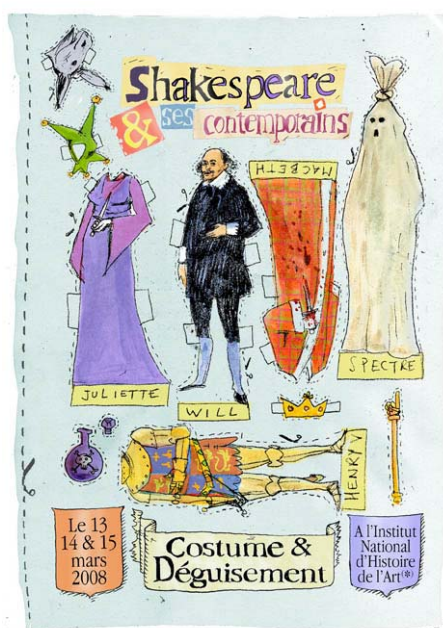


# Costume et déguisement dans le théâtre de Shakespeare et de ses contemporains



actes du Congrès

organisé par la

**SOCIÉTÉ FRANÇAISE SHAKESPEARE**

les 13, 14 et 15 mars 2008

textes réunis par

**Pierre KAPITANIAK**

sous la direction de

**Jean-Michel DÉPRATS**

COUVERTURE :  
Edouard Lekston,  
*William en carton et ses habits à découper*, 2008  
edlek@free.fr

conception graphique et logo  
Pierre Kapitaniak

© 2008 Société Française Shakespeare  
Institut du Monde Anglophone  
Université de Paris III – Sorbonne Nouvelle  
5 rue de l'École de Médecine  
75006 Paris  
[www.societefrancaiseshakespeare.org](http://www.societefrancaiseshakespeare.org)

Tous droits de traduction, de reproduction et d'adaptation  
réservés pour tous les pays

## SEEING THROUGH COSTUME

Stephen ORGEL

Disguises in Elizabethan drama are always presumed to be impenetrable, effectively concealing the self, whereas costume is designed to adorn the self, to make the self more strikingly recognizable. Both concepts are essential elements of theater, though costume, as a defining feature of almost any social role, is also essential to the functioning of every human culture. The permanence and impenetrability of the self beneath the costume, and therefore the essential superficiality of the costume, however, has not always been taken for granted. The paper considers the changing effects of disguise and costume both on concepts of the self and on assumptions about the kind of reality theater represents.

*Les déguisements dans le théâtre élisabéthain sont toujours censés être impénétrables, cachant effectivement le moi, tandis que le costume est fait pour parer le moi, pour le rendre plus immédiatement reconnaissable. Ces deux concepts sont des éléments essentiels du théâtre, bien que le costume, en tant que caractéristique qui définit presque tout rôle social, soit également essentiel au fonctionnement de toute culture humaine. La permanence et l'impénétrabilité du moi sous le costume, et par conséquent la superficialité essentielle de celui-ci, n'a pourtant pas toujours été prise comme allant de soi. Cet article se penche sur les effets changeants du déguisement et du costume à la fois sur les concepts du moi et sur les hypothèses quant au type de réalité que le théâtre représente.*

Disguise is by definition superficial, the misrepresentation of one's appearance, though etymologically it imagines something much more radical, a "dis-appearance," which can imply anything from a mere move out of sight to the total annihilation of the person whose appearance is undone. It also assumes that there is always an essence beneath the appearance, something being concealed, misrepresented, or denied. Corollary to this is that the essence is different from the disguise, and that what is concealed is what is real—this is not quite as axiomatic as it appears: consider such a construction, from *Henry V*, as "Then should the warlike Harry like himself / Assume the port of Mars...", where the self is entirely congruent with the persona. Clearly, however, being *like* oneself is different from *being* oneself—the self is a role one plays. The congruence is, in any case, acknowledged to be all but impossible, requiring a "muse of fire." When the change of appearance includes a fictional or theatrical element and is not intended to render the person unrecognizable—intended not to conceal the real but to adorn it, even

to make the person more strikingly recognizable—we call the disguise a costume, a relatively new term, existing in English only since the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, deriving from French and Italian words for “custom,” and involving notions of the fashionable. This too assumes that though the externals may change, there is a self within that does not. Disguise is the essence of theater, and thereby of drama in performance, and it is enabled by, though not subsumed in, costume—what we are meant to see beneath the costumes on stage is the characters, not the actors. But costume, as a defining feature of almost any social role, is also essential to the functioning of every human culture.

I’m beginning, however, with a few examples to remind us that the permanence and impenetrability of the self beneath the costume, and therefore the essential superficiality of the costume, has not always been taken for granted. The history of anti-theatricalism from Plato onward assumes that actors are indeed changed by their costumes; and Renaissance polemicists in England were especially exercised by the transvestism of the Elizabethan stage, arguing from both platonic and patristic examples that the wearing of female garments necessarily resulted in an effeminization of the actor’s masculine self, and from that to the corruption of the audience. The self, in such arguments, is the most fragile of entities, acutely permeable by externals. In the context of Shakespeare’s England, this claim was eccentric, even pathologically so, a defining feature of a lunatic fringe, and the urban mercantile audience to whom it was directed was largely unpersuaded, since it also constituted the principal audience for the popular theater of the age. But its assumptions nevertheless resonated in significant ways throughout the culture. Indeed, they have continued to do so: Robert Merrill, a principal baritone at the Metropolitan Opera for thirty years, was an orthodox Jew, and when he sang in *Don Carlo* or *La Forza del Destino* he always refused to wear a cross, lest this attribute of the role somehow penetrate and violate his inner self. The stage property, for this performer, had a dangerous interiority; which argues a striking belief in the power of the Christian symbol coming from an orthodox Jew. In contrast, for Caruso, singing Eléazar in *La Juive*, the Jewish ritual garments were an essential element of the role, and he made much of them. Was Caruso’s self less fragile than Merrill’s, or did he simply take the role less seriously—or was Merrill, like Shakespeare’s imagined Henry V, always playing himself?

