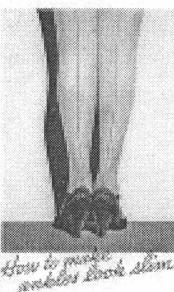
Seventeen years of selling direct to the consumer through personal representatives has given Realtile a vast laboratory of practical information which is valuable to you. There are a few highlights on this page. The man in this photo who brings you this service can help you budget your hosiery wardrobe according to color, weight and occasion. He'll save you money and enable you to look your best.

REALTILE HOSIERY MILLS, Inc., Indianapolis, Ind.



Proper Fit Increases Beauty and Wear. Realtile offers Personal Fit Hosiery. You order according to measurements of stockings length and foot size. Your hosiery is chosen from a vast variety of proportions. It clings to the right places — trodles down, stays longer.

“Men like the Regalgarde...the 1938 fashion page.”



Generally, darker shades and the new Realtile colors flavor and beautify the smile. Bright roses and tulips fit any occasion. Write today. Your Realtile Representative will give you complete information.



The Hosiery Shades That Are Best For You. Realtile has found that a woman can standards on one of these shades best suited to her complexion. Very well powdered. Please remember these proportions: (1) Color of stockings (2) Weight of stockings (3) Length of stockings.

REAL SILK
Shop-at-Home
SERVICE

Almost invariably the experts who advised women on their purchases were men, even for such quintessentially feminine products as silk stockings. The copy reads: "He'll save you money and enable you to look your best." This ad appeared in 1938.

automakers employed women designers to work on interior details and textiles.

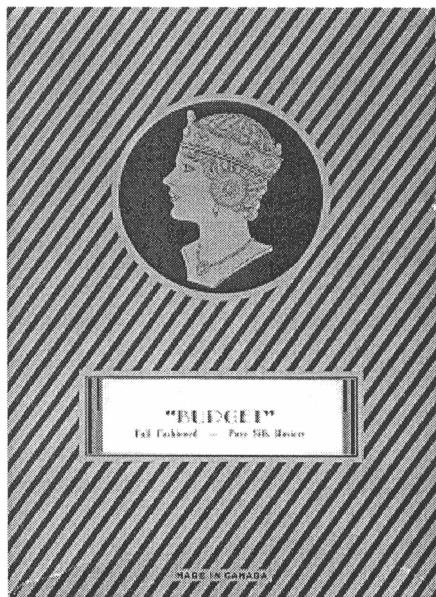
The feminists of the 1960s complained that consumerism had played a large role in the ennui of the suburban housewife of the 1950s, but Penny Sparke, in her book *As Long As It's Pink*, argues that it was not consumption itself that was responsible, but rather that this feminine culture was being trivialized. Housework was linked to leisure and unpaid work, and was not valued in the same way as work that was 'wealth creating', which, of course, was men's work. Sparke cites journalist Vance Packard's views in three highly popular books of the time as proof of the threat feminine taste posed to masculine culture. "A sense of moral outrage and neo-puritanism were linked in Packard's writings with a characterisation of the 'housewife-consumer' as a passive dupe, responsible, it was implied, through her inaction for letting commerce have its wicked way."

Fifty years later, commerce is still attempting to influence women, and as in the 1950s the pursuit of beauty and the cult of domesticity dominate the message.

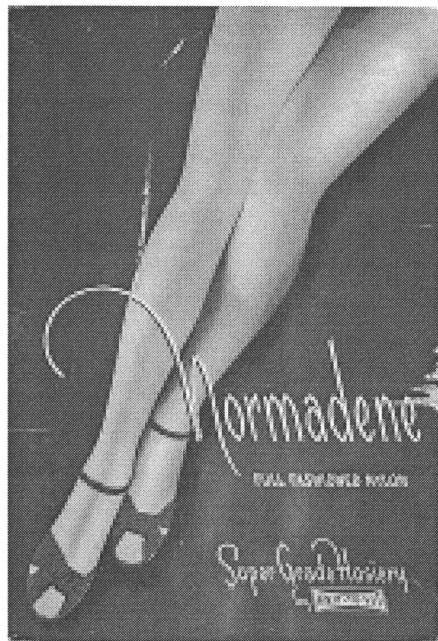
Woman as an object of beauty, of male desire and female admiration is a potent message. It has undoubtedly influenced male to female trannies as much as it has born women. What male to female tranny has dreamed of becoming a butch woman? No, our aspirations are usually far more glamorous. Transvestite princess fantasies are fuelled by advertisements of women pampering themselves, of the stunning hair, the lipstick smile and the beautiful legs. Advertisers have made a fetish of femininity, presenting us with compelling images of female perfection. We determine our authenticity as women, as many born women do, by images that are largely unattainable.

In his book *The New Icons? The Art of Television Advertising*, Paul Rutherford says that for admakers, gender is the most important resource to give meaning to commodities. Nothing demonstrates this quite so perfectly as the successful campaign for Marlboro cigarettes.

Marlboro was introduced in the 1920s and was initially sold as an upscale woman's cigarette. By the 1950s, when Philip Morris decided to remake it, Marlboro was largely neglected and had only 1% of the market. Philip Morris repackaged it, changed the flavour and added filter tips. To combat the perception that a real man wouldn't smoke filtered ciga-



Silk stockings were marketed in boxes of a "1/4 dozen". The size, colour, and other details were listed on the box ends, which were visible to the department store clerk behind the full service counter.



Nylon was developed by Dupont during World War II as a replacement for silk in the production of parachutes. Nylon stockings became highly coveted items by women, and a favourite gift of enlisted men for their girlfriends. Early nylons, like these from the late 1940s, were marketed in boxes like silk stockings.

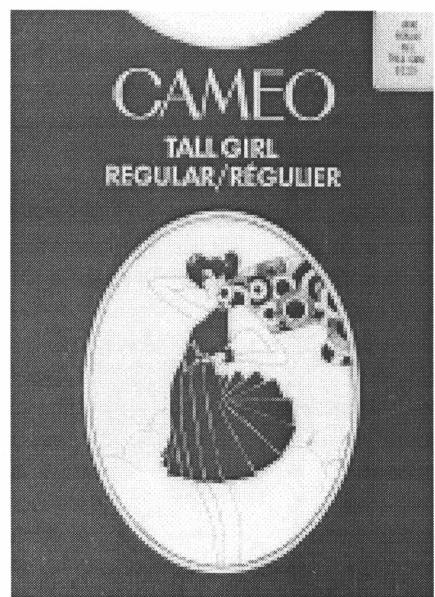
rettes, they decided to make Marlboro a macho cigarette. The Marlboro man was introduced in 1955. Initially a cowboy, the Marlboro man was soon any one of a variety of rugged male characters who suggested "mystery and intrigue". This ad campaign eventually evolved into Marlboro Country and sported slogans such as "A man's world of flavor". From woman's cigarette to a symbol of masculinity, the transition was complete, and by 1976 Marlboro was the dominant cigarette in the U.S. market.

