

Cross-dressing in Shakespeare's comedies – and beyond.

Introduction

A surprising number of the plays written for the early English professional stage featured cross-dressed characters. Michael Shapiro lists eighty in the appendix to his book *Gender in Play on the Shakespearean Stage* (1994) but it is impossible to know exactly how many there were.

Of the thirty-eight surviving plays attributed to Shakespeare, about one fifth involve cross-dressing. In seven of those plays female characters disguise themselves as young men. In three – *The Merchant of Venice*, *As You Like It*, and *Twelfth Night* – cross-dressing is central to both the complication and the resolution of the plot. The heroines also disguise themselves as men in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, one of Shakespeare's earliest plays, and in *Cymbeline*, one of his latest. In *The Taming of the Shrew* and in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* male characters are disguised as women.

In addition to all these cross-dressed disguises, three of Shakespeare's earliest history plays feature female characters who probably appeared in masculine battle-dress (Joan in Part I of *Henry VI*, Margaret in Part III, and Eleanor in *King John*). Cross-dressing had a variety of functions in these plays, some deriving from the material conditions of performance, others from the conflicting status of gender roles in the culture.

Background

The Renaissance was a transitional period from the medieval time to the modern, a culture full of contradictions. On the one hand, influenced by the medieval culture, the Renaissance culture was male dominated, and late sixteenth century England was a patriarchal society. In this hierarchical culture, women were theoretically under the rule of men, generally believed to be less rational than men and needing male protection. Legally, a woman's identity was subsumed under that of her male protector. The woman's position of inferiority required her to strive for four virtues: obedience, chastity, silence, and piety. 'The good woman was closed off, silent, chaste, and immured within the home' (Howard, 424).

From the social point of view, cross-dressing in the Renaissance had an important aspect: as women were considered inferior to men, cross-dressing presented an important change of status. If a woman pretended to be a man, she was, in fact, assuming more rights than she was entitled to. Apart from several exceptions in the real life, it was only in fiction and carnivalesque festivities that cross-dressing was allowed as a temporal escape from everyday reality. Since a woman was not supposed to 'leave her house' and to travel alone, some women might have worn male clothing for protection. If a woman's male disguise was discovered, however, she was suspected of leading 'a loose life' (Howard, 421), and was punished.

Between 1610 and 1620 there was a controversy over gender roles in England, leading to a pamphlet entitled *Hic Mulier* (*This manlike woman*). *Hic Mulier* was published in 1620 in an England that condemned transvestitism. Women wearing men's clothes were becoming increasingly common, causing concern to social conservatives. The pamphlet argued that transvestitism was an affront to nature, The Bible, and society. As with the London aldermen and magistrates, the author of *Hic Mulier* associates female cross-dressing with sexual wantonness.

The Renaissance was also a time of humanism. Humanists like Sir Thomas More, Erasmus, Luther and Calvin devoted themselves to the elevation of woman's position, and 'they all knew that that position could not be altered without a changed view of the nature which had determined it' (Dusinberre, 306). Humanists encouraged women to be educated. Erasmus once visited More in England and was deeply impressed by More's insistence on an education for his daughters (Pitt, 17).

The humanists brought about far-reaching social consequences. Influenced by them, English girls from noble families received their education in the household of some other great lady, and were either educated by her alone, or with the help of a tutor from Oxford or Cambridge. A circle of noblewomen appeared, centering round Elizabeth. Through education, these women could assess the validity of society's attitudes to women from a standpoint denied to most women. As a result, 'the prominence of educated women in Elizabethan and Jacobean society made the Elizabethans sensitive to the whole area of masculinity and femininity' (Dusinberre, 212).

As the most exceptional woman in Shakespeare's time, Queen Elizabeth I ruled for 45 years (1558 to 1603). During her reign, England underwent great changes and witnessed prosperity in various fields like politics, economy and culture. Her contribution to the country proved that women could also be outstanding, knowledgeable, and masculine. Her masculine qualities, as Pitt points out, were, 'fearless courage, toughness, arrogant defiance and a provocative defense of territory' (29). The Queen enjoyed Shakespeare's plays, and he acted before her at Greenwich in 1594 (Badawi, 33). It is reasonable to infer that Elizabeth I influenced Shakespeare's writing of the brilliant cross-dressed heroines.

