

Extreme makeovers

How did the stars of *Capote*, *Breakfast on Pluto*, and *Transamerica* go through such radical transformations to play their gay or trans characters? It's all in the tailoring—and the right (or wrong) wigs and makeup By Michael Giltz

How'd they do it? That's the question moviegoers may have pondered after seeing some of the best movies of the year. How did the outsize Philip Seymour Hoffman convince us he was the elfin Truman Capote? How did Cillian Murphy embody such a pretty transvestite in *Breakfast on Pluto*? And how did the sexy Felicity Huffman become a stolid transgender woman in *Transamerica*?

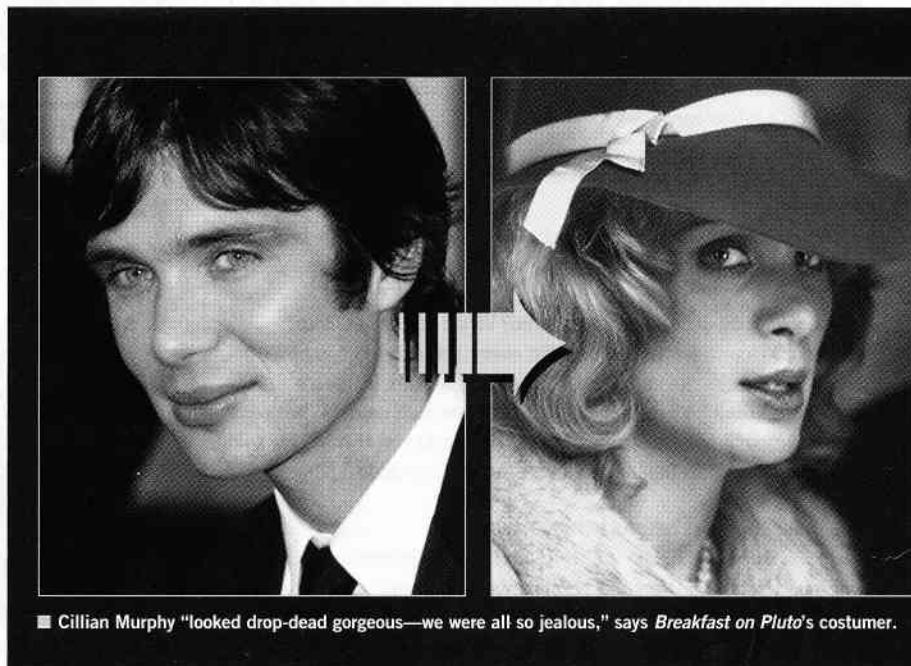
One big help: behind-the-scenes talent working on their costumes, hair, and makeup. For *Capote*, costumer Kasia Walicka Maimone says they rejected optical tricks, oversize sets (à la *The Lord of the Rings*), and even more standard deceptions.

"From the beginning, we had some obvious choices that we didn't do, like keeping him in darker colors," says Maimone. "We can't keep Truman Capote in darker colors. We tailored all the suits, and some of the

classic early '60s-late '50s three-button suits worked great. It was all about the shoulders and fitting the style. We'd use a longer cut of the jacket."

And they didn't keep Hoffman in flats when his feet were off-camera or pull any other sleight of hand. "We had a very quiet process with Philip," says Maimone, who praises the actor's collaboration. "I'd call it nonverbal communication. We had a wall of photos of Truman Capote and we spent a lot of time [with him] looking and trying different things. It was mysterious in a way. Phil...changed. He changed. He grabbed the essence of Capote."

The slim, waifish body of Cillian Murphy, on the other hand, suited his character perfectly. He played Kitten in *Breakfast on Pluto*, a decades-spanning tale of a lad who loves feminine fashion—everything from glam rock to sensible frocks. Costumer Eimer Ni Mhaoldomhnaigh spent most of her time having a ball and being annoyed at how easily Murphy



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slipped into his wardrobe.

"We tried trousers on him," explains Mhaoldomhnaigh, "a women's cut in the '70s style, which is very high-waisted, with a flared leg and a little bit of padding in the bum. And he just looked drop-dead gorgeous." She laughs. "We were all so jealous."

