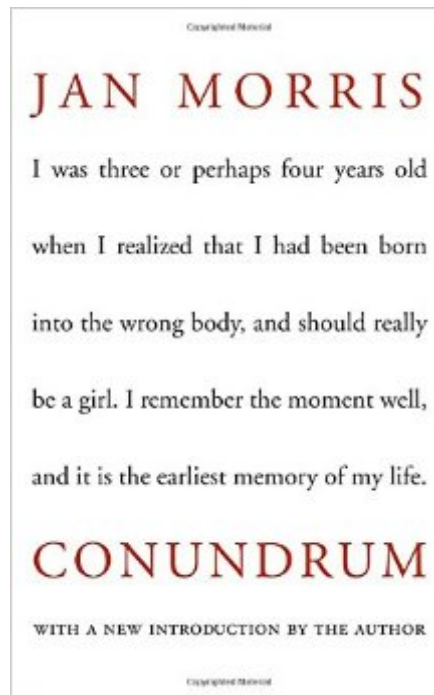


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# Conundrum (New York Review Books Classics)



## Synopsis

The great travel writer Jan Morris was born James Morris. James Morris distinguished himself in the British military, became a successful and physically daring reporter, climbed mountains, crossed deserts, and established a reputation as a historian of the British empire. He was happily married, with several children. To all appearances, he was not only a man, but a man's man. Except that appearances, as James Morris had known from early childhood, can be deeply misleading. James Morris had known all his conscious life that at heart he was a woman. *Conundrum*, one of the earliest books to discuss transsexuality with honesty and without prurience, tells the story of James Morris's hidden life and how he decided to bring it into the open, as he resolved first on a hormone treatment and, second, on risky experimental surgery that would turn him into the woman that he truly was.

## Book Information

Series: New York Review Books Classics

Paperback: 176 pages

Publisher: NYRB Classics; New York Review Books Classics edition (May 16, 2006)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1590171896

ISBN-13: 978-1590171899

Product Dimensions: 5 x 0.5 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 6.4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

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Best Sellers Rank: #390,065 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #57 in [Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Specific Groups > LGBT > Transgender](#) #122 in [Books > Gay & Lesbian > Nonfiction > Transgender](#) #833 in [Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Social Sciences > Gender Studies > General](#)

## Customer Reviews

This is an intriguing memoir, beautifully written by an author who has written numerous other non-fiction books. Jan Morris, formerly known as James Morris, was the correspondent for the London Times assigned to cover England's historic summit of Everest. The author actually accompanied the expedition to the Himalayas and did on site dispatches of the historic event. It would be as James Morris that she would write the wonderful book, "Coronation Everest", which chronicles the events leading to the historic summit of Everest by Edmund Hillary and Tenzing

Norgay on the eve of the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II. The author would eventually become a celebrated writer of many travel books, journeying the world over. This very personal book is an autobiographical narrative of the author's own gender dysphoria, as she, a biological male at birth, had always felt that she had been born into the wrong body. Elegantly written, it is not a book for those who are seeking tabloid sensationalism. Rather, it is, at times, somewhat anachronistic in feel, as it was written by someone who lived through a time when actual gender changes were still in the nascent stages. Passing historical references are made to those transsexuals who paved the way for others. The author's account of her early life is fascinating, as much of it was spent in traditional male pursuits of the time. A stint in the army as a member of the 9th Queen's Royal Lancers, years as a well-known foreign correspondent, as well as husband and father, were all roles in which the author found some satisfaction but never total fulfillment, as her gender dysphoria continually intruded upon her happiness, a dark cloud hovering over all that she did and all that she was.

A couple years ago I read one of the best travel books I know: *Venice*, by Jan Morris, who is considered one of the best British writers of today, with a body of work that emphasizes the travelogues, but that includes fiction, history, memories and non-fiction in general. *Venice* is a majestic book, which made me feel naturally curious about its author. At the time it was published in Portugal an article in a portuguese newspaper aroused my curiosity: I found out that Morris was a transsexual having a sex change in the early 70s, and that part of her work, including *Venice*, has been published with her previous male name, James. It was still as James Morris that she participated participated, as correspondent for *The Times*, in the British expedition that first climbed the Everest. The interest in learning more about the author, and the precedent of the magnificent writing of *Venice*, brought me to *Conundrum*, a volume of memoirs dedicated to the half-life that Jan Morris lived with the conviction that her sex was wrong in relation to the gender she felt that she belonged to, and the process that led her to correct this error, culminating with a stay in a clinic in Casablanca. The book was first published in 1974, and this reissue just updated with a new preface by the author. The writing is excellent. Morris' english (*Venice* I had read in translation) is lush, with a rich vocabulary, the syntax sophisticated simplicity is almost musical. The book is organized into short chapters, in which the tone, although varying between memories more reflective and more factual account, it is always very stylish and fun, combining an english way of being affluent to a view of life from those who already knew its most secret and extravagant corners.

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