As these examples suggest, it is not always clear what distinguishes the external from the internal. In the case of a light-skinned black who passes as white, for example, what is the relation between the skin color and the true self? The disguise, if there is one, is entirely internal—the person has undergone no visible change, but presents himself, or thinks of herself, in a new way. New ways of self-presentation are the very essence of fashion, which constantly reinvents itself, often blatantly, commanding attention through attempts to shock. What exactly is shocking in unconventional hair styles, revealing clothing, tattoos, body piercings? —what fears are parents expressing in their alarm at the unexpected ways their children present themselves? The fear must be that the rebelliousness is not merely external; that the costume does express an inner reality, that our children are no longer versions of ourselves; but somewhere in the course of that reasoning must also be a conviction that the costume *is* the problem, that without the external transformation the inner rebellion would cease to exist, as Hamlet's mother urges him to cast his nighted color off, as if that would restore him to sociability. Culturally, the change, in fact, tends to work in the opposite direction: the transformations of fashion quickly cease to be shocking and become simply stylish—in the past couple of decades when black has been fashionable, most of the court in productions of *Hamlet* has been costumed like Hamlet, and even the parents of my students now occasionally sport tattoos and nose studs.

How deep can disguise go? What is the effect of costume on the self? I begin with an instance in which the effect is as essential as it can be in a narrative—in which, that is, the effect is linguistic, and specifically, grammatical. Barnabe Riche, in his *Farewell to the Military Profession*,<sup>1</sup> tells the story of Apolonius and Silla. Silla and Silvio are twins, children of the Duke of Cyprus. Silvio is off at the wars; Silla falls in love with Apolonius, the duke of Constantinople, who is visiting at her father's court. When Apolonius departs, Silla determines to follow him, and persuades a faithful servant to accompany her on a ship about to sail for Constantinople. She disguises herself "in very simple attire," but the captain, struck by her exceptional beauty, proposes either to make love to her or, if she refuses, to rape her. Silla contemplates suicide, but a violent storm

---

<sup>1</sup> Barnabe Riche, *Riche, his farewell to militarie profession*, London, R. Walley, 1581.

arises, the ship is wrecked, and Silla, clinging to a chest full of the captain's clothes, is washed ashore. Realizing the dangers faced by a young woman traveling alone, she disguises herself this time as a young man, wearing the sea-captain's clothes. She takes the name of her twin brother, Silvio, makes her way to Constantinople, seeks out the Duke Apoloniuss, and enters his service.

As most of you are aware, this is the plot of *Twelfth Night*, though it is, for all its conventional romance elements, a far more rational version of the story than Shakespeare's. This heroine has already known and fallen in love with the duke who was to become Orsino, and she has a cogent reason for her cross-dressing, to avoid a repetition of the fate she has so narrowly escaped—Shakespeare cleans up the story, and in so doing removes the motive for the disguise.

Rational or not, however, the disguise turns out to be far more problematic for Silla than for Viola. After some months, when we are well into the plot, Silvio appears in Constantinople: he has been traveling the Mediterranean searching for his sister. Julina, Shakespeare's Olivia, encounters him, and naturally thinks he is his twin. She takes him home, and entertains him; she is delighted with him—for once he is not undertaking to woo her on his master's behalf, and indeed, Apoloniuss's name is not mentioned at all. And Silvio, overcoming his astonishment at the attention he is getting from a total stranger, is enchanted with her beauty and charm. One thing leads to another, and they spend the night together. The next morning, Silvio leaves, to continue his search for Silla. Two months later Julina realizes that she is pregnant.

She confronts Apoloniuss, demanding justice: his servant has taken advantage of her. Silla is summoned, and denies everything; but it is clear to Apoloniuss that Julina is telling the truth, and he insists that his servant now marry Julina. Silla refuses, offering no reason for the refusal, and Apoloniuss imprisons "him". Julina visits the prisoner, berating and pleading; her oaths and absolute conviction are so persuasive that Silla herself "was like to beleeeve that it had bin true in very deede; but remembryng his owne impediment, thought it impossible that he should committe such an acte"—notice both that Silla's disguise here is grammatical (the narration continues to refer to her with a masculine pronoun) and that she herself has to stop to remind herself that she is not what she appears—and even in doing so,

contemplating the one thing that guarantees her innocence, she remains male, “remembryng his owne impediment.” Even the eventual, ultimate revelation to Julina, Silla’s confession of the genital truth about herself, does not undo the disguise: “And here with all loosing his garmentes doune to his stomacke, and shewed Julina his breastes and pretie teates [...] sayyng: [...] See, I am a woman [...]” Silla only finally becomes grammatically female when Apoloniuss, “amased to hear this strange discourse of Silvio, came unto him, [...] perceived indeede that it was Silla..., and embracing her”—at last a feminine pronoun—orders a definitively feminine wardrobe for her and proposes marriage.<sup>2</sup> The true nature of the character here, even syntactically, is determined by the name and the provision of an appropriate costume.

In *Twelfth Night*, Viola and Sebastian are indistinguishable merely because they are identically dressed, and Viola is never in any doubt about the gender of the self beneath the costume. Nevertheless, the costume is still of the essence: at the very end of the play, when all the revelations have been made, Orsino still declares that the concluding marriage cannot take place until Viola’s original clothes have been recovered; these have been hidden by the sea captain, who, in a plot twist introduced out of nowhere at the last minute, has been arrested on some unknown charge of Malvolio’s, and will not reveal the whereabouts of the clothes until he is released, which only Malvolio can effect—and Malvolio has stormed out of the play, declaring that he will “be revenged on the whole lot of you.” It is not, moreover, merely female garb that is required for this happy ending; it must be the original costume in which we first saw Viola—no one suggests that she borrow a dress from Olivia, or buy a wedding gown. The costume, the play insists, *is* Viola, and therefore it must be the right costume.

