

APHRODITE – TRANSSEXUAL GODDESS OF PASSION

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Transsexualism is now forty years old. Or at least the modern phenomenon called transsexualism is forty, for we can define the starting point of this phenomenon as the beginning of December, 1952, when Christine Jorgensen returned from Denmark to face reporters questioning her about her "sex change." These forty years have been marked by lurid curiosity on the part of the public, and by transsexual people themselves trying to find their place in society, either through concealment of their past, or through isolated pleas for understanding. However, as more and more women and men pass through this experience, a certain critical mass is reached, producing self-awareness among the people involved, almost as a spontaneous generation. Transsexualism has begun to find its own archetypal depths, a movement away from seeking other people's approval and towards an exploration of what this intense

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journey can mean to those undertaking it.

We should explain here the use of the terms "transsexual man" and "transsexual woman." Commonly, and in much of the medical literature, a person, say, who seeks bodily changes from a male to a female form is described as a "male transsexual." Such a designation does not match the person's sense of who she herself is. She does not reshape her body because she conceives of herself as a man who would like to be a woman. Other people may assume this, and impose their "logical" vision of who she is. *But transsexualism is about passion, not logic.* In her passion, she considers herself *already* a woman, with the hormonal and surgical changes more of a confirmation than a transformation. The same holds for transsexual men ("female to male"), who consider themselves men despite an outwardly female anatomy.

This article examines a particular archetypal image, the Goddess Aphrodite, and her links to transsexual women. In particular, it looks at the myth of her origin, and her importance as a Goddess of passion and of the body. It also explores the possibility that this strange story of the Goddess's creation derives from actual practices in Greece and elsewhere.

Critical to transsexual self-awareness has been a search for archetypal resonances in myth and spiritual customs in other cultures and the ancient world. Because transsexual experience involves surgical techniques developed in the last few decades, many people consider it a wholly modern phenomenon. This may give the experience a shallowness that does not actually match the person's own sense of something with great depth and mystery. In fact, "transsexuality" is a modern approach to a condition as old and widespread as humanity itself.

"When the images change, the body changes," commented James Hillman at the 1993 Myth and Theatre Festival (in Avignon, France) in honor of Aphrodite. The transsexual person changes the body to fulfill an internal image of the self. As long as the image remains stunted, bound in by monotheist culture which denies its possibility, and by a lack of archetypal depth, so will the fulfillment of the body be limited. Transsexuality is a recreation of the soul as well as the body. Without a knowledge of the possibilities of soul, transsexual women and men too often

allow their bodies and their yearnings to become the property of others—the doctors and therapists, the tv talk shows and formula autobiographies, the tabloid shock articles, the feminists and pornographers. For the creation of soul, it is not necessary that every transsexual woman explore links to Aphrodite, or the history of “sex-change” surgery in ancient Rome. What is necessary is that such images become known to the world. If the culture as a whole contains the images they will act on the body and the soul, even if a particular person does not know about them.

Since the modern emergence of transsexuals, their experience has been to a large extent controlled by surgeons and psychiatrists. Because medical intervention is possible to change the outer form of the body, people seek treatment. And because our society portrays psychiatrists as the repositories of soul wisdom, people in distress turn to them for help. Thus, many transsexual people have looked to doctors to explain to them who they are.

Our culture believes in causes. That is, it believes in a single vision of normality, with a cause for any deviation, and, with luck, a cure. When the Church ruled our consciousness, God provided the vision, and priests the cure for defects. Now we have “nature” (thought of as a force rather than a Goddess), with doctors in charge of the cures. Transsexual people, like everyone else, tend to believe in this ideology. They may worry for years what caused their problem, and may spend more years hoping some psychiatrist can fix it.

The way out begins with the realization that no one can cure them from being themselves. But this is a commonplace. To make it real, they may need to discover and embrace the Goddess within the all powerful desire of transsexuality. Significantly, more and more transsexual people have begun to describe their experience as “religious.” Davina Gabriel, a transsexual rights activist and publisher, has written that no one can really grasp transsexuality without bringing in some ideas of “transcendence.”