It's absurd to think that a man would feel more of a man by smoking a particular brand of cigarettes, and yet that's what the Marlboro man was selling. As Leslie Savan says in her book *The Sponsored Life*, we don't buy products; we buy the world that presents them. And that world is often a narrow one. Advertisers deliberately exclude races, classes and especially genders to focus their pitch to that one exclusive group that is made to feel special and different and unique.

But is what they are selling authentic? Of course not. Savan says that "the sponsored life is born when commercial culture sells our own experiences back to us. It grows as those experiences are then reconstituted inside us, mixing the most intimate processes of individual thought with commercial values, rhythms, and expectations."



By the 1960s, nylons were on the way out. Pantyhose was developed to wear with the new mini and micro-mini skirts that were all the rage. The packaging of these nylons is classic 1960s. And who couldn't resist buying stockings called Mini Fit-Lons?

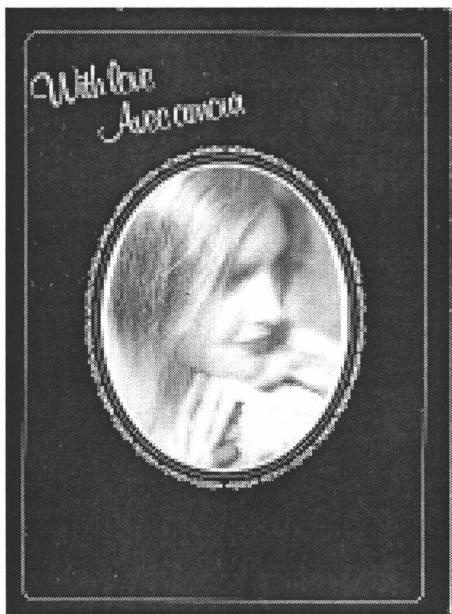


An attractive design from the early 1970s. Pantyhose packaging is often the essence of marketing to women, combining a sophisticated feminine aesthetic with an underlying message that says: "Buy these and you too will be beautiful."

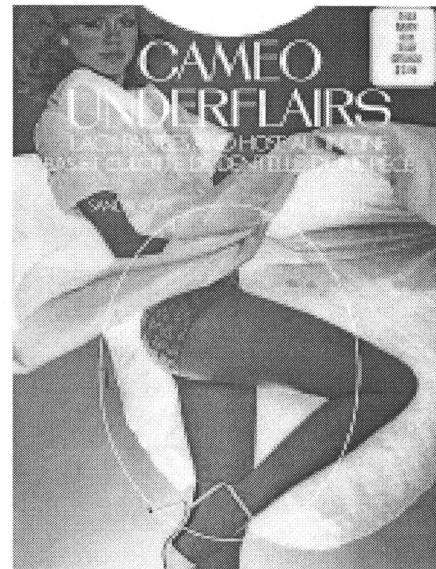
Advertising plays a huge role in perpetuating gender difference and in creating anxieties in us that we are somehow not measuring up. In the world of advertising, even the existence of the proper set of genitals, the usual benchmark for gender authenticity, is not enough to ensure a real man or woman. There is always another product you need that will make you feel more masculine and more feminine.

It is in this quest to feel more of a man or more of a woman where the trans and non-trans worlds merge. We're dupes of the same game, although our gender anxieties are far more serious than theirs. Nevertheless, someone always has a vested interest in telling all of us we're not man or woman enough. At what point do we feel sufficiently authentic? By what criteria are we judged? We need to have faith in that centre in us that confirms to us who we are, even as we are aware of the commercial and stereotypical values that may have played a part in forming it.

Transvestite princess fantasies are fuelled by advertisements of women pampering themselves, of the stunning hair, the lipstick smile and the beautiful legs. Advertisers have made a fetish of femininity, presenting us with compelling images of female perfection.



Marketing pantyhose to men so that they might buy them for their women is a dubious proposition, with prospects for success highly unlikely. Still, that has never stopped them from trying. This package reflects a male view of women. It is all soft femininity: the image is fuzzy and the woman is holding a daisy. She is looking away from the man's gaze. If that weren't enough, the pantyhose came equipped with rhinestone hearts at the ankle, little princess stuff that would make a grown woman cringe. These stockings were made by the same company that made Cameo pantyhose, but aside from the cameo effect in the image, nowhere do they advertise their brand name. Perhaps they were they afraid of alienating their women customers. Originally marketed at \$8.95, these were picked up in the sale bin for \$2.95.



All fashion thrives on something new. In the 1980s, elaborate panties were added to pantyhose. Very nice, but the stockings still ran and the extra cost didn't seem worth it. Another fine design. The woman is sexy, perhaps a little naughty, but still a lady.

TRANS ON STAGE

The Art & Politics of Cross-Gender Performance

By Teddy Michaels

It's one of the staples of trans fiction: boy gets enlisted into playing girl in school play, discovers he likes it, and has his life transformed.

This convention, however, has a much longer and more colourful history than just a figment of some trans person's imagination. Gender transgression and the theatre are intimately linked throughout human history and have served to illuminate and transform issues of transgenderism, same sex love and the role of women in society. The appearance of crossdressed characters on stage offers to the audience gender alternatives to the limited possibilities in real life while simultaneously regulating the taboos against transgenderism and homosexuality.

The tradition of males playing female roles on stage originated in part from the male obsession with female modesty. The attempt to control female sexuality by barring women from the stage had numerous consequences. It gave queer folk a venue for a small degree of self-expression; it put the theatre into the paradoxical position of being both popular culture and disreputable entertainment; and it created theatrical conventions that politicized gender roles in theatre.

In many non-western cultures, however, it was more or less accepted that homosexuality and transgenderism were a part of theatrical performance

and religious ritual. (Drama and dance are cultural forms whose roots are religious.)

The first performing gender transgressors were the shamans. Shamanism by definition is the art of transformation. Their power comes from a dramatic invocation of the spirits. Although the spirituality behind shamanistic gender changing varies among different cultures, fundamentally the shaman will become possessed, for various reasons, of the spirit of the opposite sex. The shaman, who can be either male or female, enters a trance like state and uses various dramatic talents - impersonation, ventriloquy, dialogue, pantomime, and magical tricks - to create a powerful performance that has a therapeutic effect on the witnesses. Non-believers might think the performance is faked, but the shaman's audience has complete faith in its effectiveness.

