

Bodily Transformations and Behavioural Transgressions in Will Self's *Cock and Bull* (1992)

Jennifer Moos

At the end of the 20th and beginning of the 21st centuries the visual, photographic, audible, sculptural, and literary arts are populated by rebellious, non-normative, often highly sexualized bodies. The arts have the potential to create emancipatory alternatives to normatively dichotomized body formations. This, in a hopefully utopian vision, might have a positive effect on the everyday lives of transgendered people. Based on the assumption that “[s]trategies of writing [...] are forms of cultural resistance” (de Lauretis 1984, 7) literature can be understood as a cultural space in which discursive resignifications can take place (cf. Kilian 2006, 155).

Literarische Texte können gesellschaftlich-kulturelle Geschlechterkonstruktionen durch Brechungen und Reflexionen hinterfragen, ihre Entstehungsbedingungen offen legen und problematisieren, sie innerhalb der Freiräume, die ihnen das Moment der Fiktionalität erlaubt, auf verschiedene Weise explorieren und neue Entwürfe vorlegen. (ibid.)

In this essay, I shall concentrate on bodily transformations and behavioural transgressions in a literary work by the British author Will Self. Self¹ enjoys a reputation as the “enfant terrible” (Henchman 1997, 52) of the British literary scene. His “[s]urrealist fiction” (Golomb 2003, 83) is full of “explicit violence and a vicious sense of humor that often borders the misanthropic” (Henchman 1997, 52). His fictional worlds could be said to be “populated with radical psychotherapists, archaeologists and artists” (Golomb 2003, 74). The reader is confronted with “dead people residing in the suburbs; people who wake to find that chimpanzees have replaced humans; people who develop the sex organs of the opposite

¹ Will Self was educated at Exeter College Oxford where he received his degree in philosophy in 1982. As a journalist he has worked for several British newspapers. Part of his journalistic work has been collected in books like *Junk Mail* (1995), *Sore Sites* (2000), or *Feeding Frenzy* (2002). He has published several short story collections and he works as a cartoonist for children's books. Together with David Gamble, Self has produced a commented photo book: *Perfidious Man* (2000). For further information on Will Self please check his official website <http://www.will-self.com>, 13 November 2007.

sex” (ibid.). Transformations from human to animal or young to old like in *Great Apes* (1997)² or *Dorian: An Imitation* (2002) – a rewriting of Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891) largely set in the London of the 1980s at the beginning of the AIDS crisis – form the centre of Self’s oeuvre. His 1992 book *Cock and Bull* comprises the two novellas³ “Cock: A Novelette” and “Bull: A Farce”. Self describes *Cock and Bull* as one of his “nasty books” (Henchman 1997, 52). The ‘nastiness’ and the often shocking and repulsive effect of Will Self’s fiction (cf. Heiler 2004, 193) immediately become clear when looking at *Cock and Bull*: In “Cock”, Carol, a married woman in her early twenties, grows a penis after having experimented with masturbation. The growth of the new organ, the text suggests to its readers, leads Carol to rape and murder her husband and a friend of the couple. Both men are only the first victims of Carol’s cruel crusade, as the reader learns during a train conversation between a nameless traveller and the mysterious don, who turns out to be Carol. In “Bull”, a highly masculine rugby player and trained sports journalist called John Bull is effeminized by the growth of a vagina in his kneepit. When Bull turns to his doctor for advice, the man seduces his patient, impregnates him and so breaches his “professional [i.e., medical] ethics” (Self 1993, 201).⁴ After the affair, the adulterous doctor ruefully returns to his own pregnant wife and leaves Bull behind. In the following examination, I shall focus on the second novella, i.e. “Bull”.⁵ Here, my special interest lies in John Bull’s bodily and behavioural transformations, his relation to his doctor Alan Margoulies, and Alan’s ethical transgressions.⁶ My aim is to *ask* questions on the underlying connections between body, personhood, nationality, sexuality and pathologization rather than to answer these questions.

² Cf. Heiler (2004, 193ff) for a detailed discussion of *Great Apes*.

³ I will refer to both texts as novellas since they centre on one special event, i.e. the unexpected growth of new genitals. However it is interesting to note that both, the farce and the novelette, lack a claim to seriousness. “Cock” and “Bull” present what the cock-and-bull story stands for: absurd, improbable events often carried to their (surreal) extremes.

⁴ All further quotes from this edition will be abbreviated *CB* for *Cock and Bull*.

