The fascination of manga: cross-dressing and gender performativity in Japanese media

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Abstract
The performativity of gender through cross-dressing has been a staple in Japanese media throughout the centuries. This thesis engages with the pervasiveness of cross-dressing in popular Japanese media, from the modern shōjo gender-bender genre of manga and anime to the traditional Japanese theatre. Drawing on theories from gender-studies and performance aesthetics to delineate the female gender in traditional Japanese theatre, I follow the roles of, representation of, and media for women, concentrating on (1) manga, a form of sequential art featuring illustrations with corresponding text, (2) anime, animated productions (where the word anime is the abbreviated pronunciation of “animation” in Japanese, and (3) live-action dorama, or simply dorama, television dramas, not animated, but acted by live actors. With the permission of Hatori Bisco, and concentrating on my own translation of a single
chapter from her manga, Ouran High School Host Club, as my case study, I complement my focus on gender performativity and cross-dressing, by analyzing the act of reading the manga in the light of contemporary cognitive studies in comic scholarship. Throughout my thesis, then, I frame the history of the female subject in Japanese popular media, through an analysis of the shōjo genre, the act of reading a shōjo manga, and the actual plot of that shōjo manga and its derivations to support my argument that in my material cross-dressing and gender performativity carry an enigmatic fascination that entraps the curiosity of audiences.

**Recommended Citation**

Manga centered on ‘trap’ entertainment and fetishization carries this same message. In Reversible!, Shuu Kaido is forced to attend an all-boys school where half of the students must dress as girls (alternating with the other half) in order to understand what it’s like to be a girl – the kind of feminizing ‘becoming’ of the shoujo we see in the moe affect. The first few chapters are characterized by the exact same reaction to cross-dressing 4channers were struck with while Bailey Jay gave hints of one gender or another. Shuu is quickly overwhelmed with desire towards one of the ‘traps’, and his