

Body of the Story: Revelations in Class and Gender Encountered in Character Clothing

To begin, this piece of writing must come out to its readers as being informed of itself, in possession of the knowledge that it is a narrative. A narrative- multiangled or singularly concentrated on one theme, and concept, is in all cases implying a narration that is an outward projection into the audience- whether implicit or explicit- and along with it thus come repetition and reinforcement. To clarify, the tendency of the subsequent writing will be to conflate the performance of the text to also the writing and orality that is associated with in terms of its sources and dates of writing that may or may not be disputed.

Storytelling speaks of an informal art, though often reserved often for noble audiences and associated with high-brow entertainment, it is still recaptured as an informal art. This is perhaps because of the intrinsic purpose of entertainment and nothing else. Art for the sake of its allegedly superfluous purpose of entertainment is so distinct from its more rigid cousin of a speech or a lecture.

In storytelling, there is a recalling often, and an invariable connect to history due to the reason that it is being recounted in the present, hence the event has already occurred in history, with little notice to its fictitious nature or otherwise. In doing this recounting, the narration, or the story becomes important simply because for any reason it has been selected to be told again- to be in circulation popularly.

(add something about storytelling in Italy- the clown and other characters as in *commedia dell'arte*)

Circulation then implies a belief in the language of the audience to carry forward the narration. This would be done through repetition of the language that has been used to tell the story.

(about the importance of language)

The language of storytelling, especially that which is oral and relies most often on memory, is rhythmic, poetic, and comes into itself when in the tongues of the common people who are drawn to its comfort- the comfort of fantasy, exaggeration, catharsis¹, and sometimes an invitation to thought.² The language that is thus formed holds the traits that allow it to be repetitive, and easily circulated, specifically in the ambit of theatrical storytelling and performance.

Stories are vessels of figures formed from speech that are innovative- metaphors, analogous commentary, descriptive devices, and overall flexibility in building new uses for language and exercising invention³. Through repetition these become part of the speech and canonised literature, that is later recorded and made normalised. Through language, the intent forms itself, being a by-product of this repetition and further, reinforcement.

Thus, we understand the importance of storytelling, the language that it employs to visualise descriptions, construct metaphors, and finally, intention and action. Clothes, as an accessory to both body and plot, are telling tools of the context in which they appear. Apart from being a loaded bank of interpretations, they are also seen being used explicitly in the story- as disguise, as tools of submission and power, and in many other cases- through disguise, control, and so on.

Any storyteller's strengths are said to lie in her ability to project reality and form bonds between the reality that her audience listen in and the one that is being built through narration- this is the imaginative aspect of what forms the essence of escapism (?) in all stories. To introduce relatability, characters are introduced, whether rounded and polished to

¹ Aristotle - explain

² Brecht - explain

³ As we know, there are many writers who make words and metaphors through their writing

shine, or otherwise flat, they form important checkpoints where the audience can park itself, and truly link itself to the going ons. The first thing that one notes about a character, could be its performance as feminine or masculine⁴, and then, its clothing as is perceived either through implicit understanding on the audience's part of the context and culture that the story takes place in, or through direct discussion of the get up of the characters. Here we can observe quite plainly that the latter technique is used when there is something significant to say about the actions of the characters, and the effect isn't sourced much from emotion purely at all.

At this juncture, and on behalf of William Shakespeare the plays, 'Romeo and Juliet', 'Two Gentlemen of Verona', and the mighty favourite, 'Taming of the Shrew' are called upon- all in fact set in fair Verona. The last play, is of rather heavier weight in what it will speak for its cause.

Romeo and Juliet, the characters from the play titled after them, are described hardly in their costume, except when they find themselves at banquets and parties that the former ought to have kept away from. To supplement the former point on clothing being introduced, the only purpose it seems to serve is to make the rivalry all the more kitschy- apart the rivalry itself, it is fodder for the romantic and swooning audiences to imagine a dashing, knightly Romeo hidden and the bashful Juliet also under mask. The demure, quite delicate concept of a veil between the two lovers and then the raising of a curtain that implies both a reveal and the start of the action of the plot from then on, is very clearly where the purpose of mentioning clothing is served.

⁴ Disguises become an interesting study here, where in Shakespeare's plays that employ disguising techniques, the aspect to change most is the action, and of course, clothing, which is going to form the more stout argument.

