FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

LGBT

Identity Envy: Wanting to Be Who We're Not
Jim Tushinski, editor
Jim Van Buskirk, editor
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Rainbow just might be the new black. Pop stars declare their queerness in *People* magazine; aesthetically challenged heterosexuals are rescued by a bevy of primetime queens; and a love story about gay cowboys is nominated for multiple Oscars. Pride has been a prerequisite for progress; so, as the increasing visibility of queerness within mainstream culture is met with both celebration and vehement opposition, it takes guts for queer writers to admit that, deep down, they fantasize about being someone else.

At first glance, it might seem that such an anthology has little place amidst the self-affirming literature and theory of the Gay and Lesbian Interest section. But while the title could easily be interpreted as ambivalent or even apologist, the writing itself is anything but. In fact, this unassuming tome may be among the most radical in recent publication, not because of its politics, but because it takes its stand without relying on either polarization or feel-good superficialities. Instead, the editors have compiled a collection that is characterized by its complexities. This is not so much a book about queer identity as it is about identity itself, about what it feels like to not fit in. And it is about the fantastic alternate selves that can make everyday life a little bit easier.

Each writer approaches the subject matter from a different perspective—some with humor, some with affection, and some with a poignant ease of profundity. More than anything, it is the true diversity of its voices that sets *Identity Envy* apart as a deeply meaningful text. D. Travers Scott, in "EuroTex," travels to the Continent only to discover his inner, long-rejected Texan; J.D. Guilford refuses to take sides in "Pimp Juice," wearing his "sissy strut" and his dreadlocks with equal measures of gay pride and Black pride; in "Mishmumken," Rosebud Ben-Oni, an American Jew in Jerusalem, writes about the boundaries of language and culture as they define her secret relationship with a Palestinian woman.

Rather than taking the editorial easy road, Tushinski and Van Buskirk meet the challenge of such diversity with another challenge, allowing the chapters to both stand alone and enter into conversation with one another. Writers of similar backgrounds have differing opinions: one person's cast-off religion is coveted by another. And though it is never directly addressed, each confronts the reader with the messy truth that sexuality is but one small aspect of how we create and experience identity.

Ultimately, the self is a mythical creature, made up of equal parts innermost desire and external expectation. Perhaps, as Kenyan college student Keguro Macharia writes in "Living Mythically," the only way to make sense of it all is to "create myths that do not destroy."

Courtney Arnold