# Big deal. Now we say thanks to our oppressors

## OPEN SPACE

YET again Guardian Women is colluding in the silencing of women. Your articles about Graham Flander and the Joeys (July 16) made me both indignant and angry. Women have to fight hard enough for the pitifully inadequate space they are allowed in newspapers (and the media in general) without yourselves adding insult to injury by interviewing five men, and, therefore, reducing still further women's meagre print ration.

You presumably included the two articles because you imagined them to be of relevence to women. It is the reasoning behind this assumption that I would dispute.

Graham Flander, a transvestite waiter(ess), would say that he is not a transvestite, but as a man who dresses up and attempts to pass off as a woman, that most certainly is what he is, whether he flinches at the label or not. Transvestism is no friend to women, but, rather, a blatant manipulation and colonisation of women and women's culture by men. As both Mary Daly in Gyn/Ecology and Janice C. Raymond in The Transsexual Empire point out, men posing as women (whether transvestites or transsexuals) is simply patriarchy constructing women to fit their own specifications. Taken to its logical conclusion, where would this leave "real" women?

What I also found contentious about the Graham Flander article was that the reporter never questioned his posing as a woman in order to cash in — on one of the few occupations open to women — waitressing. Not only does male-dominated society seek to relegate women into the most limited, poorly-paid, insecure and exploitative sectors of the employment market, but it also reserves the right to take over from women in these positions when it is advantageous to do so.

If David Thomas really sees transvestitism as an enlightening experience for men (as the article implies), helping them to better understand women's oppression, then I suggest he needs to do some serious thinking about the subject.

The Joeys raise other questions. From the article it would seem that sexual politics are only given credibility when *men* start to take them seriously. This is not only a distortion, but a fallacy. The fact that sexual politics are taken at all seriously is due to the considerable efforts of the women's movement, and *not* to the efforts of the few male liberals who leap on to the bandwagon.

I do not wish to devalue the Joey's work, but they are only doing something long overdue: questioning male values and assumptions in the context of male culture and male society.

There are a great many women performers and women's theatre / cabaret groups dealing with sexual politics, struggling to be taken seriously and get their voices heard. How much more relevant to Guardian Women it would have been to have interviewed one, or more, of them.

In both articles you offered a smug, congratulatory slap on the back to men, simply because they have made some attempt to acknowledge their power and privilege. So — big deal . . . are we now expected to congratulate and be grateful to our oppressors just because they begin to recognise their position as oppressors? — Yours faithfully,

**Noelle Janaczewska.**
London N1.


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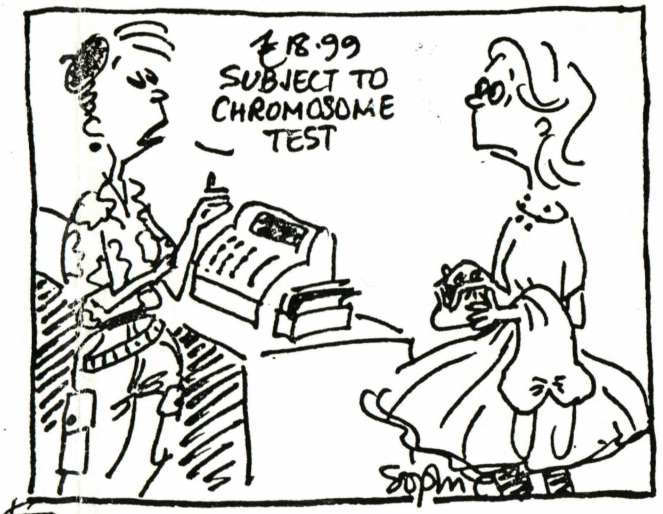


## Was it not ever so?

*'TWAS with much interest I did learn of the item in thine journal* (July 6) *and of the remarkes of some younge wimen of Kentwell. 'Tis most assuredly true, since ever it was, that it be the younger wimen that do be seeken out.*

*How be it then that mine espoused husband, Master Peter the old haymaker, be of much more than passing interest to those who would make pictures than the young men who do work in the fields?*

*The life is hard but Sir Francis Clopton doth think much of my skills and though I be of advancing years (I did have some 18 summers when the Armada did come to our shores) I do know he has more respect for mine wisdom than to caste me aside in infirmity.*

*The item in thine journal did but report the feelings and comments of the young but the old are indeed, most times, well looked after by their masters in 1610.*

. . . was it not ever so? And still it is in 1984 — truly little has changed has it?

**Ann Holloway (1984)**
*or Mistress Ann (1610).*
St Albans,
Herts.

I HAVE always assumed that women Guardian readers were a fairly liberated bunch but your story about Kentwell Manor reveals a different side to their nature.

They apparently jostle for the privilege of paying to dress up in tight corsets, not be allowed to wash and to work a long and hard day whilst being sexually harassed. They soon learn, says one happily, that it's best to be subservient and their status and treatment is likened to that of blacks in South Africa.

Only last year we heard of St Bride's school for adult women, with its mysterious references to corporal punishment, which was similarly popular.

Is women's lib. a temporary aberration? Were the MCPs right all the time? Do "they really like it?" — Yours perplexedly,

**Ken Wilson.**
Ipswich.

## Fruits of the earth

THE durian (Prue Leith, July 6) *Durio zibenthinus*, could be bought at the tube station fruit stall at Covent Garden, before they began to refurbish the area (if that is the term). It smells not so much like a rotting corpse, more like a dog turd, but it tastes adorable when eaten with a spoon.

Tropical fruits are a specialist area of the culinary arts. How odd it is that passion fruit should not be eaten until over-ripe, brown, wrinkly and unappetising; or that the akee (whose creamy-coloured aril is a Jamaican delicacy) is set in pink coloured tissue which is highly poisonous.

Prue Leith is admirably well intentioned in trying to bring imported fruit to a wider audience, but she should know that they are more widely available than she implies. The star-shaped carambola, which I first tasted six years ago in the far east, was found by my wife in a market at Cardiff last year and is now quite frequently found, even though I have yet to see it appear under its correct name. Even the monstera fruits: it tastes like strawberries. And the kiwi-fruit (under its horticultural name of the chinese gooseberry) is a popular climbing garden plant in the south of England. But do watch out for the durian. It smells revolting, but does taste good.

**Brian J. Ford,**
London W1.

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