⁵ My discussion of “Cock” can be found in the forthcoming edition *queer leben – queer labeln* (working title, ed. by Judith Coffey/ Katrin Köppert/ LCavaliero mAnN*/ Juliette Emerson/ Roman*a Klarfeld/ Daniela Müller/ Jamie Huber/ V.D. Emde. Freiburg: fwpf-Verlag, 2008). The essay is based on a conference paper held at *queer leben* (Berlin, 21-22 September 2007). Cf. also Markus Niederwimmer (2006) for one of the most recent articles on “Cock”.

⁶ In this essay, I shall mainly focus on the content level of the novella. On the structural level, John Bull’s story is related in a chronological manner with rare and short flashbacks, e.g. when the protagonist remembers his adolescence (*CB* 170f). According to Golomb, “Bull” serves as “a counterpoint to *Cock* in style as well as theme. It is a straightforward third-person narrative with a happy, or at least contented, ending. There is no menacing figure pulling us into a dark trap” (2003, 77) as is the don/Carol in “Cock”.

My interpretation will be based on a queer-feminist approach. This means that, in the context of this study, queer is expressly dealt with in its attachment to feminist theories. This approach avoids understanding ‘queer’ and ‘feminist’ as successors which replace one another. Instead, they should be perceived as forming innumerable interrelations not based on generationality. Or, in Judith Butler’s words:

There is no story to be told about how one moves from feminist to queer to trans. The reason (...) is that none of these stories are the past; these stories are continuing to happen in simultaneous and overlapping ways as we tell them. (Butler 2004, 4)

John Bull’s Story, or: “Whaddya call a man with a cunt in the back of his leg?”

In “Bull” readers witness John Bull’s bodily and behavioural transformations. In the narrative, the once “rugged, hypermasculine, rugby playing, beer drinking though sexually insecure protagonist” (Sender 1997, 19) wakes up “one morning to find that while he had slept he had acquired another primary sexual characteristic: to wit, a vagina” (CB 103). “Bull” – as much as “Cock” – is set around descriptions of bodily changes and behavioural adjustment, rape, religion and power relations, sexuality’s reliance on penetration, the protagonists’ mistaking of “orgasm for love” (Golomb 2003, 77) and the belief that male and female “waves of arousal” (CB 87) are of two “different natures” (161). This is also expressed in the perception of “male physiology (...) [as] a static and lifeless thing, a metabolic Empty Quarter, unaffected by the tremendous lunar pulls and washes of hormonal gunk that stream through its sister [i.e., female] form” (137). Yet in “Bull”, an idea also presented in “Cock” is further established: When we learn about Carol’s bad experiences with her gynaecologist, we are told that, nowadays, “medicine is the modern religion and doctors are our shamans” (27). This attitude is mirrored in Bull’s “pragmatic and childlike faith in medicine and doctors” (Sender 1997, 19) which is shamelessly exploited by Bull’s medical practitioner Alan Margoulies.

Alan Margoulies is at first described “as a ‘conscientious man’” (CB 110), even as “‘Doctor of Niceness’” (ibid.). But there is an extreme discrepancy between the ‘private’ and the ‘professional’ Alan Margoulies: At home he is “egotistic, domineering, aggressive and duplicitous” (111), he cheats on his pregnant wife, has a “proclivity for extra-marital fucking”

(112), is “addicted to the pornographic whimsy of his own silly imagination” (113) and does not care about his daughter. This is the man in whom Bull places his trust when he needs advice concerning the growth of his vagina, which he initially believes is some kind of wound or burn.

Bull’s bodily and behavioural alterations take place simultaneously. Though Bull wakes up with a vagina in his kneepit and from then on feels “an odd vulnerability” (107) connected to his increasing feminization, it is not clear whether these emotional changes begin due to the existence of his vagina, or whether the new organ grew because Bull’s attitude changed. This paper does not aim at answering this question. Nonetheless, I would like to mention some of the indications given in Self’s text. The night before his bodily transformation, Bull, in his role as the cabaret editor for a magazine called *Get Out!*, “had been forced to go and check out Razza Rob” (115), a comedian celebrated for his “vaginal gags” (116) and “cuntal humour” (ibid.). Bull leaves Razza Rob’s show early, since he “could cope with cunt jokes in his spare time, (...) [but] at work it was a chore” (117). Razza Rob’s last words towards Bull are: “Whaddy call a man with a cunt in the back of his leg?” (188). Of course, we cannot decide whether this “magical curse” (118) leads to the growth of Bull’s vagina. But we can see that Bull’s effeminization already started before this night. Hired as a “sports correspondent” (115), Bull’s being transferred to the cabaret section can already be interpreted as the beginning of his emasculation. Bull had been “a sports writer by inclination” (131) and wanted to “become a journalist in order to be with the people he admired: sportsmen” (ibid.). Sport is Bull’s “passion” (132). He plays rugby and football and decidedly wants to be near “sportsmen” (131) – and not near ‘neutral’ *sportspeople* – which is another indication of his ‘ultra-masculinity’.

