

**ARCHIVE NEWS**

VOL.3 NO.1 OCTOBER 1992

***BULLETIN OF THE TRANS-GENDER ARCHIVE***

***A NEWS AND INFORMATION***

***BULLETIN***

***FOR THE***

***INTERNATIONAL***

***TRANS-GENDER***

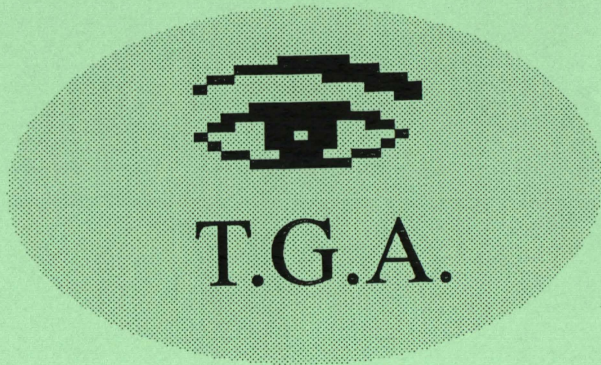
***COMMUNITY***



***T.G.A.***

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ARCHIVE NEWS: BULLETIN OF THE TRANS-GENDER ARCHIVE

Vol. 3 No. 1

Editor

October 1992

Dr R Ekins

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Archive News is not a magazine, but a news-letter and news agency. It has three simple purposes: to provide news of the trans-gender group and commercial publications; to inform the trans-gender community of the progress of the Trans-Gender Archive; to help the Trans-Gender Archive improve its dependence.

### Building the TGA

The TGA was instituted formally at the University of Ulster in 1986. Since that date the response from the trans-gender community has been remarkable. To supplement the academic material obtainable through University channels in the ordinary way, groups and individuals have been inundating us with priceless material of their own. An informal network of contributors has sprung up, sending in material from all over the globe - notably, from the U.S.A., from Germany, from France, from Australia, and from South Africa. Almost all trans-gender groups approached have kept us fully informed of their activities. The Archive receives many of the significant group magazines on a regular basis: from the U.K. - The G.d Rag (of the London TV/TS Social Group); Narcissus (of the TransEssex TV/TS Group); The Gender Dysphoria Trust Newsletter; also, Fanfare (from South Africa), Renaissance News (from the U.S.A.), and Transcare (from New Zealand), to name but a few. The Archive is now extensive, indeed. In addition to the large book and article collection, now catalogued and more or less up to date, other collections are coming on apace. Records, videotapes, audiotapes, and photographs are all represented. The Press cuttings collection is vast. We are building up a unique collection of private and unpublished material, mostly on restricted access - only available, that is, to scholars and researchers by prior arrangement with the donor.

### Archive News as a Free Resource

The TGA is a non-profit making educational and research project, housed within a University setting. The News will, therefore, come to you free of charge, in the form of a free subscription in return for your news-letters, magazines, journals and other contributions. Its circulation is restricted to Trans-Gender groups, authorized medical, legal and media personnel, and personally vetted writers and researchers deemed to be Friends of the Trans-Gender Archive.

The Archive works best when it works interactively with its donors. This issue of Archive News features contributions by readers who responded to items in past issues of Archive News. The first item on the work of Peter Farrer resulted from his helpful response to our feature in Vol. 1, No. 2 - "Trans-Gender Biography: A Guide to the Literature with an Annotated Bibliography". The second item, which features the work of Dave King, was a direct response to our continuing series on Popular Press Coverage of Cross-Dressing and Sex-Changing in the 1950's.

\*

### \*\* THE WORK OF PETER FARRER \*\*

#### \*\* WOMEN'S CLOTHES AND CROSS-DRESSING \*\*

#### \*\* WITH A PROVISIONAL LIST OF NOVELS IN WHICH MENTION \*\*

#### \*\* OF CROSS-DRESSING IS MADE, 1901-1950 \*\*

Every now and again the Archive becomes blessed with a new Friend - a dedicated and knowledgeable scholar and researcher able and willing to put at the disposal of the TGA, the benefit of years of work on behalf of the Trans-Gender community. This report is the first in what we hope will become a series of tributes to major contributors to the work of the Archive.

I first contacted Peter Farrer in connection with his book Men in Petticoats: A Selection of Letters from Victorian Newspapers, Karn Publications, 1987. This was an important publication, documenting attitudes to cross-dressing immediately prior to the re-conceptualisation of 'transvestism' as a perversion, following the work of the late nineteenth century 'sexologists'. There followed an occasional correspondence in which we exchanged information on such diverse matters as Doktor Bey's Handbook of Strange Sex, the Schreber Case, the Canadian paper Justice Weekly, and the Toronto impersonator Craig Russell. It soon became apparent that in certain areas of trans-gender research, Mr. Farrer was a world leader. I was particularly impressed by his willingness to share some of the fruits of years of patient and time consuming research. It is a privilege to open this series of 'tribute' features with an introduction to Mr. Farrer's work.