This kind of inexplicable spirituality and gender changing lost its prestige and was demonized after the cultures in which it was practiced were colonized, mostly by European powers whose citizens advocated Christianity and rationalism. Nevertheless, as Laurence Senelick points out in his book *The Changing Room: Sex, Drag and Theatre*, gender

Boulton's performances as a woman were cheered, one journal suggesting he was a "really charming girl" even as it assured its readers that there was nothing 'of the "social monster" business connected with him'.

variant performers have a long history and are taken for granted in many areas of the world. From the ancient Greeks to Brazil to numerous cultures in Polynesia, the breadth and variety of transgender performance appears limitless.

There are, however, two primary and separate components to transgenderism on stage: the performer and the gender politics that are played out by the performance.

Any social convention created by men that attempts to demarcate women's place in society is inherently about gender politics. In the first few centuries of Christianity, women itinerant entertainers were common. As the Church assumed control of performances and attempted to present religious stories, it became improper for women to exhibit themselves. Although women participated in some religious plays, their role was to represent purity and virginity. To avoid the danger of inciting lust, their role was strictly allegorical. Men would play comic and shrewish women, while boys normally assumed other female parts.

It is ironic that in attempting to control female sexuality, the male arbiters of morality were risking unleashing the devils of homosexuality and transgenderism. As early as the 16th century, a university don named John Rainoldes worried that prolonged exposure to the female role may convince the boy actor that he rather likes the part and is willing to stay in it long after the performance has finished. Since Senelick believes that the theatrical conventions of the time may have attracted gay and transgendered folk, perhaps this concern was not without foundation.

Victorian critics of Shakespearean theatre had difficulty in reconciling Shakespeare's greatness with the possibility of pederasty. They rationalized the convention of boys playing women by concluding that the boys on stage were simply masquerading, but this analysis ignored the rigorous training boy actors undertook to perform female roles. The truth is that in using transgenderism as a theatrical convention, the theatre offered a safe place to play out the social tensions between effeminacy, courtly love and the taboo against sodomy. While the dalliance with these issues gave theatre a dubious reputation, as

long as cross-gendered entertainers remained on stage the public was willing, indeed happy, to tolerate them. When they moved offstage, however, the public was not so forgiving.

The infamous case of Boulton and Park demonstrates clearly this tension between real life and the theatre. In 1871 Ernest Boulton and Frederick Park were arrested in London for wearing women's clothing in public and soliciting. They were arraigned for conspiracy to commit the catchall crime of "buggery". Their defence rested its case on the lack of evidence to prove the commission of sodomy and that the defendants frequently wore women's clothes for theatrical purposes.

This last defence was a thorough one indeed. Even the prosecution allowed, in its opening remarks, that the wearing of women's clothes in a theatrical performance was no offence. Boulton and Park's attorneys brought forth a string of witnesses,



Ernest Boulton (right) and Lord Arthur Pelham. Pelham, who was a Member of Parliament and had been suspected of being Boulton's lover, died the day after being served with a subpoena. Cause of death was listed as 'exhaustion resulting from scarlet fever', but suicide was the more likely diagnosis. (Photo: Oliver Sarony, Scarborough.)

including Boulton's mother, who confirmed that he performed in a wide range of amateur theatricals as a woman. The numerous photos of Boulton in female attire were explained as being simply made for distribution to his adoring public and that he wore these "costumes" on the street in mischief, to see if he could get away with it. This view was buttressed by testimony from a young man named Amos Gibbings, who explained that he wore his feminine clothes at a ball as an extension of his large repertory of female stage roles. Boulton's performances as a woman were cheered, one journal suggesting he was a "really charming girl" even as it assured its readers that there was nothing 'of the "social monster" business connected with him'. In the end, Boulton and Park were acquitted of all charges, to loud cheers of "bravo" from the peanut gallery.

As Laurence Senelick points out, however, in this jaded age it's pretty clear Boulton and Park were guilty. Boulton clearly spent a lot of time in public in feminine clothes. Senelick observes that gay and trans performers like Boulton performed another function also:

By transferring taboo behaviour to the stage, such gay deceivers did more than find sanctuary for it. They offered surrogate gender alternatives to the general public and exercised a potent effect on members of the audience with cross-dressing tendencies. In one of Havelock Ellis' case-histories of what he called 'Eonism', his Edwardian informant tells him of going to see female impersonators in vaudeville or army concert parties to 'await their entrance with a kind of tremor, sit and admire them, long enviously to be doing the same'. This individual was put off by vulgarity or comic dames, as well as the destruction of the illusion when the terminal de-wigging raised a cheap laugh. 'But although the performance would leave me sad

with a hungry desire and envy, yet I could never resist going.'

The therapeutic effect of these kinds of performances is still evident today. So starved are trans people for trans entertainment that we'll endure the worst movies to see it. (Hands up all of you who went to see the *Sorority Girls*.)

There is an undesirable side effect to this freedom trans performers have on stage, and that is that trans people are often not taken seriously. This space between the theatre and the public has permitted some crossdressed individuals to play the fools of the modern age, capable of uttering the harshest truths with impunity.

The most stunning example of this occurred in South Africa during the apartheid era. Playwright Pieter-Dirck Uys was considered one of South Africa's most dynamic young playwrights during the 1970s but often ran afoul of the authorities for the frank nature of his plays. Undaunted, he created the personality of Evita Bexuidenhout and began writing columns for the South African *Sunday Express*. As the fictional wife of a South African Member of Parliament, Evita satirized the existing regime by expressing the most outlandish views. When she said that "democracy is too good to share with everyone", the censors became somehow too dense to understand the irony. They continued to let Evita talk.

Having attained this foothold, Uys pushed further and began making public appearances as Evita, (an especially dangerous move since public transvestism was illegal) and then created her entire family, who occasionally made appearances with her. These included her husband, who sported a Hitler

Continued page 16

THE ORIGINS OF LIP SYNCING

In the long tradition of cross-gender performance, lip syncing is a relatively recent phenomenon. The origins of lip syncing - the practise of female impersonators and drag queens mouthing the words to songs - lie with the harassment of drag clubs by the authorities during the 1950s and 60s.

Even in cosmopolitan cities such as New York and San Francisco, drag was still illegal. Patrons had to wear a minimum of five items of male attire if they wanted to avoid being arrested during frequent police raids. In many cities, crossdressing was allowed only on Halloween, but even then in San Francisco, where the bars were open until 2 a.m., the police waited outside after

midnight to catch trannies coming home on November 1st.

