

FREE AT LAST

The morning session ended with firm instructions to return promptly for the afternoon meeting with Dr. Biber. His offices are a collection of old rooms on the fourth floor of the bank building. When I returned, it seemed as if half of Trinidad was there. This man does a land-office private practice! The waiting room, by my count, had thirty-two chairs or seatings. Every one was filled. After a short wait, I was beckoned to be examined by Dr. B. Having met him earlier in the year, I knew what type of person I was to meet. Nevertheless, there was a distinct heart-pounding, for he held my fate in his hands. In the letter outlining surgery, he was not fooling in noting that *he* would make the final evaluation. Indeed he does. Dr. B. is a mixture of Peter Pan, a pixie elf, and a masterful combination of folksey efficiency. He has a non-stop battery of questions, statements, instructions, recommendations and probings. He had a vast roomful of patients to see and yet, I had the distinct impression that I was getting his full attention and scrutiny.

With the trial by fire completed, a cab was ordered to take me to Mt. San Rafael. It is one thing to enter a hospital reluctantly for a malady or failure of some bodily function. It is quite another to *eagerly* enter such a place for an important date with congruence! I think each transsexual rightfully takes part of the hospital home with her.

Check-in was done with great dispatch. I was given a few hours to relax, meet my companions in this venture (i.e., those who had surgery a week earlier), and get my bedside materials in place. It should be noted that, after surgery, one's tippy-toes will not touch the floor for seven days. It was, therefore, important to have all materials within bedside reach. All too soon it was time to engage in that honorable, all-American, hospital game of Enema-and-Shaving. The former has always been the bane of my life but endured this time with more equanimity because of my general feelings of serenity about being in the hospital. The shaving process was painstakingly done. One can easily imagine Dr. Biber's penalty-of-death instructions if every last pubes was not eliminated! The remainder of the evening consisted of a sedative-relaxant given in the hopes that such medication would prepare one better for the next morning's events.

The dawn of surgery produced a fascinating period of reflection. The immensity of the decision came into focus and the decision to press forward was made with ease. All I could think of was Martin Luther King's, "thank god almighty, free at last." The pre-surgical shot brought on that hazy, lazy feeling and the "free at last" theme kept recurring. It was an astounding thought to know that this day had finally come. Dr. B. stopped by with a reassuring pat and smile. Once wheeled into the operating arena, the anesthesiologist began a minor speech

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A CALL FOR ARTICLES

For subsequent issues, we would like to invite our readership to submit articles, either professional or personal, about some aspect of the paraculture, to the editors, which you would like to share with others.

The articles should be two 8½ × 11, double-spaced, typewritten pages in length. They must be submitted at least one month prior to the date of publication of the newsletter. The dates of publication are April 30, July 31, and November 30.

The editors reserve the right to edit all materials for publication, to conform with space requirements and standards of good taste.

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CHROMOSOMES ARE DESTINY

by N.S. Ledins

(A review of the Janice Raymond book, *The Transsexual Empire*, and the Thomas Szasz review of her book in the New York Times.)

Thomas Szasz, M.D. has written a vintage piece: witty, clever, iconoclastic, and, nonsensical. Both the author and the reviewer make some valid points. For example, both maintain that transsexualism is in the mind. True. But that does not make it, *ipso facto*, less real. They also maintain that transsexualism is not a disease. *Concedo*. But again, that does not make it less an affective malady to be addressed intelligently without polemics and histrionics. Szasz is a master of the latter; Raymond an amateur polemician.

Both the author and reviewer have a curious knack of general myopia. They are unable to distinguish consistently between sex and gender. As a radical feminist it is understandable for Raymond to have trouble with the concept. One does, however, expect Szasz to have a better world-view. Partially because of that error, the Szasz review trumpets to an almost comical conclusion: "transsexualism is a 'trojan horse' used by manipulating men to seduce unsuspecting women." Chromosomes *are* destiny!

Such a conclusion is a rather cruel hoax (perhaps an obscenity in itself?!) on both 20th century genetic males *and* females. Raymond and Szasz give too much diabolical credit to males and hardly an operative intellect to females (except Raymondites). Their views are almost obscene caricatures of both genetic and "constructed" males-females.