### On Women's Clothes

Peter Farrer has been interested in women's clothes, their fabrics, cut and construction, from an early age, but says he has no aptitude for anything practical or creative.

He has collections of women's underwear, skirts and dresses, especially cocktail and evening wear - mainly 18th century; of women's magazines and related ephemera (catalogues, pattern books) from the 19th century onwards, including written extracts and photocopies from the 1840's onwards; and of books on the history of fashion and clothes..

His work in progress includes: Opinions on Dress - which includes extracts from letters and articles in The Queen, E.D.M., etc. - revealing attitudes of women to tight-lacing and other aspects of fashion; and a rather complete collection of all the letters on corsets and high heels in 19th century newspapers.

His future intended projects include the reprinting and indexing of references to fabrics, dresses and their supporting structures in 19th century magazines; and the collection and indexing of descriptions of clothes in 19th and 20th century fiction.

### On Cross-Dressing

Peter Farrer traces the origins of his interest in cross-dressing to the time he wore similar rainwear to his tin sister at the age of 4 or 5, and was intrigued by sexual ambiguity and interchange and consequent cross-dressing.

He is researching the frocks and skirted costumes of the small boy; boys playing girls' parts in plays or masquerades; boys dressed as girls for punishment; female impersonation by men; male cross-dressing in fact or fiction, for any reason, and at any period, or in any culture.

The data he now has available includes books, magazines, press cuttings, and photocopied or written extracts covering all aspects of his research, in particular, copies of 11 letters on the above subjects appearing in the following magazines and newspapers: The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine; Town Talk; The Family Doctor; Modern Society; Society; Pto Bits; New Photo Fun (and its successors); London Life; Nes and Queries; and Justice Weekly (up to 1962).

### Publications

Peter B. Farrer and Anne F. Sutton, "The Duke of Buckingham's Sons, October 1483 - August 1485," The Ricardian, 2 (78), September 1982.

[Escape of Lord Stafford disguised as a girl.]

\*

Peter B. Farrer (ed.) Men in Petticoats, Karn Publications, 1987.

[Photos of Boulton and Park and Oxford amateurs in female dress. Information re Boulton and Park from newspapers and letters from The Family Doctor, Society, and Modern Society.]

\*

Peter B. Farrer (ed.) In Female Disguise: An Anthology of English and American Short Stories and Literary Passages, Karn Publications, 1992.

[Excellent overview, with list of English novels and stories up to 1900 in which the male is petticoated either in reality or imagination. 42 stories or extracts, 3 colour plates and many black and white illustrations are included in this 359 page volume. It is the first of a projected series. Available from Karn Publications, 63 Salisbury Road, Garston, Liverpool, L19 0PH. Price £15.00, post free. Highly recommended.]

\*

Various articles and items in Glad Rag.

\*

### Future Projects

The Life of Maurice Pollock.  
[Amateur boy actor, c.1900.]

\*

The Lives of Boulton and Park.

\*

Anthologies of Poetry and Drama.

[including 1st publication of Swinburne's Laugh and Lie Down.]

An Anthology of Classical and Foreign Literature.

\*

An Anthology of True Incidents.

\*

An Anthology of Female Impersonation.

[including nigger minstrels in U.S.A. and U.K.; "Varsity Drag  
in U.S.A. and U.K.; photos and articles in Photo Bits, 1911.]

\*

Translation of and/or Reproduction of Pre-Havelock Ellis  
Case Histories.

[especially Magnus Hirschfeld.]

\* \* A PROVISIONAL LIST OF NOVELS IN WHICH MENTION \* \*  
\* \* OF CROSS-DRESSING IS MADE, 1901-1950 \* \*

The single most useful source has been the lists of such  
books contributed by the readers of London Life in the late  
1930's. Several are only obtainable in the British Library or  
possibly in one or more of the other copyright libraries, and  
I have not read them all. Some of my notes are therefore  
provisional only, and further study is needed.

I have included everything from a whole novel to a single  
phrase or sentence in a novel. Items asterisked '\*' refer to  
complete books devoted to the theme of feminine disguise or  
exceptionally effective shorter episodes.

Some items are apparently only to be found in the American  
National Union Catalogue.

I have included short stories, but not those in Photo Bits  
and London Life. Similarly, I have not included erotica such  
as Miss High Heels.

I am sure there must be other examples. I found mention  
of a female impersonator in Sinclair Lewis, but I have lost the  
reference. Early in 1990, the B.B.C. broadcast one of the E.  
Hornung Raffles stories in which Raffles and Bunny dress up  
as women. I have not yet been able to track this down. It is no:

contained in the first series of stories, The Amateur  
Cracksmen, 1899. Please forward to the TGA details of any items  
not included.

