

Off the Shelf #8: Trans Actions: Writing the T in LGBT

glbtrt.ala.org/reviews/off-the-shelf-8-trans-actions-writing-the-t-in-lgbt/

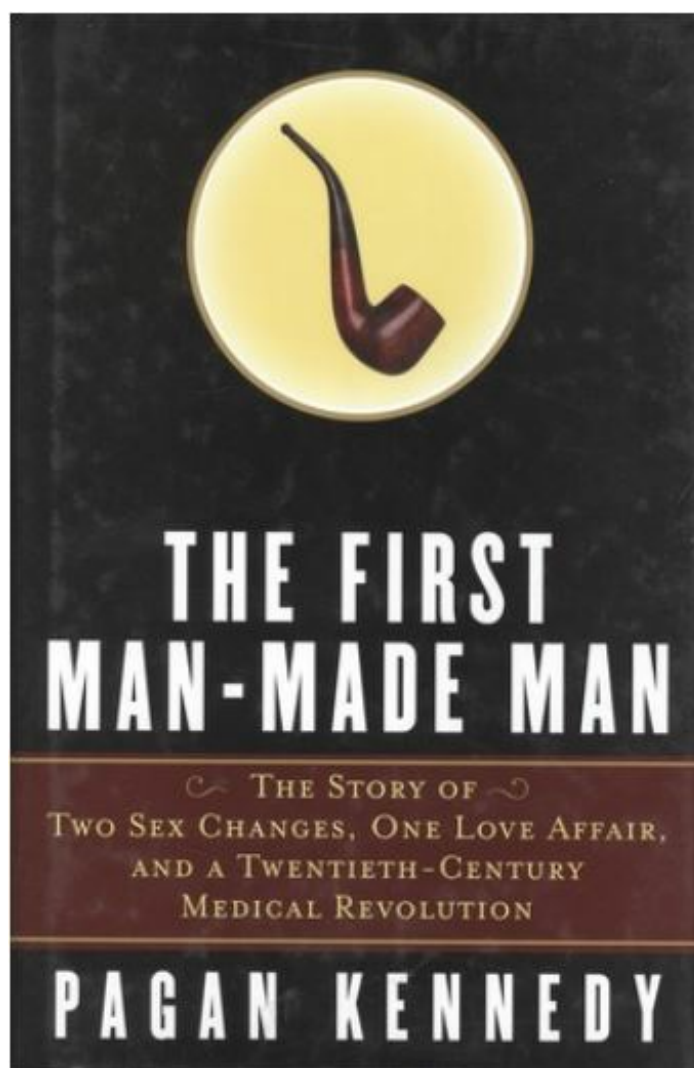
Off the Shelf #8 Trans Actions: Writing the T in LGBT

by Rob Ridinger

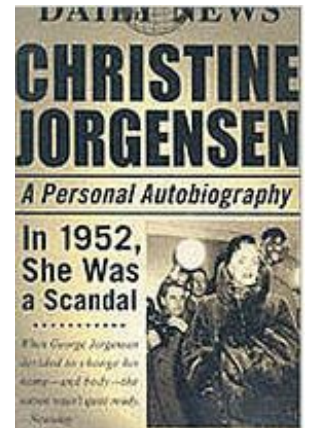
The voices of the community of people who have felt their identity to be one gender and the body into which they were born another- and who have taken action to attain new balances in their lives- are being increasingly heard and given equality in contemporary society. Given the range of types of writing on this subject over recent decades, the genre of books written by individuals chronicling their life journeys and changes or historical cases of transition has emerged as a growing and challenging field for collection development. While specific individuals who have transitioned are known in popular culture (the American Christine Jorgenson being perhaps the most familiar example) a sampling of the literature produced on and by them before and since Stonewall reveals a far more complicated picture.