The result of this harassment was increased expenses and a loss of customers. To make up for this loss of revenue, clubs started using canned music instead of live musicians, and if the accompaniment could be pre-recorded, well why not the voices as well?

Suddenly, lip syncing became the rage. Not only was it cheap for the clubs, it allowed for more amateur participation. Professional drag artists hated it, but it was here to stay, and nowadays it seems impossible to imagine a drag club existing without it.

SOLDIERS IN SKIRTS

The military has often employed cross-gender performance to boost the morale of its troops. This was a tricky strategy because, as we all know, the military is hardly sympathetic to the sexual possibilities that may arise from seeing a man appear to a woman-starved audience as an attractive young lady in a dress.

In French director Jean Renoir's film *La Grande Illusion* there is a wonderful scene that illustrates this possibility. A crate of costumes arrives for the prisoners at a POW camp in Germany during the First World War. As they open it up, they marvel at the dresses, lingerie and silk stockings that they pull out. Eventually the "angel faced" character Maisonneuve puts on a skirt, blouse and wig. His fellow prisoners-of-war look at him and fall silent, stunned by what they see. One says, "You look like a real girl", and they fall into silence again. Finally, Maisonneuve cannot help himself and he makes a few feminine gestures. The fascinated stares of his fellow prisoners speak more eloquently than words.

Although most Canadians are aware of the 1917 Battle of Vimy Ridge, few know that prior to this defining battle in Canadian history our boys also created one of the most successful of all military drag acts. The Dumbells featured Ross Hamilton as Marjorie and Allan Murray as Marie. While Murray was not especially good looking, he was said to have great legs which he showed off to great advantage during the dance numbers. Hamilton, however, was "flirtatious and graceful...always enchanting, never mincing." After the war, they played three weeks in London, and the company swelled to five drag performers and six chorus boys. The Dumbells continued to tour for ten years after the war.

But it was in the POW camps where these performances were especially important, and where the gifted female impersonator truly reigned. They strove to be "real ladies", and in doing so some no doubt tapped a vein already present in them. Oftentimes they would be called only by girl's names and would receive little attentions reminiscent of the way women were treated in civilian life.

During the Second World War, POW camps were far grimmer places and theatrical activity was reduced though not eliminated. As the war drew to a close, the U.S. army reversed its policy and tried to reduce the number of enlisted men playing female roles by adding more women to soldier's shows. By the time of the Armistice, drag would be



First World War French POW playing the female lead in a production of *L'Abbe Constantin*. From a set of post cards recording the theatre group's repertoire. (From *The Changing Room*, by Laurence Senelick.)

seen as abnormal.

Not so in Great Britain. Throughout the late 1940s and 1950s, all male shows featuring ex-soldiers were very popular in a variety of theatres. These shows became a heaven sent opportunity for marginalized queer folk. Danny La Rue, who began his career in these productions, said, "A lot of the boys liked dressing up as a woman and would have dressed up for nothing. Many of them got to the point where they could have been girls...."

Although drag would fall into disfavour in the mid 1950s, these postwar soldier's shows primed the audience for the return of drag in the 1960s.

moustache, and her 'strong and mysterious' son who belonged to a nationalist group. Uys' performance engendered numerous death threats and was described as "dancing a tango in front of a firing squad".

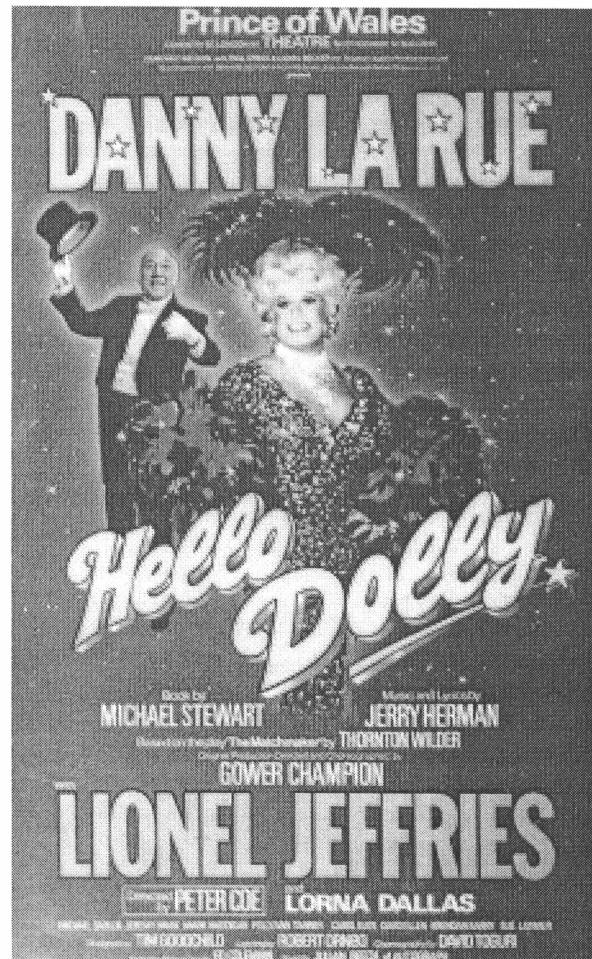
In 1993, Evita took her show to Germany, where she observed that South Africans owed a great debt to that country: "In fact, you have set us Afrikaners a very high standard; it will take us a long time before we've killed six million blacks." Having avoided prison and death in apartheid Africa, Uys continues to skewer post apartheid politicians for unkept promises.

Recently, Enza Anderson performed a similar if lesser role when she took a run at the leadership of the Canadian Alliance party. The party, not known for its friendly attitude toward queer folk, was an easy target for Ms. Anderson, and while her schtick was entertaining and her barbs well placed, no one took her too seriously.

Indeed, historically if cross-gender performers wanted to be taken seriously (or wanted their performance to be considered wholesome) they took great pains to ensure that people considered them "normal" off stage. When the famous Chinese cross-gender performer Mei Lanfang arrived in the United States in the 1920s, his performances were lauded for their distance from the "eccentricity" and "perversity" of the female impersonation of vaudeville or the Japanese theatre. (Eccentricity and perversity were common code words for queerness.) Reporters covering his tour never failed to mention the presence of his wife and child, thus reassuring an anxious public that Mei was not "one of those".

But while Mei may have been one of the "normal" folk, it seems a number of performers who took great pains to appear so, were not quite so normal as they pretended.