Early this century, magical changes of sex were popular.  
Before the 2nd World War, Feminism seemed to entail skirts for  
men. Women thriller or detective writers seemed to have a  
penchant for getting their characters into skirts.

There is very little source material from the 1940's, the  
war years in particular.

I have not made any evaluative comments, but it is  
certainly the best writers who make the most effective  
evocation of the man in skirts, particularly James Joyce and  
Wyndham Lewis.

The categories I have chosen are neither exhaustive nor  
mutually exclusive. Some items could go into more than one  
category. Other categories which were not used here might be  
better.

Fauntleroy or Girlish Costume - Normal Wear

1906. Geraldine Robertson Glasgow, Middleton's Boy.

[Fauntleroy suit and curls.]

\*

1908. L. Allen Harker, Miss Esperance and Mr. Wycherly.

[Hatched pinafores.]

\*

1910. G.H. White, \*The Maynard Cousins.

[F. suit and curls; dressed as girl by boy cousin and another  
boy; proves boyhood.]

\*

1910. Rainer Maria Rilke, The Notebook of Malte Laurids  
Brigge.

[Mother had wanted a girl. To please her, Malte pretends to be  
'Sophie', "in the small girlish house-dress which I always wore  
with its sleeves rolled all the way up."]

\*

1915. L.M. Montgomery, Anne of the Island.

[Naughty boy in sister's apron (ch. V) - first reference fiction to this punishment.]

\*

1918. Booth Tarkington, The Magnificent Ambersons.

[F. suit and curls.]

\*

1919. L.H. Montgomery, Rainbow Valley.

[Naughty boy in sister's frock.]

\*

1922. Richmal Crompton, More William.

[Cuthbert, aged 11, in white silk tunic embroidered in golden curls (p. 92).]

\*

1923. Irvin S. Cobb, \*Goin' On Fourteen.

[Sent to Sunday school in F. suit; deliberately incites teacher to apply a recent punishment: wearing a girl's sunbonnet. So naughty, so put into a girl's frilly apron; walks out of class escapes bully who thinks he is a girl and mother gets rid of suit.]

\*

Boys - Complete Masquerade As a Girl

1902. E. Nesbit, The Tuppenny Spell.

[Angry with her brother, Lucy has bought a spell which alters their characters. When she sees that her brother is dreading to meet the bullies at his school, she offers to take him to school: "Perhaps you could disguise yourself in frocks and long hair . . ." ('The Woman at Home,' Nov. 1902, pp. 142-147).]

\*

1903. C.F. de M.M., \*Boy or Girl?

[Woman mistakes artist's son for girl (long hair, girl's costume for a painting), takes him on her travels as a girl]

8

companion. They are joined by a real girl. No one suspects except a male friend of the woman.]

\*

1924. John Buchan, The Three Hostages.

[Boy hypnotised into thinking he is a girl; rescued by Mrs. Hannay.]

\*

1925. Alfred M. Burrage, \*Poor Dear Esme.

[Overseas relative returns unexpectedly; thinks Esme is a girl; family decides to turn Esme into a girl, sent to girl's school. Farcical adventures, very little about clothes.]

\*

1925. Richmal Crompton, Still William.

[Violet Elizabeth Bott compels William to say that he would like to be a girl.]

\*

1930. P. Wyndham Lewis, The Apes of God.

[Two boys "caught both dressed as girls." (Penguin, p. 215).]

\*

1945. Evelyn Waugh, Brideshead Revisited.

[Anthony Blanche, "at the age of 15, for a wager, he was disguised as a girl and taken to play at the big table in the Jockey Club at Buenos Aires" (p. 56).]

\*

Boys in Theatrical Performances

1907. Colette, La Retraite Sentimentale.

[Mention of photographs of Marcel "dans costume de fille-fleur." (In Prologue). The English translation of 1974 (Peter Owen) has "flower costume," (which is inadequate).]

\*

9

1914. Booth Tarkington, Penrod.

[Although in male costume, "the child Sir Lancelot," the hero deeply resents wearing his sister's stockings and part of his mother's dress (Chapter III, The Costume). Comic disaster results.]

\*

1916. James Joyce, Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man

[Schoolboys perform Neapolitan peasant dance. Bertie Tallon, pink dressed figure, wearing a curly golden wig and old-fashioned sunbonnet, with black pencilled eyebrows and cheeks delicately rouged and powdered, is "the little boy" who had to dance the sunbonnet dance by himself." (Pp. 83-84).]

\*

1929. Richmal Crompton, William.

[William dresses up in his sister's Mary Queen of Scots costume - his own idea, for this is in the Chapter, "William the Showman", (V).]

\*

1938. W.A.A.C., The Girl-Boy Mystery.

[Photograph of boy in girl's costume comes into it.]

\*

1949. Jean Paul Sartre, Intimacy.

[Boy as angel.].