Although published in 2007, Pagan Kennedy's *The First Man-made Man: The Story of Two Sex Changes, One Love Affair, and A Twentieth-century Medical Revolution* can be taken as a starting point for trans history during the 1920s. It tells the story of Michael Dillon (born Laura), his childhood and education at Oxford, his recognition that his gender identity was male, the actions he took to reshape himself on that model, and his eventual self-chosen exile and death in a Buddhist ashram in India in 1962. At the age of thirty-one, his autobiography *Self: A Study in Ethics and Endocrinology* was published in London, a noteworthy event given that the year was 1946. Among the notable features of this life was his romance with Roberta Cowell, one of the early male-to-female trans people, whose autobiography appeared in print in London in 1954 as *Roberta Cowell's Story*, two years after the better-publicized case of Christine Jorgensen hit the American media. Cowell had made a name for himself on the British motor racing circuit prior to transitioning, and remained involved with the sport. The fact that many of the trans biographies from 1950s and 1960s were published outside the United States partly explains the impression among American readers that this genre in this period was very limited.

By the early 1960s, trans autobiography had expanded beyond Dillon and Cowell's books to include the stories of performers in cabaret and theater. This is clear from two books that appeared in 1962 and 1963 dealing with the male to female transition of the prominent French entertainer Jacqueline Dufresnoy, whose stage name was Coccinelle, Mario Costa's *Reverse Sex* (1962) and Carlson Wade's *She-Male: The Amazing True-Life Story of Coccinelle* (1963). Dufresnoy's was the first widely publicized case of sex reassignment surgery in Europe and as such can be considered to have had an impact similar to Christine Jorgensen in the United States. Her counterpart in the United States was circus performer and



costume designer Hedy Jo Star, who was the first successful case of sex reassignment to be carried out in America, being done at the Methodist Hospital in Memphis, Tennessee in June 1962 and related in her autobiography, *I Changed My Sex*, published in Chicago in 1963. 1964 saw the appearance in Britain of Eric Gilbert Oakley's *Man into Woman: The Amazing Account of a Male's Change into Female, With Full Psychological and Medical Case History and Personal Analysis Questionnaire*. The volume (reprinted in 1970 and 1971) claimed to be an account of the life of Juliet Griffiths and her transition in 1950, but has come to be regarded as dubious. A second book by Hedy Jo Star, *My Unique Change*, was issued by the same Chicago publisher of her autobiography in 1965, although the relationship of the two titles is unclear. Despite the level of US media coverage of her surgical trip to Denmark in 1952, it was not until 1967 that Christine Jorgensen joined the ranks of trans people recounting their lives with *Christine Jorgensen: A Personal Autobiography*, reprinted in 1968 and 2000.



The 1970s in trans biography opened with *Man Into Woman: A Transsexual Autobiography* written by the English-born writer Dawn Langley Simmons (who also wrote a later book, *All For Love*, published in 1975) and was resident in Charleston, South Carolina during the civil rights struggle. Her life is also discussed as part of Southern LGBT history in John Howard's *Carryin' On in the Gay and Lesbian South*. Other less-known volumes published in the early 1970s are Barbara Buick's *L'Étiquette*, issued in Paris in 1971, and Canadian Felicity Cochrane's *Behold, I Am a Woman* in 1972. The major title of this decade (as evidenced by its being reprinted no fewer than five times up into the early twenty-first century in German, Dutch, Spanish, French, Swedish and Japanese editions) was Welsh historian and travel writer Jan (born James) Morris' *Conundrum*, which appeared in 1974. Its significance lies in its treatment of transitioning in a manner that was not intended to titillate the reader but take them thoughtfully into the mind and heart of someone making this journey. Paris, London and New York began to lose their monopoly as cities where trans autobiography could be published, being joined in 1976 by Antwerp, with Son Snelders' *Dagboek van een transseksueel*, and Firenze, where Io, *la Romanina: perchè sono diventato donna* by Romina Cecconi appeared. Carlson Wade's book on Coccinelle was reprinted after fourteen years in 1977, as were *Emergence: A Transsexual Autobiography* by Mario Martino (whose subtitle billed it as "the first complete female to male story") and *Canary: The Story of A Transsexual* by American entertainer Canary Conn.