Sedation – Seduction, or: In Search for Personhood

When Bull wakes up the morning after Razza Rob’s show, he feels sick and vulnerable and thus decides to go to Alan Margoulies to have his ‘wound’ examined. Alan likes Bull because he is “a healthy young man” (121) to whose case-notes he “had never had to append (...) the damning word ‘psychosomatic’” (122) – an idea connoted to femininity. Alan, when first faced with Bull’s vagina, becomes speechless and does not inform his patient

what exactly it is he has grown in his kneepit. Sexually aroused by his discovery, Alan abandons “his professional perspectives” (127) and “no longer act[s] in the best interests of his patient” (ibid.). Alan’s private and professional activities merge into one another, his private interest overpowering his medical ethics. In Alan’s mind, a “parallel universe of perverse calculation” (129) establishes itself and lust leads to Alan feeling “his ethics and his restraint draining out of his mind like bath-water” (134). Alan’s “conscious transgression of medical ethics” (Sender 1997, 19) makes him into a rapist fascinated by his ‘fetish for abnormality’.

The evening after Bull had come to the Health Centre, Alan visits him at his home. It is there that Bull is told that his ‘burn’ is actually a vagina. Bull suddenly understands all the changes in him: “the feelings of vulnerability” (156) and “extreme sensitivity” (126), the “deep, internal rubbings and partings within his leg” (129), his new aversion to alcohol and pubs (141) as well as to Razza Rob’s “stupid, obscene, boorish and utterly unfunny” (142) performance. Interestingly, Bull’s fully developed “new sex organ” (128) makes him adopt a ‘female perspective’ and, at the same time, evokes (heterosexual) male anxieties. When first examined by Alan,

Bull stiffened and began to experience, for the first time in his thirty-something years, acute anxiety. This was different to the fear that he usually felt when he was touched by people in non-intimate situations, or had to undress in front of them. On these occasions Bull’s secret horror was that his penis would be primed, limbered and rolled out for target practice. Bull could conceive of nothing more embarrassing than an involuntary erection – especially if a man, such as Margoulies, was touching him. (123)

This fear of bodily reactions, which can be read as (homo)sexual desire, is only exceeded by “a fear of intrusion *into* himself” (ibid.), i.e. a fear of penetration. Bull’s anxiety is confirmed when Alan offers him not sedation but seduction: “unmanned” (152) by the sight of Bull’s vagina, “[t]hrown back into pubescent homoeroticism” (ibid.) and reminded of his first homosexual experiences, Alan makes Bull’s vagina the “target” (123) of his phallic potency. When Alan deflowers Bull, Bull is depicted as utterly powerless, as “all woman” (159) since nothing could be “more feminine” (ibid.) to Alan than “Bull’s hysteria and (...) tremulous capitulation” (ibid.). Bull experiences his ‘first female sex’ as “shattering” (161). The moment Bull understands what has happened, he feels “violated, traduced, seduced, bamboozled, subjugated, entrapped and enfolded. He felt his capacity for action surgically removed” (161).

His passivity and “dependency” (ibid.) on Alan make him ask his seducer whether he will see his new mistress, i.e. Bull, again. Bull is “shy, almost blushing” (162) and speaks with “the hurt huffiness of a subordinate partner” (ibid.). In that moment when Alan, stimulated by the sight of Bull’s vagina, has transgressed his professional behavioural ethics, none of Bull’s masculine strength is left.