Julian Eltinge, the celebrated female impersonator of the early 20th century, flourished in his profession when many other impersonators did not largely because his publicity material relentlessly emphasized his virility. Coming from the respected tradition of college amateur theatricals, Eltinge maintained that he really didn't enjoy dressing as a woman, but that he was in it for the money. This message went over well with journalists, who described Eltinge as a "typical college man, big, brawny, polished, vigorous and forcible" and a "quiet, sturdy young American dressed in neat tweeds." This manly man seems, however, to have had no love life. Despite hints that he would share his Hollywood mansion with a wife, there was no wife forthcoming. He explained at the time that his career got in the way of matrimony, but recent information suggests that he had an intimate and longstanding



Danny La Rue came from the British Armed Forces tradition of cross-gender performance to become the most famous female impersonator in England in the 1950s and 1960s. While he always stoutly defended his manliness, La Rue's best friends in show business were Liberace and Wayne Newton. (From The Changing Room, by Laurence Senelick.)

relationship with a sportswriter that nearly erupted into scandal.

Danny La Rue, the most famous British female impersonator of the 1950s and 60s, came from the Armed Forces tradition of cross-gender performers. His overblown glamorous appearance was designed to distance himself from any suggestion that he might actually be enjoying himself. Laurence Senelick described his performance as "a man impersonating a man impersonating a woman" and his jokes always "referred back to his primary gender". La Rue himself said that he always let the audience know he was male, for which he claimed they were "relieved". For years, La Rue performed when anti-gay sentiment was common and homosexuality was illegal, so perhaps it's understandable that his act rejected any

To pump up school spirit for a big game, the school held a Girls Dress as Boys, Boys Dress as Girls Day in November 1993. Everyone thought it would be great fun until an announcement over the intercom referred to it as Transvestite Day. Then all hell broke loose.

hint of homosexuality. But La Rue continued to deny his gayness even after the liberation movements of the 60s and 70s, a pose Senelick finds contemptible.

...he scorns the drag artistes he first worked with as dishing mercenary queens. He claims to have proposed to a (nameless) girl who conveniently died in a plane crash, and he announced to the papers his imminent marriage to a rich Australian woman, though that was suddenly cancelled. He points out that he's just a nice Irish boy who loved his mother, longs for children, and is at heart 'one of the fellas'. Yet his best friends have always been such professional androgynes as Liberace and Wayne Newton, and everyone in British show business is familiar with his sexual predilections.

There is something sad about someone incapable of admitting to their true nature long after the horses have left the barn. Yet even Senelick admits that so long as stage transvestism is regarded as play acting, and can be written off as something between "club house ritual and locker room exuberance", it is safe and sanctioned. Indeed, as sex change surgery became more common and trans entertainers had surgery to become women, their respective reputations suffered. Senelick observes that the "public no longer saw drag as high-spirited masquerading, but associated it irredeemably with sexual perversion."

In short, at least Danny La Rue had an excuse. Perhaps he knew better than anyone the hypocrisy of a society that can only address its own gender hang ups through the theatre. For if nothing else, a tour through the history of cross-gender performance on stage lays bare male insecurities with female sexuality and roles, and society's simultaneous fascination and fear for same sex love and transgenderism. This kind of hypocrisy, denial and compartmentalized thinking marginalizes queer people's existence because it removes cross-gender behaviour from the realm of the normal, where it might be explored honestly, and dumps it in the realm of performance, where it remains at a comfortable distance.

A marvelous example of this inability to accept

the fascination people have with transgender behaviour occurred at A. L. Brown High School in Kannapolis, North Carolina. To pump up school spirit for a big game, the school held a Girls Dress as Boys, Boys Dress as Girls Day in November 1993. Everyone thought it would be great fun until an announcement over the intercom referred to it as Transvestite Day. Then all hell broke loose. Dressing up is a cute prank, but transvestites are perverts.

While stage crossdressing may keep touchy gender issues at a distance, it is nevertheless riddled with controversy and ambiguity. How could it not be? A theatrical convention that explores and reflects the sexual and political territory between the sexes cannot help but be controversial.

Suggested Reading:

The Changing Room: Sex, Drag and Theatre, by Laurence Senelick.

Crossing the Stage: Controversies on Cross-Dressing, edited by Leslie Ferris

REMINDER

Please note our new address:

Triple Echo
c/o Gender Mosaic of Ottawa
PO Box 7421
Vanier, ON K1L 8E4

Not So Good

None So Pretty doesn't measure up.

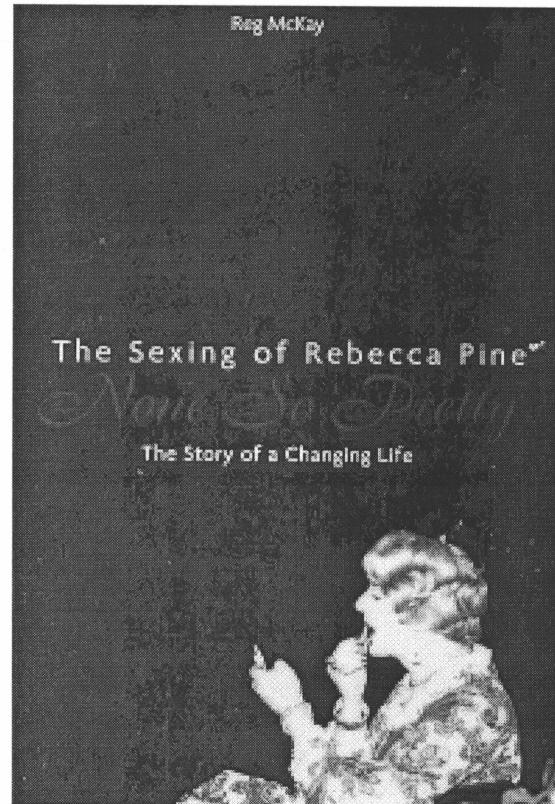
None So Pretty: The Sexing of Rebecca Pine, by Reg McKay. Routledge, ISBN 0-415-92920-2 (paper).

Reviewed by Teddy Michaels

Does the world really need another biography of another transsexual?

It's perhaps a sign of how sex changing is gradually losing its scandalous reputation that the territory has been fairly well trodden in the last few years. One would hope at this point that any new biography would have something fresh to add to the material already published. By this measure, *None So Pretty* is a weak addition to the collection of existing biographies and autobiographies. Still, it's never completely pointless reading another trans yarn. We trans people are so starved to hear stories about our own lives that even if the plot seems awfully familiar, we'll happily read another one.