At the Aphrodite Conference I did a Tarot reading for the event, using the *Shining Woman Tarot*, of my own design. The first card drawn, via random shuffle, was the Lovers. The first picture shows a human and an angel in a fierce kiss. The image

suggests a model for the work of archetypal discovery—the deep embrace of the divine and the human, the myth and the soul.

In such work, Aphrodite inspires all of us, non-transsexual as well as transsexual, not just because of her story, but also by her own willingness to “get caught,” as Nor Hall says. She will fall to her own passion as willingly as she enflames others. Sappho writes, “As a whirlwind swoops on an oak, love shakes my heart.” Aphrodite allows her own heart to shake more wildly than any of her lovers. She could not inspire love without a willingness to surrender to it. And so, she teaches us, transsexuals especially, that we cannot understand and unleash the power of desire without our own surrender.

Nor Hall writes, in *Those Women*, “Surrender to the body’s desire is in itself a source of revelation.” We, all of us, can only embrace our own imaginal souls through surrender to their demands. When we allow ourselves to do this, we discover who we are. Most people assume that transsexual women are men who somehow *decide* they would like to become women. The exact opposite is true. Many transsexual women struggle very hard to be men, for that is what society, and the evidence of their own (unaltered) bodies tell them they must be. A woman I know tried every male identity she could think of—weightlifter, sensitive heterosexual, drag queen, biker—before she finally accepted that she was not any sort of man, but a woman, and her task was not just to change her body, but to discover just what sort of woman she was.

People assume that transsexual women and men change their genders and their bodies arbitrarily, or as a matter of preference. In fact, most transsexual people, like most people everywhere, would prefer to be normal. The transsexual person must learn, and accept, what everyone needs to learn, that we cannot decide ahead of time who we are, or what identity we would like to have. We must discover and create it. For the transsexual woman this discovery becomes more acute, for the identity which emerges out of her desire is so strikingly at odds with what the world sees and expects. In the relationship between desire and identity, transsexual men and women teach a special lesson, for in order to live, and to make any sense of their lives, they must

surrender totally to a desire they cannot understand, define, or control. A knowledge of archetypal models and images—not just in myth but spiritual practices—gives this surrender the true depth of soul.

Some people critical of transsexualism have suggested that doctors created the concept as well as the medical techniques. The term “transsexual” was, in fact, coined by a doctor, Harry Benjamin, as a way to distinguish a particular condition from that of “transvestites” and “homosexuals.” However, Benjamin did not publish his work until some years after Christine Jorgensen’s surgery. In her autobiography, Jorgensen describes how she (the female pronoun applies, even though we are speaking of a time when Jorgensen was outwardly and physically male) read about the first chemical synthesis of estrogen, managed to procure a significant amount, and then sat and held the pills in her hand, awed by the power of what she was about to do.

The medicalization of transsexualism reached its culmination in the 1970’s, when it became officially listed as a psychiatric disorder. This has already begun to change, with the recent fourth edition of the *Diagnostics and Statistics Manual* of the American Psychiatric Association stating that “transsexuality per se” is not a disorder. Here too, crucial to this movement away from transsexualism as a sickness to an expression of humanity has been the realization of its ancient roots and analogues.

Before looking at the Goddess’s story, we need to note that we speak here only of transsexual *women*. They are the people whom Aphrodite’s myth reflects and illuminates. Her story concerns a transformation from a male form to a female, not the other way around. There is at least one myth which may speak to the experience of transsexual men, not as a transformation from a female to a male shape, but as a reconstruction of the male body. This is the story of Osiris’s death and rebirth. In the myth, Set does not simply kill Osiris, but cuts him up into fourteen pieces which he, Set, scatters across the world. We might describe this condition as a mythic description of the transsexual man’s sense of fragmentation before he begins to reconstruct his life and body. The myth also suggests the experience of shamanic initiation, which often includes severe hallucinations of being cut

to pieces by demons. Isis, Osiris's sister and wife, finds the pieces and puts him back together; the phallus, however, is missing. As a result, Isis must construct a phallus out of wood, which she attaches to Osiris.

