

# Gender on Stage: Drag Queens and Performative Femininity

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**Abstract:** This article examines how the performative nature of gender is (re)produced by drag queens and analyses drag culture in Euro-American socio-cultural and political space. In this study, I provide an outline of a historical tradition of portraying femininity on stage starting from ancient Greece and until nowadays. *The aim* of this research is to investigate the evolution of female roles in European and American societies and the influence of these transformations on drag culture as well as to define the position of drag performative femininity within the framework of modern feminist and queer theories. *The research methodology* is based on a systematic approach to the study of socio-political and socio-cultural phenomena in their development and mutual relations grounded on the principle of scientific objectivity. In the course of writing of this work, I have applied comparative-historical, critical and chronological methods as well as feminist and gender approaches, based on the theory of gender performativity first articulated by Judith Butler – all of which allowed to conduct a comprehensive and detailed analysis of the phenomenon of drag culture. *Conclusions* of my study offer an overview of the development tendencies of drag cultures in the USA, Germany and Ukraine providing a new perspective on “staged” femininity, which appears as a result of intertwining gender, race, class and national identities and subverts gender roles imposed by society.

**Keywords:** Femininity, Drag, Drag Culture, Gender, Gender Performativity

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## 1. Introduction

*We are all doing drag. Every single person on this planet is doing it.*

RuPaul

The debates surrounding drag culture have always been controversial and intense in the framework of feminist theory. On the one hand, the image of the hyper-feminine drag queen enters the political stage as a visual symbol of the LGBTQ+ community liberation movement; on the other hand, many scholars and theorists see drag as a parody (with extremely negative connotation), and therefore regard drag interpretations of femininity as an aggressive mockery of women and womanhood, for which they actively criticize drag culture. This critique is targeted at the performative nature of drag shows, which, although challenging the widespread gender stereotypes and undermining the mere concept of femininity, have been defining female sexuality

first and foremost through the prism of male acting skills [6]. Moreover, such representations have been focused on the selective markers of exterior aesthetic of femininity (hairstyle, clothing, makeup) and completely ignored its social or political component – the role of women in family and society [6]. Thus, drag interpretation of femininity is often criticized for being a “male-made” reproduction of a sexualized image of female identity, which appears on stage as a product “filtered” through the male gaze – an idealized version of imaginary woman. In other words, drag performs and cultivates only those forms of femininity that are primarily designed to “serve patriarchal interests” [6].

The opponents of the above-mentioned approach of defining the cultural and political roles of drag and its impact on the understanding of femininity, on the contrary, admire its ability to expand the rigid framework of gender identity, which has long been considered fixed and invariable. This perspective defines drag as a (positively connoted) parody, directed not at women, but at a patriarchal

(mis)understanding of gender roles and stereotypes that patriarchal society cultivates and supports. This article is my attempt to trace the origins of drag in Western culture, to analyse the reasons for the growing popularity of drag shows and their main stars – drag queens – and to join a multidisciplinary discussion about the performative nature of femininity and its reproduction and rethinking in drag culture, which has started at the intersection of gender and queer theoretical discourses in the second half of the last century and continues till this day.

## 2. Historical Context

In her work *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America*, Esther Newton defines *drag* as clothing that is traditionally associated with one gender while being worn by the opposite gender [18]. The term originated in the mid-19th century and referred to the underskirt – a contemporary piece of women's clothing worn by male actors who played female roles [16]. *Queen* is a term that is used in Anglophone culture to refer to a homosexual man. At the time Newton published her research in the 1970s, homosexuality in Western discourses was still closely associated with “perversion” [18], which defined a drag queen as an ambivalent figure that personified gender and sexual deviation even in the homosexual world. Such a framing had turned the drag queen into a visual symbol of stigma projected on homosexual men by the patriarchal society – an ultimate figure of the Other, which is distinctly marked by unnatural excessive femininity – such an antagonistic figure being an easily identified counterpart of the accepted standards of masculinity in a society governed by patriarchal discourses.