Rebecca Pine was born Robert Pine in Birmingham, England, November 1930. I had been hoping to learn a little about what it was like for a trans person to live in that time and culture, but aside from occasional bouts of crossdressing, Robert led a fairly conventional English life. An adolescent during the war, he was enlisted into the army at twenty during the early years of the Cold War, leaving with a teacher's degree. After being disillusioned with teaching, he became a salesman and travelled England meeting clients and buying women's clothes in strange towns where he wouldn't be recognized. The book hints at his terror of being discovered, but Robert seems also to be extremely adept at



compartmentalizing his emotions. In fact, he is remarkably lacking in introspection. He isn't in the least bit curious about why he crossdresses, and the crossdressing bits in the book are often described so obliquely that if you're not paying attention, they could easily slip by you without your noticing.

Robert married his first wife in 1956. In the 1950s, there was, of course, more pressure exerted upon men and women to marry than there is today. If men didn't marry after a certain approved period of "sowing their wild oats", then they were usually considered to be either homosexuals or confirmed bachelors. The latter was "deemed to have chosen to remain unmarried, all the better to pursue unhampered masculine activities like sport, hunting, travel, cigar smoking and drinking strong liquor." For unmarried women, the designation was worse: old maids. The book takes pains to point out this historical fact to the reader presumably as an explanation for Robert's less than successful first marriage.

Not that the match with his first wife was a bad one. It yielded a daughter and a son, and his wife still loved him while he was out dancing with the woman who was to become his second wife. While Robert rationalizes away his first marriage rather easily, it's hard to be too critical of him. His second wife Jean appears to be his soul mate, staying with him even after his transition.

The split, however, caused a major rift between Robert and his children that was never patched up. There is one major reunion when his daughter has a child and he gets to meet his grandson, but that's the end of it. As Rebecca, she writes her son and daughter informing them about the change in her life, but they don't reply. Not that there was much chance that they would. If the book is any indication, it certainly doesn't sound like Robert made much of an attempt to reconcile with them beforehand. Sending a letter to your estranged offspring telling them that you've become a woman isn't likely to make them come around.

And yet, Robert is certainly not without friends. After meeting his second wife, he and she move to Tarbert, a beautiful town on the West Coast of Scotland. They buy a store and a bed and breakfast and participate in the town's cultural and community events. This way of living was beneficial in Rebecca being accepted in Tarbert after her transition, which is rather remarkable considering the conservative nature of the town.

This is, however, one of the themes of this biography, and an important idea for anyone considering transition. After Rebecca comes out, she meets a young transsexual named Colleen:

The first difference between the two became evident: Colleen locked herself away at home most of the time, fearing hostility and being made a scapegoat by her community; Rebecca made a public announcement, appeared in the media, worked in the shop every day and pursued many social events; Colleen had separated from her wife; Rebecca and Jean were very much together. Rebecca Pine counted her blessings.

Being as open as possible is the one good lesson of *None So Pretty*. And if you don't figure it out from Rebecca's story, there is a subplot running through the book concerning a character named Newman.

Because Rebecca's story is written by Reg McKay, a social worker and freelance journalist, it's impossible to determine whether this part of Rebecca's story is true or just a fictional piece added to reinforce the point. It takes us practically the entire book to discover who Newman is and what her relation is to Rebecca, but we finally discover she's a trannie also. She first met Rebecca when they were young lads in the army, and they meet many years later by chance in Tarbert. Rebecca doesn't recognize Newman, which seems to gall Newman no end. Newman is a writer who drinks too much and lives mostly in isolation. She has a negative view of people and keeps expecting the good citizens of Tarbert to

turn their backs on Robert the moment his true nature is revealed. (Every time Newman appears in the text she is saying stuff like, "the first time they believe you to be odd...the first time you choose to be different...they will simply crucify you.") When this doesn't happen, she is bitter with envy.

This whole Newman subplot is a bizarre addition to the story, but at least there's some message in it: as a trannie, you need to have faith in people. You can't live in isolation and you can't fear people's reactions.

Still, you can almost understand Newman's bitterness. There is a smugness to Rebecca Pine that is mildly annoying. I'm not sure if her lack of introspection is a blessing or a curse, but everything certainly seems to go her way.

Perhaps we never really get to know Rebecca because someone else is writing her story. Why she didn't write it herself is a bit of a mystery, since she writes poetry. I'm sure she could have managed it, and we might have got a more intimate portrait. Instead we're left with a strange melange of truth and what seems like fiction.

There is also a mildly sensationalistic aspect to the whole presentation. The title *None So Pretty* comes from the song that was playing when Rebecca was first asked to dance by a man. (Typical trannie, she exults in the womanly feeling.) But the subtitle - *The Sexing of Rebecca Pine* - is ludicrous, and the cover photo of Rebecca applying her lipstick is trite and typical of the entire book. There is an absurd passage early in the book when the author, Reg McKay, is imagining the reactions of one of Robert's neighbours when he leaves his house after a secretive bout of crossdressing.:

The net curtain billowed slightly as if by a breeze. The old woman in the neighbouring house bent at her window and observed that nice gentleman Bob Pine march sprightly down his path, briefcase in hand, package under the same arm. 'Such a fine upstanding young man,' she thought. 'Nice couple. A credit to the street and no doubt.'

Yes, it's shocking how normal transsexuals can appear, isn't it?

None So Pretty seems to have been written from the point of view that any transsexual's life is intrinsically so odd that it is a story worth telling. While that might be true, the number of good biographies of transsexuals that have already been published have raised the standard somewhat. Unfortunately, *None So Pretty* doesn't measure up.

The Transgendersed Jesus

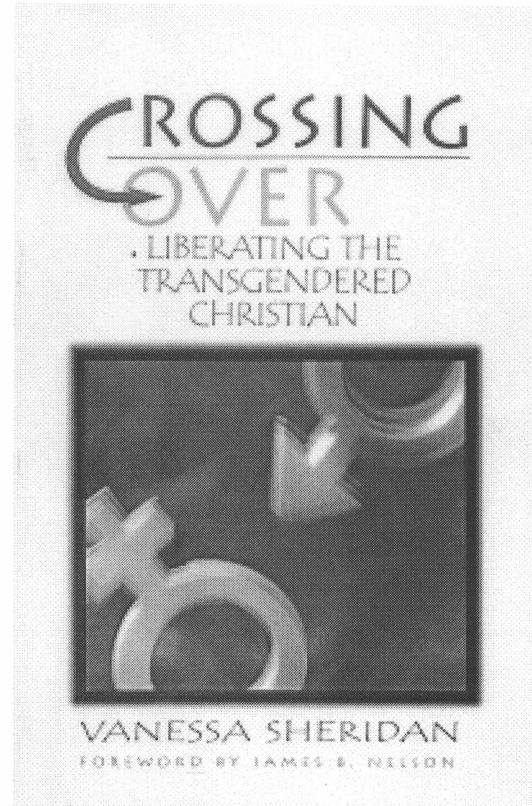
Crossing Over: Liberating the Transgendersed Christian, by Vanessa Sheridan. The Pilgrim Press, ISBN 0-8298-1446-9.

