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Review of *What Becomes You*. By Aaron Raz Link and Hilda Raz

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What Becomes You. By Aaron Raz Link and Hilda Raz. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007. xiv + 296 pp. \$24.95 cloth, \$14.95 paper.

What Becomes You is one book of two stories. The first is the memoir of Aaron Raz Link, a transsexual man raised in Lincoln, Nebraska, who describes his journey through trans life and queer kinship. Trained as a scientist, Link has a sharp eye for detail and offers keen descriptions of gender transition, even as he inverts many of its stereotypes. He describes the process of coming out to friends and family as watching *them* undergo a “sex change”: a sudden reordering of their perceptions once they realize he is a man rather than a woman—and has been all along. Aaron counters the characterizations of transpeople as having dual selves, or as being one self trapped in another’s body by asking: “I wonder who the second person I’m imagined as might be?”

Link is particularly adept at mapping the intertwined mazes of psychiatry and medicine, and offers as good a description as has been published about the infuriating illogics that govern the medical management of transsexuality: “If [the psychiatrist] had decided that I was mentally healthy, I would not have been allowed to have surgery, because a mentally healthy person wouldn’t want what I wanted. I made it clear to him that I wanted surgery. He diagnosed me as mentally ill. I thanked him. . . . Like all transsexuals, I had to be declared mentally incompetent to make surgical decisions for myself before a competent and experienced surgeon was willing to perform surgery on me.”

The second story belongs to Aaron’s mother Hilda Raz, and the inclusion of her essays responding to Aaron’s transition makes this book unique. But their encounter does not always succeed; the fact that Hilda’s story concludes the book both makes hers the hermeneutically privileged position and renders her text oddly nonresponsive to Aaron’s. When she characterizes her son as a “stranger,” “this guy who was my daughter, who chose against me, who chose to be a man,” the figure of her fantasy bears little resemblance to the Aaron the reader has come to know. Aaron patiently dispels the question of “choice” thusly: “This particular decision—whether to convert

myself from a woman into a man—is one I’ve never had to face. . . . In the world of my own consciousness, I never was a woman in the first place. And for better or for worse, our own truths are the only truths we ever know.”

The author may be underestimating his own narrative powers here. The deep pleasure of memoir is that it can teach us to see truths through eyes other than our own, and *What Becomes You* accomplishes exactly that.

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