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# THE NEW WOMAN

EMMA HEANEY

LITERARY MODERNISM, QUEER THEORY, AND THE TRANS FEMININE ALLEGORY



# The New Woman



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# The New Woman

*Literary Modernism, Queer Theory,  
and the Trans Feminine Allegory*

Emma Heaney



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# Contents

List of Illustrations	vii
Acknowledgments	ix
Note on Usage	xiii
Preface	xv
Introduction	3
PART I: THE MODERNIST ALLEGORY OF TRANS FEMININITY	
1. The Development of the Allegory of Trans Femininity: Sexology, Gay Rights, Psychoanalysis, and Literary Modernism	23
2. Blooming into a Female Everyman: Feeling like a Woman in Joyce's <i>Ulysses</i>	67
3. The Flesh That Would Become Myth: Barnes's Suffering Female Anatomy and the Trans Feminine Example	99
4. Ceased to Be Word and Became Flesh: Trans Feminine Life Writing and Genet's Vernacular Modernism	153

PART II: MATERIALIST TRANS FEMINISM AGAINST QUEER THEORY

5. A Triumphant Plural: Post-Structuralism, Queer Theory, and the Trans Feminine	203
6. Materialist Trans Feminism against Queer Theory	253
Notes	299
Works Cited	319
Index	333



# Illustrations

Figure 1. Page from Djuna Barnes's personal scrapbook	106
Figure 2. Thelma Wood, circa 1932	147
Figure 3. Djuna Barnes, <i>The Ambisexual Art Dealer</i>	152
Figure 4. Article from the September 1973 issue of <i>Moonshadow</i>	254
Figure 5. List of trans liberation political organizations	262
Figure 6. Flyer promoting "Gay Women's Free Spirit"	275



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# Note on Usage

In this book, terms are used in the following ways:

*Male assigned at birth* and *Female assigned at birth* (MAAB and FAAB) mean just what they say: people whom medical and state authorities identify as male or female at birth. These are important terms because they allow collective reference to people whose experiences are shaped by a set of expectations associated with their assigned sex.

*Cis* is an adjective that indicates a rough alignment between assigned sex and the sex with which one identifies. *Cissexism* is the presumption that assigned sex and identified sex always align and the rejection of any evidence that this is not a universal condition. A related but distinct term, *transmisogyny*, is the particular denigration that is directed at trans women and trans feminine people. It combines the force of misogyny (grounded in sexual violence, devaluing of feminized work, and biologizing of intellectual inferiority) with the charge of either artificial or inadequate womanhood and the imperative to prove one's womanhood.

*Trans feminine* refers to MAAB people who avow a female or feminine gender identity by using female pronouns, identifying with one or more vernacular trans feminine terms (around the turn of the twentieth century in the United States, Britain, and France these terms include *fairy*, *Mary*, *molly*, *queen*, *tante*, and *molle*) and/or identifying as women. This book uses the pronouns *she/her* for *people of trans feminine experience* who identify as women and/or whose self-representation is geared

toward affirming their female identity. In the case of fictional characters, this book uses she/her pronouns for characters who identify as female. In cases where gender identity is unclear the gender-neutral pronouns *they/their* are used.

*Trans feminine* also refers to a range of practices (styles of dress, makeup, and grooming); vocabularies and ways of speaking; and sexual, labor, and social arrangements that have historically accompanied trans feminine people and socialities. These trans feminine aesthetics and cultural qualities emerge from trans feminine circles but are also available to gay men who might only inhabit the category for a period of their life or exhibit certain trans feminine qualities while not identifying with the category. The trans feminine in this sense is also a cultural field that was stringently policed by gay men in the early twentieth century, who might accuse one another of being a “swish” or acting “transy.” These aesthetics and qualities bore strong ties with those of working-class and poor cis women during the period.

*Trans feminism* is a political theory and set of political practices that grows out of the collective experience of trans women and feminine gender-nonconforming people. The final chapter of *The New Woman* addresses trans women’s organizing after 1970 that announces itself as the social movement Trans Liberation. The book also uses this term more capaciously to refer to earlier writings that express trans women’s self-assertion and collective assertion in the face of the enormous structural and interpersonal pressures that have been exerted on trans feminine people to deny or apologize for their identities.