Historically, the tradition of depicting femininity by male actors in the Western world can be traced back to ancient Greece<sup>1</sup>. Our modern understanding about ancient Greek plays, acting, physical theatre space, costume, masks and the relation of play to audience begins with the Athenian festivals of Dionysus – big celebrations in honour of the god Dionysus in the fifth and sixth centuries BC [5]. In the sixth century, both women and men took part in these ceremonies, but by the fifth century, when ceremonies were becoming what is known as theatre, women had completely disappeared from the stage. Researchers have not found specific laws or behavioural codes that would prohibit women from featuring in stage productions, nor have they traced the specific reason or date that would mark the onset of women's absence from the stage [5]. With the development of patriarchal society in Athens, women became isolated from public political and intellectual life and began to adopt “traditional” female roles attributed to them – those of wife, mother and caretaker, their sphere of activity being limited to the household and childcare. Sue-Ellen Case

directly linked these socio-economic changes to the restriction of women's participation in Dionysus festivals, which led to their eventual exclusion from theatre [5]. According to Case, the female characters (performed by male actors) who from now on would appear on the ancient Greek scene were not just *women*, that rather patriarchal fiction of the *Woman* – an artificially created image of a woman as the absolute opposite of a man [5].

Since women no longer took part in theatrical performances, female characters were personified by men. Femininity on stage was carried out primarily through a set of visual attributes: a woman's tunic that was shorter than a man's, a woman's mask with longer hair, special body pads designed to recreate a female figure, as well as gestures, movements and vocal intonations. Thinking about such a female figure, it should be remembered that she was generated by a masculine point of view, which was distanced from female experiences both socially and politically, and thus reflected only a masculine image of women and femininity, which were often generalized and stereotyped.

The Elizabethan English theatre of the Renaissance period (and until 1662) also excluded women actresses from theatrical productions. During the times of Shakespeare, women experienced considerable pressure from patriarchal society, which required them to behave according to specific social roles. Women were expected to be humble, quiet and attached to the private space of their homes, their main ambitions being limited to marriage, having children and running a household. The development of medical thought of the time gave rise to the idea of a woman as an “underdeveloped” man who lacks male genitalia – a weak creature that was prone to physical and psychological diseases, and therefore required male control and guidance. The Protestant religious tradition insistently alluding to the Biblical myth of the Fall and Eve's role in it, only reaffirmed the idea that women were flawed creatures susceptible to the devil's temptations, and thus asserted male domination over women at the highest level. Acting and participating in theatrical productions that allowed women access to the public sphere were seen as the exact opposite of society and the Church's expectations of women, and hence actresses were associated with adultery, whoredom, debauchery and decadent morality.

Although there is evidence that women from poor backgrounds took part in street performances and the Elizabethan court ladies were allowed to participate in theatrical masques – lavish dramatic performances often spoken in verse which took place at the royal court – all commercial acting companies of the time consisted exclusively of men and the roles of female characters were usually played by young male actors. Such homosocial male theatrical troupes were considered socially legitimate because they did not threaten the established gender hierarchies, their portrayal of female characters reflecting only the *idea of a woman*, not a reality. Moreover, such a rendering of femininity written by a male playwright and embodied on stage by male actors mirrored the masculine fetishized ideal

<sup>1</sup> My work engages primarily with drag as a cultural phenomenon in Western discourses and interacts with the Euro-American theatrical tradition. I deliberately omit the discussion of femininity performances by men in Pan-Asian culture, (e.g. Japanese kabuki theater or the classical Chinese theatre), as well as in cultural traditions of the indigenous peoples of North and South America.

of woman of the time.

The attire of English women of the Renaissance period was extremely complex and consisted of many layers of clothing. It would take a lot of time and help from a dresser to put on a woman's costume. Wigs, which were in vogue at the time, were not problematic to get, unlike make-up, which was lead-based, and therefore had detrimental effects on the body of women – both on stage and in real life. As argued by Bilal Hamamra, “boy actors were painted to signal their feminine roles, but painted faces [also] signified lascivious women”, therefore “[t]he painting of the boy actors reinforce[d] cultural prejudices about female deception” [9], typical for the misogynistic discourses of the early modern England. Whether cross-dressing on stage was considered to be a threat to masculinity is open to interpretation. In any case, such performances were a common theatrical practice that was understood and accepted by all participants of the theatrical process: playwrights, actors, critics and audience.