Disguises in Shakespeare are almost always absolute—with a small number of exceptions, nobody ever sees through a disguise (the exceptions are Falstaff in drag in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, Tamora’s impersonation of the allegorical figure of Revenge in *Titus Andronicus*, Tybalt recognizing Romeo behind his mask at the Capulets’ ball, and the most significant one, the Muscovite masquerade in *Love’s Labor’s Lost*, which the ladies penetrate with ease, though their own disguises are impenetrable to the men—Shakespeare’s

---

<sup>2</sup> Geoffrey Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare* (London: Routledge, 1958), 2:361-2.

testimony, perhaps, to the superior perspicacity of French women). But for the most part in Shakespeare's drama, people are as they present themselves. We treat this as a theatrical trope, a point where we are simply required to suspend our disbelief—my students often ask me whether Orlando in his scenes with the disguised Rosalind in *As You Like It* really thinks he's talking to a boy. My reply, that on Shakespeare's stage he really was talking to a boy, only reveals to them how unimaginable the conditions of the Elizabethan stage are, how far Shakespeare is from being credible. But there are some striking cases in the world outside the theater that suggest that the device has more to do with cultural assumptions than with theatrical convention. I have discussed two of these in my book *Impersonations*,<sup>3</sup> and I return to one of them now for a closer look.

The cases concern Lady Arbella Stuart and Elizabeth Southwell. Both these aristocratic women escaped the bondage of patriarchy and arranged their own marriages through successful transvestite disguises—disguises as impenetrable, and impenetrable in the same way, as those of Rosalind, Jessica, Portia, Viola, Imogen. I'm focusing here on Arbella Stuart, whose case has ramifications that I didn't discuss in *Impersonations*.

Arbella Stuart was the granddaughter of the famous and formidable Bess of Hardwick, Countess of Shrewsbury, so loyal a supporter of Queen Elizabeth that for twenty years she and her husband were entrusted with the custody of Mary Queen of Scots. In 1574, however, Bess married her daughter, in haste and in secrecy, to the Scottish queen's brother-in-law, the young Charles Stuart, Duke of Lennox, brother of Mary's murdered husband the Earl of Darnley and therefore uncle to James VI of Scotland, who even at this period was being spoken of as the presumptive successor to the English throne. Lennox himself had the same claim to the English throne as his brother Darnley had had, through their grandmother Frances Brandon, Duchess of Suffolk, the niece of Henry VIII—it was chiefly this claim that had recommended the disastrous Darnley as a husband for Mary, who had always had her eye on the throne of England. Any marriage with Lennox, therefore, affected the line of succession to the English throne, and could not be performed without the crown's permission.

---

<sup>3</sup> Stephen Orgel, *Impersonations: The Performance of Gender in Shakespeare's England*, Cambridge, C.U.P., 1996.

Nevertheless the match was solemnized at Hardwick Hall in Derbyshire, Bess's estate—a long, hard ride from London; it took several weeks for the news to reach the capital. Elizabeth was enraged, and imprisoned the bridegroom's mother, but her trust in the Shrewsburys was such that, beyond a stern rebuke, they suffered no consequences; the young couple were left alone, and the marriage was allowed to survive.

Lennox died after only two years, and the sole child of that marriage was the Lady Arbella Stuart, who was therefore a first cousin to King James and a distant cousin to Queen Elizabeth. Much of her life was taken up with attempts to find a suitable husband for her, one who would be acceptable to the English crown. Needless to say no such person could be produced: neither Elizabeth nor James had any interest in increasing the pool of candidates for their throne.

So Arbella finally took matters into her own hands. In 1610, at the age of 35, she secretly married William Seymour, a grandson of the Earl of Hertford with a distant claim to the throne—in 1603 she had proposed marriage to his brother Edward, a boy of 16 whom she had never seen, but had received only a curt and frightened dismissal from his father. This time no parental permission was solicited, but the match was still illegal, requiring the king's permission, and when it became known, Seymour was imprisoned in the Tower and Arbella placed under house arrest, initially at Lambeth. But when it was found that this made it too easy for her to communicate with her husband, she was ordered to be sent to Durham. As the journey began, she took ill, and the party stopped at Barnet, in north London, for some weeks. As the move once again seemed imminent, Arbella took action. She persuaded one of her attendants that she was stealing out to pay a final visit to Seymour, and would return before morning. She disguised herself as a man, with trousers and boots, a doublet and a black cloak. She wore a man's wig that partially concealed her features, and a black hat, and she carried a rapier. In this disguise she fled, successfully deceiving an innkeeper and an ostler as to her sex, and headed for the coast for a rendezvous with Seymour, where they intended to take a boat to freedom in France.

Seymour escaped the Tower through an equally ingenious disguise plot. Seymour's barber, who regularly attended on him, appeared at the Tower thoroughly disguised, and asked for himself

(that is, asked for Seymour's barber), saying that he was with Seymour. He was admitted, together they disguised Seymour in the barber's usual clothes, and both then went out together. The guards asked no questions, since the disguised barber was the man who had just gone in; nor did they say anything to the man they took to be the barber, because he was accustomed to go in and out almost daily.<sup>4</sup>

For Arbella this comedy did not have a happy ending: the couple missed their rendezvous, and though both took ships separately for Calais, Arbella's was pursued; she was arrested at sea, and spent the rest of her life—only five years—imprisoned in the Tower. Seymour, however, disembarked safely in France and lived abroad until Arbella's death. He then returned to England, and within the year married the daughter of the Earl of Essex.

