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## Life after the sex change: a rollicking journey

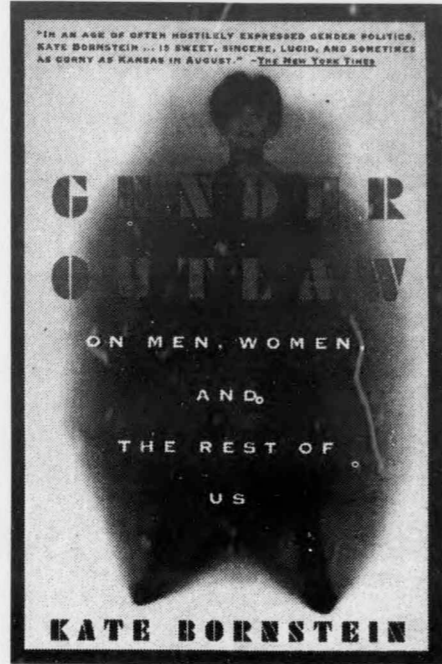
**Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women, and the Rest of Us**  
 Kate Bornstein  
 Vintage/Random House

by Mimi Cormier

Ten years ago, or perhaps even as few as a couple, the publication of *Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women, and the Rest of Us* would have been cause for controversy. After all, this autobiography addresses Kate Bornstein's experiences as a "transgendered" individual. Who would have thought that such a book would be picked up by a major publisher and go into a second printing? Bornstein's gender can't be the only thing changing these days.

Once upon a time, the issue of transsexuality was considered either taboo or open to ridicule. Any serious discussion of its implications was left mainly to those at society's margins: transsexuals themselves, and others who found themselves unable to conform to the dominant expectations about gender roles. No one else really considered the issue relevant. The transsexual experience remained largely a silent one.

Recently, however, a turning point arrived in society's discussion of gender roles. Not only is Bornstein's personal story being published, it is slowly but surely creeping into mainstream media.



If you suspect that you've seen Bornstein on *Geraldo*, you aren't mistaken—she was on the episode titled "Transsexual Regrets: Who's Sorry Now?" As Bornstein puts it, "I was the one who wasn't sorry." Her refusal to apologise for her beliefs or excuse her actions is a refreshing antidote to the atmosphere of victimization that too frequently accompanies autobiographies dealing with sexual or gender confusion.

Bornstein's book absorbs the reader not because

it is a self-pitying purging or a confession. Instead, Bornstein sets out to write a celebration of the search for identity. Maybe it's this new attitude on the part of a growing number of transgendered individuals that is changing current discussion of gender roles.

The reader must be warned that Bornstein's story is not as straightforward as appearances might lead one to believe. Bornstein is more than a transsexual—she is transgendered. Born and raised according to the 1950's middle-class concept of a male, and never comfortable with the rigid gender-role dictates of American culture, Bornstein underwent a sex-change operation as an adult and adopted the name Kate, hoping that life would be more fulfilling according to society's concept of womanhood.

After having surgery and living what to all appearances was the life of a typical woman (Bornstein even learned mannerisms considered feminine in a special course for transsexuals), she came to the conclusion that gender roles were based on superficial distinctions that do not produce personal fulfillment in and of themselves. Bornstein then determined to be transgendered, picking and choosing clothes, careers, and yes, even lovers, according to her individual preferences, ignoring what the dominant culture decrees appropriate for conventional genders.

*I write for the point of view of a gender outlaw because I don't want to bear. We don't*

*want you in our club / We don't want you on our land / We don't want you in our march. And I say I don't know why the separatists won't let me in—I'm probably the only lesbian to have successfully castrated a man and gone on to laugh about it on stage, in print, and on national television.*

*Hello, Geraldo, are you reading this?*

Bornstein's journey of self-discovery, whether you agree with her choices or not, is a rollicking education for readers. Glimpses into an entire counterculture unknown to most people are to be found in *Gender Outlaw*. Kate reveals such trivia as the fact that, contrary to popular belief, there are as many men in this world who used to be women as there are women who used to be men. Bornstein also explores the often divisive politicking that goes on inside America's gay and lesbian rights movement.

Bornstein's pastiche approach to writing, putting together a book that roams between photos, alternating fonts, interviews, and more, makes the book a visual reminder of human malleability. *Gender Outlaw* is an enlightening and genuinely thought-provoking look at the questions arising from conventional wisdom about gender. Given the book's unprecedented success, it is likely to open the market to more literature of this kind, by authors who are willing to consider gender confusion seriously and openly, without taking pains to mollify whether their readers or themselves.

## Sandlots a spotty account of Maritime baseball

**Northern Sandlots**  
 Colin Howell

University of Toronto Press

by Mark Savoie  
 Reviewer Extraordinaire

Colin Howell's *Northern Sandlots* is an admirable effort to provide a social history of baseball in the Maritimes. Unfortunately, however, it falls far short of its promise.

The strength of the book is its treatment of the early evolution of the sport within the region. In these chapters, Howell gives the reader a thorough understanding of the societal values and expectations which gave rise to the adoption of sport in general and baseball in particular by social reformers. Howell deftly explains—within the context of the Maritimes—the desire of these reformers to promote middle class values through sport.

