Magnus Hirschfeld

Chapter XII

Androgyne Mania

Subjects afflicted with androgyne mania form a most particular group. Persons afflicted with this obsession suffer from the incompatibility of their sex with their psyche, and they attempt to transform their physique to conform to their aspirations. They wish to evoke the impression of not belonging to their sex, and they see themselves other than how they are made. This androgyne mania can exhibit itself in a true physical androgyne, it can also be found without androgyny.

Feminine men in this category endeavor to suppress every last hair not corresponding to the feminine type. Several years ago some of these androgynes actually resorted to depilation by X-rays, which caused deplorable external ravages. On the other hand, feminine men resist having “the operation” of cutting their hair, which they preferred to see long. Virile women, even in the age of complicated coiffures, always opted for haircuts and sometimes, already in very early childhood, developed a strong hatred of their long hair. Certain viragos use all sorts of means to grow a beard, or, failing that, like to glue on a stylish moustache. Many feminine men develop a true hatred of their Adam’s apple, and more than one has asked if we couldn’t remove the disfiguring protuberance.

Breasts especially are an object of envy of the imaginary androgyne. The psychological tendency to transform a quality that is resented because it is deemed unsuitable manifests itself here with particular violence. The feminine man envies the abundant breasts that the virile woman detests; she envies the flat chest that the feminine man abhors. More than one effeminate man has tried paraffin injections, vacuum devices or cosmetic surgery to obtain a “beautiful bosom.” The virile woman, on the other hand, develops such a horror of her breasts that she finally consults a surgeon to request that they be removed.

The waist plays no less a role in androgyne mania. A delicate waist is appreciated by effeminate men who often squeeze it tightly with a corset, an instrument hated by virile women.

Androgyne mania extends to the genitals. We have often come across, in feminine men, the desire to be castrated. For their part, virile women, when wearing masculine garb, often attach an artificial member to complete the illusion that they so enjoy.

But androgyne mania goes even further; it can become a pathological obsession. The subjects afflicted by this androgyne obsession believe that their bodies show real signs of the other sex when there is no trace of any. There are in these cases spontaneous fantasies, sometimes organic sensations, that the subject enjoys; similar to hypochondriac manias, with the difference that in this case the sexual imagination is a source of pleasure. One patient proudly shows us his pectoral muscle as a woman’s breast; another boasts of a feminine silhouette that he clearly does not possess. A feminine transvestite patently claimed that “a little split” was forming in his scrotum.

We will see in the next case to what degree a subject can be obsessed by an idea – gynecomastia – that sums up his femininity. The subject, already very feminine during his childhood, notes, at seventeen years of age, the formation of breasts that he describes in his correspondence, as full, round and beautiful. He never notes any milky secretion and has been unable, much to his regret, to succeed in causing any through attempts at nursing.

At the age of forty, the subject has a weak sex drive and has never engaged in coitus or masturbation. He is mainly drawn to women; the necessary attraction for him being a beautiful bosom. He is in a relationship, a sort of erotic friendship, with a young woman. The care and mutual admiration of breasts is the principle element of this strange friendship. He considers this friend to be homosexual and believes that she loves him for his feminine qualities.

He wears a corset and a bra, would like to be a complete woman, adores his breasts, and curses his genitals. He writes that he has tried to castrate himself, but stopped at the first sign of blood at the site of the scrotum incision.

“Often,” he writes, “upon waking, my hands wander over the delicious roundness of my breasts and I wonder if it’s a dream or a reality. To wash and massage my breast is one of my greatest pleasures.” He has named his breasts: the right one is called Friede, the left one Elvire! “My woman’s breasts, the adored Friede and Elvie, rule in my home,” he writes. “My efforts to return my breasts to their original form when they held themselves up, have failed. I have probably already passed the Spring of my breasts, and must, like all woman, get used to the idea of losing their beautiful form with age. My bosom is getting heavy and is sagging.”

“If I could, only one time, taste a woman’s sexual pleasure. If I could, only one time, menstruate and experience all the sensations from beginning to end. If I could, one time, only one time, experience maternal joy from pregnancy to giving birth. What weigh me down are the sexual signs of my body’s masculinity. To nurse an infant would be the greatest joy of my life.”

Finally, his wish is granted. He writes that a woman has given him her newborn to nurse: “We are very curious to see if there will be milk,” he writes. But the news is not good. Finally, he writes: “There was no milk. However, these twenty six days were for me the height of feminine happiness. The excitement of nursing was so strong that I had to take the infant off of my breast for a while. In a state of anticipation, I experience seminal secretions several times while nursing. Perhaps the negative result of these attempts is due to my age. If there had been milk, I would have had the joy of nursing the child for several months. My entire soul rebels against my masculinity and yearns to be freed from its bonds, and every day my body reveals to me through my woman’s breasts, more attractive ways of life.”

The subject refusing to undergo a medical examination, and communicating with us only through letters, we were never able to verify that his gynecomastia really existed, or if the adored Friede and Elvire were only the imaginary product of his androgyne obsession.

But the classic case of androgyne mania is that of the painter Ejnar Wegener, well known in Paris. Wegener published, under his female name, Lily Elbe, his biography, *A man changes his sex –*a book unfortunately too subjective to help enlighten us.

Rather feminine as a child, according to his recollection, Wegener however developed normally. Drawn to women, he married a woman painter, Gerda Wegener. It is while posing for his wife as a feminine model that he claims to have discovered the well-being afforded him by cross-dressing. He later describes how his second “Me,” baptized Lily by a friend, took form and how the artist got into the habit of playing this role more and more often. The transformation was so complete that his own parents did not recognize Lily Elbe as their son.

Little by little, Wegener, after some time, noticed modifications of his physique, his silhouette became more feminine, his nature more humble; he claims also to have observed strange periodic bleeding from his nose. His wife also noted these facts. “I came to form the opinion,” he writes, “that I was both man and woman at the same time and that the woman in my body was getting the upper hand.” Depression, going as far as the idea of suicide, followed.

A German doctor, passing through Paris, consented to transform Wegener into a woman by surgery. We saw Wegener at our Institute in Berlin prior to the operation: Very feminine in his demeanor, and especially in his movements, the subject presented, however, not a trace of physical hermaphroditism, not even pronounced androgyny.

Having officially become Lily, he describes the different operations that he underwent successively: first, castration, then amputation of the penis, and finally the transplantation of ovaries. We were barely able to confirm, during the surgery, the remains of ovaries.

His sexual instinct, directed exclusively towards women before the operation – Wegner indignantly defended himself against suspicion of homosexuality – became, after the surgery, feminine to the point that Lily envisioned marrying a male friend and even wished to become a mother. Her death, which followed soon after, was not due to the operation, but to cancer.

The case of Lily Elbe strongly evokes three other cases of transvestism driven by androgyny. The desire to become a woman was so strong in these cases that the three subjects independent of one another first had themselves castrated, followed by the removal of the penis – all in order to suppress the traces of their virility. Finally, they had an artificial vagina constructed by tucking the skin of the scrotum inside. Although this vagina could hardly perform the organic functions of a real female organ, the psychological effect of this final transformation was surprising: what had previously been anxious and unhappy men became calm and content women.

Translated by Anne M. Callahan

Chicago, IL

September 19, 2018

note on translation:

Here again Lily is spelled with "y."  I translated the name of the autobiography in French, "Un homme change de sex," as A Man changes his Sex. Render that however it works best for your site.  Also, Hirschfeld uses "feminin" a lot, rarely using femme and never femelle when I think they better convey the sense.  I've kept it at feminine and femininity except for once when it clearly means a woman's biological body and feminine is just wrong.