Reviewed by Teddy Michaels

Early in her book *Crossing Over: Liberating the Transgendersed Christian* Vanessa Sheridan addresses the question of why transgendered people should bother staying in a church that ostracizes, censures and oppresses them. For her, the answer is personal and a sign of her faith. She sees the tremendous potential for good within the Church and she wants to see justice and love win. Well, I do too. Unfortunately, I only have a short time on this planet, and I find the courts are quicker at delivering justice than the Church is.

Nevertheless, I'm inclined to agree with Sheridan's assertion that "a soulless movement is ultimately doomed to failure", even if she and I don't exactly agree on the religious particulars. When I became aware that my religion didn't approve of people like me, I had no problem whatsoever dumping my religion. It was a bit of an eye opener then to read some of the case histories Sheridan includes in this book of trans people who are so conflicted by who they are and what their faith thinks of them that they are almost suicidal. Plainly, it's important that some transgendered folk are willing to take on the thankless task of reforming organized Christianity.

While Sheridan encourages trans Christians not to hate their oppressors, and delivers her criticisms of the church in a respectful manner, her major point is bold, to say the least. She claims the Church



is heretical for not respecting the diversity of God's creation. It "is idolatrous and heretical to make gender-based social mores or expectations more important than the well-being of a person made in God's image."

While she admits that a literal interpretation of the Bible "does not appear to lend the transgendered much sympathy", she also contends that there are many passages that support us. The Bible, she says, is our book too, and should not be co-opted by our oppressors.

The message to transgendered people here is twofold. First, that you must learn to accept your gender orientation as a gift from God. "Part of our responsibility includes recognizing and affirming the reality of the gender gift itself, rather than denying or rejecting it." Jesus was always on the side of the oppressed, and he is on our side too. The second part of the equation, however, is that he expects us to be a part of our own liberation. Sheridan's thesis here is that we have a duty and a responsibility to help others "overcome their prejudices and bigotries so that legitimate progress toward understanding, acceptance and mutual respect may become genuine reality."

I rather like this message. She is taking a Christ-like view of the people who hate and oppress us. These people are damaged by their own fears and

they need our help to overcome their disability.

Of course, many of these people aren't interested in the things we have to teach them, and Sheridan's Church might be similarly hostile to her proposals for reform. She calls on the Church to repent for its sins against gender diverse people, and much as I may agree with her, I still find myself saying, "Yeah, right, that'll be the day."

Sheridan makes many empowering observations for the transgendered Christian, but these observations stem more from a personal relationship with Jesus than they do from a relationship with her Church. In fact, she says that the Church's greatest failing is its inability to accept its own transgendered nature. She asserts that "Jesus manifested many behaviors and characteristics that could easily be considered 'transgendered'".

This is not an original observation, of course, but one well worth repeating, if only because the Church always takes such great pains to conceal the fact. Early images of Christ were distinctly feminine, one of the most famous being a marble statuette from about 370-380, now in the Museo delle Terme in Rome, that depicted a seated Christ wearing a short sleeved tunic and with women's breasts.

From the eleventh to the sixteenth century, as the Church solidified its dominance, it assumed control of the image of Jesus. The pagan iconography disappeared and was replaced by a new Christ. He became bearded, stern looking and more manly.

Despite this attempt to masculinize Christ and the prohibition against women becoming priests, the Christian priesthood is still full of feminine imagery: the skirts, and the celibacy, which is equivalent to a kind of self-castration. Laurence Senelick says that the "delicate balance required of the Christian priest in bearing the signs of effeminacy without being stigmatized as an effeminate is not easy to achieve. Hence the patristic over-reaction to transgender masquerade and the Church's intolerance of other forms of cross-dressing."

Sheridan accepts this transgender Christ and bases her transgender liberation theology on the example of Jesus' life. She quotes Marcus Borg, who claims that Jesus' "teachings and behavior reflect an alternative social vision. Jesus was not talking about how to be good and how to behave within the framework of a domination system. He was a critic of the domination system itself. Indeed, that's the best explanation for why he was killed."

The main points of a transgender liberation theology are to free gender variant people from institutionalized social and religious oppression; transform the second class status of trans people to one of acceptance and respect within mainstream

It is idolatrous and heretical to make gender-based social mores or expectations more important than the well-being of a person made in God's image.

society; recognize the spiritual and emotional well-being of trans people; and pursue justice, peace and happiness for trans people.

Liberation theology concerns itself with the study of God as a proactive agent in the lives of persons who struggle to be set free from oppression. Liberation theology's primary tenet is that God, rather than being neutral, is always on the side of the oppressed. In "liberation theology" God is viewed as the liberator of the oppressed. Oppression in any form is seen as a "sin". Resistance to oppression - the struggle against sin - thus becomes God's will for our lives.

Even if you do not believe that Jesus was God (as I don't), this is a powerful message. It gives meaning to our struggle as trans people. And how can one not take courage from the idea that Jesus would have been on our side? The challenge for those transgendered people who wish to remain in the Church is to convince other Christians of that.

The title *Crossing Over* refers to the story of the Israelites escaping the Pharaoh's armies by crossing over the parted waters of the Red Sea. To this day, "crossing over" remains a common theme of hope and inspiration for oppressed faith communities. That it has a second more literal meaning for trans people makes this an especially apt title for a small book that delivers a message of hope for conflicted transgendered Christians.

Bad Sex

The first volume of transgender erotica is a major disappointment

Best Transgender Erotica, edited by Hanne Blank and Raven Kaldera. Circlet Press, ISBN 1-885865-40-6.

Reviewed by Alison Terry.