# Preface

On February 4, 2014, Janet Mock appeared on the CNN public affairs program *Piers Morgan Live* to promote her memoir *Redefining Realness*, which recounts her coming of age in Honolulu as a mixed-race trans girl and her life in New York City as a young journalist. Host Piers Morgan began the interview by remarking that her present physical appearance was all the proof that he needed that she “should always have been a woman.” Morgan’s questions focused on genital surgery and the responses of cis male lovers, what *Redefining Realness* calls “the titillating details that cis people love to hear” (Mock, 227). When the interview aired, Mock was outraged to see that CNN producers had edited out her resistant responses and also captioned her image with the phrases “formerly a man” and “a boy until 18.” Via Twitter, she demanded that Morgan “stop sensationalizing [her] life and misgendering trans women.” CNN promptly invited Mock for a repeat appearance. An aggrieved Morgan asked “to learn why it is so offensive to . . . say that [Mock] grew up as a boy” and then “had surgery . . . to become a real woman.” This time Mock was prepared to answer Morgan’s insistent framing of womanhood in cis terms. All babies, she pointed out, are assigned a sex at birth: “a matter none of us [has] control over.” Her story, she insisted, is “not about what surgeries I may or may not have had. It is not about how I disclose my gender to people. It’s about who I am now. I’m Janet Mock . . . a fierce trans advocate.”

What is remarkable about Morgan's behavior in the second interview is that, despite his repeated assertion of his own ignorance, when Mock attempted to answer his questions, Morgan interrupted to confidently reassert the facts of sex as he knows them: genitals determine sex. He would only accept a framing of trans experience as a change from one sex to the other enabled by doctors who perform surgery. Morgan's response to Mock, both his framing of trans life and his peculiar mode of address that claimed ignorance but conveyed authority, rested on several *a priori* assumptions that this book will historicize. These are:

1. Trans feminine existence is new. Sources extending in time from fin-de-siècle tabloid headlines through Piers Morgan position trans women as unfamiliar. Through what rhetorical and conceptual tools can trans feminine experience be positioned as consistently new for over a hundred years or, as this book will argue, for the entire duration of its existence as a distinct field of experience? This persistent framing denies trans feminine history so completely that until recently most trans girls grew up without knowing that another trans girl had ever existed, despite the long history of trans feminine community and ample sources on trans feminine lives. Morgan installed newness in the figure of change that he enforced when he told Mock that through surgery she had become a new person, her true self.
2. Trans women must present their credentials before cis people to be assessed for authenticity. Much of Mock's memoir focuses on her family, the community of trans girls and women that she found as a young woman, and her life with her now husband. Throughout her book, she cites black feminist foremothers and expresses a profound identification with contemporary trans women's organizing and trans women's history. Morgan's approach extracted her from these communities and socialities in which her life makes sense. He posited her trans womanhood as the single definitional fact of her life. Mock's blackness and indigeneity; her experience as a sex worker and a journalist; the political priorities that trans women identify: none of these topics were queried. Morgan insisted that Mock report solely on facts that he deemed relevant to determining if her claim to womanhood was legitimate and what her trans experience has meant to cis men.
3. All individual trans women feel exactly the same way about their bodies. Morgan insisted that young Janet must have been con-

fused, bullied, isolated, and at war with her body. According to him, these conditions were relieved when she achieved authenticity through surgery. Morgan never considered that, as Mock writes in her book, as a child she looked at other girls and women and identified with them, rather than rejecting herself and her body. As a teen she found community with trans girls and women who recognized her on the terms of their shared experience. These girls and women capacitated each other when they shared clothes or tips about getting hormones. These women availed themselves of medical services as their inclination dictated and access allowed, but Mock makes it clear that women have different kinds of bodies, and this diversity exists among trans women as well.

4. Trans feminine experience is ultimately impossible to understand. The simple fact of Morgan's interview positioned Mock's story as an object of knowledge, implying that it would be investigated in order to expand the understanding of interviewer and audience. In the interview, however, trans femininity, posited always as an object of potential knowledge, was maintained as an object of potential knowledge. Morgan's repeated claims to ignorance expressed his unwillingness to know.

As I argue in the following pages, this framing of trans women as new, subject to cis judgment, singularly defined, and impossible to understand was first crafted in the late nineteenth century and was reiterated throughout the twentieth century. Piers Morgan took these ideas for granted because they have thoroughly permeated the dominant cultural understanding. But why did Morgan persist in insisting that Mock admit that she misunderstands her body, her life, and the lives of her sisters? Consider this: if Mock never became female, if she was a girl to begin with, what does that mean for Piers Morgan? Like many cis doctors, judges, and reporters before him, Morgan crafted the encounter with a trans woman as a stage on which to reassert the universality of cis experience. In order to do so, he had to resist the entry of trans women's reality into the hall of official knowledge. The true import of this interview, however, is that Janet Mock is positioned in history to resist Morgan. It is the work of this book to trace the rhetorical path that led us to this point.