The second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Europe is characterised by the rise of theories based on the idea of homosexuality as the so-called “third sex”, which was defined as sexual and gender inversion. These theories have created a strong associative link between male homosexuality and femininity. Since the 1850s, more and more works in psychology and medicine have been devoted to congenital “deformities”, which were believed to cause an individual's homosexual preferences [16]. Male homosexuality was defined as a “perversion”, and the professional literature on the study of human sexuality of the time emphasized the femininity of homosexual men. In the 1860s, Karl Heinrich Ulrichs in his work *Forschungen über das Räthsel der mannmännlichen Liebe* (*The Riddle of Man-Manly Love*, 1864-1865) first used the term “Uranism” to refer to homosexual men, whom he called “Uranians”. Ulrichs considered homosexuals to be the “third sex”, which is characterized by inverted gender characteristics. Therefore, homosexual men, according to Ulrichs, are born with a “female soul”, which explained male erotic attraction to their sex [16]. This psychological theory was significant not only because it linked same-sex attraction to gender inversion, but also because Ulrichs believed that inversion was limited to the soul and not to the body. Thus, he maintained “an element of heteronormativity at the level of the psyche” [16]. As Gert Hekma points out, Ulrichs’ theory, which defined homosexual men as a “third sex”, gained its popularity because such a model of homosexuality defined by its strong association with femininity did not menace the dominant heteronormative discourse and was “a nonthreatening representation of homosexuals for heterosexuals” [11]. The results of the discussions around this theory reinforced the stereotypical image of the homosexual as “soft” and “feminine” – the Other, fashioned according to the logic of compulsory heteronormativity, who deviated from the heterosexual norm and whose “feminine” behaviour and appearance (as it was thought at the time) had created the very foundation of the archetypal image of a drag queen.

### 3. Drag in Academic Discourses

In their shows and performances, drag queens often imitate and legitimise what sociologist Revin Connell calls *hegemonic femininity* – dominant for a certain time period and culturally specific ideal of woman [12]. In today's Eurocentric world, such an ideal is embodied by a white, wealthy, middle-class, physically attractive woman who has no disabilities and possesses a set of essential visual markers of femininity. The staged femininity of drag queens, which consists of high heels, corsets, huge wigs organised into luxuriant hairstyles, elegant dresses and expensive jewellery, distances the “ideal” of femininity from real women further than ever. bell hooks, analysing “Paris Is Burning” (1990) – the documentary about the lives and dreams of New York gays and drag queens – regards the drag performances presented in the documentary as a detrimental activity which reinforces gender and racial oppression through its idealization of the image of the white rich woman as the only one worth striving for and which parasitizes on the existing stereotypes [6]. Therefore, drag does not challenge gender binary, but simply tries to approach gender norms by appropriating female sexuality. Feminist critics often define drag as a parody of a woman, a parody that is (at least partially) based on stereotypes and clichés that are rooted in patriarchal society. Unlike masculinity, which is unmarked and defined as natural by default, femininity in sexist societies is *always already* associated with artificiality, which is only reconfirmed by drag performances [7]. Kate Davy defines a female drag image as one that “foreground[s] the male voice” and “is primarily about men” [7]. Susan Bordo in her article “Gay Men's Revenge” analyses male images in commercials and argues that the aesthetics of masculinity is becoming more feminine, and homosexual men can embody feminine features better than women themselves [3]. The scholar believes that this practice colonizes female sexuality and forces women to strive for a “perfect” body – an illusory unattainable form of femininity imposed on women [3].

Other researchers of the nature of gender (Butler, Garber, Lorber, Muñoz, Rupp and Taylor) argue that drag queens perform those transgressive actions that destabilize gender and sexual categories, revealing the social nature of the concepts of femininity and masculinity, hetero- and homonormativity. American philosopher and gender theorist Judith Butler defines drag performance as an important platform where the artist “challenge[s] compulsory heterosexuality and its central protagonists “man” and “woman”” [4]. Butler defines gender as a sociocultural construct that is formed through the systematic repetition of a certain set of actions by the subject. By imitating the actions and manners traditionally attributed to women, drag “mocks both the expressive model of gender and the notion of a true gender identity” [4]. José Esteban Muñoz sees drag performances as a form of what he defines as *disidentification* – “a performative mode of tactical recognition that various minoritarian subjects employ in an effort to resist the oppressive and normalizing discourse of

dominant ideology” –, and thus drag can (and should) be regarded as an act of rebellion against the mainstream oppressive discourses and an attempt of “reformatting of self with the social” [17]. In his performances, RuPaul – a black and openly gay man – undermines and confronts the concepts of gender, race and sexual norms. The RuPaul’s show offers its audience a variety of stage incarnations of femininity that help better understand the constructed nature of gender. In this show, the aim of the participants is not just to successfully replicate a woman’s appearance, but rather to “perform female gender through the performance of femininities” [8] – a range of intricate qualities and actions that shape the concept of femininity: manners, movements, facial expressions, voice intonation and pitch etc. Hence, in drag performances the body ceases to be a passive surface on which gender is located, and instead becomes a platform for performance that reveals the performative nature of femininity [4].