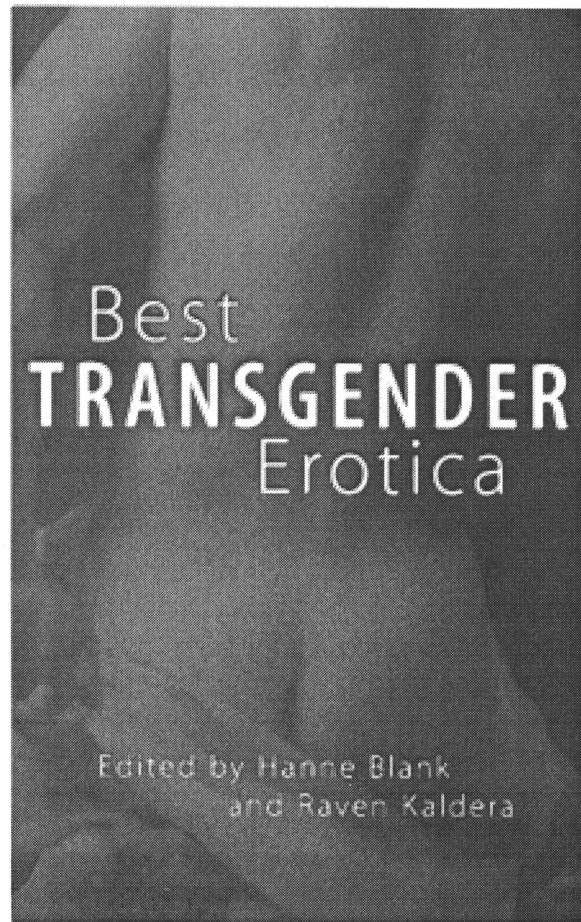
In the introduction to *Best Transgender Erotica*, the editors Hanne Blank and Raven Kaldera tell us that they deliberately discouraged writers from submitting "forced feminization transvestite" stories because they found them "a little too facile, not introspective enough to be interesting" and too repetitive. Unfortunately, this sets up high expectations that this collection of transgender erotica will not be facile, repetitive or uninteresting, which sadly is not the case.

Let's be blunt. Some of these stories are complete crap.

Take *Wild Ride*, by Raven Gildea for example. It's a story about a male and a tranny boy riding a motorcycle. The tranny boy is sitting behind and rubbing up his partner. They stop and have sex, which is described in detail. End of story. Here's an example of the writing:

You know you deserve this. You know you want it. You want your Daddy to spank your nasty little ass, don't you? You were playing with my dick just so you could get me to spank you, weren't you? You're nothing but a sick, perverted little boy who doesn't know what's good for him. You're lucky to have a strong Daddy to take care of you. That's right, Daddy's gonna give you what you need...

Oh my god, stop already. This is every bit as juvenile as a forced feminization story, and certainly no more interesting. In fact, about half these stories are either



boring or pointless, and most of the rest are only mildly entertaining.

At this point I probably should mention that I don't generally read erotica. ("Yeah, sure", I can hear you saying.) I was under the impression, which now appears to be embarrassingly naive, that erotica was a step above porn, that it was sexy because it respected certain fundamentals of story telling like, oh, plot and character. In this collection, if you find a story with one of these elements reasonably represented consider yourself lucky.

The majority of these stories are about transmen, but that should not pose a problem. A well-written story will transcend limitations like the reader's sexuality and will engage him or her on an emotional level. I know this because thankfully there are a few genuinely good stories here.

One of the best is *Small Considerations*, by R. Gay. On the surface, it's about a transman and his friend Blake, for whom he has a deep attraction but whom he keeps at a distance. What it's really about, however, is the difficulty one gender variant individual has in expressing how he wants to be loved. Actually, identifying the central character as "he" is

problematic, as we never know how he wishes to identify himself. The story is written in the first person and he is never named, although initially he identifies as a feminist lesbian who doesn't "do men". However, he also has had a mastectomy and aspires to having a male body, "my cunt the only part I really want to keep". He may know how he wants to present himself, but his gender liminal status has also alienated him from people to the degree that he cannot believe he will ever be accepted. And indeed his friend Blake does have trouble understanding: "So you don't want to be a woman, or a man, but you have to be with a woman and not a man? It makes no sense."

The narrator's particular experience of gender may be alien to me, but the difficulty in conveying how you'd like people to perceive your own trans body certainly isn't. In fact, the central problem of being trans is having people project meanings on to you based on the body you possess. Consequently, it is very easy to identify with the central character and his struggle to express how he sees himself. You find yourself hoping he has the courage to find a way to unite with his lover, and the sex when it comes is a natural conclusion to an emotional journey.

Surely this must be the point of a collection of transgender erotica. The only thing we share as trans people is this struggle to have people accept us the way we see ourselves. A collection like this, if it seeks to entertain all trans people, can't just be about individual sexual preferences without any emotional context, otherwise any old erotica will do. After all, the mechanics are pretty well the same for everyone. For this collection to distinguish itself as transgender erotica it has to do more than just have trans people in it.

The other superior story is the last one, *The Essence of Magic*, by Stacey Montgomery Scott. This story, about a male-to-female transsexual, treads similar emotional territory as *Small Considerations*. It is also well-written and is filled with acute observations: "But actually having sex with people was hard - their bodies always seemed so interesting, but my own body always seemed so alien. I could never believe that they were really interested. And nothing felt right."

Following her transition, something she calls a sacrifice ("You don't transition, you simply stop resisting transition, you just give in. You stop fighting."), she is still burdened with insecurities. "I can't do this if you think I'm a boy," she says to her lover. "I don't know why, but it matters. You have to understand that I'm a girl, or we have to stop."

This is an honest story that dares to suggest that sex isn't easy, a shocking admission to make in

an erotica collection. Her lover responds to her concerns this way:

Look, I have sex with girls. That means I've been here before. I've known victims of rape and incest and you don't want to know what else. Anyone who really has sex with girls knows that there's sometimes stuff you can't talk about, or really have to. It's okay. If you didn't have issues, you wouldn't be human enough for me to mate with... Look, we all have this fantasy that sex just happens, in the darkness, like magic. It isn't like that at all. It isn't so easy. We have to work for it. Girls have to, anyway.

This is good stuff, so superior to the majority of stories in this collection that it makes most of the others look pathetic in comparison.

The editors seem awfully proud of this first volume of transgender erotica, but unfortunately they haven't delivered. Nevertheless, there are some gems here and they hold out promise that volume two might be better.

Where's Tara??

No, our fictional trans heroine Tara Taylor has not succumbed to the evil Dirk Rednek. Look for the final episode of her story coming up in the last issue of *Triple Echo*.

We have other goodies in store also, including more fiction, features, book reviews, art and a few surprises too.

We hope you enjoy our celebration of four years of publishing *Triple Echo*. Watch for the super-sized last issue due out late fall.



Collage by Rachel Steen