The 1980s continued to see trans biography produced by both mainstream and paperback presses. One of the more familiar titles from this decade is *Second Serve: the Renée Richards Story* (1983), profiling the male-to-female transition of the American tennis player and ophthalmologist Richard Raskind. It would be followed in 2007 by a second autobiography, *No Way Renée: the Second Half of My Notorious Life*. Jan Morris, of *Conundrum* fame, also brought out a further biography of her work as a travel writer in 1989's *Pleasures of a Tangled Life*.

The 1990s can be seen as the decade when the pace of publication of trans biography and autobiography moved from an occasional title to a subject more regularly covered.

Both female-to-male and male-to-female changes are covered, although the former is more commonly seen in these

JAN MORRIS

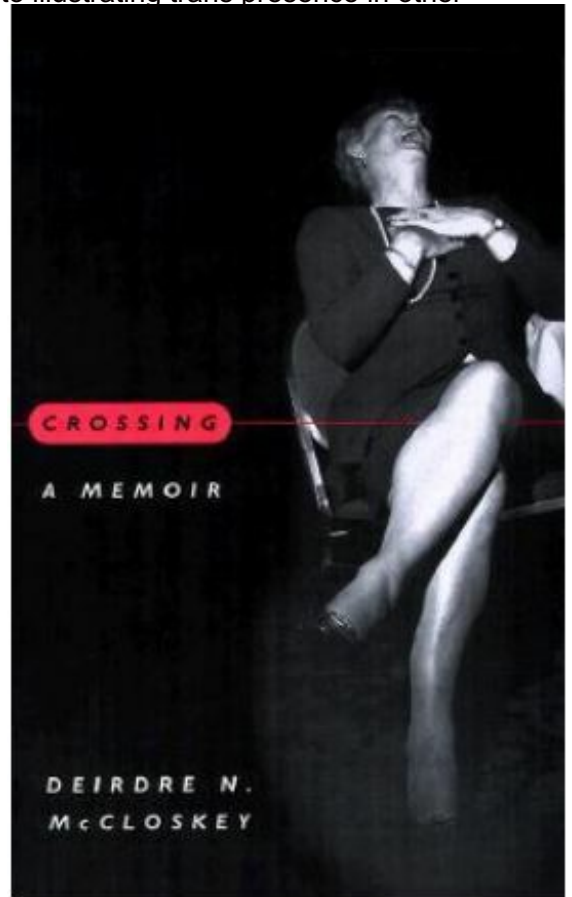
I was three or perhaps four years old
when I realized that I had been born
into the wrong body, and should really
be a girl. I remember the moment well,
and it is the earliest memory of my life.

CONUNDRUM

WITH A NEW INTRODUCTION BY THE AUTHOR

years. The people involved also shift away from the entertainment field to illustrating trans presence in other professions. Examples of this are economist Donald (now Deidre) McCloskey's 1999 work *Crossing: A Memoir* and the frank and detailed account of male-to-female transition in journal form from Claudine Griggs, *Passage through Trinidad*, from 1996.

