



Gender Unmasked

by Holly Boswell

We learn our gender just as if we were rehearsing to be a character in a play, only it takes a lot longer, and by the time we're done, we've forgotten who we really are. It takes a kind of transgender detachment to elude the inevitable pronouncement of the casting director, who tells us what role we must play according to our physical type. This is what is called "sex-role stereotyping".

Most people accept their roles without question. Some are actually well suited to play them, but many others are not, and find ways to bend the rules of gender so that they may play their role more authentically. For transgendered people, the rules must be turned upside-down, or even disregarded altogether. Otherwise, our dramas in gender roles become both comic and tragic.

Have you ever noticed that really great acting is enhanced by one's ability to lie? Unless we possess the natural talent to portray ourselves within the acceptable range of stereotypes, we are left to improvise our part as best we can. Of course, profoundly artful acting is possible when we totally surrender to a given role and make it our own. With enough effort, dedication and sacrifice, we might manage to inject our personal reality despite the discrepancies of form. But at what cost? Truth is, gender is a lie.

As a predominantly feminine spirit in a male body, I learned to act like a boy to satisfy the expectations of others. Lying became second nature, though fortunately, I could never really fool myself. I played my role dutifully for over thirty years, with one notable detour. Yes it's true, I was a thespian before I became a lesbian, as anyone in my community could see.

Theatre was a blessing for me for many reasons. I got to shape-shift through a myriad of characters, building confidence along the way, and letting people who thought they knew me in only one form see how fluid I could be. I also hoped that they, too, would

begin to question their own role assumptions. I had a lot at stake, living in a relatively small town where little goes unnoticed. My friends mean a lot to me, and all the relationships extending from my entire family were at risk.

Happily, my gender-shift went rather smoothly. I believe my years in theatre were powerful stepping stones for all of us to make those adjustments with grace, humor, and compassion. I am very grateful for that compassion, as I am now able to live my life quite openly and play my part in a positive light.

My gender path is every bit aligned with my spiritual path. And as "spirit in human form", I am committed to encouraging *everyone* to remember who they really are. We shouldn't let the arbitrary system of gender limit us from being just as rich and full as we were meant to be when we arrived in this particular life form. This opportunity is too precious to waste.

In theatre, masks have always been a central device. But what is a mask? How does it conceal or reveal one's character? As you ponder your own uniquely gendered *persona*, it may be useful to examine the root of that word. It is from the Greek: "per-sonare", which means "sound going through". It describes sound (spirit) flowing through a mask (the role we play). This is derived from ancient Greek concepts of theatre. It is also significant to note that all religious practice grew out of ancient traditions of ritual theatre.

So, are you content to be a mask, or are you willing to divest yourself of pre-ordained roles and limiting expectations such as gender? Are you willing to uncover who you really are, and honor yourself as the beautiful spirit that entered this world, wanting to manifest in truth and love? And beyond the LGBT considerations, wouldn't it be wonderful if everyone asked themselves these questions? While masks have their own uses and magic, shouldn't we also learn how to live without them?

Let's not be fooled by the masks of gender. Let's get naked. Be fluid. Rediscover ourselves, and playfully explore the greater range of human possibilities. Spirit will thank us.

Of Daphne and the laurel bough
And that god-feasting couple old
That grew elm-oak amid the wold.
'Twas not until the gods had been
Kindly entreated, and been brought within
Unto the hearth of their heart's home
That they might do this wonder thing;
Nathless I have been a tree amid the wood
And many a new thing understood
That was rank folly to my head before.

In the Body's Virgin Wilds

by Holly Boswell

In the body's virgin wilds,
my heart, a tree, deep-rooted
in the jungle of dark words, weighting
my dreams, waking earthen ears
in the vines, lush-leav'd, entwining,
my arms, open to desire
in the flesh, night breeze, breathing
my flower, to fall for you...

alight in liquid love alive,
and whirl awash in water's wiles,
rinsing rhythms 'round the river's
naked grace, juices race
to meet, to melt, and moistly mingle
taste of tongues that tangle, tingle,
spiral power pours and pools and
follows feelings flowing free...

lets my love lift my life higher,
sails the song that longs for you,
into lofty space, embraces
vast new skies, new minds of blue,
finds us here, at last, together,
sun to moon to eye to eye,
at the source that lasts forever,
shining through our smile's delight.

I Don't Like this Mild Place

by Dallas Denny

I don't like this mild place
Where the sun is friendly and does not burn
And the waves roll softly onto the shore
Where the rain falls gently, kissing my skin
And the wind is a mere puff on my face
I do not like the cool summers and the warm winters
The nice people and the dogs on leashes
I prefer a darker place
Where the winds rage and the waves crash onto the rocks
Where tempers flare in the boiling midday sun

And youths loiter around my car
Causing me to nervously clutch my purse
Where the ambulances scream through the night
And windowpanes crack from the cold
I would rather be in the swamp, covered with leaches
Than on this lush and manicured lawn
I prefer the desert and sunblistered face
To this brook burbling over moss-covered stones

I could spend my life here in this clime
Where there are no summers and no winters
No spring and no fall
Just one nice damn day after another
But the time would run together
My life would seem short
Without the bookmarks of intemperate weather
Like the day it reached one ten
Or the day the tornado cut a swath through my
neighborhood
I could stay here forever
But without bookmarks I tend to lose my place

Cold Winds

by Kristen Pifer

A cold wind of fear blows up the ass of ego
and I become a shadow of myself.

Its predictable spontaneous anger rumbles
in my being.

All my quaint little prayers have fallen
from the air and lay round about my feet
like last week's refuse.

Self-will, who usually allows me
to hang her on this cross to entertain
pride with a show of mock crucifixion,
jumps down to take control.

Doubt swears it's a comedy.
Reason agrees wholeheartedly, saying,

"So you think you can transcend what you are?
Even your very nature?"

Confused, I stretch out to my full stature.
I push my chest out like some pseudo-
peacock, all grand and shit.

When noone's looking, I lick my wounds
and consider the alternatives.

Who is it that I'm trying to impress?
I haven't a clue.