The most serious flaw in both the book and the review is the failure to address two key issues: *congruence and signification*. Both Raymond and Szasz display an unusual ignorance by passing off shallow research under the name of academic excellence. Many of Raymond's footnotes display that the "extensive" or "substantial" numbers she is talking about are N's of 2, 5, 10, 13. This is terribly inept. Both the reader and the transsexual deserve a better fate. In addition, to be enamored by a Casablanca en-

trepreneur is rather odd. They could have received much the same notation from outstanding American surgeons. Obviously, surgery is not the magical answer. Obviously, too, the issue is "in the mind." The issue of transsexualism will not be resolved by knee-jerk concern or pseudo-research.

Transsexualism, as a phenomenon, is a matter of the affective order, not a cognitive trip into the unknown. The issue is a search for congruence (*not* integration), and a searing confrontation with significant impact points. The Szasz-Raymond mis-reading of the human condition is either an idyllic quest to place males on an un-

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FREE AT LAST

but I slipped off into dreamland long before she completed her pitch!

To really wake up — after hours of trying — was a startling experience. The deed was done; the act was completed. A deep sense of relief and peace settled over me. I felt congruent at last. The pain was minimal; the discomfort great. My innards felt like all the packing in the world had been commandeered to be used inside me! As the week progressed the packing was to be my constipatory downfall! For the moment, I felt terribly grateful for the surgical success of the day.

Having slept all day, I was wide awake for the night. This was *my* day and I was not going to lose it in an artificially induced slumber. So, I spent the time reminiscing and working on my book. I watched the sunrise and cried with delight at what I saw. And, I began my seven days of confinement in bed.

The days quickly passed. Constipation set in — in spades! After many tears and acting very wretched, the dam broke and the rest of the stay was easy street! Cards, flowers, phone calls — all made the day more joyful. Learning new experiences on the eighth and ninth days were glorious and, at times, hilarious. The urination experience, for example, was the most comical — but learn how I did!

Saying goodbye to this unique place, setting, people and surgeon was a difficult task. The unlikely site of Trinidad, Colorado became, in the last analysis, the most appropriate setting for this magnificent experience. Quiet, peaceful, and serene. All the things I had sought I found. My date with surgical destiny was deeply moving and profoundly serene for me. I had come to a fabulous surgeon whose medical deftness must be praised. A fairy-tale, little, modern hospital in the mountains came alive and embraced me for nine days. In large measure, Dr. B., the hospital, and the town itself will always be a special memory.

THE TRANSEXUAL EMPIRE

Dr. Raymond demonstrates an academic researcher's knowledge of the various aspects of the transsexual problem in contemporary society. She uses a mix of investigative reporting well integrated with the dialecticism of the feminist movement's intelligentsia to present her rational bias, analysis, and findings. The resultant book is a fascinating and often thought provoking presentation of a sexist position which maintains that you are either born a biological female, or not. From this "bottom line" she rationally disposes of the concept of there being "transsexuals." To her one cannot be a transsexual any more than one could be black by dying one's skin. Her key premise is that there are men (and a handful of very sick women) who are trapped in patriarchal sexist stereotypes which are being exploited by a Medical-Psychiatric empire that will sacrifice individual sexual identity to reinforce these stereotypes. In short, no amount of human understanding and compassion will turn the Jewish "gorilla" into a real racially pure Aryan German.

Her "cure" for the transsexual is: (1) re-educate society to eliminate sexist positions (excluding hers), (2) reduce Medical-Psychiatric empire's powers to compel the individual seeking liberation from a gender identity crisis to exchange one stereotyped sex-role for the other by limiting and drastically controlling sex-change facilities, (3) confront the transsexual's sexual/political male stereotyping through peer and/or individual consciousness-raising counseling (Don Quixote must face the mirrored Enchanter to see reality & sanity), and (4) limit the media's fixation on the transsexual (burn a few books, etc.) by focusing upon those who have resolved their problems without surgery (she does not offer bi-gender, transgender, or crossdressing as the alternative unless perhaps if she is the role-model).

