

An Essay on the physical and moral influence  
of dressing as a woman

Caroline de L\*\*\*,  
Born de La P\*\*\*.

1831 <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Translated from the French by Eric Feron. The original document in French can be found here.

The city of \*\*\* is endowed with the actual example of what Louvet de Couvray so nicely hypothesized in his novel, *Faublas*. There, Mr. the chevalier de Freminville always shows up dressed as a woman. He seems to enjoy his costume so much that he never dresses otherwise. Indeed, everyone believes it would be a great pity to do so, because his appearance as a woman is so superior that it is impossible to find a more complete and more astonishing illusion. To be sure, the physical features of the chevalier de Freminville must be particularly appropriate, and so are they. His features are mild, regular, and expressive; his waist is perfect and quite thin; his limbs are delicate; his hands are small. But it is his foot, so nice and so endearing, that is the envy of any woman. Last, his body expression, his movement and his countenance are those of a woman. He is always dressed most elegantly and tastefully, and he always follows fashion so that he is an example and sets the pace for most ladies. As of late, we have seen him at an evening event surrounded by pretty women, and they were no match to his grace and elegance. He was wearing a pink satin dress with a richly embroidered tulle canevas enhanced with lace; he was wearing a nice hat made with bright pink satin enhanced with a white *saule* feather; the endearing foot, covered with a delicate stocking, is adorned with small white satin. His overall demeanor is exquisite, and nobody can uncover the stratagem.

Every day Mr. de Freminville takes a renewed pleasure at dressing up as a woman and hide his genuine self behind this costume, which he cherishes with passion.

Who would believe that behind such a frivolous appearance, called madness by a few austere naysayers, the chevalier de Freminville is one of the most distinguished gentlemen in his rank, is gifted with several pleasurable talents, and is a renowned scientist? He is the author of several remarkable publications and belongs to several scientific societies.

The tendency that some men have towards assimilating themselves to the female gender is neither new nor without numerous examples; it emanates from a great moral sensitivity, together with a delicate physical build.

So to say, every man is subject to specific inclinations or favorite mania that eventually become passions. When carried over to an extreme, it brings some kind of weirdness or singularity to its subject, and it is sometime even described as madness. That is inappropriate, however, since this passion might overwhelm a man without altering his intellectual abilities.

The various inclinations that dominate their subject almost against their will, and often do so over a lifetime, are less related to the moral education

received, and more related to his physical build and the shape of his limbs. These inclinations are born with us, they strengthen with age, they become impetuous and take over us until our death. A strong, vigorous and robust man is likely to also like adversarial situations. He will favor violent exercises such as hunting, horseback riding, and fencing.

Whoever is born with a strong intelligence but little sensitivity will be ambitious or tightfisted; gambling fury will dominate him, he will like speculating, risky enterprises, and he will try his luck in all sorts of ventures.

A cold temper will seek pleasure from food and meals. He will like wine and strong liquors take him out of his natural lethargy. He will be a drunkard all his life.

Great physical and moral sensitivity and gentleness are doubtlessly the reason for certain men's inclination to dress up like a woman, and for their passion to become, as much as possible, part of a gender they worship.

The suave elegance of women's garments and the idea that wearing them moves one closer to these charming persons meant to provide felicity act most deliciously on the nervous system of a delicate person, and make him feel joys that remain unknown to people whose complexion is coarser. Women are themselves far from insensitive to the same effect of their garment; it yields a pure and innocent pleasure, an endearing feeling named coquetry.

Such are the reasons that give the chevalier de Freminville great pleasure with bringing the whole appearance of a woman upon himself, and to always dress as such; in doing so, he finds so many great charms that I have often heard him say that nothing in the world would convince him to stop dressing as a woman.

May men not be, as they generally are, such severe critics of women's coquetry and their taste for finery, since more than one of them take great pleasure with imitating us with both regards. Hercules himself, the legendary hero himself, enjoyed dressing as a woman and spin at the feet of the queen of Lydia. Achilles spend the most beautiful and enjoyable years of his life in Lycomedes' court dressed as a woman, which brought him even closer to his dear Deidamia.

Setting aside the legend and looking at historical antiquity, we see that Sardanapale, king of Assyria, was constantly dressed as a woman. His court consisted only of women with whom he found great pleasure spinning, embroidering, and in general only enjoy the activities of the gentle sex. He largely preferred these activities to the duties arising from the need of government, as sign of how much he was tributary to his passion. Although his

country was invaded by enemy forces, he deemed it not precious enough to leave a woman's garments for the armor of a warrior. Beauty's empire was preferable to him above anything else; to be a woman meant more to him than being a king, and he preferred to immolate himself rather than leaving his costume and bear with the winner's law.

