

Sex reassignment surgery is something of a commonplace today. Indeed, it might be argued that the spectre of persons born either male or female turning (or being turned) into the opposite sex has become almost routine to the point where countries such as Thailand and Brazil have become major Meccas to people from all walks of life and from around the globe for this sort of medical intervention. These developments have often occurred in tandem with activities the nature of which some, rightly or wrongly, may describe as somewhat 'on the seedier side.' These include pornography and prostitution centred around so-called 'ladyboys' and 'trannies.' Again, perhaps not coincidentally, Thailand and Brazil have emerged as the major, though not the sole, locations where such practices have proliferated. Much attention, both within and without academia, has been devoted to the topic of 'transgenderism,' resulting in a variety of discourses both factual and fictional in nature, ranging from medical and psychological treatises to works of literature, movies and televised series. A recent example of the last category which is currently attracting much attention is called *I am Jazz*, a series devoted to the trials and tribulations of a teenager of that name who, though born a male, currently self-identifies as a transgender individual and is keen to undergo sex reassignment surgery, an operation which, even as I write, has not been without serious and, to this point at least, unresolved, complications.

Some individuals, of course, have for a variety of reasons chosen not to go this far and have resisted the lure of making fundamental and irreversible anatomical changes (e.g. castration). Instead, they have opted to allow their bodies to remain basically 'as is' and have contented themselves with behaving, dressing, etc. in the manner of the opposite sex, often to the point where it is difficult, if not impossible, to know that a given individual who may appear to be one sex is in fact, biologically speaking, the opposite. The early '90s movie *The Crying Game* immediately springs to mind in this respect, not least the scene where the ostensibly female love-interest of the chief protagonist undresses and, in so doing, reveals the presence of a fairly formidable penis where a vagina ought normally to be, much to the shock of her would-be lover.

My interest in all this is largely epistemological (though there are ethical ramifications, these are beyond the scope of this short presentation). To be precise, I am keen to understand the intellectual reaction which androgynous figures provoke in the male viewer especially and, in particular, his attempt to come to terms with and, above all, make sense of this specific instantiation of the phenomenon of hybridity. Drawing on Graeme Nicholson's equation of seeing with a form of reading, my argument is that, in the course of his psychical maturation, the male has almost always been socialised in such a way that his vision is inevitably ensconced in a theoretical problematic (what Luce Irigaray, pace Lacan, terms an 'imaginary') which, precisely because organised around the primacy of the phallus, is predicated upon the existence of binary opposites. Such a predisposition to see the world entirely in terms of dichotomies consequently informs the male's apprehension and articulation of the Real, is responsible for his angst in the face of blurred boundaries and, last but not least, informs the Procrustean measures taken that are designed to reinstall binary opposites precisely where these latter are most menaced by what, in Derridean terms, may be called the 'play of difference.'