In her ground-breaking study of male homosexuality “Between Men”, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick defines male homophobia primarily not as a fear of possible intimacy with another man, but rather as a man’s fear of feminization [15]. Patriarchal society regards femininity as an inferior secondary form of gender behaviour, and therefore any association of a man with femininity poses a threat to his innate social and economic privileges and the power he receives in such a society. The drag queen can be seen as a rebellious figure who is not ashamed of her femininity – she is proud of being feminine and turns it into a source of her power. Staged femininity in drag performances is an active force, which implements humour as a universal tool for cathartic liberation from fears, anxieties and internal conflicts of both an artist and an audience. Thus, drag is not just theatrical act at the centre of which stands a female figure; it is an important space for rumination and self-reflection, for re-thinking gender norms and rebelling against gender clichés. As Marjorie Garber has pointed out, the aim of most drag queens nowadays is not simply to impersonate the opposite sex on stage, but to destabilize the very concepts of gender and normative sexuality by blurring the boundaries between them [19].

#### 4. Drag and Pop Culture

In the 20th century, drag had been heavily influenced by pop culture and show business and transformed into a more complex and specific phenomenon – it was no longer an “imitation of *a* woman, *any* woman, but an imitation of *the* woman, the star, the Mae Wests, Judy Garlands, and Marilyn Monroes whose glamorous auras as legendary icons have been incorporated into the aesthetic of drag [emphases in the original]” [10]. The refined female images of famous pop stars and actresses full of glamor and luxury have become a source of inspiration for the new drag aesthetics. The 20<sup>th</sup> century has drastically changed fashion industry, especially the mainstream fashion – “[i]n all but the most formal contexts, the distinctions in clothing between the sexes have

become so amorphous, so ill-defined, that it is almost impossible to do drag of contemporary women’s daily wear, which is virtually identical in appearance to men’s clothing, consisting of such genderless staples as blue jeans, t-shirts, leather jackets, sweat shirts, khaki pants, back packs, baseball caps, and tennis shoes” [10]. In order to maintain the illusion of femininity on stage, drag performers were forced to reject androgynous fashion trends of their present and search for inspiration in the past, when clothing clearly conveyed gender distinctions. That is why, according to Daniel Harris, the aesthetics of drag today is penetrated by the strong feeling of nostalgia and is marked by a retrospective (if not old-fashioned) understanding of femininity attributes [10].

An extremely important milestone in the history of drag culture – as well as LGBTQ+ culture in general – were the 1960s, namely the events of 1969, called the Stonewall riots, during which drag queens were one of the main driving forces. The Stonewall riots marked the first time in history when members of the LGBTQ+ community resisted the state’s legitimized system of harassment and discrimination of sexual and gender minorities. The riots are widely considered a watershed moment that transformed the gay liberation movement in the United States as well as around the world. Feelings of shame and inferiority because of one’s “deviant” sexual and/or gender identity persistently imposed by a heteronormative patriarchal society have transformed into a sense of self-worth, self-acceptance and self-pride. This change was a significant precondition for the evolution of later generations of drag subcultures and the transition of drag performers to mainstream show business in the following years.

Among the events of the next two decades, there were two that have played a particularly important role not only in the development of drag culture, but also had achieved a great success in the mainstream: the drag balls in Harlem and the “Wigstock” drag queen festival [1]. The tradition of drag balls dates back to the pre-World War II times [13]. Since the 1970s, a highly organized and developed drag culture emerged around the balls [1]. In this culture, African and Latin American drags lived in so-called “houses”, the structure of which copied the model of a family with appropriate social roles: mothers, daughters, sisters etc. “Houses” took part in drag balls – competitions, where they tried to surpass their rivals with the refined attire and superb style of performances. The ball culture has become a cradle of voguing – a dancing style inspired by the poses of models on the cover of the fashion magazines (e.g. Vogue). Vogue had gained its popularity after the release of Madonna’s “Vogue” music video on MTV (1990), which featured dancers from Harlem and from “Paris Is Burning” (1990) [1]. The Wigstock Festival, first held in 1985, at the pinnacle of its popularity in the mid-1990s, attracted 50,000 visitors from all around the world and became an incredible commercial success for its organizers, writing its name into the mainstream culture.

