

**BOOKS**

**Misfortune**

by Wesley Stace; Breakout Books, 2005; \$23.95 hardcover

In *Misfortune*, Wesley Stace mixes Charles Dickens with Jeffrey Eugenides to create a delicious tale of gender identity and family rivalry in Victorian England.

The time is 1820. Lord Geoffroy Loveall, the inhabitant of Love Hall and the wealthiest man in England, spots an abandoned baby on a junk heap. Rescuing it from certain death, the heirless Lord Geoffroy carries the baby home and adopts it as his own, naming it Rose in memory of his deceased sister and dressing it in ruffles and lace. Problems ensue when it's discovered that Rose is a boy, a fact that the effeminate Lord Geoffroy, deep in mourning from the passing of his beloved sister, refuses to acknowledge.

As Rose grows, so does her confusion about why her figure doesn't match her best friend Sarah's and why she feels the urge to stand while peeing like Sarah's brother. The first whiskers of adolescence and sleeping in the same bed with Sarah don't help.

Meanwhile, all manner of outraged relatives circle Love Hall, determined to lay claim to the family fortune and steal it from Rose. In a particularly enjoyable scene, a cousin tries to



seduce Rose only to discover that there's more to her than he imagined.

Stace, who's better known as the musician John Wesley Harding (he's produced 13 albums, including *Awake*, featuring a duet with Bruce Springsteen), has written an ambitious first novel. More than 500 pages long and spanning 75 years, *Misfortune* (a clever play on words—Rose's nickname is Miss Fortune) examines how gender roles are influenced and how the courageous young hero/heroine learns

to incorporate both the male and female aspects of his/her personality into a complete identity.

Stace does a terrific job of keeping a complex plot afloat with plenty of twists and historic details (including original period-like ballads written by the author-composer), and Rose's narrative voice is a delightfully observant combination of innocence and purposefulness.

—Floyd Sklover

**Girl, you'll be a man soon**

Trans twists tangle complex plots in two new novels

**Choir Boy**

by Charlie Anders; Soft Skull Press, 2005; \$16.95 hardcover

Have you ever wanted something so badly that you'd do nearly anything in order to achieve it? What if you barely understood the implications of the "nearly anything" that you were willing to do, but they would change your very identity? What if it would also change your sex?

This is the situation 13-year-old Berry Sanchez finds himself in as he searches for a way to avoid the fate of others whose voices have changed, thus removing them from the St. Luke's Episcopal Cathedral boys' choir. To preserve his sweet soprano voice, he first tries to slice open his testicles and then, thanks to the help of a sympathetic transsexual he meets at his shrink's office, begins taking female hormones—with surreal and unexpected results.

Author Charlie Anders once identified as a choir boy but has come to identify and be identified as a male-to-female transgender writer

with a quirky, sassy, tomgirl-ish fashion sense and effervescent personality. As with her previously published nonfiction book, *The Lazy Crossdresser*, this first novel is filled with good humor and subtle social insights. Anders weaves an enchanting mixture of wholesomeness; gritty, angst-filled teen reality; and selfless

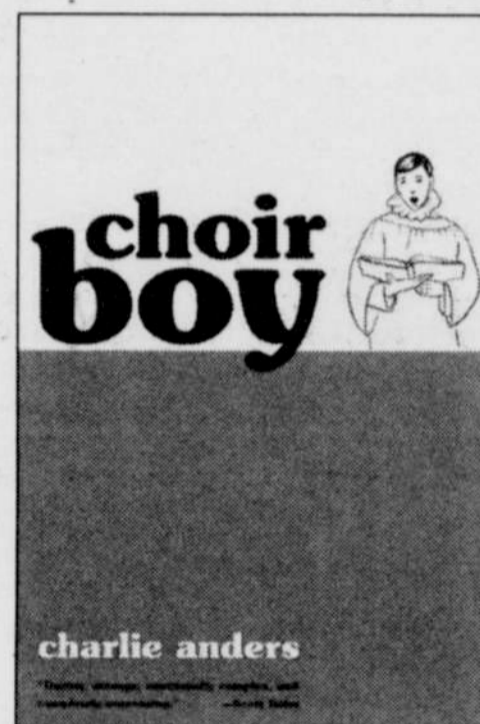
yet narcissistic fairy tale romance into a hip, captivating and thought-provoking written tapestry. Her ability to craft concise and believable dialogue is exceptional, and her short, punchy sentences keep the pace moving at a breezy, youthful pace.

If there is a fault to be found in *Choir Boy*, it is that Anders seems strangely enamored with pithy, ultra-hip comments that, like a beautiful porn star repeatedly looking into the camera, seem more acutely self-aware than absolutely necessary. But this is a minor criticism, given the book's

nuanced depth and easy reading quality.

In addition to providing a good old-fashioned, downright absorbing read, Anders has crafted an important message about unintentional gender transformations that will touch even the most sexually vanilla. One doesn't need to be transgender to fall in love with the single-mindedly aesthetic Berry Sanchez. All one needs to be is a human being who has felt out of place, awkward or otherwise Other.

—Theresa "Darklady" Reed



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