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## Conundrum (New York Review Books Classics)

*Jan Morris*

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# JAN MORRIS

I was three or perhaps four years old  
when I realized that I had been born  
into the wrong body, and should really  
be a girl. I remember the moment well,  
and it is the earliest memory of my life.

# CONUNDRUM

WITH A NEW INTRODUCTION BY THE AUTHOR

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**Jan Morris : Conundrum (New York Review Books Classics)** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Conundrum (New York Review Books Classics):

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Yet another dimension By John P. Jones III in the human condition. I remember when this book was first published in the 1970s, having read a review in the New York Review of Books on

it. At the time I considered the condition too much of an anomaly to read about. There were so many larger groups fighting for their rights and change in status in society: women, blacks, homosexuals, Hispanic farm workerseven veterans of the latest war. Transgender issues certainly are more prevalent in the news today, with numerous arguments about bathrooms. One push to read it came from Elizabeth Pisanis *The Wisdom of Whores: Bureaucrats, Brothels and the Business of AIDS*. Much of her book is set in Indonesia, in the marginalized underworld of prostitution and drugs. In order to learn more about the methods of HIV transmission, Pisani had to learn how this subculture actually worked. And it is complex, and even confusing, with many a subcategory, and a reticence of outsiders to ask what really goes on. As a fellow reviewer quipped: even they are confused about their condition and role (which is something Jan Morris confirmed in this work.) The other push came from my reading of my first work written about Morris Trieste *And The Meaning Of Nowhere*. I found that work rewarding. She has something useful to say. Perhaps she could shed some light on this confusing issue. James Morris grew up in Wales a country she is still fond of. At the age of four, listening to his mother play Sibelius on the piano, he realized that he was actually of the female gender. But what that actually means, I felt she failed to illuminate. She distinguishes her transgender status from sexual longings for the same sex as well as transvestitism. She just felt she was a woman, yet does not distinguish what that means from being a man. It is an increasingly slippery slope, if sex is set aside, to define how women really are different from men, other than their physical characteristics. Negative stereotyping could abound. She doesnt go there; it is as though the reader should understand, and at least this one does not. James Morris managed to play the male role into middle age. He went to Oxford, and at the end of the Second World War joined the 9th Queens Royal Lancers, and entered the aforementioned Trieste with the regiment at the wars end. He would go on to Cairo and the British mandate of Palestine in the immediately aftermath of the war. He seemed to love the Army. He was an intelligence officer, and it seemed to be a very pleasant club. Given my own perspective, I found the following difficult to digest: the English class system to have been one of the secrets of such a regiments long success it meant there was no envy, you see, it was all in the nature of things. After the military, he had a respectable career as a foreign correspondent for *The Guardian*, *The Times* (of London), and worked in the Arab News Bureau in Cairo. From there, in 1953, he climbed to at least 19,000 ft. on Mt. Everest, and his lean 26 year old body raced down off of Everest, providing the scoop to the world that Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay were the first to successfully reach the summit and return (but he never mentions their names in this account!) More astonishingly, Morris would marry, and father five children. However, in a chapter entitled Zero, he says that many a male reader would want to know about his sex life, and it is summarized by the chapters title. Hum. As I said previously, it is confusing or better yet, a conundrum, since there are those five kids Another five immaculate conceptions? Throughout all of this, he continued to wrestle with the fact that he was not in the right body. One doctor in NYC seems to have been particularly understanding and helpful. He starts on hormone therapy. A massive amount of female hormones (estrogen?... he does not specifically say). His body definitely softens, and he enters into an androgynous state, where strangers are not too sure. Finally, he decides to have the male equipment removed, and due primarily to legal reasons, travels to a well-known physician in Morocco. This is where many a male might cross his legs (and not coquettishly!) And after reading Morris description of the staff, the furnishings, and the sanitation, doubly so. Afterwards, he describes the various other patients who had been tormented so long about their condition, and the relief they have finally achieved. Jan Morris writes well and incisively on many issues. I just purchased her book *Sultan in Oman*. Regrets about her transformation? None. S/he has lead a fascinating life, and has been brave enough to share it with the world. Much of that rates 5-stars. But I felt that there were omissions, and unreconciled inconsistencies in the account, and, of course there is that devotion to the 9th Queens Royal Lancers, all of which merit no more than 3-stars, and thus Ive averaged to: 4-stars. 6 of 6 people found the following review helpful. living with the riddle By bagoas A couple years ago I read one of the best travel books I know: *Venice*, by Jan Morris, who is considered one of the best British writers of today, with a body of work that emphasizes the travelogues, but that includes fiction, history, memories and non-fiction in general. *Venice* is a majestic book, which made me feel naturally curious about its author. At the time it was published in Portugal an article in a portuguese newspaper aroused my curiosity: I found out that Morris was a transsexual having a sex change in the early 70s, and that part of her work, including *Venice*, has been published with her previous male name, James. It was still as James Morris that she participated participated, as correspondent for *The Times*, in the British expedition that first climbed the Everest. The interest in learning more about the author, and the precedent of the magnificent writing of *Venice*, brought me to *Conundrum*, a volume of memoirs dedicated to the half-life that Jan Morris lived with the conviction that her sex was wrong in relation to the gender she felt that she belonged to, and the process that led her to correct this error, culminating with a stay in a clinic in Casablanca. The book was first published in 1974, and this reissue just updated with a new preface by the author. The writing is excellent. Morris' english (*Venice* I had read in translation) is lush, with a rich vocabulary, the syntax sophisticated simplicity is almost musical. The book is organized into short chapters, in which the tone, although varying between memories more reflective and more factual account, it is always very stylish and fun, combining an english way of being affluent to a view of life from those who already knew its most secret and extravagant corners. Jan Morris's vision is somewhat dated, especially in how confined by gender stereotypes, and how these stereotypes inform her