Although the two men continue dating each other, Alan soon returns to his wife Naomi who awaits the birth of their second child. For Alan, Bull is no more than another, though special, trophy. He is Alan’s “greatest coup” (168). Bull’s existence, on the other hand, is debased to that of “Bull the man; Bull the woman; Bull the cunt” (ibid.). Having dipped into the depth of Bull’s mysterious bodily transformation, Alan is no longer interested in him. For Bull, however, the changes do not come to an end: His vagina matures and grows hair (170), he further explores his “new sexuality” (171), enjoys masturbation and he finds out that his clitoris requires “not a staccato pressing (...) but a teasing, suggestive stroke” (ibid.). These are indications of Bull’s increasing sensibility and emotionality. But there are other effects, too: Bull collapses and repeatedly feels sick, gets his “period” (192) and has “stomach cramps” (193). Bull’s perception is so drastically influenced that everything he sees, whether “[d]oors, windows, garage forecourts, railway tunnels, even bus shelters” (172), strikes “at him with forceful, imagistic resonance. It’s all cunts! (...) It’s all openings, entrances and doorways” (ibid.). London’s “phallic” (ibid.) architecture is rated unimportant/impotent and re-evaluated in ‘vaginal terms’.

Bull feels “depressed” (177) when his boss at *Get Out!* fires him and he reacts speechlessly to the bad news only to learn that his colleague Juniper⁷ is to replace him. When being fired, Bull is “passive and yielding” (174) which stands in sharp contrast to the “progesterone and oestrogen nauseas competing with one another” (177) inside his body. Strolling around aimlessly in London, Bull passes by a “broken window” (178) which symbolises “what had happened to him. His vitrified hymen had been broken into shards by Alan’s thick dick” (ibid.). Bull’s identity crisis manifests itself when standing in front of two shop windows, one of which displays “tights and other feminine impedimenta” (180), and the

⁷ Bull and Juniper had an affair once. When having sex, she had “gone on top” (142), her “thighs had hammered down on him” (143) and her “vagina had gripped Bull’s poor penis with the riffling handclasp of an aspirant mason” (ibid.). Juniper has now not only grabbed Bull’s most masculine body part but also one of the social signifiers of his masculinity, i.e. his job.

other which is decorated with “rugby equipment” (ibid.). Torn between his slowly decreasing masculinity and his beckoning “womanhood” (ibid.) Bull comes to ask himself “Who am I?” (ibid.). Who or what can he be? Where does he belong to? This, according to Butler, is an important question because it addresses the relation “between intelligibility and the human” (Butler 2004, 58) as we can see from the following explanations:

[This relation] carries a certain theoretical urgency, precisely at those points where the human is encountered at the limits of intelligibility itself. [Butler] (...) suggest[s] that this interrogation has something to do with justice. Justice is not only or exclusively a matter of how persons are treated or how societies are constituted. It also concerns consequential decisions about what a person is, and what social norms must be honoured and expressed for “personhood” to become allocated, how we do or do not recognize animate others as persons depending on whether or not we recognize a certain norm manifested in and by the body of that other. The very criterion by which we judge a person to be a gendered being, a criterion that posits coherent gender as a presupposition of humanness, is not only one which, justly or unjustly, governs the recognizability of the human, but one that informs the ways we do or do not recognize ourselves at the level of feeling, desire, and the body, at the moments before the mirror, in the moments before the window, in the times that one turns to psychologists, to psychiatrists, to medical and legal professionals to negotiate what may feel like the unrecognizability of one’s gender and, hence, the unrecognizability of one’s personhood. (ibid.)

As the novella illustrates, it is difficult for Bull to maintain his personhood when being confronted with his vagina in the mirror. At first, the “big, ginger man kne[els] moaning on the carpet” (CB 155). Bull collapses. For Alan, Bull is only a case of “genital abnormality” (136) to be seduced. The doctor even consults “leaf after leaf of the *Journal of Abnormality*” (ibid.) to find a case like Bull’s. Bull tries to acknowledge the fact that his body has been altered by an “invasive feminine biology” (156), and that the material effect of his vagina has destabilized his hitherto unquestioned male identity. He furthermore tries to acknowledge that his body now houses “strong, meaty and reassuringly masculine odours” (158) as well as “strained, fishy and yet flannelly” (ibid.) aromas. But he still feels all “alone in the world” (181) and “unable to confess his true nature” (ibid.) to anybody apart from Alan. Since his medical practitioner is not to be trusted, Bull muses about joining “a self-help group for people like him, some sort of Vaginas Anonymous” (ibid.). Standing in front of the shop window, Bull is addressed by Ramona, a post-op male-to-female transsexual prostitute. She invites him to her room and relates her own transformation (hi)story to Bull. Bull, who seeks “an ally” (182), has soon to find out that Ramona is, unlike himself, “a chimera, or a

