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Katherine's Diary: The Story of a Transsexual

by Katherine Cummings. Published by William Heinemann, Port Melbourne, Australia, 1992. Reviewed by Dallas Denny.

Beyond Belief: The Discovery of My Existence

by Christina M. Hollis. Published by Genesis Publications, Galena, IL. Reviewed by Dallas Denny.

For many years, my only contact with other transsexual people was via their autobiographies. The first I found was *The Man-Maid Doll* by Patricia Morgan. I noticed it on a clearance table in an outlet mall, and managed to lag behind my girlfriend long enough to pay for it and stuff it into a paper bag. Later, I read it with fascination and disgust (fascination with Morgan's change, and disgust with her lifestyle).

Morgan's book was less the story of her transsexualism than the story of a long and lucrative career as a prostitute. Her lifestyle was characterized by trouble with the law, abusive relationships with men, and excesses of alcohol and other drugs. Somehow, during all the tumult, she had sex reassignment surgery.

Not that I knew much at the time, but Morgan didn't fit my private picture of transsexualism. She seemed more like an aggressive gay male who liked the attention paid to her by men because of her breasts and vagina. Still, I figured that if she had had SRS she must be transsexual. And she certainly fit all the stereotypes promulgated by the medical literature. I couldn't quite myself to throw the book away, but I put it in the bookshelf and forgot about it until it came time to write this essay.

Recently, I reviewed for this journal *Feelings: A Transsexual's Explanation of a Baffling Condition* by Stephanie Castle. Now I have been asked to review two new transsexual autobiographies, *Katherine's Diary: The Story of a Transsexual* by Katherine Cummings, and *Beyond Belief: The Discovery of My Existence* by Dr. Christina Hollis.

Dr. Hollis' book consists of journal entries, beginning with the onset of crossdressing late in her life, and culminating in the immediate postoperative period. For many of the entries, she annotates the text with notes describing her feelings and the circumstances at the time she wrote. The entries span several years of rapidly escalating crossdressing and her quest for sex reassignment.

Cummings' book is a retrospective look at her life told from a (just) postoperative perspective. She describes her career as a librarian and her crossdressing during several decades of travel through Australia and America. She was present at the seminal crossdressing event of the 60s, a weekend attended by and written by such people as Virginia Prince, Dr. Wardell Pomeroy, and Darrell Raynor. Cummings' narrative ends just after her surgery with a tone of obvious regret and despair, backwards-looking at a ruined marriage rather than forward-looking to life as a woman.

Let me say now that having endured more than twenty transsexual autobiographies my major problem with them is that without exception they focus on the pain of being transsexual. It is almost as if the authors wish to justify what they have done by explaining how miserable they were before, and how happy they are now. No one, with the possible exception of Holly Woodlawn, who once answered, when asked if she felt like a woman trapped in a woman's body, "No, darling, I feel like a man trapped in high heels," has focused on the joys of being transgendered—and Woodlawn could give Morgan a run for her money in the depravity department.

Cummings' and Hollis' books do not break from the tradition. They are riddled with angst. But where they differ from earlier autobiographies is that both seem to have significant regrets about what the effect their transition has had upon their lives and their relationships with others. While on the one hand they proclaim how they are now liberated and happy, it doesn't take much reading between the lines (I had meant to type reading between the *lines* here, but perhaps the typo is instructive) to see that they rushed into surgery without resolving the issues of separation from their families. Cummings goes so far as to write that she would gladly go back to living as a man in order to be with her former wife and family—but she isn't sorry she had surgery, oh, no.

Both Cummings and Hollis fit the criteria for what has been considered secondary transsexualism. Their desire to pursue sex reassignment came late in life—Cummings' gradually, after a long career of crossdressing, and Hollis' suddenly, with no prior history of crossdressing. Once their decision was made, they moved swiftly, with the drive and energy for which males are famous, and surgery was a *fait accompli* after only a couple of years.

For some time, the good folks from the Boulton and Park Society have been talking and writing about *Gender Euphoria*, a phenomenon in which an individual becomes increasingly infatuated with their new presentation and rushes headlong into decisions which will have lifelong consequences. They warn that eventually such persons may find that they have destroyed their lives in pursuit of a hoped-for happiness which never quite

materializes. Both Cummings and Hollis, writing from a perspective only months after surgery, seem to be awakening to this remorse.

Autobiographies should have some significance, or they are merely an exercise in self-aggrandizement—or, as I have just noted, in the case of transsexual people, as an exercise in self-justification. Both Cummings and Hollis seem to be struggling with their ambivalences, and have put it into book form, but one must ask—what is the importance of their books to other people?

Cummings' book contains some fascinating history, for she was active in the early days of organized crossdressing in the United States, and writes of the same people and gatherings as does Darrell Raynor in *A Year Among The Girls* and Virginia Prince in the 100th issue of *Transvestia*. But aside from that, the lesson of her book, and of Hollis' is probably not what either of them intended, for the reader is left not with a sense that they made the correct decisions, but that they rushed headlong into something the consequences of which they were just beginning to understand at press time.

Sex reassignment is a miracle of the late 20th century, and it is the right decision for many of us. But it is an unwise decision in many cases, to which Cummings and Hollis, and perhaps Patricia Morgan, might be able to attest.

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Gay Issues in the Workplace

by Brian McNaught. Published by St. Martins Press, New York, 1993.
Reviewed by A. Kane.

The issues surrounding the hiring and continued employment of people with aconventional sex and/or gender-diverse lifestyles are complex and fraught with emotion, prejudice, and homophobia. What McNaught does is to clarify what the issues are and offers a field-tested approach to coping with these issues in the workplace.

One of the chapters in the book is entitled "Homophobia and Heterosexism." Here for the first time one can read in plain language what homo-