Nero, the emperor, also very much enjoyed dressing up as a woman and to show himself in public wearing a female attire without any concern for his dignity. Heliogabal, the young emperor of Rome in the third century, had worn female clothes almost always back to his youth, and found it greatly charming to keep dressing up that way all the time. We could cite many other examples from these ancient times that show how many men found it attractive to dress as a woman.

During modern times, Henri III, the king of France, was very fond of this passion: His greatest joy was to dress up as a woman and to appear as such at balls, merry-go-rounds, and shows of his time.

This inclination, as strange as it seems, does not alter the qualities of those it enslaves; Monsieur, the brother of Louis XIV gives us strong evidence of this fact, as he was completely dominated by this inclination; yet it harmed neither his virtues nor his courage. He distinguished himself during several battles, including that of Mont-Cassel in 1667, where he was the supreme commander of the French army. "Monsieur (said Voltaire) led the charge with valor that was not expected from an effeminate prince. Never did anyone see a better example that courage is not incompatible with softness: The prince, who often dressed as a woman and had the same inclinations, acted as a leader and as a soldier. (Voltaire, the century of Louis XIV, Vol. 1, p. 176)".

Another remarkable example from the same era is that of the abbot of Choisy, a member of the Acadmie Fran caise born in 1664 and sent by Louis XVI as ambassador to Siam. He was so passionate about dressing up as a woman that he left the capital, bought a castle and land in the Berry region and lived there many years dressed as a woman, believed to be such, and living as such under the name of Ms. the Countess of Barres. His agreeable physical appearance contributed greatly to the illusion and urged him to give in his inclination. The story of his life, which he published, tells us warmly and in his own words the great happiness he felt when he became free to exercise his inclination in his castle near Bourges without obstacle, and the pleasure he took at enjoying it free of any constraint. He dressed up as a woman almost all his life; even in old age he could not take upon himself not

to dress that way. And when, fearing ridicule, he did not dare showing up in public wearing the female costume, he still did so in private.

The abbot of Choisy wrote an excellent biography of Charles V and other very good works. D'Alembert praised him in his *Mémoires de l'Académie française*.

During the same era, the abbot of Entragues, and the chevaliers of Pradine and of Lorraine often enjoyed dressing up as women.

One of my friends, Ms. P\*\*\*, was one of the honor maids of the empress Marie-Louise and she had a son who had inherited her very delicate complexion. His waist, his feet and his hands could have afforded him to play a woman. Even his voice did not contradict this appearance. One of the great enjoyments of this young man was to dress as a woman and he did so almost all the time. During the carnival, he would not miss a single Opera ball, dressed with his favorite garment. He seduced a rich Swedish man who fell madly in love and courted him assiduously, convinced as he was that he was who he seemed to be. The young P\*\*\* took pleasure at this game for a long time; In the end however, the Swedish lad became so pressing that he decided to unveil his identity and confessed his female identity went only as deep as his garment and his appearance. The foreigner took this declaration as a personal defeat and would not believe any of it. In the end, he could not doubt his error when confronted with the word of several other people. He was so affected that he shot himself in the head, either out of sorrow, shame, or despair. Several witnesses can confirm this fact, which I authenticate. Constant, Napoleon's valet, discusses it in his Memoirs. (*Mémoires de Constant*, Vol. III, page 245.)

Following all these examples upon which we could have added more if we had not feared making unnecessary repetitions, how could anyone be surprised to see the gentle and gracious chevalier de Freminville enjoy dressing as a woman? Why wouldn't he practice such an innocent tendency that seems so enjoyable for him to satisfy? I just demonstrated how simple and natural it is, and it would be a great pity that he be blamed for it. Being a woman, I must confess I find great pride that a man such as Mr. de Freminville enjoy dressing with the garments destined to my gender. No woman will ever be able to wear them with more taste, grace, and elegance than he does. Let us see examples of my discourse, which will demonstrate it is not possible to dress better than he does.