\*

1950. Damon Runyon, Big Boy Blues.

[Short story: Army officer angry at wife's treatment of son but delighted when sees him as a ballet dancer in a tutu at a charity show. (In First to Last, 1954, p. 343.).]

\*

Masquerading for Fun

1901. Colette, \*Claudine in Paris.

[Claudine meets the girlish Marcel: "But he was a girl!" (p. 33). Later she says to him: "Aren't you, thank heaven, almost exactly like the very prettiest of my schoolfriends?" (p. 45). She steals some of his letters and finds "a woman's photograph." But it is signed "Jules", and with the help of a magnifying glass, she realises it is a man. (p. 107).]

\*

1902. Colette. \*Claudine Married.

[Claudine marries father of Marcel and becomes his step-mother. She writes: "I am wrong calling him 'that little boy.' At twenty, one is no longer a little boy and he will remain a little girl for a long time." (p. 57). Marcel lends her the key of his "love nest," and she takes her friend Rezi there. They find his portrait: "It was unmistakably a portrait of Marcel dressed as a Byzantine lady . . . Marcel was holding one loose panel of the stiff, transparent dress away from him, with an affected gesture." (p. 149).]

\*

1907. Feodor Sologub. \*The Little Demon.

[Girl dresses youth up in her clothes. Later she and her sisters dress him up as a geisha for a fancy dress ball.]

\*

1922. \*Ulysses.

[Bello to Bloom in brothel scene: "No more blow hot and cold. What you long for has come to pass. Henceforth you are unmanned and mine in earnest, a thing under the yoke. Now for your punishment frock. You will shed your male garments, you understand, Ruby Cohen? and don the shot silk luxuriously rustling over head and shoulders and quickly too." (p. 507).]

\*

1927. Beverley Nichols, Crazy Pavements.

[Party life in the 1920's: "How pretty the Hon. Maurice Cheyne looked when he went to Mrs. Grinhaven's Ball dressed as a woman!" (p. 278).]

1936. Francis Gerard, Number 1-2-3.

["John idly picked up a photograph which lay upon the girl's desk. It was of a group in rather odd fancy-dress. He saw that once that the men were dressed as women and vice versa. (No. 222, paper-back, 1938)."]

\*

Compulsory Masquerade as a Woman

1906. Luz Frauman, \*Weiberbeute.

[Woman hypnotises step-son of 16 into believing he is a girl. She then dresses as a man and marries him. (Written by one of Magnus Hirschfeld's case histories and published in Budapest. No trace in U.K. or U.S.A. Summarised by H., pp. 171-178).]

\*

1911. Rudyard Kipling, The Honours of War.

[Two subalterns capture and tie upon unpopular fellow officer in a sack. He gets his revenge with the help of Stalky and the latter's friends. They fasten the two men up in sacks, dress them in muslin, put bonnets and feathers on their heads and take them to the Officer's Mess. (Short story included in Diversity of Creatures, 1917, pp. 105-128).]

\*

1930. P. Wyndham Lewis, \*The Apes of God.

[Daniel Boleyn's male costume for the party (doublet and hose) is burnt accidentally and he is told: "For the rest of the evening you'll have to be a girl Dan!" (p. 443). Accidental embarrassment in Mrs. Bosun's closet: "Well I suppose we must find this young gentleman a young lady's frock mustn't we?" Daniel thinks: "She would regard it positively as a joke and good hearty side-splitting one too, to slip one of the repulsive garments that all women wore upon their legs to make them look different to men's though they weren't (hung probably - and he shuddered - with the most fearful bawdy frills and other ways stupefyingly disconcerting) upon his." (pp. 45-462). Dan arrives at the Assembly: "A lovely tall young lady was . . ." He is deeply embarrassed by being treated as a girl and made the subject of amorous advances. (pp. 475 onwards).]

\*

1938. Eric Linklater, The Impregnable Women.

[See below, under "Futurist or Feminist Element in the Cross Dressing." (A more elaborate version of 1911. Rudyard Kipling, above).]

\*

Historical

1916. Adolf Georg Paul, Excellenz Unterrock.

[Based, "with much freedom" (Havelock Ellis: Eonism, p. 3) on the life of the Chevalier d'Eon. "Unterrock" means underskirt or petticoat. No trace in U.K. Copy in U.S.A. (Nat. UN. Cat.).]

\*

1932. M. Coryn, The Chevalier d'Eon.

[Fictional treatment of the life of d'Eon. (Copy in B.L.).]