To refer to a more tender use of an article in clothing, and that too metaphor, one recalls the daring Romeo utter his desire to be the glove on Juliet's hand, so that he may touch her cheek.⁵ Similar stock is used through the play.

The two gentlemen of Verona, are more adventurous with their lot, venturing into the compelling areas of friendship and deceit. The betrayal, though not directly linked to the use of disguise- which in fact is employed by only one character⁶, is seen to be linked to clothing. Julia's transformation into Sebastian, is an act of escape, of her shedding her femininity through shedding the clothing that was worn by her previously and taking on the clothing worn by a man. In addition, it helps her travel undetected, safe from the elements that could have rendered her vulnerable as a woman. This is in fact a recurring event in some of the other plays where women dress up as men to ensure their safety during travel, but it is also notably used to win favour⁷ through clandestine means and covert operations.

While taming Katherine, in the play of similar name, Petruchio the charming but seemingly ill-bred suitor is shown to be so through various means that revolve around his appearance. To his wedding Petruchio is in his squalid best, crummy boots and hat, on a sickly horse, he trudges to the wedding party- attacks on his attire are met with an unseemly dignified claim that Katherine is marrying the man, not the clothes. From then on, Katherine is shown a mirror to her 'shrew'⁸ like behaviour as her new husband throws tantrum after tantrum over the minutest mistake. Significantly, when Petruchio first encounters Katherine, she is in the process of grooming herself. He interrupts her ritual, asserting himself over her. Once they are married, he uses another technique, refusing her access to any of her fine clothing because they don't seem to be up to the mark. While getting late to go to a dinner party, Petruchio is

⁵ Where is this line

⁶ Julia into Sebastian

⁷ Romeo and Juliet, Taming of the Shrew

⁸ Why we use quotes to describe shrew has something to do with the misogynistic context it's used in

feigns something close to revulsion at the finery that the tailors have readied for his wife, and in the end, refusing her any sashes and hats, they go in simple clothing.

The genres of all the three plays, 'Romeo and Juliet', 'Two Gentlemen of Verona', and 'Taming of the Shrew', have a link to the kind of role that appearances play. While

In every possible characteristic of cloth, stitched or unstitched, colour, the access to it, who is allowed to drape it, and even what *else* is being used in place of cloth on the body. Since the inception of their use they have been so closely held to the body that they are indistinguishable from the physical form of the wearer and come close to be a most defining feature of one's self. This is noticed in instances when you set out to ascertain someone's economic background, or social status⁹. **For this purpose, clothing would include anything that is worn on the body, including varied accessories.**

It is perhaps for this reason; shame is closely associated to one's state of apparel. Stripping someone naked, making their person public, when it would be privately conserved under cloth, is violating due to the shame it induces. "Shame arises every time we are unable to make others forget (*faire oublier*) our basic nudity."¹⁰ (need to exterminate oneself, feeling of discomfort and distress, this is possibly why clothes are a popular target and means through which to bully someone, or control someone.)

The oppression that is exercised through this fabric is of importance to us due to how it is conceived in storytelling- this can be through written or oral, and it is interesting to note that in many folklore or popular legends surrounding women, their bodies are the most astutely described. As a little girl who would be unable to sleep most nights, a fascinating woman from the state of West Bengal (in East India) would keep me company as a nanny, of sorts.

⁹ Caste- how women of lower castes in India were not permitted to wear cloth on their upper bodies

¹⁰ Levinas – On Escape

On one rainy night, when I must have been particularly unmanageable, she attempted to dampen my spirits in tandem with the general environment, and told me about a *dayan* who would roam naked on the streets, her skin a pallid blue and glowing in the dark- the trick is, readers, to not let her see you and to especially keep any naughty children out of her way.

It is not difficult to find such lore and where the focus on these women's unruliness is their lack of clothing¹¹, or the nature of their clothing. Such a display of themselves could only be threatening- where is the shame that one sought to escape, but also ultimately desire in others? It is through the shame of others that the one inducing and in control of the shame is vested with the power to control. (references)

When one talks of the body in narration and storytelling, there is a jarring sensation in the extraction of the body from the story for the purpose of talking about it. Bodies are so inextricably part of the story that they almost are the story.

¹¹ One also finds the general practice of with hunts prevalent