On February 2, 1828, the chevalier de Freminville was at a ball at Mr. de St. D\*\*\*, his hair elegantly dressed with roses. He was wearing a dress

made of muslin, with a large blonde lace collar. This dress was adorned above the bias with three rolls of pink satin, and he was wearing a corset made of the same satin sewn with "pointes". The muslin sleeves were very large and they featured wrists made with the same pink satin, and small white shoes covered his delicate feet. With this elegant garment he attracted everybody's attention. It was the first time I saw him, and I could not believe he not be a woman, and a very beautiful one at that.

A few days later, I saw him again at another ball held at the same household. His hair was dressed with ribbons plated with gold on a poppy-colored background. His short-sleeved dress was made of bright pink crepe, with tab panels enhanced with satin border of the same color. Anyone could thus see the curves of his endearing arm, whose roundness and whiteness looked to me as astounding as the rest of his persona; he had long white gloves and small pink satin shoes. This time I knew he was a man, and I could not help admiring the grace and elegance of his manners and demeanor, and the lightness and flexibility of his dancing moves. All this was in sharp contrast with the stiffness and the clumsy and borrowed attitude that most men have when they dress up as a woman, as one can see every year during the carnival. With the chevalier de Frminville, everything looks so natural and so easy when dressing with a woman's attire that it was clear he had long gotten used to wearing it.

In December 1829 I saw Mr. de Freminville at a show. That evening, he was wearing a yellow poplin dress, with a double row of embroidered black silk frills. The sleeves were very wide and made of muslin. His hair dress consisted of a full amaranth green velvet beret, ornamented with a bird of paradise. His shoes made of pansy taffeta could not have better outlined his endearing foot. I was with several people who did not know of him, and they were asking each other who was this pretty woman. I told them the heart of the matter, but nobody would believe me and all thought I was mocking them. Fortunately, Mr. B\*\*\* entered our lodge during the intermission. He knew the chevalier very well and he confirmed what I said, so that everyone had to surrender their views and believe me. From then on, the ladies in my company forgot all about the show and spend the rest of the evening looking at the person who took so much pleasure identify himself with our gender.

On April 10th last year, I met Mr. de Freminville during a walk (promenade), still dressed as a woman, with a pretty white muslin dress, richly embroidered at the knees. He was wearing a capote made of blonde and blue and white gauze ribbons, ornamented with blue hyacinth. Her waist, as thin

as a nymph's, was outline by a sky blue belt, and his scarf had the same color; he also had blue satin shoes. In June afterwards, I met him at the botanical garden (which is a science he is fond of). He was wearing a white dress with an embroidered tulle collar, and his slender and svelte waist was outlined by a pink belt; he had a black blonde scarf, black prunelle shoes, and he was wearing a pretty rice straw hat, ornamented with pink ribbons and a pink acacia flower bouquet.

During the past few days I met with him in a circle where he showed up wearing a pink taffeta dress, an embroidered tulle canezou, a pink crepe beret ornamented with marabous, and pretty pink shoes. Having started a conversation with him, I asked his permission to be cited in this pamphlet as the most remarkable example of the staunch inclination that some people of his gender have to wear the costume and espouse the manners of ours. I have been thinking for a while about this singular inclination; I tried to analyze it and to understand its causes. Having found many examples from the past and the present, I believe I have found its source and I attempted to demonstrate that this inclination that first appears to be bizarre, is as natural as other passions and all the more likable that it is completely innocent and does not lead to poor heath, loss of fortune, shame, or regret.

Since Mr. de Freminville most graciously, fully and completely acceded to my request, it is with his agreement that I speak about him in this modest work, which I dedicate to him. I hope his tastes will now be justified to any reasonable person, and I also hope this work will avenge him of the stupid discourses of a few idiots above which his temperament takes him so high that their discourse cannot really hurt him. I join many other ladies to approve and applaud his inclination; we all wish him the best, so he may keep following such quiet and soft inclinations as long as possible by continuing to always dress up as a woman.

### **Translator's notes:**

The author of this work was the Chevalier Christophe-Paulin de la Poix de Fréminville himself. The Chevalier lived at the junction between the XVIIIth and XIXth centuries. His career as a Navy commander was only one of the multiple facets of a character that also included a recognized naturalist, historian, artist, and early contributor to the LGBTQ Movement. For more information, please refer to the following biographical information.

### **About the translator:**

Eric Feron is an indirect descendant of the Chevalier de Fréminville. As part of his education at Ecole Polytechnique, Feron trained as a Navy midshipman. He is an engineer, professor, and researcher with a focus on humans and automation in real-time systems.