

GEORGE AND JULIA — Julia Grant (New English Library, £1.00)

A lifetime of bad decisions

this is women's work, don't they? So he *must* be a woman *really*. QED.

Julia Grant was born George Roberts. On Sunday March 9 this year he had his genitals cut off and, as far as he is concerned, he is now a 'real' woman called Julia Grant. But the book is about George's life, leading up to the day of his operation, so strictly speaking it's about George and not about Julia. And I shall refer to the author as 'he'.

way that oppression works. It's a tale of deceit, treachery and self-delusion, and it makes a very salutary read. No puritanical treatise could possibly demonstrate more effectively how, in the words of Christmas Humphreys: "We are not punished *for* our sins but *by* them."

he talks of his "close friendship" with a man he has chatted to in a pub for two hours.) As a result he is continually being surprised when people behave in ways that are outside the role they happen to be playing. It's not so much that he is a self-confessed liar as that he is simply unable to tell the difference between fiction and truth. At one point he boasts: "I was a good con man, and social workers and suchlike are easy people to fool." And again: "I had all the screws fooled; they all thought I was the perfect prisoner." It never seems to occur to him that silence doesn't necessarily mean acceptance or assent. In fact it seems unlikely that he has ever actually been able to perceive that other people exist at all. (So it's just possible that *George and Julia* is a novel. If it is, it's a very bad one.) It is virulently anti-gay. At one point he comments that he hasn't had a "real" man for weeks, and it's clear that he means a *straight* man. It is equally anti-women: "He was convinced that I was a woman. I only wished that I could lie on my back and open my legs and prove that I was." This is not really surprising, because this is the story of what happens when a person so completely internalizes society's moral value judgements that they are forced to reject all aspects of themselves that don't fit — even to the extent of taking a knife and cutting off the offending parts.

In fact, the whole book is the story of a lifetime of bad decisions. His decision-making has always been based on skin-deep analysis of his problem. Inevitably, his solution has been skin-deep too. And since what he wants to claim as his "ultimate" salvation is itself literally skin-deep too, it seems inevitable that his life will continue in the same way. And my heart goes out to him.

But his life has not been destroyed, as he believes, by a biological error but because of a social one. This doesn't mean that I accept his self-portrayal as "victim". He has made his own bad decisions all the way, and he has suffered, and presumably will continue to suffer the consequences until he finally learns not to judge people or events by their surface appearance.

Some years ago I spent a summer on the Ile du Levant, a naturalist island in the Mediterranean. For a few weeks there was a perfect hermaphrodite staying there too. She/he had the perfectly formed body of a lovely young woman, and equally perfectly formed male genitals. On the island, she/he was able to go about naked, and the 'reality' of her/his being was there for all to see, completely beyond the reproach of so-called normal citizens. But as soon as she/he returned to the mainland and 'civilization', a choice of sex roles had to be made, and whichever role she/he chose, it would inevitably involve an unhappy compromise. Because 'normal' society only offers *two* alternatives. But this is exactly what the gay and women's movements are about. It is up to all of us to create a form of human society in which everyone, no matter what form their physical, psychological and spiritual sexuality expresses itself in, can live without feelings of rejection or alienation, without the need for any unhappy compromise, and above all without the need to take a knife and cut their bodies, as poor George Roberts has done, in order to conform to society's needs rather than their own.

George Roberts lives in a fantasy world. He is obsessed with superficial trivia. (At one point

Now, I don't wish to deny George's right to do what he wants with his own body. I simply think he has made a wrong decision based on an inadequate analysis of the nature of his problem. His reasons for convincing himself that he is *really* a woman are unbelievably superficial. For example, he "likes" wearing make-up and dresses; he "feels relaxed" when he's in drag; and when he does his housework in drag he "really enjoys cleaning, dusting, washing, cooking, ironing". Now, everybody knows that

Alan Wakeman

George and Julia is an appalling book. It's also a demonstration of how a nasty, exploitative, commercial book can be a valuable insight into the pernicious

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JULIA GRANT

It saddened me that Alan Wakeman's review of 'George and Julia' by Julia Grant (GN 203) should have provided yet another opportunity to deny the validity of the transsexual experience.

I haven't read the book myself, but agree the reasons quoted that Julia gives for convincing herself she is really a woman *do* appear unbelievably superficial. This is not to say that all transsexuals are motivated to seek a sex-change operation merely because they like to appear feminine and like playing traditional female roles. For most of us the feeling is far more profound. It's not a question of wanting to be women, we *are* women. It's not a question of internalizing society's moral value judgements, nor of conforming to society's needs rather than our own. Like Alan Wakeman, I cannot regard transsexuals as victims: but how can he be so sure that transsexualism is a question of social rather than biological error?

We are born "hermaphrodites": our primary gender is hidden, and we reject our secondary physical sex. It is nonsensical to suggest that transsexuals should work in the gay and women's movements to help create a new society in which they might

overcome their feelings of rejection enough to be able to avoid genital surgery. Even in a gender free society transsexuals will still seek surgery to resolve their conflict.

Besides, such a utopia is not exactly round the corner, and we have to live with ourselves here and now. Whether or not George/Julia has made a bad decision ultimately only she can tell: I know plenty of other post-operative transsexuals who aren't living in a fantasy world, aren't obsessed with trivia, whose self-analysis has been far more than skin-deep, and who can now live without feeling alienated from themselves.

Perhaps Alan Wakeman should have considered George/Julia's worst decision of all: her decision to go public, exploit herself, and so appoint herself as a spokesperson for all transsexuals. The majority of us avoid all publicity: true transsexual or not, Julia Grant is an exceptional one, and I'm sure many transsexuals like myself feel she has done a lot of harm, because, like Alan Wakeman, her critics extend their justifiable criticism of the person to include thousands of others.

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JULIA GRANT-	Book REVIEW
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