Shakespeare was quick in reflecting the intellectual influences of his time. All the heroines (Julia, Portia, Rosalind, and Viola) are from aristocratic or wealthy families, educated, intelligent, and courageous enough to disguise themselves in order to enter the men's world. In this way, Shakespeare also catered for his female audience.

Shakespeare's use of cross-dressing

In Shakespeare's most famous comedies, four women characters all don a masculine disguise.

1. Julia in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* (1594). In order to act freely in a patriarchal society, Julia transforms herself into a boy to pursue her lover.
2. Portia in *The Merchant of Venice* (1596). Portia disguises herself as a man in order to travel to Venice and as a lawyer to enter the courtroom.
3. Viola in *Twelfth Night* (1600). Viola becomes a eunuch in order to win Duke Orsino's love.
4. Rosalind in *As You Like It* (1600). Rosalind acts as a shepherd to escape from Duke Frederick and to test Orlando's love.

In addition, in the 'Romance' play, *Cymbeline* (1611), the main female character, Imogen, puts on male clothes in order to visit her lover, Posthumous Leonatus.

Most of the plays involving heroines in male disguise take a sympathetic view of cross-dressing. They usually present it as a strategy used by wives and girlfriends to follow or rejoin the men they love. In other plays they put on male clothes in order to protect themselves from male sexual desire. Note that if a woman is cross-dressed, she usually becomes a boy of a lower status (Rosalind, the heiress to the throne, becomes a humble owner of a herd of sheep; the rich heiress Portia becomes a junior, though wise, lawyer; the noblewoman Viola becomes a pageboy). Although generally a cross-dressed man was more acceptable than a cross-dressed woman, in Shakespeare's comedies we seldom encounter men in women's clothes.

There are a number of aspects of cross-dressing in Shakespeare's comedies:

1. The heroines construct their masculine appearance before traveling.

- Portia's masculinity is constructed through her lawyer garments and masculine behavior. Before leaving for Venice to enter the courtroom, Portia talks with her maid Nerissa about her disguise:

In such a habit

That they shall think we are accomplished
 With that we lack; I'll hold thee any wager,
 When we are both accoutered like young men,
 I'll prove the prettier fellow of the two,
 And wear my dagger with the braver grace,
 And speak between the change of man and boy,
 With a reed voice, and turn two mincing steps
 Into a manly stride; and speak of frays
 Like a fine bragging youth, and tell quaint lies,
 How honourable ladies sought my love,
 Which I denying, they fell sick and died— (III. iv. 60-77)

- In *As You Like It*, Rosalind is 'more than common tall' which enables her to look more like a man. She arms herself with a 'curtle-axe', a 'boar-spear', and a 'martial outside'. In this way, Rosalind can play the man convincingly:

Were it not better,
 Because that I am more than common tall,
 That I did suit me all points like a man?
 A gallant curtle-axe upon my thigh,
 A boar-spear in my hand; and, ---- in my heart
 Lie there what hidden woman's fear there will, ----
 We'll have a swashing and a martial outside,
 As many other mannish cowards have
 That do outface it with their semblances. (I. iii. 118-25)

2. Shakespeare's cross-dressing women are active and determined rather than passive and submissive.

- There are 4 strategies of active behavior: verbal activity (being a shrew), clever manipulation (disguised as sweetness and obedience), open defiance (including elopements) and disguise (especially a specific type of disguise, cross-dressing). More than one of these strategies can be employed by one character.
- The heroines are not trapped in a home. They put on men's clothes and travel alone, to be a lawyer or soldier, to pursue their goals, especially for love.
- In Elizabethan times, girls' marriages were arranged by their fathers, as in *The Merchant of Venice*, Portia's marriage is restricted by her father's will. However, Portia is not submissive completely to her father's will. She helps Bassanio to choose the casket and finally she marries the husband she loves. Portia also wins Bassanio's loyalty and love by helping Bassanio to pay his debt to Antonio.
- Rosalind, Viola, and Julia also try to take the initiative in love, and they succeed eventually.
 - Rosalind is active in tutoring Orlando in love. She disguises as Ganymede and promises Orlando to cure his love sickness.
 - Viola pursues Orsino's love forwardly. After surviving the shipwreck and coming to Illyria, on hearing Orsino's name, Viola begins to fall in love with Orsino, and determines to win his love. When Orsino sends her to woo Lady Olivia, Viola says to herself: 'Whoe'er I woo, myself would be his wife' (I.iv.42). Viola succeeds at the end of the play, when she discards her male disguise; Orsino asks her to be his wife immediately.
 - Julia takes the initiative, managing to win her lover back. Just after Julia and Proteus announce their love to each other, Proteus is sent by his father to the house of Duke of Milan to study. In order to be with Proteus, Julia disguises herself and comes to Milan where she sees Proteus courting Sylvia, the Duke's daughter. Julia disguises herself as Sebastian, to be Proteus's servant and is assigned to woo Sylvia. Instead of wooing, Julia tells Sylvia that Proteus has a lover at home, thus Sylvia dislikes Proteus. Eventually, Julia reveals her true identity; Proteus realizes Julia's beauty and marries her.