The disguises of Shakespearean drama look less conventional if we consider them with these cases in mind. It is scarcely hyperbole to say that disguise offered Arbella Stuart the only hope of an escape from the intolerable situation her paternity had placed her in—Imogen's case in *Cymbeline* is hardly more melodramatic. And both Seymour's and Arbella's disguises were genuinely impenetrable, quite as impenetrable as any in Shakespeare. Arbella had a long, hard ride from Barnet to the coast, during which she and her servant stopped at an inn and changed horses—the ostler later reported only that the young man seemed unwell, and had difficulty with the horse (Arbella would have been accustomed to riding side-saddle), but he had no inkling that there was a woman beneath the clothing and hair. And though both Seymour and his barber were well known to the guards of the Tower, it was nevertheless perfectly possible to disguise Seymour as his barber and his barber as somebody unknown, both impenetrably. These cases are a good index to how much the sense of who one was in the period depended precisely on externals, on costume, wigs, facial hair, attributes such as jewelry and accessories—on everything that comprised the representation of a social role. But beyond this, there must be a presumption in the culture that such superficialities represent realities, and are the closest we can come to knowing somebody.

But now let us consider two counter-examples, the first from two centuries later. In the last act of *Le Mariage de Figaro*, in which Suzanne and the Countess are disguised as each other, Figaro, at a

---

<sup>4</sup> Sarah Gristwood, *Arbella* (London: Bantam, 2003), p.302-3.

moment of high drama, suddenly penetrates Suzanne's disguise. In Beaumarchais, it is Suzanne who accidentally lets her identity slip out; but in Da Ponte's libretto for Mozart, Figaro recognizes his wife's voice—"io conobbi la voce che adoro", "I knew the voice that I adore." The two women have been imitating each other, but there are limits to mimesis.

The limits, however, to both mimesis and recognition, are only those of Enlightenment aesthetics: consider a Renaissance analogue. *Don Quixote* is full of people in disguise, and the eventual revelation of the truth beneath the disguise constitutes one of the main narrative principles of the work. The revelation, however, is hardly ever a matter of the disguise being penetrable, save of course in the case of Don Quixote himself, whose chivalric persona is constantly coming undone—the hero is a credible knight only to himself. Near the end of part 1, however, in the course of the extended episode of Cardenio, comes the story of Doña Clara and the mule boy. Doña Clara is traveling with her father, a judge; they are staying at an inn with a number of other guests, including Cardenio, Dorothea, Don Quixote and Sancho Panza. Dorothea and Doña Clara are sleeping together, and in the middle of the night Dorothea is awakened by a song. Cardenio enters to tell them that it is a mule boy singing, with the most beautiful voice he has ever heard. Dorothea wakes Clara to hear the mule boy, and Clara immediately identifies the voice as that of Don Luis, a noble youth who is in love with her—like Figaro, she has no difficulty recognizing the voice that she adores. He has indeed disguised himself as a mule driver, but the disguise is basically irrelevant. Here is the story.

Don Luis lived in a house opposite Clara's, and though her father kept the windows of his house carefully curtained, the youth saw Clara, perhaps at church, and fell in love with her. He never spoke with her, but made her understand by gestures from his window that he wanted to marry her. She loved him too, but she was well aware that his aristocratic family would never agree to such a match for their son, and she never told her father about it. When her father determined on the journey they are now taking, she could not even see Don Luis to wave farewell. But after they had been on the road for two days, she says, "I saw him [...] dressed as a mule-lad; and so much like one that if I had not borne his portrait in my heart, I should have found it

impossible to recognize him. I knew him; I was amazed; I was delighted [...]. I have never spoken a word to him in my life, but [...] I love him so much that I cannot live without him.”<sup>5</sup>

The disguise, therefore, is impeccable, but she sees through it because of the portrait in her heart—it is that that she recognizes, the projection of her innermost self. And, adoring him as she does, she also immediately identifies his singing, although she has never heard his voice: they have never exchanged a word. This is magically romantic, a testimony to the mystical power of true love.

It all seems much more routine the next morning, however, when Don Luis’s father’s servants appear at the inn to apprehend him and bring him home: they have found him easily, and have no difficulty penetrating his disguise. They berate him for his socially degrading costume, and at this point, even Doña Clara’s father recognizes him. In fact, the concept of disguise itself undergoes a significant transformation in the course of this story. Initially it appears as the essence of romance, epitomizing the love that pierces to the heart, the truth of the self that can be known only by the beloved. But as the plot unfolds and the young man’s scheme unravels, the disguise appears more and more a mere gesture toward the conventions of romance. It has scarcely concealed the youth at all; everyone who knows him recognizes him, not only Doña Clara. The disguise has at most briefly enabled him to travel without attracting attention. Even the motive for the concealment turns out to have been greatly exaggerated: in the morning, hard pressed to explain himself, the young man finally confesses his love to Doña Clara’s father, who, mastering his astonishment, is delighted with so fine a match for his daughter; and the story becomes positively banal as the episode ends with the whole group of travelers discussing ways of persuading the young man’s father to approve the marriage. Presumably they will succeed: the romance dissipates with the disguise, and we never hear the end of this story. Without the disguise, the episode is of no further interest.

So disguise here is a metonym for romance, both the romance of love and the romance of storytelling, a metonym for the novel itself. It seems axiomatic that the point of any disguise plot is the penetration of the disguise, the revelation that constitutes the plot’s resolution; but in this case the revelation simply aborts the story. In the same way, when

---

<sup>5</sup> Tr. J.M. Cohen (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Classics, 1990), p.389-90.

the old gentleman from La Mancha with the uncertain surname, Quexada or Quesada, stops impersonating the chivalric knight Don Quixote, which is the only identity he has for us, the immense novel is finally over.