journey through the gender streaming. But it is important to remember that this book is forty years old, and since the time it was written, the way how gender overcame the most simplistic dichotomy male-female, is probably the greatest revolution of our time. Thus, it is not very reasonable to accuse Morris of a pre-revolutionary vision when, somehow, we have to thank her for having been, like many others, at the genesis of this revolution. Conundrum means enigma. The leitmotif of this admirable, deep, funny and intense book is not so much the search for an answer to the riddle, but rather the process of learning how to live with it. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. One of the great books of the 20th century By Thalassinoides A psychic and spiritual adventure. Morris is a gifted writer singularly attuned to himself and the world around him. This is the nonfiction Orlando, equal parts "fact" and imagination. You may think you know this story, but to share it through Morris' words is to feel something of a transformation in one's own self.

The great travel writer Jan Morris was born James Morris. James Morris distinguished himself in the British military, became a successful and physically daring reporter, climbed mountains, crossed deserts, and established a reputation as a historian of the British empire. He was happily married, with several children. To all appearances, he was not only a man, but a mans man. Except that appearances, as James Morris had known from early childhood, can be deeply misleading. James Morris had known all his conscious life that at heart he was a woman. Conundrum, one of the earliest books to discuss transsexuality with honesty and without prurience, tells the story of James Morris's hidden life and how he decided to bring it into the open, as he resolved first on a hormone treatment and, second, on risky experimental surgery that would turn him into the woman that he truly was.

"Her woman is shockingly conventional, yet to read this great travel writer's account of transition is to understand the word 'journey' truly. Eileen Myles, T: The New York Times Style Magazine [Conundrum is] a brilliant piece of writing to my mind, it should be part of the established canon of great literature. Tom Hooper, director of "The Danish Girl," Vogue A very good writer telling a profoundly poetic story... In fact, it is the author's extreme subjectivity that makes the book as good as it is... After reading this most charming of all Cinderella stories, one feels that sex is just as much a conundrum as ever, which is to say, according to the American Heritage Dictionary, 'a riddle in which a fanciful question is answered by a pun,' or 'a problem admitting of no satisfactory solution.' The New York Times Conundrum remains an exquisite read a rare gift of empathic insight into an experience which most of us will never have but which is strewn with elements of the struggle for belonging, acceptance, and authenticity that most of us face daily in one form or another. Maria Popova, Brain Pickings Certainly the best first-hand account ever written by a traveler across the boundaries of sex. That journey is perhaps the ultimate adventure for a human being, but although it has been the subject of myth and speculation since ancient times, it is an authentically modern experience... What Jan Morris does offer, through her life and her work, is a window on the wondrous possibilities of humankind. Newsweek This book is a very well-written account of some of the emotional factors which eventually led the author, by then in his forties, to submit to expensive surgery in Casablanca. The Washington Post Book World "This is a beautiful book. I found it to be melancholic, courageous, and wise. That its subject matter is Jan Morris's transsexual journey almost seems secondary to her incredible prose and the clarity of her honesty and introspection. Beyond the issue of gender, she searches for an answer to that most elusive of questions: who am I?" Jonathan Ames The finest descriptive writer in our time, of the watercolor kind. Rebecca West If there is anything typical about Miss Morris's experience, however, she has successfully disguised it. The Times Literary Supplement From the Inside Flap "This is a beautiful book. I found it to be melancholic, courageous, and wise. That its subject matter is Jan Morris's transsexual journey almost seems secondary to her incredible prose and the clarity of her honesty and introspection. Beyond the issue of gender, she searches for an answer to that most elusive of questions: who am I?" -- Jonathan Ames About the Author JAN MORRIS (1926), is Anglo-Welsh and lives in Wales. Educated at Oxford, and a member of the British Army, she has written over forty books, most recently, The World: Life and Travel, 1950-2000.