3. All four heroines show their intelligence and capability, even better than the men.

- Portia successfully defeats Shylock, not only saving Antonio from losing a pound of flesh, but also dividing Shylock's wealth into two halves, one belonging to the State, the other to Antonio. Portia's success implies that she has 'the best mind of those present, better than that of her social superior to the Duke and better than that of her husband' (Pitt, 92). Thus Portia subverts the stereotypical ideas of women as the less superior. In Jean Howard's words, Portia's competence reveals that 'masculine prerogatives are based on custom, not nature, since a woman can indeed successfully assume masculine positions of authority' (433).

4. Although the heroines show their masculinity in cross-dressing, they are still biologically female and physically weak sometimes, and they still hold feminine characteristics like tenderness, affection, and chastity.

- Rosalind faints when Oliver, Orlando's brother, shows her the napkin 'dy'd' in Orlando's blood. And when Oliver encourages her by saying, 'Be of good cheer, youth. You a man? You lack a man's heart' (IV. iii.166), Rosalind's answer is 'I should have been a woman by right' (IV.iii.178).
- Viola is afraid when she is challenged to a duel with Sir Andrew Aguecheek, a foolish and unsuccessful suitor of Olivia's, as she says to herself: 'Pray God defend me! A little thing would make me tell them how much I lack of a man' (III.iv.301-2). Viola's fear is due to her physical frailty.

5. All four heroines are admirable women, endowed with good feminine qualities like chastity, constancy, tenderness, affection, selflessness and proficiency in housework.

- Rosalind has good reputation among the people of her country due to 'her smoothness, her very silence, and her patience' (I.iii.80). Thus Duke Frederick wants to banish her so that Celia, his daughter, can be the 'more bright' and 'more virtuous' (I.iii.83). Viola is praised by Mrs. Jameson in *Shakespeare's Heroines*: 'the preservation of her (Imogen's, in *Cymbeline*) feminine character under her masculine attire, her delicacy, her modesty, and her timidity are managed with the same perfect consistency and unconscious grace as in Viola' (qtd. in Dusinberre, 264).

6. In disguise, the heroines' gender identities are ambiguous: they are men and women, masculine and feminine.

- Portia is Balthazar, Rosalind is Ganymede, Viola is Cesario, and Julia is Sebastian. Their women's part and men's part always mix together, which is dramatically effective, and also proves that gender is free-floating.
- In *The Merchant of Venice*, Portia disguises as Balthazar in the courtroom, a young and learned doctor, and brilliantly handles legal technicalities. At that moment, is the lawyer Portia or Balthazar? On the one hand, the lawyer deals with the case, standing aloof from her real social position— a woman, a housewife with a big household; on the other hand, when Bassanio speaks to Antonio:

Antonio, I am married to a wife
Which is as dear to me as life itself;
But life itself, my wife, and all the world
Are not with me esteemed above thy life.
I would lose all, ay, sacrifice them all
Here to this devil, to deliver you. (IV.i.280-5)

- ... Portia intervenes and reasserts her status as woman and wife, "Your wife would give you little thanks for that, If she were by to hear you make the offer" (IV.i.286-7). At that moment, Balthazar, the lawyer reminds himself of his real identity and Portia the wife redirects audience's attention to her disguise. Thus Portia is both a woman and a man: Portia the wife and Balthazar the lawyer.