Pluto director Neil Jordan kept using the word "gentle" to describe the character of Kitten, who stumbles through IRA bombings and vicious personal betrayals, delicately refusing to pay any attention. So Mhaoldomhnaigh found a white fur jacket "that was really soft and fluffy against his skin." And since Murphy has hairy, manly arms, keeping them covered up was key. The shoes, however, were no problem, thanks to the wide platforms of the '70s. "If they had been stilettos, it might have been more awkward," she says.

In *Transamerica* the difficult challenge for costumer Danny Glicker was making a small and feminine woman like Huffman convincing as awkward at being a girl. "Felicity has a gorgeous body and is so petite," says Glicker. "When I first met her, I thought, *How am I going to do this? She's gorgeous!* So we did lots of little tricks. I dropped her waistline slightly so her waist was sitting at her hips. Felicity has a gorgeous, tiny waist, but of course [her character] Bree has a more masculine waist."

One big help came from trans people, specifically film consultants Calpernia

Addams and Andrea James, who run a company called Deep Stealth to help in all facets of a person's transition. "One of the things Andrea and Calpernia pointed out to me was that very often when you transition later in life, as Bree has, you haven't been building your wardrobe your whole life," says Glicker. "You have to go out and buy everything all at once. And when you go out on that sort of shopping trip, you have as many mistakes as you do successes."

Jason Hayes—a hair, wig, and makeup artist who created wigs for Huffman and did Addams's hair for the film—drew on his own experiences in the drag and trans community. He first did drag on a dare when he was 19 years old and went on to win numerous beauty pageants, such as Miss Boston. So Hayes knows better than most that transgender women and drag queens are very different people. Bree had to look clumsy, because she was just learning how to apply makeup and do her hair, but she couldn't look pathetic.

Citing tricks to give Huffman the appearance of a man making the transition to a woman, Hayes explains, "We tucked the wig behind her ears to make them stick out a little bit." Also, since the Bree character had recently had hair plugs put in, the wig looks sparser toward the front. Hayes adds, "We had a dash of gray because that's what her hair would naturally be doing then. It wasn't more than four

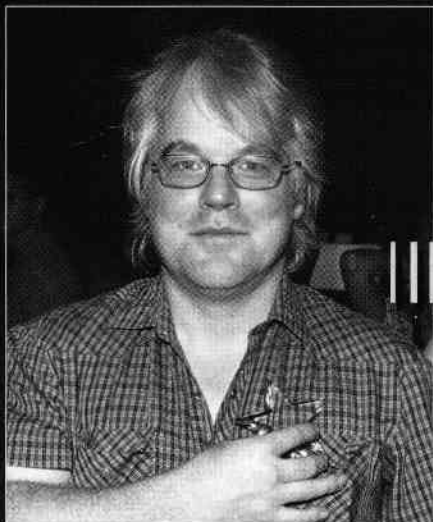
or five strands. It had to look awkward but not like a bad wig—it was a really tricky balancing act."

He suggested Huffman's makeup would be thicker and applied by hand—Bree couldn't afford fancy extras like brushes and pads. And no expensive makeup either: Someone at Bree's stage would probably slip into a drugstore and grab a Max Factor Pan-Stik. "Her eyebrows didn't quite match," adds Hayes. "It's very subtle, but it registers. She had to look like she was learning. You have to root for her."

Costumer Glicker is proud of Bree's pink suit that appears early in the film, an item that had to look cheap but chosen with care. "That was a \$99 suit," he says, "which for Bree, of course, is a huge luxury."

And he'll always remember the most nerve-racking moment—the filming of a party where Bree appears alongside people who've made the transition in real life. "I remember torturing myself a little bit about the moment Felicity walks into the room as Bree with mostly trans women and, I think, one trans man," says Glicker. "I was discreetly in the corner watching their expressions and thinking, *Please, please, please, just recognize this woman.* I didn't want to see any headshaking. And they did. It was a look of recognition and acceptance." ■

Giltz is a regular contributor to several periodicals, including the New York Post.



■ Tailoring and dark colors—rather than camera tricks—turned Hoffman (left) into Capote (center).