In short, Dr. Raymond's rather callous lack of concern for the deeply emotional dilemma of the transsexual's search for sexual/gender identity and her scorn for the compassion shown towards the transsexual by a small element of the medical-psychiatric community bodes ill for the mercies of her future sexist society towards other

TRANSSEXUAL EMPIRE

minorities. My only hope is that she may read this review and that it will serve to raise her consciousness to the fact that the substitution of one sexist position by another does not improve the human condition, nor does the fixation upon sex based superiority lead to a realization of human potentials. As a feminist, I thought that this was the basis of our whole movement.

CHROMOSOMES ARE DESTINY

reachable pedestal only to pepper them with "ethical" brickbats, or a wish that humans become angels so as to have "proper" seductions!

There is hardly a professional person alive in the field worth his or her salt who would now claim that "passing" is the key ingredient to conversion surgery. What *is* probed is the claim of the person to cope and live economically, socially and relationally with dignity. It is very true that transsexualism is not a disease but *not* for the reason adduced by Raymond. She maintains that since we have discovered the tools of conversion surgery, it is erringly called or labeled a disease. I submit that transsexualism is considered disease-laden precisely because we do NOT know enough about it. It is frighteningly consoling to be able to say — as with alcoholism — "it is a disease." (Something like the "devil-made-me-do-it" syndrome!) All we have to do is find the mysterious "transsexual tsetse fly" and all will be well! We thus pin the label of disease because we do not know enough to pierce the layers of confusion about the matter.

We would concur that "transsexers" are "curing" nothing. Any capable surgeon or professional dealing with such people will only claim to assist in the search for congruence where incongruence has reached terrifying destructive proportions. It may be that the human condition deserves better, but reality may also say that integrity is at stake in taking smaller, less grandiose steps than those envisioned, *in vacuo*, by Raymond and Szasz.

There is no doubt that surgery produces a male-to-constructed-female." Szasz seems to pant heavily at such a startling and novel Raymondism. In face, what else is new? Most sane trans-

sexuals — perhaps in the same proportion as radical feminists — will admit to the reconstruction note. Having admitted that, the issue is still left to be deciphered. We all march to different drummers. We may all stand by and cajole, berate, praise, or damn those who are not living up to our slit-view of reality, sexuality, genderality. Raymond's petulant thesis about male-to-constructed-female is only the reverse side of the coin. I might just as well suggest that Raymond is simply a female-unconstructed-to-male. It makes about as much sense — which is no(n)sense.

"Society's unremitting anti-feminism" is Szasz's final howitzer volley — an echo from Raymond's book. One is not sure whether to chuckle, cry or both. Come now! The world needs less iconoclastic tripe and more bridge-building. Perhaps it is best to admit — sadly or otherwise — that a few of us get mixed up in life. There is no insidious, sinister, patriarchal plot. Imprinting got all "balled up" (to put it quaintly!). As the years go on we search for congruence. For many of us, self destruction was a fervent hope. Perhaps we should have achieved *that* goal to avoid the ultimate obscenity in Raymond's mind of perpetrating nazi-like plots on unsuspecting women by seducing male-manipulators! Again, chromosomes are destiny.

Raymond speaks of our malady as a sickness. Yes. But then, there are many sicknesses around us and among us. Arrogance is a severe sickness; intolerant bellowing and shouting and polemical obscenities are an obscenely sick state — especially when done under the disguise of scholarship. Refusing to have charity for another would seem to be a grave sickness indeed. The human list of foibles is long. Transsexualism is but one foible, hardly an empire being built of crafty manipulators.

Szasz and Raymond seem to have quixotically tilted with a false windmill. The barber's dish of transsexualism has turned for them into the golden helmet of Mambrino — with equally devastating results. At the conclusion of the Szasz interview and Raymond polemic, one wonders who, after all, are the obscene ones.

NOTE: The Transsexual Empire by J. Raymond is available through the Outreach Book Service.