- In *As You Like It*, the crossdressed Rosalind's identity is more ambiguous. Rosalind disguises herself as Ganymede, and as Ganymede, she acts as Orlando's Rosalind in the wooing scenes. Thus Rosalind-cum-Ganymede has three roles: Rosalind, Ganymede, and Orlando's Rosalind. By performing the last role, Rosalind plays out the masculine constructions of femininity. cross-dressing enables her to demonstrate femininity in a man's disguise.
- In *Twelfth Night*, Viola-cum-Cesario's ambiguous identity is a difficult problem for Viola to 'untangle'. Viola is trapped in the love triangle with Orsino and Olivia: Viola loves Orsino, Orsino bears one-sided love to Olivia, and Olivia falls in love with Cesario. At the end of the play, Viola's twin brother Sebastian turns up. Olivia and Orsino recognize the 'true' objects of their affection and the love-relationships sort themselves out accordingly. The woman Viola marries Orsino and Sebastian her twin marries Olivia. Time untangles everything. Sebastian's appearance not only solves all the problems, but also suggests gender ambiguity between Viola and Sebastian. They are twins, which means they share the same appearance, as Antonio remarks: 'An apple cleft in two is not more twin / Than these two creatures' (V.i.223-4). Two persons under the same appearance can be a man and a woman; then one person with two faces under different circumstances can perform both masculinity and femininity.
- Similar to Viola, who is assigned to woo Olivia for Orsino, Julia in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* also does errands between her lover Proteus and his new lover Silvia. Contrary to Viola, who suffers in the untangled love triangles, Julia makes use of her disguise to alienate Proteus from Sylvia. Julia's mind travels easily between the world of men and women, between Julia the woman and Sebastian the page. When Proteus orders his page to deliver his former lover Julia's ring to Sylvia, Julia the woman bitterly upbraids Proteus, 'It seems you loved not her, to leave her token. She is dead, belike?' (IV.iv.74).
- In *As You Like It*, the cross-dressing scheme is very complex, as we encounter a boy actor who plays a girl, who pretends to be a boy, who performs in the role of a woman. Moreover, there is a direct reference to the real sex of the actor playing Rosalind towards the end of the epilogue. Rosalind steps out of her role, the male actor has just finished playing a part of a woman and addresses the audience in his own voice announcing what he would do if he were a woman. Nevertheless, it takes place just in the end, the epilogue is a transition between the fictional world and the real one, to which the spectators are about to return. The extra-theatrical reality may be fully realized by the audience before and after the play; during the play the spectators are supposed to cooperate as much as possible with the playwright and the performers by using their imagination, believing the story and feeling with the characters.

Androgyny

Dreher (1986) explores how cross-dressing is connected with the concept of androgyny, popular in the Renaissance. This concept appeared in alchemy as well as in writing and visual art. One of the key terms of alchemy was *balance*, and androgyny is an expression of a balance between the masculine and the feminine principles. On the physical level it can be seen in the figures who carry both masculine and feminine features; beautiful boys with feminine grace and boyishly slender women. The spiritual level of androgyny was even more important than the physical one. Cross-dressing stresses the idea of androgyny by giving it a physical dimension, but most of Shakespeare's comedy heroines are active, dynamic and resourceful, which are the qualities associated rather with masculinity than femininity. At the same time, the masculine features are balanced by the constant reminders of the heroine's femininity. With the cross-dressed heroines these reminders are perhaps even more important than with the others, as their masculinity is being continuously confirmed by their clothes.

Portia may be a mistress of a great household, she can undertake a daring journey and solve a difficult legal case, teaching all men and her husband in particular a lesson, but in some respects she remains feminine. She obeys her dead father's wish and lets the casket trial select a husband for her, although she feels

frustrated by her inability to choose for herself. She gives, at least formally, herself, her fortune and the rule over Belmont to Bassanio.

Viola seems to be the most feminine of the three. She cross-dresses purely for safety and does not enjoy the part at all, she sees herself as a deformity. In her scruples and her femininity apparent even in the male disguise she is different from Portia and Rosalind. She needs a male authority of the sea-captain to be able to start her role. Moreover, her first plan is not to pretend to be a man but a eunuch, someone less masculine than a man. She obediently woos another woman for her beloved. She is alone with her secret, there is no female character with whom she could be Viola and not Cesario. Unlike Rosalind, she does not find amusing the fact that Olivia has fallen in love with her; she is troubled, because it further complicates her already difficult relationship with Orsino. Moreover, she genuinely pities Olivia, because she knows too well what an unrequited love feels like, she has the feminine quality of empathy. Her femininity is further confirmed by her reluctance to fight in a duel. The final blow to her masculine role is her reunion with Sebastian—the twins represent the concept of androgyny in between themselves, as soon as Sebastian is back and will balance her femininity with his masculinity, Viola can become fully feminine again. Because her masculine attire throughout the play confirms rather than undermines her femininity, she can stay in it in the end of the play.