In the early 1970s, a subculture of performers called *Tunten* emerged in West Berlin. At that time “Tunte” “connoted “soft men”, “feminine men” and “men in women’s

clothes”, being used by heterosexual men as an insult before being transformed into a *nom de guerre* in a political sense by Tuntén themselves” [1]. Unlike the elegant and sophisticated drag queen, who “tried on” the images of Marilyn Monroe, Madonna, Cher or other popular female superstars, Tuntén looked absolutely unglamorous – sometimes even careless and shabby – embodying various female characters on stage in a comic manner of “the trash travesty” [1]: a cashier girl in a supermarket, the daughter of a right-wing politician, an old woman in the toilet etc. The members of the troupe who played Tuntén on stage claimed that their drag was not just a recreation of an image of a woman; rather, it was an expression of their feminine side and (partially) of their own (gender) identity [1]. Grotesque performances of Tuntén reinterpreted female image in drag culture and challenged the norms of the heteronormative society of that time, thus questioning the established gender roles and clichés.

In the modern world, the major figure in contemporary drag culture is rightly considered to be the American drag queen and musician RuPaul. International success came to RuPaul in 1993, when MTV broadcasted the queen’s music video “Supermodel of the World”. In 2009, RuPaul had founded the world-famous “RuPaul’s Drag Race” – a parody of another popular American television reality show “America’s Next Top Model” – which later became a huge success in the mainstream culture and received the prestigious Emmy Award in 2016. The participants of the show competed in various fashion shows, catwalks and photoshoots as well as created their own luxurious looks trying to surpass each other’s and the audience’s expectations. The RuPaul’s show has become a drag queen “star factory” of its generation. The winner of the seventh season, Violet Chachki, gained an enormous popularity after participating in the show, which secured her a contract with Dita von Teese’s burlesque ballet, a cooperation with the Moschino brand and an invitation to the Met Gala in 2019, the theme of which was camp – an aesthetic style that regards something as appealing because of its bad taste and value and which organically fits into drag aesthetics due to its excessive theatricality, grotesqueness, some vulgarity, sensitivity and love of the artificial. The winner of the third All Star season, Trixie Mattel, is one of the most successful and affluent queens in the world: her audience on Instagram reaches 3.1 million subscribers<sup>2</sup>, and she co-hosts the popular *UNHhhh* show on YouTube. The popularity of drag artists and increasing attention to their work shows that drag performances have long ceased to be just a superficial male performance of female roles and has grown into something much more intricate and complex – into the performative practice of femininity, which goes far beyond the stage space and becomes (almost) inseparable from the persona of a performer.

As it was noticed by the scholar Eir-Anne Edgar, the main purpose of “RuPaul’s Drag Race” is to recreate standard femininity through a number of practices associated with it in society [8], and only those participants whose “stage femininity” can approach stereotypical norms of femininity

can expect acknowledgement from both the jury and the audience. In this respect, the RuPaul’s show is quite controversial: on the one hand, drag performances challenge the biological definition of gender and the fixed nature of the sexual identity it implies; on the other hand, only performers who follow socially accepted standardized femininity and its norms are successful in the show – almost all of the winners promote images that are visually close to the concept of femininity approved by patriarchal discourse [8].

In Ukrainian reality, the main drag queen of the country is, of course, Andriy Danylko, commonly known by his stage name Verka Serdutchka. Unlike his Western colleagues, Danylko’s performances did not simply imitate the superstars of the past or the present – instead, he had created an original image of Verka, a comical train conductor, who offered a new interpretation of post-Soviet femininity. Verka is a simulacrum of transgressive femininity of the 1990s, wrapped in postmodern sensibilities and an extravagant costume adorned with colourful sequins in the best traditions of the Western drag queens. The sarcastic and outspoken Verka, who communicated with her audience in a simple and appealing manner, drastically differed from the two models of conventional femininity typical of post-Soviet Ukraine defined by Ukrainian scholar Oksana Kis as the “Barbie” and the “Berehynia” (a woman-guardian) [14]. The Berehynia is a female archetype, whose main functions and roles are associated with the woman’s abilities of reproduction, nurturing and mothering, whereas the Barbie – the ultimate symbol of Americanization and globalization in Ukraine after the collapse of the Soviet Union – is an embodiment of female sex appeal fully situated on the surface of woman’s body, suggesting that women’s main purpose is to be an object of male desire that can satisfy male gaze [14]. Barbie’s overt sexuality or Berehynia’s modesty and obedience have little to do with Verka – she embodies a new Ukrainian self-made woman, who is independent and confident to take her destiny into her own hands. For the last few decades, we have witnessed Verka’s transformation from a lower-class train conductor and saleswoman to a Eurovision sensation in 2007, the UK’s Guardian having declared Verka’s memorable bonkers hit “Dancing Lasha Tumbai” “[t]he best song never to win Eurovision” [20], and one of the most popular figures on the Ukrainian stage nowadays.