The opening years of the twenty-first century were marked by an expansion of trans writing beyond biography into consideration of the meaning of trans identity with all its philosophical and social implications. One of the influential voices in this discussion was Colorado journalist Matt Kailey, writer for and editor of Out Front Colorado who drew on his work to create *Tranifesto: Selected Columns and Other Ramblings from A Transgendered Mind* in 2002, followed in 2005 by *Just Add Hormones: An Insider's Guide to the Transsexual Experience* and in 2012 by *Teeny Weenies and Other Short Subjects*. He later reused the first book's title as the name of the website for trans discussion he ran prior to his death of heart failure in 2014. The telling of trans lives also expanded in the new century to reflect the increasingly early claiming of alternative identities to the mainstream in the coming out process. Excellent examples of this are *Some Assembly Required: the Not-so-secret Life of A Transgender Teen* by seventeen-year-old Arin Andrews, and Katie Rain Hill's *Rethinking normal: a Memoir in Transition*, both published in 2014. Trans lives in celebrity families and in the military also came to the fore, as told in Chaz (formerly Chastity) Bono's 2011 book *Transition: The Story of How I Became a Man*, and in the 2015 book, *Brother in Arms: A Transgender US Navy Sailor's Memoir* by Landon Wilson. Trans voices moved from being a single thread in LGBT anthologies to creating collections of their own such as *Trans/portraits: Voices from Transgender Communities* edited by Jackson Wright Shultz and issued by Dartmouth College Press.



The genre of trans life stories clearly presents challenges for collection development in libraries of all types and sizes, as the diversity revealed by this sample indicates. A useful tool for librarians seeking to explore trans writing more deeply can be found on the TG Forum website, "[A Comprehensive List of Trans Autobiographies](#)". The only drawback to this list is that it has not been updated since 2012, a gap that can be addressed through the use of such primary online catalogs as WORLDCAT and the Library of Congress. The question for librarians is not whether we will represent the trans community in our collections, but how to do so, taking advantage of the rich body of works waiting to be discovered.

References

Andrews, Arin. *Some Assembly Required: The Not-so-secret Life of A Transgender Teen*. New York: Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2014.

Bono, Chaz and Billie Fitzpatrick. *Transition: The Story of How I Became A Man*. New York : Dutton, 2011.

Buick, Barbara. *L'Étiquette*. Paris : la Jeune Parque, 1971.

Carryin' On in the Lesbian and Gay South. Edited by John Howard. New York: New York University Press, 1997.

Cecconi, Romina. *Io, la Romanina : perchè sono diventato donna*. Firenze : Vallecchi, 1976.

Cochrane, Felicity. *Behold, I Am A Woman*. New York : Pyramid Books, 1972.

Conn, Canary. *Canary: The Story of a Transsexual*. New York: Bantam Books, 1977.

Costa, Mario A. *Reverse Sex*. London : Challenge Publications, 1962.

Cowell, Roberta Elizabeth. *Roberta Cowell's Story*. London : W. Heinemann, 1954.

Denny, Dallas. "[A Comprehensive List of Trans Autobiographies](#)." Accessed 21 October 2015.

Dillon, Michael. *Self: A Study in Ethics and Endocrinology*. London, 1946.

Griggs, Claudine. *Passage Through Trinidad: Journal of a Surgical Sex Change*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1996.

Hill, Katie Rain. *Rethinking Normal: A Memoir In Transition*. New York : Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2014.

Jorgensen, Christine. *Christine Jorgensen: A Personal Autobiography*. New York : Bantam Books, 1967.

Kailey, Matt. *Just Add Hormones: An Insider's Guide to the Transsexual Experience*. Boston : Beacon Press, 2005.

Kailey, Matt. *Teeny Weenies and Other Short Subjects*. Denver, Colorado : Outskirts Press, 2012.

Kailey, Matt. *Tranifesto: Selected Columns and Other Ramblings From a Transgendered Mind*. Philadelphia: Xlibris, 2002.

Kennedy, Pagan. *The First Man-made Man: The Story of Two Sex Changes, One Love Affair, and a Twentieth-Century Medical Revolution*. New York, NY : Bloomsbury, 2007.

McCloskey, Deirdre N. *Crossing : A Memoir*. Chicago, Illinois : University of Chicago Press, 1999.

Martino, Mario. *Emergence: A Transsexual Autobiography*. New York : Crown Publishers, 1977.

Morris, Jan. *Conundrum*. New York : Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1974.