Conclusion

Cross-dressing in Shakespeare's comedies makes the heroines' gender identity ambiguous: they are both men and women, owning both femininity and masculinity, thus cross-dressing helps to deconstruct Renaissance gender stereotypes, the binary opposition of gender, and eventually, patriarchy. From a more practical perspective, the *represented* female character who cross-dresses relieves the boy actor, at least for a time, from the burden of impersonating a woman.

The ending of comedies usually brings the fictitious world back to balance, Shakespeare's heroines leave their active days behind and gladly accept the authority of the men. Today's audience is often left to wonder whether the husbands the comedy heroines get serve as a reward or as a punishment for their activity. Bassanio can easily be read as a fortune-hunter who irresponsibly spends vast amounts of borrowed money and is primarily interested in Portia because she is so rich. Orsino is presented as a self-absorbed egoist who cannot take "no" as an answer. Orlando seems to lack negative qualities, he is a virtuous youth who can wrestle well, but otherwise he is nothing to write home about and we cannot help feeling that the lively and intelligent Rosalind perhaps deserves something better than that. Nevertheless, all the heroines get what they wanted. And at least Portia and Rosalind are not silenced towards the end as many other comedy heroines are, to conform to the Renaissance ideal of a silent and obedient wife.

In Renaissance England, dress was the code of one's identity, symbolizing one's gender and social class. The stability of the social order depended much on maintaining absolute distinctions between male and female. If a woman put on men's clothes, she transgressed the gender boundary, and encroached on the privileges of the advanced sex. Renaissance gender stereotypes required women to wear women's clothes, to be submissive, passive, silent, closed off, and immured within home. However, in his plays, Shakespeare dresses his heroines with men's clothes, indirectly encroaching on the privileges of men, and deconstructs the gender stereotypes. To summarize:

1. Cross-dressing helps women characters to travel alone, to enter the men's world, and to act as men, instead of being confined at home.
2. In men's clothes, the heroines Portia, Rosalind, Viola, and Julia all demonstrate masculine qualities such as intelligence, wit, capability, and courage.
3. The heroines also demonstrate their admirable feminine qualities such as tenderness, chastity, constancy, and selflessness, so their combination of feminine and masculine qualities proves that femininity and masculinity are not two opposites and masculinity is not superior to femininity.
4. All the heroines take the initiative and control the action, especially when they pursue love. Rosalind dominates the love games with Orlando, and Portia takes control of the court and her

husband's relationship with Antonio. Their behavior suggests that they are not inferior to men. Shakespeare transforms each heroine, activating her, giving her voice and empowering her with subjective initiative, but without depriving her of the qualities of traditional femininity such as affection, tenderness and selflessness. For him, there is an easy cross-over of masculine and feminine traits to both genders. As Dusinberre claimed, Shakespeare saw men and women as equal in a world which declared them unequal. He did not divide human nature into the masculine and the feminine, but observed in the individual woman or man an infinite variety of union between opposing impulses. To talk about Shakespeare's women is to talk about his men, because he refused to separate their worlds physically, intellectually, or spiritually. (308)

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Appendix: Chronological list of plays with heroines in male disguise

The first date is that of performance, and the bracketed date is that of first publication.
Blank spaces indicate that the author or acting company are unknown.