One can imagine a romance in which the plot does not ultimately undo itself in this way; where disguise becomes the reality, the true expression of the self—where the impersonation becomes the person. This actually happens in Beaumont and Fletcher's play *Philaster* (1609), in which the embattled heroine Euphrasia, disguised as the page Bellario, decides to remain permanently in drag and serve her lord and lady as an epicene youth, equally attractive to men and women. There are gestures toward this sort of essentialization of costume in Shakespeare. In *As You Like It*, when Rosalind disguises herself as the youth Ganymede to accompany Celia in their flight into the forest of Arden, it is for the same practical reasons offered by Barnabe Rich's *Silla*: women on the road are always in danger, and the presence of a man—any kind of man, even a prepubescent youth—is a sufficient deterrent to predators. The disguise subsequently becomes a cover for her meetings with Orlando; but why is the cover necessary? It would appear, indeed, to be self-defeating: by the middle of the play, when Orlando is tacking love-poems to Rosalind on every tree, Rosalind is perfectly well aware of his feelings for her. She even acknowledges the pointlessness of continuing her disguise: "Alack the day, what shall I do with my doublet and hose?" Why not at this point reveal herself, and consummate the love? But the play is scarcely half over; for another two acts, always as Ganymede, she puts Orlando through a series of tests and catechisms, good for comedy but only serving to delay the ultimate erotic satisfaction. Disguise here, as in the episode of Doña Clara from *Don Quixote*, is the essence of romance, and when the disguise is discarded the romance has ended—in this case in marriage, though if we think about what happens after marriage in Shakespeare, for example in *Othello* and *Romeo and Juliet*, it is not clear that abandoning the disguise necessarily constitutes a happy ending.

In *Twelfth Night* Viola is initially quite explicit about the relevance of her disguise to her inner state. It will be, she says, "the form of my intent." By the middle of the play she has changed her mind, calling disguise "a wickedness/ In which the pregnant enemy

[Satan] does much”: she is now trapped in a costume that misrepresents the form of her intent, that makes it impossible for her to express her feelings. But she too maintains the disguise long after its utility in the plot has been exhausted. In the middle of act 3, when Antonio intervenes in her duel with Sir Andrew and calls her Sebastian, it is clear to her that her brother is alive and in Illyria—she concludes the scene with the recognition “That I, dear brother, now be ta'en for you.” The resolution, the unmasking, could occur at any point after this; but she retains her disguise for another two acts, even in the final confrontation with her twin, putting him through a pointless exercise comparing details about their parentage. The eventual unmasking, moreover, does nothing to change the terms on which the play has operated throughout: appearances remain of the essence. Olivia has fallen in love with the cross-dressed Viola, and when Sebastian appears, identically costumed, she instantly, effortlessly, transfers her feelings to him—the twins are, for Olivia, interchangeable. But if falling in love with a cross-dressed woman is the same as falling in love with a man, what is a man except the costume?

There are very few plays that are willing to acknowledge that gender is in fact more than the costume—that that part of the self that is defined by gender is ultimately and absolutely real and knowable. Viola, challenged by Sir Andrew, laments that “a little thing would make me tell them how much I lack of a man,” (III.iv.282-3) invoking in that lack a very old anatomical fantasy that women are men with something missing (the fantasy is as old as Galen, but it is still present in Freud). The play alludes to this assumption elsewhere, in its puns on “cut” and “cunt.” This is obviously a male fantasy, not a female one, though in this case Viola’s failure of nerve is not merely a function of the missing genital organs: in the duel, Sir Andrew turns out to be no more of a man than Viola. In a much more substantial example, John Fletcher’s strange play *The Honest Man’s Fortune* (1613), a very attractive young man named Veramour is propositioned by an elderly lecher. To repel his attentions Veramour claims he is really a woman, and proceeds to dress accordingly. This stratagem is only marginally successful, since the lecher is equally attracted to women, and as the play nears its climax, a good deal of discussion takes place over the difficulties of distinguishing attractive boys from women. The argument is short-circuited when one of the participants tartly

observes that a hand thrust into the subject's underpants would easily settle the matter—a piece of common sense that would demolish a good many disguise plots.

Even in the real world, however, common sense is not always the bottom line, and the boundaries of mimesis are far more extensive than they are in the theater. The witnesses who were deceived by Arbella Stuart saw nothing more intimate than her hair and her clothing, but they also detected nothing in her manner to suggest that any surprises might lie hidden beneath the clothing: gender here was a matter of behavior and costume. There are a number of famous cases of people who successfully lived cross-gendered for years, for example the Chevalier d'Eon as a woman, and the jazz pianist Billy Tipton as a man. Tipton's sex was discovered only after his death, by the medical examiner; his wife and children (the children were adopted) had been entirely unaware of it. This means, obviously, that the marriage was without the usual sorts of intimacy, but his wife explained that this suited both of them, and the marriage was long and happy. This all sounds quite inconceivable, but Diane Middlebrook's superb biography of Tipton renders the story both credible and touchingly human. Initially Tipton passed as a man because in the 1930s for a woman to perform in jazz clubs as anything but a vocalist was simply impossible—the elderly band members from her early years, whom Middlebrook tracked down and interviewed, said they of course knew she was a woman; her cross-dressing was what made the band viable. Gradually the impersonation became the person. Tipton's wife, a stripper, said she was initially attracted to him precisely because he was unlike the other men she had known, gentle and affectionate, and not eager for sex—an unusual kind of man, in her experience, but not an inconceivable one, and since she had been badly mistreated by sexually aggressive men in the past, she was grateful for his manner and found him easy to fall in love with. He explained his physical aloofness by saying he had been seriously injured in an accident, and was obliged to wear heavy elastic bandages around his chest all the time; obviously they never saw each other naked. Out of this fiction Tipton constructed an entirely satisfactory life with a wife, and later with children, for whom the fiction was fact.