Verka’s postmodern *body-in-drag* ceases to exist as “a fixed, unitary, primarily biological reality” [2]. Instead, it becomes a “significant carrier and register of culture” [2], whose low camp femininity has been transformed into a political declaration: the lyrics “lasha tumbai” phonetically resembles a phrase “Russia good-bye”. Although Andriy Danylko (rather unconvincingly) denied any allegations from the Russian side claiming that “lasha tumbai” stands for the Mongolian “whipped cream”, the verse has become a prophetic statement of Ukraine’s drastic change in the state’s relations with Russia and a manifestation of the new Ukrainian soft power against Russian aggression. After the Russian Federation had brutally invaded Ukraine on

<sup>2</sup> The data relevant as of November 23, 2022.

February 24, 2022, Danylko officially recognized that the phrase should be interpreted as “Russia good-bye” and that from now on Verka Serduchka in her performances will sing exclusively this line, which symbolically represents the desire of Ukrainian people to break up with Russian colonial aggression and stop Russia’s imperial expansion in the country.

For another Ukrainian drag queen Maydana (Kostya Kharlamov), who was forced to leave Ukraine and move to the Netherlands due to homophobic violence she was exposed to, the ability to freely perform femininity through drag is also a political statement. The name “Maydana” derives from the name of Ukraine’s central square Maidan Nezalezhnosti (Independence Square) in Kyiv, where two major political protests in the history of independent Ukraine have taken place – the Orange Revolution of 2004 and the Revolution Dignity of 2013-2014 (also known as the First and Second Maidan Revolutions respectively). The queen’s name suggests her own resistance against the oppressive system of heteronormative society, the norms of which she subverts with her eccentric performances of femininity. Thus, femininity, which has always been considered as something secondary and unimportant in male-dominated world, is transformed into a powerful tool of resistant against patriarchy and homophobia. Moreover, I believe that drag femininity of Ukrainian drag performers one of the most prominent Ukrainian queens – is *always* a political performance directed at external or internal repressive strategies, thus redefining well-known slogan of second-wave feminism from the late 1960s “*the personal is political*”. Doing drag on stage or marching through the streets during Ukraine’s Pride Parade, queens perform an act of rebellion, which is embodied in their exaggerated hyperbolized femininity.

Ever since the Stonewall riots, drag has become a visual manifestation of the fight against the forced naturalization of gender roles ascribed to women and men. Drag queens do not only challenge the authenticity of gendered behaviour expectations based on biological sex, but also perform a political statement celebrating the freedom of choice – including a choice of gender roles. Moreover, they offer a new perspective on femininity, which goes beyond the roles traditional for women in patriarchal society: wife, mother, housewife or mistress, and therefore their flamboyant drag could be defined as both a socio-cultural phenomenon and a political manifesto against the rigid framework of behavioural patterns in which society confines women.

## 5. Conclusion

As a cultural and social phenomenon, drag has come a long way from incorporating theatrical femininity by male agents on the stages of ancient Greece and Renaissance England to the exquisite and elaborated drag performances of today characterized by a substantially new level of preparation and production. Drag is simultaneously being mercilessly criticised for appropriating femininity and

exploiting gender stereotypes, as well as highly praised for challenging heteronormativity as the only acceptable norm in a patriarchal society. Modern feminist and queer theories utilize different approaches in their definition of drag femininity – it is simultaneously interpreted as a practice that perpetuates gender stereotypes and as the one that undermines the very foundation of sexist society, showing that there is nothing natural or innate in the way we perceive gender roles. I believe that the drag can be defined as an art of performing gender. Moreover, I suggest that it functions as a Lacanian mirror, which creates a liminal space for gender(ed) identities and stimulates a rethinking of the very framework of gender. Whom we see in this mirror – the Other or the Self – depends on the angle which we look at the reflection reflected back at us.

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