# The New Woman



# Introduction

General feeling: I feel like a woman in a man's form; and even though I often am sensible of a man's form, yet it is always in a feminine sense. Thus, for example, I feel the penis as clitoris; the urethra as urethra and vaginal orifice, which always feels a little wet, even when it is actually dry; the scrotum as labia majora, in short, I always feel the vulva. And all that that means one alone can know who feels or has felt so. But the skin all over my body feels feminine; it receives all impressions, whether of touch, of warmth, or whether unfriendly, as feminine, and I have the sensations of a woman.  
—Case Subject 129, Richard von Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1886)

The girl-boy [is] a female who has, along with some other male structures, developed testicles and penis in place of the usual ovaries and cunnus. Here it is not so much a case of a female brain in a male body, but of the female brain in a *female* body.  
—Jennie June, *Autobiography of an Androgyne* (1918)

We begin with these two accounts of bodily self-understanding written by trans women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Both passages contain a variant of a phrase that Karl Ulrichs coined in the 1860s to explain desire between men. Such desire, Ulrichs explains, arises because the feminine partner has an “*anima muliebris virili corpore inclusa*,” “a woman's soul enclosed in a man's body.” Above, Subject 129 adapts Ulrichs's phrase to “a woman in a man's form” and Jennie June to “a female brain in a male body.” These are the kinds of phrases that formed the popular understanding of trans experience throughout the twentieth century. Although both writers are obliged to reference such phrases, the complete passages make plain that neither woman's

experience conforms to this now-familiar formulation of mismatched bodies and minds. Rather, these women define female embodiment on the level of organs and sensations in terms that do not conform with cis understandings of womanhood.

The first epigraph records the experience of Subject 129 in a sexological study that was conducted by the psychiatrist Richard von Krafft-Ebing and published as the influential medico-legal manual *Psychopathia Sexualis* in 1886. Subject 129, a 42-year-old Hungarian medical doctor, describes not a discrepancy between her genitals and female sex identity, but rather certainty regarding the facts of her body: what others might call a penis, she knows to be a clitoris. Far from being sadly trapped in the wrong body, Subject 129 feels with luxurious acuteness sensations that align her with women. With the medical precision of a physician and the empirical credibility of the patient, Subject 129 reports that—despite what experts might claim to *know*—she *feels* a clitoris, a vagina, and “always” a vulva as the anatomical features of her body. For the sake of legibility to the cis reader, she must concede to the phrase “man’s form,” but what follows makes clear that she does not require bodily change to achieve womanhood because she already has a female body.

The second epigraph comes from a memoir published thirty-two years later in 1918 by the trans feminine New Yorker who went by the street name Jennie June.<sup>1</sup> In contrast to Subject 129’s narrative, solicited by a psychiatric researcher with diagnostic standardization in mind, *Autobiography of an Androgyne* is a personal account of June’s “career as a fairy” in the working-class bars, streets, and tenements of the Bowery neighborhood from the 1890s to the 1910s (Lind, 188). Her memoir describes the survival techniques she and her trans sisters employed, the violence they suffered, and the thrills they enjoyed. Like Subject 129, June affirms that she is a woman with a female body. Without deference to the narrative of entrapment, she notes that some women are born with “penises and testicles.” “Girl-boy” is the term she chooses among the many vernacular terms in the period for people who have been told that they are men but know themselves to be—and recognize each other as—women.

Since the 1860s, experts accounted for same-sex desire through parsings of inverted gender, beginning with Ulrichs’s formulation and later expressed in terms such as “the intermediate sex” and “the third sex.” In the late nineteenth century, trans femininity emerged in sexological understanding as an extreme expression of this inverted condition. By the 1910s, as Jennie June was completing her memoir, researchers had dis-



covered sex hormones, grounding an explanation of gender nonconformity as a result of a biochemical imbalance. In 1922, the year that June published a second memoir, surgical knowledge expanded to offer the surgical transformation of genitals as the defining event of “sex change.” Here and elsewhere in her memoir, June explicitly rejects these expert diagnoses of her body and mind. Subject 129 speaks from a time before the sexological model defined trans womanhood.<sup>2</sup> Jennie June speaks from within a trans feminine sociality, still alive and well in the twenty-first century, that refuses the sovereignty of the sexological model.

In resistance to the individualizing form of the diagnostic, each woman affirms her place in a sorority of women, including those women “who feel or have felt” the experience of being “girl-boys.” Their perspectives present a profound challenge to the accepted idea that penises ground male identity and vaginas ground female identity during a period in which men of science reevaluated the biological and chemical definition of sex. These men refused this challenge by insisting on the aspirational status of trans women’s sex. Through the medical conceit of the woman trapped in a male body—and this is the central claim of *The New Woman*—sexologists distilled the variety of trans feminine experience into this single entrapped figure that novelists and theorists then installed in fictional and theoretical narratives about gender, desire, and historical change.

