

## Book Reviews

idea of the imagination influencing the shape of the developing foetus was in existence before and after Van Helmont. In the eighteenth century the image-making faculty was transferred to the brain. The nineteenth-century conception that only what is in the outside world is real was replaced during the twentieth century by the thought that what goes on in people's minds can have just as much reality.

Dr. Fischer-Homberger's book is pervaded by a deep humanity and a strong fellow-feeling for ill-treated and misunderstood women throughout history. But far from stridently bemoaning their fates, she keeps her keen sense of humour throughout.

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MARY DALY, *Gyn/Ecology: the metaethics of radical feminism*, London, The Women's Press, 1979, 8vo, pp. xviii, 485, £3.95 (paperback).

JANICE C. RAYMOND, *The transsexual empire*, London, The Women's Press, 1979, 8vo, pp. xxvii, 220, £2.95 (paperback).

*Gyn/Ecology* is not so much about gynaecology as it is about the complex web of interrelationships between women and their environment. Mary Daly charts the pollution of this female ecosystem by male-centred ideology, setting out to destroy false perceptions imposed by the language and myths of patriarchal society. The aim is partly achieved by coining new, feminist, words (hag-ology for hagiology, crone-ology for chronology), and partly by reinterpreting some key moments in women's history. The customs of suttee, footbinding, and circumcision, the massacre of women as witches in renaissance Europe, and the stultifying sexism of modern American gynaecology and psychotherapy are stripped of their conventional (male) explanations and are shown as real atrocities committed by men on women.

But *Gyn/Ecology* is a feminist manifesto, and is difficult to read. More accessible is Jan Raymond's *The transsexual empire*, a book about the power wielded by male-dominated medicine. Raymond argues that a society such as ours, which encourages role conformity based on biological sex, will naturally turn to sex-conversion surgery rather than yield to what it sees as a threatened obliteration of these roles. The transsexual is thus the victim of a horrendous plot to maintain the sexual *status quo*. To change one's sex by surgical means is seen here not as the solution to a personal crisis, but as unthinking conformity to stereotyped ideas about male and female, stereotypes that are created by men and reinforced by the medical machine. Men who wish to become women have to prove their willingness to conform to the masculine image of womanhood; women wishing to become men have to pass the same male-oriented test. Through their very existence reconstructed individuals therefore affirm the male world-view: those who are in a unique position to turn their "gender agony" into an effective protest against the social structures and roles that created the dilemma in the first place, fail to do so.

Together these books offer genuinely new interpretations for familiar themes. They must be welcomed for their insistence on seeking answers not from the individuals concerned but from society at large.

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