

*gender manga and  
me: pirated  
manga and latent  
trans desire*

by tshirt





kids these days go on about lgbtq rep this queer-baiting that. back in my day we had to obsessively consume vaguely problematic content in the definitely problematic "gender bender" tag on the now defunct mangahere dot com just to feel something.

obviously, with the internet, i probably could have found something with actual gay people. however that would be humiliating to seek out and it didn't occur to me anyway. we're talking about deeply felt but nonetheless entirely sublimated urges here people.

it helped, i think, that there was a period of time when you couldn't consume a single shoujo manga without there being some sort of contrived crossdressing. women are not alright, and this was the only way for them to express it because they hadn't invented cries for help then either. so, via this insidious mechanism, this sort of genderplay for children got canonized as like an actual genre and not a pure and naked fetish slash sexuality.

anyway, so being heavily repressed, my only outlets were these gender nonconforming heterosexual couples and also reading psychological shoujo about women tormenting each other. but we are concerned with the former here today. i think this is actually relatable content because who among us didn't psychosexually imprint on a manga we checked out from the san jose public library system and then later monomaniacally read pirated alternatives in order to chase that same high?

that's right, i'm talking about ranma 1/2. ran-

ma 1/2 is about a boy, ranma, who falls into a cursed spring in china and as a result, becomes a girl when he is covered with cold water and a boy when he is covered with hot water. it's very simple. he also has a multi gender harem because of his sexual magnetism. it's mostly a martial arts manga though.

akane, his primary love interest, hates boys. ranma is a simple solution to this problem. why doesn't akane marry a boy... who's actually a girl? while akane is resistant to ranma in his guy form, they share touching homoerotic moments in his girl form. akane is hugged tight by a barechested girl ranma, and they both blush.

the casual topless nudity is common in ranma. everyone has their tits out all the time. it's a trip. there's a lack of eroticized shame that's present in other genderbend manga. rather than the new body being a source of mystery and unease, ranma carries himself with an enviable unselfconsciousness.

in general there are no secrets in ranma 1/2. for instance, kuno is only not in the know about ranma's dual forms because he's too thickheaded to realize what's going on before his eyes. ranma will attempt to clarify the truth, and kuno will blithely dodge it. the joke is on kuno for not realizing the obvious, not on ranma for sexual difference.

this allowed me to get mired deep in its appeal without needing to confront what i was doing. the secrecy came later; the joy came first.

so what did ranma teach me? homosexuality is when you project onto a guy who's forced into being a girl and loves women (gay) or when you project onto a girl who's forced into being a man and is like nooo i can't feel these feelings i'm so repressed (gay). or perhaps you project onto the girl who desperately wants to love someone but hates men (gay). or perhaps you project onto the guy who ends up accidentally gay for the gender swapping protagonist, which is much less embarrassing than being intentionally gay ofc, but still nonetheless (gay). and so on.

perhaps you even project onto an unrelated side character who is just very stupid and completely oblivious to the whole gender play going on behind him, and instead blithely does whatever he wants without regard to the fraught implications of girls loving boys who are girls (or girls who are boys). which is actually quite. you know. prescient. and gay.

anyway, later, when i was trying to find it again online, i encountered the no doubt search engine optimized title for "1/2 gender manga," 1/2 prince. 1/2 prince is about a girl who plays as a bishie elf in a vr video game and makes wacky friends and gets into situations because of this both off and online. to my child self, it was good, but it wasn't enough. here is a non exhaustive list of some of the other series i remember being transfixed by:

ai ore:

this one isn't strictly genderbend it's just that it's a twink4butch relationship. they're in a band together and everyone is so phobic

towards their straight love.

akb49:

guy who crossdresses and enters idol group akb48 in order to watch over and protect his crush, who has also joined the group. i can't tell if there were a lot of crossdressing idol manga in my memory because of my tastes or because there just are a lot.

nononono:

girl impersonates her dead twin brother to chase her olympic dreams of ski jumping. it's by the elfen lied guy. it was one of the first seinen titles i read, if i remember correctly, and accordingly was fascinatingly adult.

my boyfriend is a vampire:

pretty boy gang leader gets bitten by a vampire and turned into a girl in the process. this one is a double gender bender because quickly the book takes on the tone of "girl pretending to be a guy" for the main character. this one was over the top trashy drama. good stuff.

pretty face:

guy gets in an accident and the doctor reconstructs him based on a photo of a crush the guy had on him. he gets mistaken for his crush's missing twin sister and for reasons he decides to impersonate her until he can find the real twin sister.

your and my secret:

this is a bodyswap one about a girly boy and a tomboy girl. they don't actually date each

other. they begin dating their respective closest friends prior to their... transition shall we say. btw the transmasc is super excited about his new transhet lifestyle and the transfemme is reluctant but eventually is like. fuck it. sure. everyone's happier this way.

idol ace:

this one is about a girl who's an idol who wants to play baseball and switches places with her childhood friend during games so she can achieve her dream. this one is mainly notable because i was convinced it was by rumiko takahashi too but it's not. it just kind of looks like it.

i'm sure there were more but also like my memory sucks. this is an archaeological project for me. but like in my own psyche. what else. the gender of mona lisa. after school nightmare. uwasa no midori-kun. kanojo ni haru hi. reversible. the beautiful skies of houou high. i'm just showing my ass here i should stop listing series.

anyway this is all to say. the unconscious is powerful. it can drive you to places you haven't even heard of yet.