It would be incorrect here to say that all Tipton's family knew of him was his costume. The costume represented an inner truth. That

truth was constructed, certainly, but all our selves are surely constructed. The Billy Tipton story is no more incredible than the innumerable stories of people with aristocratic pretensions who turn out to have come from humble origins—the facts of gender seem to us much more basic and undeniable than the facts of social class, but surely this is an illusion. Billy Tipton’s or Arbella Stuart’s sexual anatomy would have been the ultimate reality only for the purposes of one particular type of sexual intercourse; for all other forms of social interaction, most of what constitutes life, gender is not a matter of anatomy but of self-presentation. There is, moreover, some degree of deception in every form of self-presentation—appearing naked is rarely an option in human society, and decisions about what to wear are decisions about the power of costume to make us look better than we look to ourselves, better than we know we are. “All the world’s a stage” indeed, as Shakespeare’s Jaques says, “And all the men and women merely players,” though one could pause at length over that “merely,” as if the theatricality of everyday life were simple or superficial, rather than essential. On Jaques’s stage, the actors are everything; his theater has players but no playwright.

Over the centuries, the stage has gone to great lengths to insist on its coincidence with reality, initially through illusionistic scenery, and, from the 18<sup>th</sup> century, increasingly, through the invocation of history, specifically realized in historically informed costumes. In fact, it is probably not overstating the case to say that whatever historical relevance theater has claimed has been expressed through costume. The move into history, however, was neither direct nor consistent. The famous Peacham drawing for *Titus Andronicus* (Ill.1) gestures toward ancient Rome in the costume of Titus, in the center; but queen Tamora’s costume is quite generalized, vaguely medieval, certainly neither Roman nor Elizabethan. Her sons and Aaron the Moor, on the right, are in outfits that combine Elizabethan and Roman elements, and the guards on the left are Elizabethan soldiers. The costumes here identify the characters according to their roles and their relation to each other, not to their place in a historical era—there is no attempt here to make the stage a mirror of the Roman world. Within two decades of this drawing, however, Inigo Jones was consulting the best available authorities on ancient Roman dress for his costumes for

masques at the court of Charles I (Ill.2). If the king was to be idealized as a classical hero, the classical context had to be authentic.

On the dramatic stage, however, for the next two centuries, costume was either contemporary, or retained the syncretic character of the Peacham sketch. Here, in the frontispiece to *Henry VIII* in the first illustrated Shakespeare, Nicholas Rowe's edition of 1709 (Ill.3), Henry VIII wears a costume based on the famous Holbein portrait, but his courtiers wear 18<sup>th</sup> century formal dress, with frock coats and wigs. The first attempt at a systematic change of the sort Inigo Jones had introduced into the masque did not come until 1731, when Aaron Hill's *The Generous Traitor, or Aethelwold*, set in Anglo-Saxon times, was staged in Old English costume—this was the author's idea, not the producer's. A *Macbeth* in historical Scottish costume was performed in Edinburgh in 1753, but the first Shakespearean production in historic dress came to the London stage only in 1773, in Charles Macklin's *Macbeth* (Ill.4), in which Macklin, for his first entrance, wore a plaid scarf, tartan stockings and a knee-length tunic (the tartans were anachronistic for 11<sup>th</sup> century Scotland, but less so than a kilt would have been). This was not a success, partly because Macklin was too closely identified with his famous Shylock—this caricature is entitled *Shylock Turn'd Macbeth*—but even more because the costuming was totally inconsistent: by the middle of act 2 Macbeth was wearing 18<sup>th</sup> century breeches (Ill.5), and his Lady Macbeth, Mrs Hartley, refused to wear Scottish garments at all, and was modishly dressed in a hoop skirt, in the fashion of Mrs Yates's Lady Macbeth a decade earlier, depicted here (Ill.6). Here, however, is an up to date Scottish Macbeth from the same era: Francesco Zuccarelli's *Macbeth, Banquo and the Witches* (Ill.7), painted in London in the 1760s—this is the first Italian illustration of Shakespeare. Zuccarelli was famous for his landscapes in the tradition of Claude Lorrain, with, as here, a little Salvatore Rosa as well; these usually included mythological subjects, but, in a striking innovation, the mythology here is Shakespeare. But what a Shakespeare! The Scots tartans are striped, rather than checked, and Zuccarelli had clearly never seen kilts, which should just cover the knee and would not be blowing in the wind; and the witches are graceful country girls, not at all “So withered and so wild in their attire / That look not like the inhabitants o' th' earth...”: this is Shakespeare imaginatively adapted to the requirements of romantic landscape

painting. But also adapted to contemporary politics: the blue caps of Macbeth and his troops were the uniform worn by the Jacobite rebels at the battle of Culloden in 1746, when the Jacobite forces were decisively defeated. The costumes give a clear sense of what side Macbeth—and Banquo—are on: the wrong side.

By the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the vogue for historic costume in drama was well under way. John Philip Kemble played Hamlet in Elizabethan dress in 1783 (Ill.8), and Talma, in Paris wore a 16<sup>th</sup> century German academic gown (Ill.9). This was in Ducis' adaptation of the play, in which authenticity was otherwise not an issue: Hamlet spends much of the time carrying an urn containing his father's ashes, although cremation in the Middle Ages and Renaissance was reserved for heretics. This *Hamlet*, in any case, had little enough to do with Shakespeare: Ducis' ghost reveals to Hamlet (who has been king from the beginning, having succeeded his father on his death) that the queen, not Claudius, was his murderer; and at the end both Ophelia (Claudius's daughter, not Polonius's) and Hamlet are still alive.