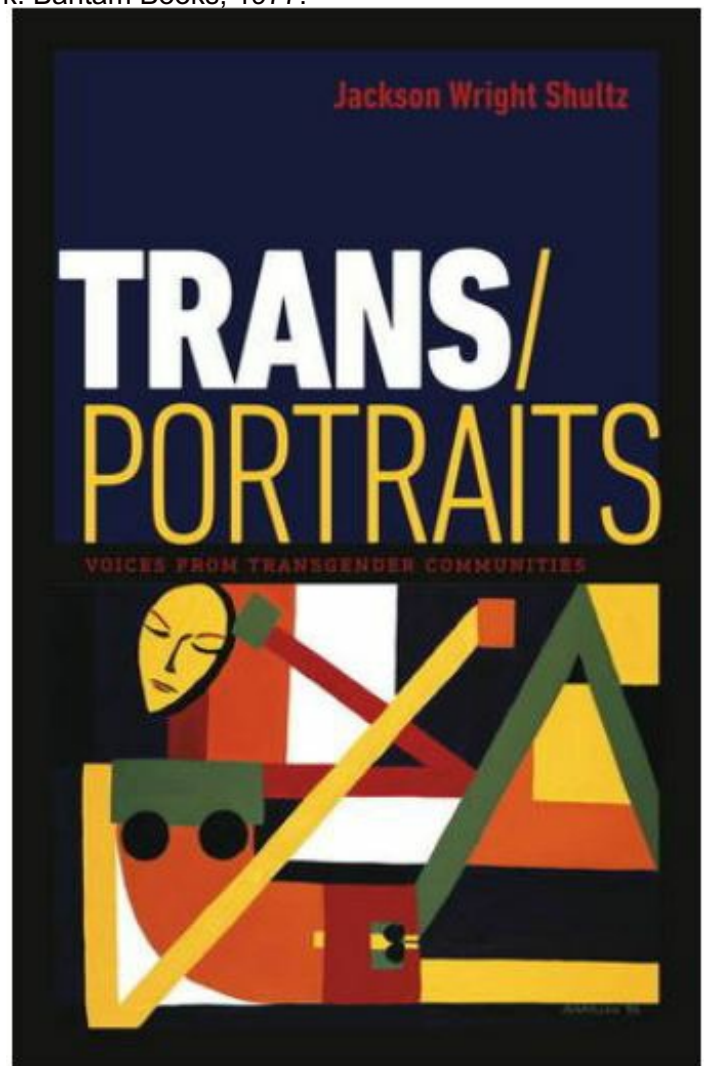
Morris, Jan. *Pleasures of A Tangled Life*. London : Hutchinson, 1990.

Oakley, Eric Gilbert. *Man into Woman: The Amazing Account of a Male's Change into Female, with Full Psychological and Medical Case History and Personal Analysis Questionnaire*. London : Walton Press, 1964.

Richards, Renee with John Michael Ames. *No Way Renée: The Second Half of My Notorious Life*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2007.

Richards, Renée and John Michael Ames. *Second Serve: The Renée Richards Story*. New York: Stein and Day, 1983.

Shultz, Jackson Wright. *Trans/Portraits : Voices From Transgender Communities*. Hanover, N.H.: Dartmouth



College Press, 2015.

Simmons, Dawn Langley. *Man Into Woman: A Transsexual Autobiography*. London: Icon Books, 1970.

Snelders, Son. *Dagboek van een transseksueel*. Antwerpen : De Nederlandsche Boekhandel, 1977.

Star, Hedy Jo. *I Changed My Sex*. Chicago : Novel Books, 1963.

Star, Hedy Jo. *My Unique Change*. Chicago : Novel Books, 1965.

Wade, Carlson. *She-male : The Amazing True-life Story of Coccinelle*. New York : Epic, 1963.

Wilson, Landon A. *Brother In Arms: A Transgender US Navy Sailor's Memoir*. New York: Skyhorse Publishing Company, 2015.

Copyright R. Ridinger 2015.