representative of some new, third sex” (190) with a “fake vagina” (191) utterly different from Bull’s own: “[I]n the mini-feminine world of Bull’s leg, everything was in perfect running order. It was all compressed, true enough, and distorted, not unlike the internal organs of a midget. But it was all in perfect running order” (210). He has a fully developed cervix, ovaries, tubes and a womb. When confessing his ‘otherness’ to Ramona, Bull becomes “horribly aware of his leg’s radically independent gender” (191). He is not like Ramona. She, on the other hand, is shocked and screams “like a giant foghorn” (192) when she discovers Bull’s vagina. For Bull, her reaction is proof enough for the fact that he is not a transsexual but some other disturbance to “the natural order of things” (114). This reaction is rather surprising because it illustrates that Alan Margoulies, as a representative of the medical establishment, is not the only one who sees Bull as a pathological case. The transsexual Ramona is ‘freaked out’ by Bull’s non-normative body, too. Thus, Bull is illegible in the contexts of his own understanding of the gendered body, heteronormative medicine *and* gender-deviant transsexuality. This means that he is completely denied personhood.

Still in Search for: New Bodies, New Nations, New Sexualities?

John Bull’s name ironically characterizes him as the “English Everyman” (Golomb 2003, 77), as the personification of Great Britain. When Bull finds out that he is pregnant, he initially considers committing suicide because Alan returns to his wife and does not want to date him anymore. In the end, however, he decides to live. He travels, moves to the US, gives birth to his son Kenneth in San Francisco and finally settles down as a single parent in Cardiff, where he runs a “sports goods and memorabilia shop” (CB 213).⁸ Janet Harbord writes that the English national body, as personified in John Bull, “has become feminized, less able to perform the feats of phallic mastery that characterized its colonial past” (1996, 43). The traditional notion of the nation as masculine and empowered is clearly destabilized by Bull. However, the fact that he bears a son could be interpreted as an indication of his

⁸ As we know, travelling has become “a common metaphor for transsexualism as a crossing of national borders from one place to another, from one state to another, from one gender to another” (Halberstam 1998, 165). It can be applied to the bodies in *Cock and Bull*, too. Just as Bull does not transform from ultra-masculine to ultra-feminine, but rather is still categorized by others as male, in the same way, his move from London to Cardiff, from England to Wales, remains within the British national body.

maintenance of the nation's patrilineal history, because the family is connected "to the historical past of the nation, and glances ahead to connect the family to the future of both familial and national stability" (Halberstam 2005, 5). However, since Bull leaves London and makes Wales his new home, he destabilizes English, if not British, "phallic mastery" (Harbord 1996, 43). Nevertheless, for people like Bull, England might still not be 'feminine enough' as long as "disciplinary discourses such as medicine, psychiatry and sexology" (Sender 1997, 22) dictate their lives.

These discourses not only regulate the intelligibility of Bull's body and personhood but also inscribe the taboo of homosexuality into Alan's and Bull's bodies. Throughout the novella, Bull and Alan are hunted by their bad consciences because they fear being gay. Homosexuality is described in terms of trying to "gain acceptance for [t]his 'peculiarity'" (*CB* 171). Bull's rugby mates celebrate "their seemingly unquestioning masculinity" (195) in daily carousals. Their latent homophobia is exposed when they suspect Bull of being a "poof" (208) because he does not socialize with them after their matches. When Bull lies and tells them that he has an affair with a married woman and therefore did not hang around with them, they treat him like a hero: "Bull was much praised for his athleticism. For scoring so many tries when he must have been shagged out from the night before. There was much backslapping, and stiff punches to the upper arm" (*ibid.*). (Had he told the truth about his and Alan's affair, he would have been spared such scenes of praise.) This rather stereotypical understanding of sex and gender roles shows that we are still in need of new masculinities in the shape of "a quite radical rethinking of male sexual morphology" (Grosz 1994, 201). As Grosz argues, this is not fully

impossible for heterosexual men, but it must involve a radical transformation in the kinds of sexual practices they engage in and an even more difficult transformation in the structure of desire whereby they are not weakened as men, do not see themselves as "feminized," in their willingness of [*sic!*] take on passive positions, to explore the rest of their bodies (as well as women's), taking on pleasure of a different order, but are able to reclaim, reuse, reintensify, body parts, zones, and functions that have been phallicly disinvested. (*ibid.*)⁹

⁹ For a discussion of the male body and sexual practices see also the recent newspaper article „Das arme Arschloch des Mannes“ by Baltazar Castor (2007).