Here, on the stage of Drury Lane in 1805, is Kemble's *Coriolanus* (Ill.10), in ancient Roman costumes based on Poussin (Ill.11). The movement toward history was codified by James Robinson Planché's archeologically correct designs for Charles Kemble's *King John* in 1824 (Ill.12). The playbill for this production declared that the play will be presented "with an attention to costume never before equalled on the English stage. Every character will appear in the precise habit of the period, the whole of the dresses and decorations being executed from indisputable authorities"—the authorities cited are not textual but material, visual, documentary: tomb effigies (as here), royal seals, manuscript illuminations. These were the models Planché provided for Shakespeare. They served first as the basis for the costumes of Kemble's *King John*, and, two decades later, in 1842, for those of Macready's production of the same play—the costumes remained unchanged because they stamped the productions as authentic. This is what Planché did to theatre, and it gives a striking sense of what the attractions of theatre were now conceived to be.

Planché's work was a manifesto, backed by a genuine historical impulse and informed by an impressive body of scholarship. He also published "correct" costume designs for *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *As You Like It*, and several other plays, for which he selected appropriate, if

**III.1:** Henry Peacham, drawing based on *Titus Andronicus*, c. 1614



**III.2:** Inigo Jones, a Roman priest, costume design for *Albion's Triumph*, 1630; with his source in Onofrio Panvinio, *De Ludis*, 1581



**III.3:** Title page to *Henry VIII* from Nicholas Rowe's *Works of Shakespear*, 1709



**III.4:** Charles Macklin as a Scottish Macbeth, 1773. The print is entitled "Shylock Turned Macbeth."



**III.5:** Macklin's Act 2 costume in *Macbeth*



**III.6:** Mrs Yates's Lady Macbeth, c. 1760, the model for Macklin's Lady Macbeth, Mrs Hartley



**III.7:** Francesco Zuccarelli, *Macbeth, Banquo and the Witches*, c. 1760



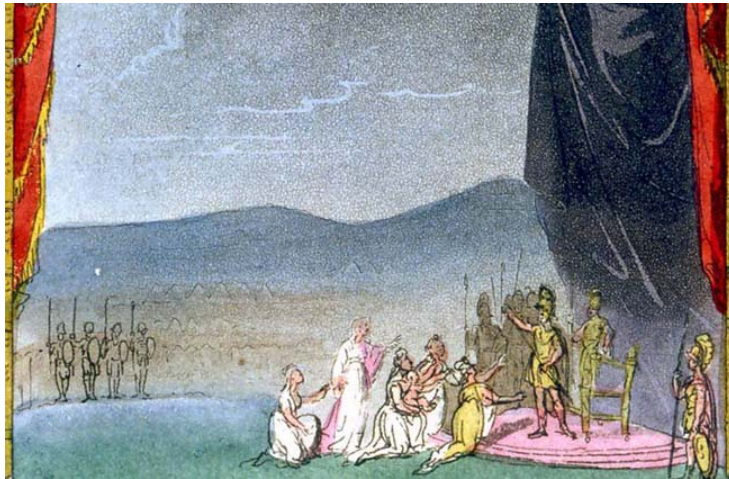
**III.8:** John Philip Kemble's Elizabethan *Hamlet*, 1783



**III.9:** Talma in Ducis' French adaptation of *Hamlet*



**III.10:** *Coriolanus* V.3 at Drury Lane, 1805, from Rudolph Ackerman's *Microcosm of London*, 1808-11



**III.11:** *Coriolanus* Before the Gates of Rome, engraving after Nicholas Poussin



**III.12:** J. R. Planché, tomb effigies from the reign of King John



**III.13:** Ball scene from Zeffirelli's film of *Romeo and Juliet*, with Perugino models for comparison



**III.14:** Women's hairstyles from *Romeo and Juliet*, with contemporary models



**III.15:** A courtesan's chopine, from Zeffirelli's *Taming of the Shrew*



**III.16:** Katherina (Elizabeth Taylor) with the other Veronese wives



**III.17:** Bianca (Natasha Pyne), Lucentio (Michael York), and an unnamed extra: a publicity photo



**III.18:** The same scene as it appears in the film



**III.19:** *Shakespeare in Love: Romeo and Juliet* in performance



**III.20:** Mercutio/ Edward Alleyn (Ben Affleck)



**III.21:** Mercutio's death: Joseph Fiennes as Romeo/Shakespeare



**III.22:** Nicholas Hilliard, Sir Walter Raleigh



**III.23:** Nicholas Hilliard, George Clifford, Earl of Cumberland



**III.24:** Artist unknown, Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton



**III.25:** Ian McKellen in the film of *Richard III*



arbitrary, historical eras. The effect of this sort of historicizing is, of course, to place the plays at a considerable distance from us—theater becomes a mirror of the past, showing us how life was lived in historical eras. In Shakespeare's own theater, though as we have seen, plays with classical settings had gestures toward the period, for the most part plays were costumed in Elizabethan dress—the Italy of *Romeo and Juliet* was a version of England. There were practical reasons for doing this, but it also meant that the plays were not distanced from the audience, in the way modern Shakespeare is when we do it in any sort of period costume, which is what, thanks to Planché, tends to seem natural to us.