Where the transsexual woman seeks to remove an outer object—more precisely, to invert it and internalize her sexuality, for the modern surgical technique does not remove but reconstructs the genitals—the transsexual man seeks to build something on, very much in the way of Osiris. Just as the Aphrodite myth may reflect ancient practices of self-performed “sex change” surgery, so it is possible that the story of Osiris derives from an early form of Egyptian shamanism, in which people anatomically female took on male identities, including the wearing of wooden phalluses.

Compared to the story of Osiris, the myth of Aphrodite is much better known. Few people, however, have looked at the possible links with transsexual women. And yet, these links are very striking. The story comes from Hesiod. Though he wrote later than Homer, Hesiod is sometimes said to have recorded the older strains of the myths. And since the story he tells resembles other, lesser known Goddesses, as well as actual practices in the ancient world, we can see his story as carrying authority. It is Hesiod's story that most subsequent writers have turned to as Aphrodite's “official” origin. The usual etymology for her name, that it means “foam-born,” derives from Hesiod's myth of her birth.

This myth begins with a disturbance in creation. Ouranos, the sky God created by Gaia as her consort, is oppressing his lover, smothering her by too close an embrace. At the same time, he despises the children brought forth by their nightly unions, so that as Gaia gives birth, Ouranos seizes the children and hides them in darkness.

To gain back control, Gaia creates a sickle, an instrument that by its shape derives from the crescent Moon. The sickle originally may have been a women's invention, used in prehistoric times to speed the gathering of wild plants. In a cave excavation some years ago, archaeologists found a curved stone blade which they took to be the war weapon of a chieftain. Only when one of the researchers thought to examine the instrument with a microscope

did they find, not traces of blood, but rather vegetable particles. If the lunar shape, and the use in harvesting, identify the sickle as female, it suggests that the attack on Ouranos will be more than self-defense. It will (re)assert femaleness as a primary energy.

Gaia gives the sickle to her son Kronos, who ambushes his father, grabbing Ouranos's genitals in his left hand, and cutting them off with the right. Most of the literature on this story describes Kronos as "castrating" Ouranos, just as the god Attis is described as castrating himself. The same term is used in historical literature for the self-surgery performed by the Gallae, Attis's Phrygian worshippers. Freud, too, uses the term "castration" to describe the fear of the male upon first seeing the female body. But castration actually means only the removal of the testicles. In all these examples, beginning with the Greek myth, the act is the removal of the entire male organ. The difference is important, since farmers castrate animals to prevent them from fathering offspring or causing trouble in the herd, and we would think that actual castration would be enough to neutralize Ouranos as a danger to Gaia. But Kronos—and Attis, and the Gallae—seek something more, the entire removal of maleness.

Kronos throws the genitals into the sea, thereby surrendering or returning them to the primeval female body, described in modern scientific as well as mythological traditions as the womb of all life. We do not learn what happens to the organ itself. Instead, the myth tells us how the action stirs up a foam upon the water. From this foam arises the perfect female, Aphrodite.

We might describe the Goddess of Love as Ouranos's daughter. Feminist descriptions of her as the daughter of Gaia do not match the actual story—unless we consider Ouranos's emasculation as a rebirth engineered by Gaia. There is an interesting relationship here to contemporary transsexual surgery. Virtually all sex reassignment surgeons are male, and therefore analogues of Kronos. The transsexual women, however, look on the surgery as something that joins them to the world of women. Neo-pagans among them sometimes describe themselves as "daughters of Gaia."