There was an attempt in Anglo-Saxon North America during the latter part of the nineteenth century on the part of the middle classes to either uplift the lower classes or to prevent the degeneracy of middle class youth. Although the rhetoric of the period spoke more often of the first option, Howell argues convincingly that it was the second which served as the actuality. In fact, as Howell informs us in his excellent discussion of Saint John's brief flirtation with professional baseball during the late 1880s, the sport began losing its respectability with middle class society when it was realised that while baseball was indeed acting as an equaliser, it was not middle class values which were serving as the equilibrium, but rather lower class values.

This realisation has been documented for several other sports in several other areas. The most notable of these was Mel Adelman's *A Sporting Time*, which continues to serve as a guideline for any serious study into the history of sport and baseball. However, neither this nor any other selection from the copious literature on class differences in sport takes anything away from Howell's research. He has definitely provided us

with an important addition to our knowledge of this question.

Whether this addition is worth a book is questionable, but it is made less so by Howell's inclusion of a discussion in the change in the pronounced justification for ball playing which accompanied the realisation that it did not serve as a tool for social improvement. Obviously, baseball continued to be played in the Maritimes long after the turn of the century. Howell shows us that the newly accepted reason for playing the game had become civic pride and regional identification. Perhaps understandably—he does work out of St. Mary's University in Halifax—this discussion places far more emphasis upon Nova Scotian baseball than New Brunswick. New Brunswick is not ignored—this would be a virtual impossibility given the dominance of St. Stephen's ballclub during the 1930s—but it is given short shrift in comparison to Nova Scotia. Nevertheless, these two chapters ("Reforming the Game" and "Baseball as Civic Accomplishment") stand as the strongest to be found in the book, since the historiography of this aspect of baseball history is not extensive as of yet.

Less instructive, however, are his chapters on women's and ethnic baseball ("Gendered Baselines" and "The 'Others'"). The former of these is a "waste of dead trees" which can only be considered as having been included to fulfil an agenda which required a chapter about women's baseball. This is an admirable desire, but it would have been far better served had he actually written a chapter on women's baseball in the Maritimes. Except for the trivial example of the tour of the female Chicago Blackstockings during 1891 the chapter touches upon the Maritimes in only the most peripheral of manners. Even during the long discussion of events outside the Maritimes, the emphasis is far more upon prevailing nineteenth century attitudes towards women's baseball than upon women's baseball *per se*. There is nothing intrinsically wrong with this, except that it has already been written in greater detail by a large selection of qualified historians. Howell would have been far better served to simply refer his readers to this historiography rather than creating

the illusion that he was introducing new material.

All these things aside, however, it is in his concluding chapter ("Extra Innings") that *Northern Sandlots* has its most glaring faults. First of all, the quality of history to be found within this chapter is not nearly up to the standard found earlier in the book. Besides, except for a digression into a litany of names of players who played in the region who either had or were to have success in organised baseball south of the border, this chapter is essentially a duplication of the chapter on baseball in 'Sandy' Young's *Beyond Heroes*. Indeed, the bulk of the chapter reads as Young's work, poorly disguised as a scholarly history.

Secondly, Howell makes a serious error when it comes to determining the cause and effect for baseball's supposed demise in the Maritimes. He states that it was the importation of American professionals following the Second World War which changed the justification of Maritime baseball from that of civic pride and regional identity to one of simply acting as a training ground for major league prospects. It is to me far more likely that the 'demise' of baseball in the Maritimes was simply an extension of the collapse of baseball's minor league system which happened throughout the United States during the 1950s. When it is realised that the minor leagues shrank in size from AAA, AA, A, B, C, and D baseball to only the top three levels it becomes understandable that the days of the unaffiliated Halifax and Dartmouth (H&D) League were numbered. With this realisation it must be understood that the collapse of baseball in the Maritimes is only a small part of a much larger scenario which encompassed leagues which had been importing ball players for over half a century, making it unlikely that this practice's brief history in the Maritimes can serve as a sufficient explanation.

Lastly, it is far from accurate to describe Maritime baseball as dead following the collapse of the H&D League in 1959. Howell dedicates only one paragraph to this entire period and concludes that baseball was dead since spectatorship never returned to sustainable numbers. While it should be acknowledged that baseball fans in the

Maritimes have shown a preference for major league ball as seen on television, it should not be denied that baseball still has a solid core of support. Youth baseball continues to flourish at both the recreational and competitive level, and it is within the last decade that such names as Bill Lee and Ferguson Jenkins were imported to play in the Maritimes.

Ultimately, it must be accepted that while baseball in the Maritimes never fulfilled the promise which had been projected for it, it did nevertheless find a niche within the sporting community of the Maritimes that it maintains to this day.

Despite these serious flaws, *Northern Sandlots* is an important contribution to baseball's historiography. The first half of the book—with the exception of "Gendered Baselines"—provides the reader with an excellent depiction of the values which surrounded baseball during its formative years within the region. The back half of the book is less well researched, but does show great promise as an introduction to understanding the forces behind baseball as played in the early twentieth century. It is only when Howell advances beyond the Second World War or when he attempts to artificially fulfil an agenda of completeness that he fails to be convincing.

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