Of course, even when we do the plays in period costume, there's a problem about the period. The thrilling, visually stunning Franco Zeffirelli films of *Romeo and Juliet* and *The Taming of the Shrew* are set in 15<sup>th</sup> century Verona and Padua, with historically accurate costumes and sets. Zeffirelli's decor really does work beautifully; but as far as Shakespeare is concerned, there's nothing authentic about it: Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet wore the same clothing their audiences wore; their tragedy didn't take place in the distant past, and the society of Verona was a recognizable version of the society of London. If we try to be authentic, however, and emulate Shakespeare by dressing our productions in Elizabethan costumes, we simply make the play into another period piece—it is still ancient history, only now the history is Shakespeare's rather than that of the characters. I conclude with some comparative examples, from Zeffirelli and from the film *Shakespeare in Love*, the climax of which is a performance of *Romeo and Juliet* in Elizabethan costume. These costumes give a good sense of what the limits of authenticity are for us.

Here's the ball scene from Zeffirelli's *Romeo and Juliet*, with some Perugino courtiers from about 1480 for comparison (Ill.13). These really are very authentic costumes—there was an extremely knowledgeable costume historian at work here. The women's headgear was especially striking, because it was willing to use authentic styles that risked looking faintly ridiculous to modern audiences (Ill.14). For *The Taming of the Shrew* Zeffirelli moved about half a century later in time, and went for sumptuousness in addition to authenticity, but there was lots of period detail—for example a courtesan who flirts with one of the newly arrived suitors is shown wearing chopines (Ill.15),

fashionable high-soled shoes. They look ridiculous to us, but they're authentic 1540 Venetian footwear. The women's costumes were especially elaborate, but Elizabeth Taylor's were less authentic than everyone else's, because she insisted on having her own designer provide her costumes (Ill.16). Here you can see that her dress is much less voluminous than everyone else's, and makes her much more shapely. There is a particularly nice example of this playing with authenticity in the hair styles. Usually in historical movies, even when the clothes are correct, the hair styles will be modern—this is necessary for the stars to look glamorous. Here's a publicity shot of a banquet scene with Michael York and Natasha Pyne (Ill.17). Natasha Pyne has nice 1968 hair, modeled on Debbie Reynolds; but look at the servant behind her—she doesn't have to look glamorous because she's an extra, and her hair style is authentic. The discrepancy was apparently too much for the film's editors, and in the final cut you only saw the servant girl in profile (Ill.18).

Now let us look at some images from *Shakespeare in Love*, which did a beautiful re-creation of Elizabethan costumes. The climax of the film involves the first performance of *Romeo and Juliet*. This was, correctly, played in contemporary costume (Ill.19)—that is, what went on onstage looked just like what went on offstage. But the film's devotion to authenticity went only so far. Here's Ben Affleck, as the actor Edward Alleyn preparing to play a very effective Mercutio (Ill.20); and here is his death scene in the play (Ill.21), with Joseph Fiennes as Shakespeare playing Romeo (which is probably incorrect—presumably Burbage was Shakespeare's Romeo). The costumes are perfectly correct, but look at their hair. Late 20<sup>th</sup> century short, Affleck's a sexy brush cut, and Fiennes's fashionably windblown. Elizabethan men wore their hair long, sometimes down to their shoulders. But these aren't Elizabethans, they're movie stars, and they have to look glamorous. Here are three very sexy Elizabethan men, for comparison: Sir Walter Raleigh (Ill.22), George Clifford, Earl of Cumberland (Ill.23), glamorous privateer and one of Elizabeth's favorite courtiers, and the Earl of Southampton (Ill.24), Shakespeare's patron—the more hair, the sexier.

Shakespeare plays are most often performed nowadays in something approximating modern dress, as a way of restoring that Elizabethan sense of immediacy, as in the very successful film of

*Richard III* with Ian McKellen (Ill.25). This has become quite routine, though for audiences who don't see much Shakespeare, and who know the plays, if at all, only from reading them, the modern costumes are a distraction, because the language remains archaic—part of what makes Shakespeare a classic is that he is so firmly in the past. There are good reasons for using modern settings and costumes—the relations between the social classes, for example, become much more easily understood if the dress codes are modern rather than Elizabethan—but there's really no way around the discrepancy between the language and the setting, and little way of mitigating it; it's just something the director has to hope the audience will get used to, and it seems worth taking the risk in order to avoid the sense that the play is safely canonical, *merely* a classic; in order to restore some of the drama's original energies. Updated Shakespeare has often been, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, highly charged politically—the incendiary productions of *Coriolanus* in Paris in 1934 and of *Macbeth* in East Berlin in 1982 had an authenticity that went beyond décor: Elizabethan theater was always relevant to current issues, and was assumed to be intended as such, and the costumes themselves on Shakespeare's stage had a kind of authority that was not without its element of danger. I conclude with a passage from my book *Impersonations*.

When Prospero tempts Stefano and Trinculo to their destruction with a closet full of “glistening apparel” he invokes a central cultural *topos*. Caliban declares the garments to be “trash”; but they are trash only because the conspirators have not yet succeeded, and are not yet entitled to wear them. Robes of office, aristocratic finery, confirm and legitimate authority, they do not confer it. There is obviously, however, a widespread conviction in the culture that they do. Caliban may well be revealing here just how much of an outsider he is—the costumes, after all, belong to Prospero. Prospero himself invests his cape with the enabling power of his magic: “Lie there, my art.” Analogously, the wardrobe of Henslowe's company included “a robe for to go invisible,” asserting in a culturally specific manner how powerfully garments determined the way one was to be seen, and not seen. These fictions, moreover, reflected an economic reality: the theatre company had its largest investment, its major property, in its costumes; and the costumes were for the most part the real cast-off clothes of real aristocrats. As the legitimating emblems of authority,

these garments possessed a kind of social reality within the culture that the actors, and indeed much of their audience, could never hope to have. The actors and characters were fictions, but the costumes were the real thing.

Stephen ORGEL  
Stanford University