\*

1932. Margaret Irwin. Royal Flush.

["The Story of Minette", daughter of Charles I and first wife of Philippe, brother of Louis XIV, known as "Monsieur". The latter's liking for dressing up as a girl is mentioned several times (pp. 111, 115, 315, Penguin edition). "Monsieur, dressed as a woman, in a modern fashionable dress all hung with lace, and a blond wig of flowing curls, his face as pink and white as though a porcelain veneer had been laid over his olive skin, was mincing and fluttering at the side of the Chevalier . . ." (p. 315). I have not yet identified the original French sources for these incidents. Dumas covers the same period in his Louis de La Valliere. Also, the escape of the future James II, disguised as a girl, is mentioned. (pp. 82, 171).]

\*

Eccentric or Effeminate Men in Full or Partial Feminine Attire

1914. Anatole France, The Revolt of the Angels.

[Maurice searches for his angel: "Maurice visited the restaurants where nihilists and anarchists take their meals. There he came across men dressed as women . . ." (p. 299, Everyman).]

\*



1926. Ronald Firbank, Concerning the Eccentricities of Cardinal Pirelli.

["Disguised as a cabellero from the provinces or as a matron (disliking to forgo altogether the militant bravoura of a skirt), it became possible to combine philosophy, equally, with pleasure." (Ch. II).]

\*

1927. Compton Mackenzie, Vestal Fire.

[Man in woman's nightgown. (Ch. 3).]

\*

1933. Anthony Powell, From a View to Death.

[Major Fosdick puts on a woman's hat and evening dress in the privacy of his bedroom. (pp. 17, 159, 178, 186; 1977 reprint).]

\*

1939. Francis Gerard, Emerald Embassy.

[Man in bed in woman's nightgown. (p. 209, paper-back, 1940).]

\*

Female Disguise for Concealment or Escape

1908. Kenneth Graham, The Wind in the Willows.

[Mr. Toad escapes from gaol dressed as the washerwoman.]

\*

1928. \*The Masqueraders.

[Twin brother and sister disguised as opposite sex.]

\*

Female Disguise for Some Practical Purposes, Outwit Enemies  
Commit Crime

1901. Ethel Turner, A Modern Achilles.

[Young man dresses as woman to escort two girls. (Short story added to the children's novel, The Story of a Baby).]

\*

1904. E. Nesbit, The Golden Gondola.

[Oswald dresses as grown-up woman to accompany his sister Alice, on a visit to their uncle's editor, to say they like his stories. "But no slow passage of years, however many, can ever weaken Oswald's memory of what those petticoats were like to walk in, and how ripping it was to get out of them, and have your own natural legs again." The speaker in the story is boy; the author, a woman. (From New Treasure Seekers).]

\*

1912. A. Conan Doyle, \*The Fall of Lord Barrymore.

[Boxing story: bully defeated by young boxer disguised as girl. (Included in Tales of the Ring and Camp).]

\*

1921. B.B. (Cuthbert Morley Headlam), \*A Strange Delilah.

[Out of work soldier who had been a star female impersonator in army shows in France, applies for job as girl companion.]

\*

1924. Agatha Christie, The Man in the Brown Suit.

[Accomplice of master criminal masquerades as missionary and a stewardess on a liner sailing to South Africa. Later, on the long train journey from Cape Town to Bulawayo he works as the criminal's female secretary. (Shown on U.K. TV, April 1990).]

\*

1931. Dornford Yates, Adele and Co.

[To outwit the jewel thief Boy, Piers and Berry dress up as fashionable women. (Ch. XII).]

\*

1933. Margery Allingham, Sweet Danger.

[In order to conceal his presence from the rival gang, Campio borrows some clothes from Amanda. (Ch. XVII).]

\*

1934. Louise Gerard, \*Strange Paths.

[In order to protect family interests and outwit enemies, young man travels to Russia disguised as a girl. Forced to share cabin on boat with a real girl.]

\*

1936. Joseph Delmont, \*Fraulein Bandit.

[Arpad has a talent for female impersonation. As the family fortunes are low, he earns money doing impersonations at a restaurant. Helps his sister outwit criminals by posing as her cousin in her clothes and also acting as a maid.]

\*

1936. Francis Gerard, Number 1-2-3.

[Johnny Langland has a talent for female impersonation. Commits murder and eludes detection dressed in the clothes of his twin sister, who is a doctor.]

\*

1942. Thorne Smith, The Passionate Witch.

[One of the characters uses partial feminine disguise.]

\*

Futurist or Feminist Element in the Cross-Dressing

1927. H.A. Vachell, \*Miss Torrabin's Experiment.

[The time is the present, just after the First world War. After a successful amateur performance in one of his sister's "prettiest and most exiguous frocks," Jim Torrabin bets his aunt that he can masquerade as his sister for a fortnight at a Scottish castle. His aunt accompanies him as another guest (the hostess is in the secret), while his sister acts as his maid. The aunt sees it as an opportunity for him to learn something of what it is like to be a woman.]

\*

1935. Victoria Cross. \*Martha Brown, M.P.

[Set in the future: Women rule and roles are reversed. Many men wear skirts, including the husband of Martha Brown: "He was very simply dressed in a little black lace dress that just reached his knees, pale pink stockings and diamond-buckled

shoes, bare arms and a small diamond crescent, her gift to him, set in the shining masses of his black hair." (p. 12).]

