

JULIA TV
GRANT
REVIEW

from

PRES MAT ♀

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TRANS-SEXUALS]

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TV

A CHANGE OF SEX BBC2, 15, 16 and 17 October

My boyfriend and I watched these programmes with natural fascination. How George Grant became Julia Grant is something the entire nation must have wanted to see. We were spared no details of the actual operation, but the story left out many of the more interesting questions about masculinity and femininity.

For George it was quite simple. "I've had to go shopping for a lot of clothes," he said, "ready for when I start living as a female." How odd. Many females manage to live their lives as women with just a pair of jeans and a pair of sneakers.

George was now living as Julia, having trouble keeping her job, and needing accommodation. An official from the

GLC showed her round a little flat. "Christ," murmured my boyfriend. "All you have to do to get preferential treatment from the GLC is to be a freak." I was angry too when I thought of all the other single people, women and men, refused a council flat in favour of families.

Julia had a running battle with her psychiatrist. Obviously he didn't expect any patient of his, male or female, to make decisions about their own body. And while I was irritated to high heaven by Julia's assumption that living as a woman meant wearing long flowing gowns and stiletto heels on every conceivable occasion, I had every sympathy with her

attitude. After all, every true man would pass out at the thought of his penis being cut off. If George/Julia wanted it that much, it was up to him/her.

Julia, a flamboyant personality in either gender, acquired a boyfriend. "I am straight" he said sadly. Julia seemed to think that proved something. "He's not a homosexual, he's only known me in my female role, he loves me as a woman." Maybe Julia's concern for her boyfriend's frustration in not being able to make love to her was what finally prodded the medical profession into an operation. Male sexual frustration was something they could understand far better than Julia's desire to be female.

What, I wondered, did it feel like to be followed by a TV team everywhere one went? "I've got them with me," Julia says as she visits her family. Self-consciously they are pathetically understanding about his ambitions, saying stoutly, "If that's what you really want, it's your life."

Julia wanted to talk about whether a writer ought to exploit personal experience in his/her art, but the film left that question undiscussed too. At one point I wondered if Julia was doing it all just to provide material for a TV programme, but maybe she did the TV to get money for the operation — not to mention the cost of all those dresses and shoes.

At last came operation day and ten days later Julia left the nursing home. She made it to the car in carpet slippers. Gone was the flamboyant, confident walk; Julia was obviously uncomfortable between her legs. She had not given birth to a baby, but

to her female self — and the pain was the same.

Julia's bravery in fighting for what she wanted impressed me. Now, we gather, she's going to campaign for transsexuals to be allowed to marry, for the sex on birth certificates to be changed. Her lively, slightly outrageous personality remained unchanged throughout any gender role, yet the apparent message of the film continued to be: All real females wear nail polish.

An early part of the film sticks in my mind. George explains to a psychiatrist, in front of medical students, that he's always felt like a woman, nay, he even thinks like one. The psychiatrist turns to a girl student and asks, "You're a woman; how does a woman feel?"

"I don't know," came the reply. "I just feel like me."

I wish Julia luck and hope that one day she'll be able to leave off her make-up and just feel like herself.

Val Wineyard