Some feminist writers assume that Hesiod, an extreme misogynist, used this story to claim that Aphrodite belonged entirely to

male creation, in the way that Homer and Aeschylus described Athene belonging to the male because of her creation out of Zeus's head. This makes little sense, for the story comes weighted with so much anxiety for men it would hardly serve to reassure them in the face of female power. More significantly, Aphrodite shows no special connection to Ouranos, the way Athene does to Zeus. She is not really his daughter so much as his *replacement*. The overbearing male suffers the removal of his genitals, and from that very act, the female, graceful and passionate, comes into existence.

Aphrodite belongs to the earth, Gaia, for we find her with fruits, with flowers, with roses and hyacinths, poppies and pomegranates. She belongs to the sea, where she first rose naked from the water. But she belongs as well to the sky, the domain of Ouranos. Described as "golden" she comes with the dawn. Doves attend her; she rides through the air on chariots of swans and geese, birds known for their beauty and their fierceness, for Aphrodite is not simply graceful and lovely, but also cruel and merciless. When she comes to a rest she sits on a throne of swans.

Most important for her sky connection, she is identified with the planet Venus, which bears the Goddess's Roman name. The apparent motion of the planet Venus (the path it makes through the sky as seen from the Earth) forms a five-petaled flower over a period of eight years. At least one plant with five-pointed flowers is called "Venus's looking-glass."

Aphrodite is often depicted holding an apple. The apple, too, links the Earth and the sky, Gaia and Ouranos, for if we cut an apple in two horizontally we find a perfect five-pointed star. The sky is Aphrodite's home and her origin. Even if unwillingly, Ouranos sacrifices his very sex to create her. And then he withdraws, deep into the lost limbo of Tartarus—the same way the male persona of transsexual women may be said to withdraw once the female self fully emerges.

The parallels between Aphrodite and modern transsexual women would be striking enough if her story was wholly isolated. In fact, we find other images of Goddesses emerging from the parts or bodies of emasculated Gods. The Goddesses are often depicted as passionate, powerful and creative, as if the trans-

formation has completed a process of development. Or, the God may be seen as out of control, dangerous, like Ouranos, with the emergent Goddess a more productive influence.

In Amathus, devotees of the local Goddess assimilated to Aphrodite described the deity as "double-sexed." They named him/her Aphroditos. According to Robert Graves, the Hittites describe how Kumarbi bites off the genitals of the sky God Anu, and then spits out the seed onto a mountain to produce a Goddess of love. Graves considers this story a source of the creation of Aphrodite. Kerenyi describes how a son of Hermes and Aphrodite refuses the love of the nymph Salmacis, but then plunges into her fountain. The god and the nymph merge.

The most significant figures in this context are the god/dess Agdisthus, and her/his son, Attis. Agdisthus was described as hermaphroditic, but also arrogant and dangerous (we might recall here Plato's myth of Zeus splitting apart hermaphroditic humans in order to limit their completeness). To tame Agdisthus, Dionysos ties the male part of his organs to a tree. When Agdisthus awakes, the phallus engorges, and a sudden movement severs it.

This gruesome act does not lead to Agdisthus becoming crippled, or withdrawn, or enraged. On the contrary, Agdisthus now emerges as Kybele, the Phrygian Goddess described later in Rome as "Great Mother of the Gods." The removal of the male organ appears to open the way for a full emergence of the female. Later in the myth, Kybele's son Attis attempts to imitate Agdisthus, with a self-performed surgery (though some accounts claim that Artemis sends a boar to gore him; the Phrygians considered Artemis another name for Kybele, an association which might be confusing to those who know Artemis only in her classical form as a virgin huntress).

Gender-changing or cross-dressing deities and heroes appear again and again in Greek myth. Sometimes they are figures of comedy, as when Achilles' mother dresses him as a woman to protect him from going to war, or when Heracles must wear women's clothes as a humiliation. Sometimes there is a link to madness, as when King Pentheus dresses as a woman to infiltrate the Bacchae, who discover him and tear him to pieces in

Euripides' play. Or the crossing of genders is only suggested, as when Niobe sneers at Leto for having a mannish daughter and womanish son.

