

POETRY

Reflections on "He That Once Seemed Invisible"

The "heartsong" in this poem is my transness, that part of my being where my sex/gender and body/mind do not match. What do I mean by transness? The answer is twofold.

First, I mean transsexual, or, the fact that my body and brain chemistry feel completely wrong. My transsexuality is the feeling that I was "born in the wrong body." It is the way my breasts hurt when I notice or think about them; it is the fact that my body does not feel like my own. It is that I look in the mirror and see a female body, but underneath I see a male body waiting to crawl out from underneath.

My transsexuality is what drives me to start T (testosterone hormone therapy), shots I will inject in myself weekly or biweekly for the rest of my life to make my brain chemistry mirror that of a biological male. It is why I plan on getting top surgery, or removal of breasts and creation of a male-appearing chest. Bottom surgery refers to genital surgeries. For FTM's (female-to-male transsexuals), bottom surgery is expensive, takes several surgeries to create one set of genitalia, and does not create a fully functional penis. Its risks and costs make me want to wait for a better surgery to come along. That's only my opinion; many FTM's get bottom surgery and are happy. My transsexuality is everything female about me that does not match my male self-image.

Second, I am transgendered. This is an umbrella term that covers many types of non-gender-conforming behaviors and ways of being. Some are: transsexual; transvestite (cross-dressing for sexual purposes); cross-dresser (dressing as the opposite sex for fun; drag queens and kings are examples); genderqueer (a broad term that usually refers to people who dress or act in ways "atypical" to their birth sex); and two-spirit, like myself. What is a two-spirit? By certain Native American beliefs, and, in other cultures by other words, two-spirits are people who have characteristics of both sexes and don't identify completely as one sex or the other.

You may ask, how can you be both transsexual and two-spirit? My answer: I embody

characteristics of both sexes, and I do use the label "man" and the pronoun "he," but I am not meant to do this from within a female body. My female body feels completely wrong to



Tobias Novak

PHOTO: DOK WRIGHT

me. I desire to express varied gender attributes from within a male body while identifying as a man. This is why I am transitioning, or, changing my sex from male to female. Transitioning includes T, binding (flattening my chest with a special "binding shirt"), name change, top surgery (and bottom surgery if one chooses it), learning to pass as a man (passing refers to society viewing you as male; people saying, "that person there - that's a man") and wearing male clothing on a daily basis (though I do plan on wearing drag occasionally once I pass).

I am a transsexual, two-spirited, transgendered man. This is my heartsong, and without it I would not know how to find my way home. ▼

➤ Tobias C.D. Novak is a writer, singer-songwriter-pianist and artist, and is a co-organizer of the Transcending Boundaries conference this October in Worcester, MA. Tobias recently started a magazine and web community called MGQM that explores issues of gender, sexuality and other forms of identity (www.mgqm-magazine.com). He lives in Burlington with his beloved Bengal cat, Jean-Paul Sartre le Deuxieme.

➤ Photographer Dok Wright's website can be found at dokwright.com.

HE THAT ONCE SEEMED INVISIBLE

BY TOBIAS NOVAK

I feel you all the time
 Moving through my body, summoning the indescribable
 Your infusion smells of heartsong
 Shattered melodies, memories reborn
 Your presence illuminates my core
 as you rush through my blood fierce and free
 As the waves cover my bones, I still can swim,
 and I am awestruck, amazed, newly aware
 You bring me new life
 I sit back and feel you in me, allow you in completely,
 permit myself to bathe in your essence,
 and in this stillness I am liberated, free, reborn
 Body and mind unstrung from tangled masses of confusion
 What once seemed unmanageable softens beneath my fingers
 Unearth me from this watery grave turned womb
 Give me new life as I mold you like red-earth clay
 from the cliffs of my youth
 Magnolia trees stand strong and still above the waters of the Puget Sound,
 the sea I claim as home
 Gentle winds, blow through me,
 down the cliffs, past the rugged edges of the red rocks formed over time
 from wild, unrestrained waves crashing into malleable earth
 I sit open and still at the water's edge,
 waiting for you to unearth me
 Sudden movement
 I feel it from beneath the ground
 Like the earthquakes I slept through as a child
 Only now I am awake,
 Feeling your every movement,
 And I am not afraid.
 For liberation awaits,
 and your heartsong holds me close
 As the waters crash against the cliffs, I am held safe and free,
 your infusion of redefined maleness flowing through my veins
 unrestrained, unstoppable, constant
 I am he that once seemed invisible
 Newly unearthed, standing upright, hands raised to the sky
 Your heartsong shines down on me, radiating into my fingers
 My small hands drawing down the maleness I have only now accepted,
 reveling in an identity that has never felt more real
 Your infusion has rebirthed me,
 and I am not afraid
 For maleness has liberated me, and I will not use it as a weapon
 It is a tool to love with, simply a way to Be
 Your heartsong has unearthed my Being,
 and I am not afraid
 I feel you all the time,
 he that once seemed invisible
 May your infusion hold me close,
 and your heartsong give me strength
 The journey has just begun
 And I am not afraid.
 I am he that once seemed invisible,
 And I am finally able and ready to be seen.