\*

1938. Eric Linklater. The Impregnable Women.

[War breaks out in 1944, but between France and England. The women go on strike and force the politicians on both sides to make peace. A farcical episode of enforced dressing up occurs with very little relevance to the main plot. Two naval officers obtain possession of the theatrical wardrobe of a female impersonator. Out of sheer devilry they compel two other men to dress up in the clothes and burn their own clothes. The two are chased through the streets of Edinburgh. The victims are the Minister of Munitions and a manufacturer of munitions, so perhaps their fate is intended to be a sort of rough justice (pp. 243-244, 252-252 and 278-285).]

\*

Magical Changes of Physical Sex

?1899. Archibald Clavering Gunter. \*A Florida Enchantment

[This is before 1900, but is probably the first novel to introduce changes of sex. A person who swallows the seed of the Obi tree changes sex. The tree is destroyed and the last four seeds come into the possession of Miss Lilian Travers. She and her maid eat two seeds. The change takes time and at first they continue to wear women's clothes. Then they go on a journey and return as two men, Lawrence and Jack. Lawrence falls in love with Bessy, Lilian's girl friend. He has difficulty with his former suitor and compels him to take a third seed, which starts to turn him into a woman. Before the end Lawrence relents and lets the man-woman have the last seed. (Based on synopsis in L.L. 8-6-1940, but copy in B.L.).]

\*

?1904. L. Frank Baum. The Marvellous Land of Oz.

[This is the story of the boy Tip and his attempt to recover the Kingdom of the Emerald City from the Army of Revolt led by the girl Jinjur. It is thought that the rightful king is the Scarecrow, but in the penultimate chapter it is revealed that the true ruler is Princess Ozma, whom the Wixard of Oz gave to the sorcerer, Mombi, to conceal. Mombi is forced to explain that she transformed the baby Ozma into the boy Tip. She is then compelled to transform Tip into the Princess. Tip is

1930. Ditto. Salome: The Wandering Jewess.  
[Ditto].

\*

1934. Francis Gerard. The Scarlet Beast.

[Set in the time of Hanibal: eunuch priests in feminine robe  
(p. 220).]

\* \* \*

\* \* HALF-WORLDS BETWEEN THE SEXES: POPULAR PRESS COVERAGE \* \*  
\* \* OF TRANSVESTISM AND TRANSSEXUALITY, 1949 - 1959 \* \*  
\* \* THE CASE OF ROBERTA COWELL \* \*

Archive News Vol. 2, No. 1, featured the first part of what was originally intended to be a two part series on the TGA's holdings of Newspaper cuttings on transvestism and transsexuality between 1949 and 1959. Many items featuring Roberta Cowell were included in this first part which was scheduled to be concluded in Vol. 2, No. 2. In the event, Vol. 2, No. 2. was never published. Instead, an expanded series continues in this issue of Archive News. This series is prefaced by an important paper sent to us by Dave King of the University of Liverpool. Dr. King has been studying press treatment of cross-dressing and sex-changing for many years and has kindly put at our disposal his own study of the press coverage of Roberta Cowell which we are proud to publish. Similar studies of the treatment afforded to other cross-dressers and sex-changers are badly needed. We would be happy to publish them.

CHANGING SEX IN THE 1950'S - THE PRESS

COVERAGE OF ROBERTA COWELL (1)

Dave King

University of Liverpool

According to her autobiography (2), Cowell had been operated on in the early months of 1952 after a period of taking female hormones. Nearly a year earlier her birth certificate had been altered. Just over a year after the publicity over Christine Jorgensen's case 'it was disclosed', as many papers phrased it, that Roberta Cowell had changed sex. The 'disclosure' was in the form of a Press Association statement which was reproduced with varying amount of detail in the press on Saturday March 6th, 1954. The Times was the only major national newspaper not to publish the story. This was shortly before the publication of Cowell's autobiography, a rough serialisation of which began in Picture Post the following Saturday and presumably the press statement was a calculated attempt to structure the publicity which would be likely to follow.

In most papers the story was the main front page one and the headlines chosen emphasised the fact of a change. 'MAN

you to understand the front page sex dilemma'.

On the same day the People also ran a front page story (though much shorter and less prominent than the Pictorial) under the headline 'Roberta is no real woman'. It stated that

'the operation was not really so sensational: it was largely to speed up the changes that were taking place naturally. But just as Roberta had never been a full blooded male so she will never be a hundred per cent female capable of motherhood'.

'The public must realise' it quoted one doctor as saying 'that it is quite impossible for anyone who has been a complete man to turn into a complete woman'.