Aside from Agdisthus and Aphrodite, the most significant crossed gender deity in Greek myth is Dionysos. It is no accident that Dionysos should be the god called on to emasculate Agdisthus. Called "the womanly one," or "the hybrid," Dionysos was raised as a girl. According to Arthur Evans in "The God of Ecstasy," Dionysos's followers sometimes embodied the god as a stick decorated with a dress and a beard. Evans describes how women worshippers of the God dressed as men, with long phalluses, an image that recalls Osiris's wooden penis. Male worshippers took on the clothes and roles of women. Evans cites this description by Diodoros of Sicily: "...quite soft and delicate of body, by far excelling others in his beauty and devoted to sexual pleasure." That last phrase brings Dionysos to the realm of Aphrodite, reminding us that "ecstasy" takes us out of ourselves, but not out of our bodies. Transsexuality is a movement of passion and ecstasy. The body is its vehicle rather than its destination.

Dionysos' function as a "god of ecstasy" links him to the archaic religious structure called "shamanism," for Mircea Eliade has shown that ecstatic trance is the shaman's primary experience and source of power. Of course, the expression alone would not demonstrate a connection between Dionysos and shamanism. But the myth—and the practices of the god's followers—suggests such a connection very powerfully.

Disguised Achilles reveals himself when he chooses a sword over more feminine gifts. Dionysos, however, when offered several toys as a child, chooses a mirror, a feminine attribute, not just for its concern with beauty, but also for its moon-like power of reflection. The mirror traps him, and demonic forces dismember him and throw him into a boiling cauldron. Now, this story exactly mirrors the trance terrors of many shamans, who become cut to pieces (like Osiris), boiled alive, and otherwise broken down to allow for a rebirth as a new being—often in a new gender. (There is also a poignant parallel in the lives of many transsexual women, who as children try very hard to conceal

their femininity, for they know that such slips as choosing the wrong toy can result in severe punishments, including bullying or humiliation. Psychiatrists who treat so-called "gender conflicted" children often lay traps for their involuntary patients in exactly this way. They will set out a selection of toys, such as dolls and cap guns. If the child makes the "inappropriate" choice, he or she is punished and ridiculed.)

The maenads, Dionysos's female followers, were described as taking on male characteristics under the god's power. Their behavior was considered masculine (as well as uncontrolled), and their very bodies expressed maleness, for they stood rigidly erect, like phalluses. They also acquired shamanic powers. They could run barefoot through snow for miles. They wound snakes through their hair without being bitten. The maenads did not alter their bodies through surgery, but through trance. They became trance-sexuals.

Shamans gain powers of prophecy. In this sense, we might describe the seer Teiresias as the very model of a shaman. His name, which means "he who delights in signs," occurs often enough in Greek stories of different localities to suggest that "Teiresias" was a generic term for prophet. Teiresias gains his powers, at least indirectly, by changing sex. Coming across two snakes copulating, Teiresias kills the female and is transformed into a woman. After seven years, she sees a similar sight, kills the male, and once more becomes a man, but now with a suggestion of hermaphroditism. T.S. Eliot describes Teiresias as "an old man with wrinkled dugs." In the notes to "The Wasteland" Eliot calls Teiresias the poem's main character. (The poet's own name might lead readers of the distant future to consider him a mythological character himself; "Eliot" is a variation of "Eliahu" which means "God is lord," while "TS" is the standard abbreviation for "transsexual").

According to the classical myth, Zeus and Hera argue over whether the man or the woman receives more pleasure in sex. Each one insists the other has the advantage. They ask Teiresias, and when he says the woman, Hera in her fury strikes him blind. Teiresias then receives from Zeus the gift of prophecy in compensation. While not ignoring the story that has come down

to us, we can guess that it might reflect an older image of the seer who gains prophetic powers by merging genders and turning the sight inwards.