1570-83 [1599]	<i>Clyomon and Clamydes</i>		
1576-80? [1594]	<i>The Wars of Cyrus</i>	Farrant	Chapel?
c. 1578 [1578]	<i>Promos and Cassandra</i>	Whetstone	unacted?
1583-85 [1592]	<i>Gallathea</i>	Lyly	Paul's
c. 1589 [1592?]	<i>Soliman and Perseda</i>	Kyd?	
c. 1590 [1598]	<i>James the Fourth</i>	Greene	Queen's?
1592-94 [1615]	<i>The Four Prentices of London</i>	Heywood	Admiral's
c. 1593 [1623]	<i>The Two Gentlemen of Verona</i>	Shakespeare	Chamberlain's
1593-94 [1599]	<i>George a Greene</i>		Sussex's
1596-98 [1600]	<i>The Merchant of Venice</i>	Shakespeare	Chamberlain's
1598 [1616]	<i>Englishmen for My Money</i>	Haughton	Admiral's
1599-1600 [1602]	<i>Antonio and Mellida</i>	Marston	Paul's
c. 1600 [1601]	<i>Cynthia's Revels</i>	Jonson	Chapel
1600 [1623]	<i>As You Like It</i>	Shakespeare	Chamberlain's
c. 1600 [1600]	<i>The Maid's Metamorphosis</i>		Paul's
1601-2 [1623]	<i>Twelfth Night</i>	Shakespeare	Chamberlain's
1601-2 [1611]	<i>May Day</i>	Chapman	Chapel
c. 1602 [1602]	<i>How a Man May Choose a Good Wife from a Bad</i>		Worcester's
c. 1602 [1631]	<i>The Fair Maid of the West, I</i>	Heywood	
1603? [1603]	<i>Philotus</i>		unacted?
1603-5 [1638]	<i>The Wise Woman of Hogsden</i>	Heywood	Queen Anne's
1604 [1608]	<i>The Honest Whore, I</i>	Dekker and Middleton	Prince Henry's
1604 [1605]	<i>The Fair Maid of Bristow</i>		King's
1604-7 [1608?]	<i>Your Five Gallants</i>	Middleton	Chapel?

Beyond: Cross dressing in contemporary British film comedies.

As we have seen, there is a strong tradition of cross-dressing in English comedies. This tradition continued from Shakespeare's time up till the present day, offering a means of evading strict censorship laws. The Licensing Act of 1737 gave the Lord Chamberlain the role of arbiter of theatrical taste. The role, held until 1968, was introduced by the Prime Minister Robert Walpole, to gag his theatrical critics, in particular Henry Fielding, by banning any offensive reference to a living person.

So from the 18th century every British playwright had to obtain a license for the public performance of a play. Any reference to homosexuality was taboo. State censorship reigned unchallenged until the turn of the 19th century. A growing recognition of the centrality of the writer and arrival of subsidy for the theatre inspired a resistance to censorship. The Royal Court productions of Edward Bond's *Saved*, and *Early Morning*, which included a lesbian affair between Florence Nightingale and Queen Victoria, were instrumental in the censor's demise. By September 1968 the *Theatres Act* was in force and the censor banished. Not so coincidentally, the musical *Hair* opened that night in the West End.

The Theatres Act is relatively flexible, but "censorship" still comes in many forms such as self-censorship born of fear, legal or political threats and a new age of religious censorship.

Cross-dressing in motion pictures began in the early days of the silent films. Charlie Chaplin and Stan Laurel brought the tradition of female impersonation in the English music halls when they came to America in 1910. Both Chaplin and Laurel occasionally dressed as women in their films. The tradition has continued for many years, usually played for laughs. Only in recent years have there been dramatic films in which cross-dressing was included, possibly because of strict censorship of American films until the mid 1960s.

Cross-dressing allowed writers to use suggestion and double-meaning to examine the prohibited topics of sexuality, and as such became an established part of the comedy-writer's toolbox. Cross-dressing thus became part of the culture of English comedy, as can be seen in the *Carry On* films that started in 1958, before the 1968 Act, and continued after it, till 1978. This cross-dressing was developed by the *Monty Python* team, from 1969 to 1974, similarly testing the new act.

Women now share the stage equally with men, so cross-dressing in contemporary British comedy usually consists of men dressing up as women. *The Crying Game* (1992) brought cross-dressing and homosexuality to the screen, surprising the viewers, who did not know until the end of the film, that the main 'female' character was in fact a man.

Some like it hot (1959) (US)

Tootsie (1982) – Dustin Hoffman becomes the female star of a television soap opera (US).

Yentl (1983) – Barbra Streisand dresses as a boy so she can study the Jewish law. (US)

Nuns on the Run (1990) – Eric Idle and Robbie Coltrane disguise as nuns. (UK)

Ladybugs (1992) – Jonathan Brandis dresses as a girl to play in the girls' soccer team. (US)

Mrs. Doubtfire (1993) – Robin Williams disguises himself as a woman so he can see his children. (US)

The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert (1994) – Transvestism and transsexualism figure in this offbeat comedy of three men traveling cross country to perform a drag show at a resort in Alice Springs in the outback of Australia. (Australia)

The Full Monty (1997) (UK)

Shakespeare in Love (1998) – Includes Shakespeare's use of female impersonators in his plays (UK)