The next day (March 15th) several papers reported a statement by Cowell's father repudiating the claims of 'some of the Sunday papers' (the Pictorial was mentioned by the Daily Mirror) and stating that he was satisfied that Roberta was completely female. Many references were made to Roberta's father being a surgeon or doctor. In an interview with the Daily Herald he stated that 'I am told that it is quite on the cards for her to bear children'. The Daily Sketch reported that the family had told its reporter that 'a man is in love with Roberta' and that 'her bust measurement is one inch larger than Jane Russell's'.

On the 19th March 1954 the Manchester Guardian asked 'WHAT IS A MAN? PARLIAMENT MAY HAVE TO DECIDE'. The article reported the B.M.J. (same date) as suggesting that Parliament should define what is a man and what is a woman. The Guardian's report closely followed the B.M.J. distinguishing transvestists from hermaphrodites. The following Sunday (March 21st) the Pictorial reported a 'generous retraction' by Cowell's father. In this 'retraction' he stated 'this is not a case of hermaphroditism' and agreed that Roberta is a transvestist. He also agreed the case was not unique and that he could not expect Roberta to become a mother. Finally it also referred to the latest edition of the B.M.J. which it said followed the same lines as the Pictorial. Although triumphant the Pictorial's tone is, again, not hostile.

After this the Pictorial and the rest of the press seemed to drop the controversy. A few small reports appeared announcing her return home, her 'wish to wed' and a small cosmetic operation in Rome. Picture Post ran a serialisation of her life story over 7 weeks beginning on 13th March. With a front page picture it introduced the story as 'the most moving human document of the century' giving a summary of the 'transformation', the subsequent extracts from Cowell's book affirming the claim that she had become completely female. The

Sunday Despatch on April 4th had a story by Lisa Morrell, Cowell's current companion.

Only the People continued the controversy and in a more hostile manner. Its reporters were obviously looking around for more information. A front page main headline on 21st March promised 'AMAZING NEW FACTS ON ROBERTA' and the story underneath stated that Cowell had lived as a man with a woman after her birth certificate had been changed. On April 11th 'after weeks of investigation', stated Duncan Webb under the headline 'ROBERTA - THE GHASTLY TRUTH AT LAST', 'the People is today in a position to print the whole of the facts about the Robert Cowell 'change of sex' case and to state that the public has been misled'. The article went on to state that Cowell 'is not and never has been a woman'.

'The change was purely outward and artificial'. There was no physical condition that called for the operations. They were done purely to meet Cowell's abnormal craving'. When all this work was complete the horror that was Robert Cowell released himself on the world as 'Roberta'.

The article ended with a call for the birth certificate alteration to be challenged. 'Cowell should be restored to the register as a man'.

Finally on the 18th April, when the News of the World published a 'glamour' shot of Roberta adjusting her stockings and reported her statement that she would like to get married, the People printed the same picture saying 'COME OFF IT ROBERTA'. It said that Cowell 'is now shamelessly exploiting his notoriety'. 'Could there be anything more revolting' it asked 'than this person pretending he is a 'glamour girl' when in fact he is merely a man who has been emasculated and who has none of the vital feminine organs'. It referred to 'this disgusting exhibition' concluding that 'Cowell should face that fact that he is now nothing but an unhappy freak and so ..... he should go into a home and so avoid contacts that might lead to normal relationships'.

Cowell herself was undoubtedly the main focus of nearly all the press reports but to a limited extent there was reference to her as a member of a category. The medical term in use at this time to refer to persons who wished to change sex was the transvestite. In this sense, the readers of the Guardian or the Pictorial would have been introduced to the idea of transvestism and its distinction from hermaphroditism. For the rest there was just an awareness of the particular case and vague references to a controversy over whether or not she was a 'real' woman. Judging by these accounts most papers

seemed happy to accept that she was. Only readers of the People were treated to words like 'disgusting' and 'freak'.

(1) Originally included as part of David King, Transvestite and the Transsexual: A Case Study of Public Categories and Private Identities, Ph.D. dissertation, University of Essex, 1986, pp. 342-351. A book based on the thesis and with the same title has recently been published by Avebury Press. The study is of major importance and is highly recommended.

(2) Roberta Cowell, Roberta Cowell's Story, London: Heineman, 1954.

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\* \* HALF-WORLDS BETWEEN THE SEXES: POPULAR PRESS COVERAGE \* \*  
\* \* OF TRANSVESTISM AND TRANSSEXUALITY, 1949 - 1959 \* \*  
\* \* PART 2 \* \*

1954

"Schoolboy in Girl's Clothes: His Mother Wanted a Daughter," Daily Mirror, 9 August 54, p. 3.

Picture captions: "Mehrdad Khonsari, 4, the Boy Who is Wearing Girl's Clothes Until He is Seven;" "Three Pals Go Off to School."