Robert Graves tells us that in southern India men fear that seeing snakes coupling will produce the "female disease," which Graves says is Herodotus' name for homosexuality. This raises an important point. None of the Greek stories about crossing gender suggests anything about same-sex desire, or sexual activity of any kind, other than the changing of identity. Despite stories that claim Teiresias spent her seven years in female form as a whore, it is clear that Teiresias does not change from man to woman and back again in order to seduce anyone, or to enjoy sex from a different side, but as a mystery of self.

Today, many people assume that transsexual women are somehow an extreme manifestation of male homosexuality. Either they must be effeminate men who identify wholly with women and want to imitate them, or else they are thought to be self-hating homosexuals who cannot accept their desires and so must become women to appear "normal." This assumption misses the point about transsexuality, that it focuses on subjects rather than objects. It is a passion of the self, not of others.

Queen Victoria was said to deny the possibility of lesbianism on the grounds that since women hated sex and only endured it for the sake of men, why would two women do anything, without a man to compel them? People sometimes express a similar attitude to transsexual women who are lesbians. Since they assume that men change sex in order to have intercourse with men, why would a "man" change sex to make love to women? The answer lies in the fact that the transsexual woman never thinks of herself as a man in the first place, and her "change" is done to fulfill an inner need, not an outer one.

A society based on monotheism assumes that people are one thing, and one thing only, and that this monolithic self can never change. Thus someone born with a penis is assumed to be male, desire women when grown up, and exhibit masculine behavior. Our culture attributes any modifications of this pattern to sickness, twisted upbringing, or genetic impairment.

Transsexual women and men demonstrate the in(ter)-dependence of four separate factors: anatomical sex, gender identity, sexual preference, and role behavior. A great many transsexual women (some say as many as a third or even a half) are lesbian. A similar high percentage of transsexual men are homosexual.

Consider the example of the woman described above, who tried every male role she could imagine before surrendering to her knowledge of herself as a woman. She has not had sex reassignment surgery and so remains genitally male, despite the development of breasts and round hips due to hormone therapy. She is also naturally very pretty. However, she rides a motorcycle and dresses in leather jackets, torn T-shirts, jeans, and heavy boots. And she is a lesbian, living for several years with a lifelong lesbian who has no doubt that her pretty, biker partner is a woman.

Shamans who change gender often do so primarily by changing their clothes and their social function in the community. In the ancient world of southern Europe and the Near East, anatomical males changed their bodies, severing their male genitals to take on female appearance and identities. The context in which they performed these acts was that of sacred worship of a powerful Goddess, and as a result of their willing sacrifice they usually became priestesses.

We have knowledge of this practice in Asia Minor, North Africa, India, Arabia, Canaan and elsewhere. The Bible gives us backhanded evidence of the practice surviving into ancient Israel, with its prohibition, "He who is wounded in the stones or hath his privy member cut off shalt not be admitted into the congregation of the Lord." (Deut. 23, 2) The Bible tends to prohibit whatever belonged to the competing religion of Goddess worship (such as the commandment against planting trees in sacred places). Indeed, Rabbi J. H. Hertz, in a commentary on this passage, wrote, "The first to be excluded are the self-mutilated or the unsexed in the service of some heathen cult."

The most documented version of these sex-changing priestesses are the Gallae, the Phrygian worshippers of Cybele who accompanied their Goddess to Rome. Accompanied by dancing and chanting, and in states of ecstasy, the Gallae initiates would

"unsex" themselves, using stone sickles, an instrument which not only recalls Ouranos, but also points back to the prehistoric times. They then ran through the streets, throwing the severed genitals into doorways held open for them. The offering was considered a blessing by the household which received it, and in return they would nurse the Galla back to health. When healed, the Galla ceremoniously received women's clothes, and, dressed as a bride, entered the service of her Goddess.