In this respect “Bull” is an interesting example of ‘alternative masculinity’. Bull, for some time, does not pay much attention to his “original genitals” (*CB* 200), even temporarily forgets “about his most obvious masculine attribute” (201) and engages in new sexual practices. However, these practices still rely on penetration and fixed roles regarding activity and passivity. Sender concludes that while in “sexual relations with Alan, Bull is profoundly feminized, and while the homoerotic component of this sex is (guiltily) enjoyed by both, it is suppressed beneath the normalcy of ‘heterosexual’ intercourse between them” (1997, 20).

In conclusion, we can say – and this is true for “Cock” and for “Bull” – that femininity is depicted as “weakness” (*ibid.*) and, in the end, the male body’s physiology ‘wins’ over the female one: Bull’s vagina and pregnancy do not ‘make him a woman’; his male status is not doubted when he moves to Cardiff. In “Cock” on the other hand, Carol’s penis renders her appearance male. The traveller on the train easily identifies ‘her’ as a “*man*” (*CB* 11). “Cock” ends in ultimate destruction while “Bull” closes quasi-happily. In one of the first US reviews of *Cock and Bull*, Michiko Kakutani wrote that

[w]hat is disturbing is the blatant sexism that underlies these two novellas. Although Mr. Self writes under the guise of sending up sexual politics and gender wars, his stories end up buttressing the oldest, most sexist views of men and women.¹⁰

It is not only sexism, misogyny and homophobia which underlie *Cock and Bull*, it is rather a radical misanthropy which teaches us that the deconstruction of bodies must not be the *only* aim of a queer-feminist politics. It is thus not enough to “premise (...) that the body is itself a field of signification, a site for the production of cultural meanings and ideological reifications” (Griggers 1994, 128). In “Bull”, bodily fixity is destabilized by the growth of a vagina in Bull’s kneepit. On the other hand, gender roles remain stable since Bull, in his relationship with the medical practitioner Alan Margoulies, is mostly associated with feminine

¹⁰ Kakutani’s review, written in 2003, can be found at <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9F0CE1D81430F932A05756C0A965958260>, 13 November 2007.

In contrast to Kakutani, Markus Niederrwimmer foregrounds the “parody” (2006, 70) and “biting irony” (75) inherent to Self’s work. Niederrwimmer states that “[o]n the surface, Self only inverts unequal gender roles. At a deeper level, Self provides an ironic metaphor for the elasticity of sexed/gendered positions and exposes the rigid binary law as contingent and iniquitous. (...) Rather than perpetuating traditional views on sex and gender, Self transgresses the causal relation between the body and identity by exaggerating these relations to a point that they appear artificial rather than natural” (2006, 76). As we have seen, these transgressions take place only in a limited, heteronormative realm of pairs of exclusively binary oppositions, which do not detach masculinity from maleness and femininity from femaleness. There are no positive depictions of female masculinity and/or male femininity, for example.

vulnerability and powerlessness whereas Alan is portrayed as the active seducer. However, when Bull is pregnant, gives birth to “his and Alan’s love-child” (CB 213) and afterwards settles down in Wales, he partly unsettles (hetero)normative notions of the family and the nation. He does not entirely transform into ‘the opposite sex’, as does Carol in “Cock”, and thus can be read as a positive example of the incorporation of a queer-feminist agenda. In challenging conceptual, sexual and sexed dichotomies, *Cock and Bull* portrays the body in flux. If, in accordance with Anna Henchman, we understand Will Self’s personality as “[f]luctuating between the brash, self-contradictory manner of the enfant terrible often portrayed in the British press, and the somewhat surprising persona of the serious writer and family man” (1997, 52) the same characterisation could be said to fit his novellas “Cock” and “Bull”.

Yet, both narratives’ insistence on the superiority of male sexual attributes over female ones, their adherence to penetrative sexual intercourse as the only possible sex act, and the pronouncement of misanthropic ‘anti-discourses’, are signs for the fact that transgender or transsexual bodies may “abolish [the body’s] materiality as the stable ground of meaning” (Stryker 2000, 596) but do not necessarily “cause all that seems solid to melt into air” (ibid.). *Cock and Bull* thus presents itself as a text fluctuating between the realisation of queer-feminist objectives and the relapse into conventional, normative values and prescriptive morality. It illustrates that the body in its manifold manifestations has the potential to open up new ontological spaces to be inhabited. However, bodily transformations, as portrayed in *Cock and Bull*, do not necessarily destabilize sex(ed) and gender(ed) normativity. Therefore, the body’s effective rebelliousness (not only in literature) needs to go hand in hand with changed “attitudes, beliefs, and values” (Grosz 1994, 17) in order to overcome pathologization.

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