"A mother who longed for a daughter gave birth to a boy. She was so disappointed that she decided: 'Until he is seven I will keep him looking like the girl I wanted.' And her son, now aged four, goes to school dressed as a girl. He wears his hair long and loose and dresses in summer frocks. Sometimes, on little Mehرداد Khonsari trips through the streets to nursery school in Kensington, London, people say: 'What a lovely girl! What beautiful golden hair.' For they do not realise that Mehرداد, youngest son of a former Minister of Labour in Persia, is a boy. . . His mother . . . said: 'After my first son was born I hoped for a daughter. When I had two more sons I was disappointed that I decided to dress them as girls until they were seven.' Homayoun, the boy now 12, was the first to wear long hair and girl's clothes. That was in Persia. Mrs. Khonsari said: 'Dressing him in girl's clothes did not affect his outlook and he did not develop any girlish characteristics. I feel sure it will not harm his younger brother Mehرداد. But the

teachers at the nursery school find Mehرداد's clothes confusing. One said: 'We are always speaking of Mehرداد as 'she' or 'her' - and the pupils just can't get used to him. But Mehرداد has no girlish ways at all. He is a real boy through and through. He hates wearing an apron to keep his clothes tidy when he's painting."

\*

"Changed Personality with His Clothes," News of the World, 10 Oct 54, p. 2.

"A Jekyll and Hyde - that was the description given to a man who was stated at Birmingham to have changed his personality when he changed his clothes. He is Arthur Phillips, aged 34, of Gillet-road, Edgbaston, Birmingham, who was placed on probation for two years after pleading guilty to a disorderly act and being a blemisher of the peace. For a breach of a probation order made last year concerning an improper act he was fined £5. He was ordered to spend the first 12 months of his probation in a hospital. Mr. M.P. Hugh, prosecuting, said that while dressed in women's clothes and wearing lipstick with a strip of sticking plaster over his moustache, Phillips stopped his car and asked an 11-year-old boy for a direction. Then he offered the boy a lift. The boy refused and walked off. Phillips followed him and two other lads in the car. . . . When questioned the man said: 'I am so ashamed. I only came out of hospital last year for the same thing. It is hopeless.' He added that he had bought some women's clothing that day, including nylon stockings, and had borrowed some of his wife's garments. Mr. Hugh added: 'At that time he was quiet and lacking in self-confidence, but he put on his ordinary clothes and a different personality emerged. That shows that there is something in this man's outlook and make-up that is baffling. Here he is, a man with a moustache, who gets into women's clothing and takes over the personality of a woman. While he is dressed in women's clothing he is one person and as soon as he divests them a tremendous change comes over him.' Mr. Alec H. Evans, defending, said it seemed that as a result of hospital treatment Phillips had been partly cured and it was to be hoped that further treatment would cure him completely. . . . Mr. Hugh said: 'This is another instance of the very valuable help that is given to the public by the Special Constabulary.'"

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"September Day In The Park," News of the World, 24 October 54, p. 3.

Terence Hector Hiscock was accused of offences concerning four girls aged 7 to 10. The report details how a witness saw "through some bushes" the 35-year-old shop assistant

Terence Hector Hiscock with two seven-year-old girls, all three unclothed. The witness said: "Are you going to come quietly or do I have to beat hell out of you?" Hiscock agreed to go quietly and he took him to the police-station. Mr. G.A. Pollard, prosecuting, told the court that in two saddle-bags which Hiscock carried on his cycle were found a woman's wig, clothing and cosmetics. The man was alleged to have told the police that for some time he had had an urge to dress as a woman . . . Hiscock was committed for trial."

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1955

"These Chorus Girls Are Men!" Weekend Mail, 3-7 February 55, p. 3.

Features photographs of the two chorus 'girls' both together, and with the other chorus girls. "Audiences all over Britain have watched a touring review called 'Oh, Those Legs' - never suspecting that two of the chorus girls are MEN. Sounds fantastic? After seeing the show at Portsmouth Empire recently, I CAN VOUCH THAT IT IS TRUE . . . Mrs. Annette Duval, 44-year-old producer of the show, said: 'We couldn't find girls for the chorus, so I advertised. Peter and Ricky sent photographs of themselves dressed as women. I invited them for an audition. Imagine my surprise when two MEN arrived! When the show first started . . . the two men used to take off their wigs on the stage at the end of each performance. But audiences never twigged they were men . . . They just thought they were wearing hair styles shorter than those of the other girls. So after that they decided to carry on the illusion by keeping their wigs on all through the show'. The "Weekend Mail" says: "There are plenty of pretty girls longing for a chance in the chorus. These men should make way for GIRLS!"

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To be continued.

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T.G.A.

#### COMMUNICATIONS AND DEPOSITS

*For all communications, and for the making of open or closed, personal or group deposits, contact Dr. Richard Ekins at the Archive. Trans-Gender groups sending their magazines to the T.G.A. have an automatic subscription to Archive News.*

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