The Romans displayed ambivalent attitudes to the Gallae. While some despised them, calling them eunuchs, or "drones," others, such as the poet Catullus, treated them with respect. There is little doubt that they considered themselves to be women, or that their preeminent place on Cybele's worship derived from their changing sex. Some modern feminists, such as Merlin Stone, have suggested that the emerging patriarchy created the Gallae as substitutes for women priestesses, as a way to claim the Goddess for males. The evidence, however, supports almost the opposite. The Gallae, and their counterparts in other cultures, belong to a strain of religion very ancient and deeply embedded in the worship of mother Goddesses. Their presence deeply disturbed patriarchal consciousness, as shown in the Hebrew prohibition. Roman law forbade any non-Phrygian males from becoming Gallae.

The archaic practices continue even today, in India, with Goddess worshippers known as Hijras (the name recalls "Phrygia," though I do not know of any research connecting the two). The Hijras remove their male organs in surgery performed by a "*dai ma*," usually a leader, or guru, in the local Hijra community. Before the British outlawed the practice in 1888, the surgery was performed in temples of the Goddess Bahuchera, a variant of Durga. The initiated Hijra, while healing, eats a diet similar to that of women after childbirth. When healed, she receives women's clothes, sometimes bridal dress, like the Gallae. Hijras dress as women, and many describe themselves as women, though outsiders will often consider them a third, or neuter sex, because they cannot bear children. Whatever their original religious function, they now perform at festivals and weddings, where they bless the bridegroom. They are popularly thought to have

the power to cause impotence in men. Interestingly, when the Greek mortal Anchises discovers that his mysterious lover is in fact Aphrodite he begs her not to make him impotent. A more positive connection to the Greek Goddess goes back to the time of the moghuls in India, when Hijras performed a ritual known as "*solah shringar*" to prepare courtesans to meet their lovers.

The difference between the Gallae or Hijras and modern transsexual women may be one of cultural background and assumptions. In India today, the Hijras are most often from low caste and traditional backgrounds, while those who identify themselves as "transsexuals" come from the Westernized middle class (the sophisticated surgical techniques of "sex reassignment" are banned in India along with the cruder operations of the Hijras). At the same time, some transsexual women in the West have begun to look to the Hijras as a partial way of addressing that intuition of "transcendence" in what they have done. The Hijras, and the Gallae, give substance to the words of Dallas Denny, political activist, medical researcher, and publisher of the magazine *Chrysalis*: "Transsexualism is a religious experience."

And transsexualism is a *passionate* experience, driven by an absolute inner conviction. It is no accident that Aphrodite, the Goddess born from Ouranos' severed genitals, should be the Goddess of love, of the body and its desires, rather than, say, the hearth, or science, or domestic bliss. And it is no accident that the cross-gendered god, Dionysos, should be the god of ecstasy.

The transsexual woman knows that she is a woman in the way we know a revelation. She knows this despite all common sense, despite all the evidence of her body and her upbringing. She knows this despite all her efforts, her heroic battle, to resist this knowledge. She knows it the moment she accepts that she knows it, when she surrenders to the body's desire. For contrary to the popular cliché, she is not at all trapped in the wrong body. She lives in exactly the *right* body, though she may be trapped in the wrong culture, with its insistence that her knowledge is either a sickness or a sin, and certainly a delusion. It is the body which leads her to revelation, which knows what it needs. She cannot know herself until she accepts what her passion is telling her, that

she is a woman, and only by changing her body can she become her own truth.

At the Myth and Theatre Festival, Laurence Louppe said of Leonardo Da Vinci's work, "The body reveals the truth, of which it is a carrier," and further, "We know also that Da Vinci was a devotee" of Aphrodite. After Da Vinci's death, his more secret work revealed experiments performed on cadavers to explore the possibility of sex change surgery.

The transsexual impulse appears the world over, and always as a passion. In the words of Camille Moran, transsexual activist, "We were always here, we were here when the Earth was a green spirit. We were a natural occurrence in a singing world."

For the transsexual woman, the passion and the revelation live in her own body, and in the body of Aphrodite, who has gone before her, and who inspires her.