

## Attacks on Drag from opposite directions



**THIS IS A PICTURE OF GRAHAM GILES**, better known as Dame Gracy, who was a significant figure in Manchester's gay scene for a number of years. He raised money and help for Aids patients by his sponsored plunges into the Rochdale Canal. He also led a few pioneers onto the streets for the city's first Pride march in which, despite arrests, Gracy and a dozen friends laid the foundations to what has become today's gigantic annual event. In retirement Graham lived in Victoria Square, the remarkable social

housing block built by Manchester Corporation in 1897. Here, in his final adventure, Graham created a large flourishing garden to replace the barren space in the centre of the square.

Gracy, was a homosexual drag queen, not a transvestite or a transsexual. Here the modern confusion begins, because a great swathe of 'gender critical' people, along with their opponents amongst 'trans' activists, have recently focused on the drag tradition, repositioning it to make it suitable for today's arguments and protests. Both sides of the argument are effacing the history and nature of drag for their own purposes. One side is claiming the drag queen for the non-binary, multi-gender, queer, trans 'community', while the other side attacks the drag queen for lampooning women and grooming children to believe in the gender-bending fluidity promoted by their opponents.

In the resulting scrum homosexuality is now facing a bashing, no doubt wholly unintended by either side, but nevertheless this course may have troubling consequences, setting us back years.

A cohort of young lesbians, for example, are being persuaded by trans ideologues that they are really and truly boys. At the same time a number of gay lads are being told that they've probably been girls all along. This "*being born in the wrong body*" malarky has unaccountably been growing at a rate of knots since around 2014 or 2015.

The much simpler explanation that some boys just fancy other boys, because they are attracted to male bodies, or are perhaps, just sissies who love feminine roles, is ruled out of the question. Similarly, girls who find female bodies appealing are said to be just confused about their gender, and should perhaps seek gender reassignment, because "Tom Boys" are really lads in the making. In this way homosexuality appears to be a waning condition. Indeed, some trans activists insist that we're really attracted to other people's "gender presentation" – in fact to their minds -

and not to their bodies at all. Biological sex, along with homosexuality, must from now on take a back seat.

Meanwhile, some of the gender critical crowd are suggesting that drag queens reading stories to kids in school, is all part of an evil plan to plant trans ideas firmly into very young minds – it's grooming no less. Some even say that paedophiles in drag are corrupting the kids. This leap to paedophilia reminds me of the 'unfortunate' forty-one-year-old prince whose liaison with a seventeen-year-old girl got him labelled as a kiddie-fiddler, *despite the fact that the age of sexual consent in Britain is 16.*

This kind of moral panic forms part of a wider concern about the fact that "sexuality" education is in some places replacing "sex" education – the difference being that sexuality training strays into questions of gender identity, and even self-stimulation; what in simpler times we called wanking. (Although it seems to me a jolly good idea to teach adolescents that masturbation is a thoroughly good thing.)

In complete contrast sex education should be the properly phased introduction of children, at appropriate ages, to information concerning biological reproduction, sexual relationships, and related issues. In the course of worries of this kind we have encountered the idea that children should not be told anything about homosexuality, and that parents must have the right to protect their kids from 'gay propaganda' – this is music to the ears of Vladimir Putin, Hungary's Viktor Orban, Orthodox Jews, mainstream Roman Catholics, and Muslims of all stripes.

Now the way drag has become tangled up in all this is because of suggestions that drag performers are automatically or spontaneously engaged in undermining traditional sex roles and modes of self-presentation. This misunderstanding is definitely a consequence of trans activists and ideologues re-writing history in order to waft any disruption of masculinity or femininity into their imaginative realm, and their enthusiasm for assertions that changing

one's sex, is not only possible, but desirable, and what's more, has always been so.

It is at this point that the venerable Widow Twankey springs readily to mind. She was really a late Victorian figure, most famously played by George Wild Galvin, better known as Dan Leno, who played a raft of other female parts in pantomime. Pantomime is, of course, a form of burlesque show in which men play women and women play boys, much enjoyed by children, because of audience participation, and by adults for the *double entendre* and sex references. The bawdiness, vulgarity, and gender role reversals, probably have their root in the late Middle Ages in English adaptations of the *Commedia dell'arte*, and the *Harlequinade* of the eighteenth century.

Clearly, we are much more familiar with camp presentations which lampoon the artificiality of gender roles. This sense is probably a twentieth century phenomenon when women participated, not simply as Principal Boys, but in Music Hall acts like Vesta Tilley's *Burlington Bertie* from Bow. What is going on here are presentations of the artificiality of masculinity and femininity. This is the camp content at the heart of the matter; drag through the course of the last century became a rich field for absurd comedy in which all conventional assumptions about masculinity and femininity are thrown up in the air.

This tradition is rooted in the perception that femininity and masculinity are socially constructed ways of being, are infinitely malleable, and the source of much dressing up, fun, and marvellous vulgarity. To see drag as anything else – as sinister attacks upon women – or as insinuations of trans ideology and our contemporary sex change malarky, is perhaps more absurd than drag itself.

It has recently been suggested in some quarters that the act of drag queens reading stories to young children is really a form of child abuse because it will confuse the kids regarding the relationship between biological sex and gender. This strikes me as nuts, because we're talking about very young people who

probably believe in Santa Claus, the Tooth Fairy, Unicorns, and the eternal happiness of princesses.

What must be acknowledged is that the imaginative world of children is extremely complex, and must not be prematurely suppressed, because it forms an essential part of the process in which we all become slowly aware of the distinction between imagined worlds and brute reality. This is why young kids are in no position to make decisions concerning their gender or sexuality. They need to have entered the world of adults in which most of us will have developed a strong sense of the difference between fantasy and reality, limitless desire, and the restrictions which biology and social structures place upon it. Before kids can take any irreversible decisions about their gender presentation they have to have left the fantastical world of childhood far behind.

It is indeed important to defend the right of adults to present themselves as men or women or some indeterminate state. People should always have the right to dress how they like. Of course, they cannot have the right to insist that other people accept their fantasy as reality, but everybody must be allowed to present themselves in any way that they wish, without fear of attack or discrimination.

Drag, on the other hand, has nothing to do with imagining that you have been born in the wrong body. On the contrary, its salience is that we know that they are mostly men dressed as women, and little or no attempt is made to hide this fact. Drag Queens are simply challenging gender stereotypes for the fun of it, for its inherently comedic value. Now, if vulgar burlesque is not your 'cup of tea', don't go to watch drag artistes perform – don't pay them any mind – but please don't try to drag us all down into the pit of despair conjured by today's 'gender critical' and 'trans' hullabaloo.