

“IT IS DEIRDRE YOU MOURN FOR”:
THE THIRD-PERSON NARRATION
OF DEIRDRE MCCLOSKEY’S *CROSSING: A MEMOIR*

Minh Phuong Nguyen

Dr. Elisa Glick, Thesis Supervisor

ABSTRACT

This thesis uses Deirdre McCloskey’s memoir *Crossing* (1999) as a case study to explore the relationship between personal and cultural narratives of transsexuality.

McCloskey’s work is noteworthy for being the only trans memoir written almost entirely in the third person. As I demonstrate, this formal strategy makes her multiple selves legible and disrupts conventional notions of transsexuality as the “wrong body” experience—a linear journey in which one’s life is cut in half. Instead, my analysis reveals that the narrative arc of transsexuality can be circular, consisting of hybrid and multiple identities. Building on Jay Prosser’s theory of transsexuality as narrative work, this thesis argues for a complex and relational model of trans (autobiographical) subjectivity in which transformation hinges on the recognition of continuity among past and present selves.

In *Crossing*, McCloskey situates her narrative as an historical and political document of the 1990s, an important decade for trans history and politics. Exploring the connections among psychological, social, and cultural influences that give rise to her identities Donald, Jane, Dee, and Deirdre, McCloskey does not seek to make a confession or impose one narrative onto her life; instead, she uses third-person narration to explore the permeability among her past and present identities, treating her memories as the stepping stones that help her cross from man to woman. In so doing, *Crossing* illuminates the personally and socially transformative power of multiplicity and hybridity in trans self-narratives.