*The New Woman: Literary Modernism, Queer Theory, and the Trans Feminine Allegory* begins by addressing the historical occlusion of the experiences like those described in these epigraphs and the consecration of the single definition of trans femininity as the condition of “a woman trapped in a man’s body.” The book then charts the historical itinerary of a conviction based on this single definition that has medical, literary, and theoretical modes of expression. This is the conviction that trans feminine existence—the fact that people identified as male at birth later come to assert a female or feminine sex identity—is an enigma that invites investigation and, once solved, offers a blunt cipher that explains the fact that definitions of sex categories change over time, often in seemingly abrupt spurts that challenge the organization of society. *The New Woman* argues that Ulrichs’s formula and its diagnostic and popular conceptual offspring have lived on as the dominant popular explanation for trans feminine experience because this formulation has taken on the status of an explanatory figure in stories about the *general* relation between bodily structures and sex identity. At historical moments when this relation is being reevaluated, the trans feminine allegory reinserts trans women into a cis understanding of sex as that

understanding is adjusted to account for historical change.<sup>3</sup> These conceptual orderings attribute to the experts' trans feminine model both a kind of absolute material ground for trope (actual castration) and the most ideated narrative (a story of a treacherous crossing). The forwarding of this story allows the writer to avoid the actual provocation of trans femininity: genitals do not ground sex in the way that cis people imagine, and all bodies can be penetrated and are thus vulnerable to social feminization. It is trans feminine life in its great diversity that presents this singular challenge to cis logic and not the Modernist period's technological innovations in endocrinology and genital surgery.

This book identifies two cultural formations that are particularly significant in the maintenance of the trans feminine allegory at moments of historical change in the understanding of sex. First, interwar transatlantic Modernism, defined capaciously to include sexological and psychoanalytic as well as literary texts, concretized the figural status of trans femininity at a moment when the feminist woman and the effeminate homosexual became emblems of the historical forces that provoked a profound reorganization of the understanding of the categories of woman and man. Second, in the early 1990s, Queer Theory announced itself as an intellectual response to the limits of a previous feminism that took "woman" as its political subject. These Queer Theory texts revived and reinforced the figural assumption of the trans feminine allegory that the Modernists innovated during the period in which trans life was medicalized.<sup>4</sup>

*The New Woman* suggests that the installation of trans women in narratives that are *about* the conceptual reordering of sex attaches this allegorical association to trans femininity itself in popular understanding. The diverse lives, socialities, and experiences of embodiment of trans women are also bound by similarities of experience born of being *positioned as trans women*. Sexologists, psychoanalytic thinkers, Modernist novelists, and Queer Theorists have refashioned trans femininity as a figure that holds explanatory power regarding the sex and sexuality of cis people. This assumption that trans women's very existence *means something* outside itself, something about the gender of a putatively cis general subject, imposes a representational disjuncture between trans self-knowledge and trans *meaning*. The itinerary of this presumption of figurality and trans women's refusal of it in the long twentieth century are the focus of this book.

The book is divided into two parts; the first focuses on the Modernist period and the second on the period since 1970. Part 1, "The Modernist Allegory of Trans Femininity," first examines the late nineteenth-century

sexologists who gathered trans feminine self-descriptions from which they distilled the singular figure of the extreme invert as a type of person distinct from cis women and gay men. The sexological figure then grounded the medicalization of trans feminine life when endocrinological and surgical innovations enabled gender-confirming health care in the form of hormone injections and genital surgeries in the early twentieth century. Whereas nineteenth-century mollies and fairies functioned socially *as women*—and in the working-class districts of London, New York, Paris, and elsewhere continued to do so—the medicalization of trans femininity cohered in a nosology that required trans women to regard their bodies and sex as misaligned. This model insisted that trans women regard their womanhood as only an aspiration, in order to legitimate a program of hormone prescriptions and surgical sex change as a medical cure. This taxonomic specification and deliteralization of trans feminine life provided the expert trans feminine figure that grounded the literary and theoretical allegorical installations that followed.<sup>5</sup>

In the early twentieth century, Modernist novelists identified the emergent trans feminine type as a figure for a historical process: a realignment of gender through the feminist redefinition of woman and the historical emergence of homosexuality that redefined man. During this period, bourgeois women envisioned a partial escape from the material conditions that historically feminized them through political agitation for dress reform, education, divorce, birth control, and, most paradigmatically, suffrage. The period's print culture offered bourgeois women the popular figure of the New Woman through which they imagined their transition from their mothers' role of corseted wives to their future as individuals with sexualities, careers, and educational prospects, or, in short, with many of the qualities that define the masculine franchise. In the same period, the centering of the homosexual as a quintessential aberrant social type, and in particular the popular depiction of the extreme invert as a mincing and lisping effeminate, threatened men with the femininity that might lurk within them.

Freud was the first theorist to proffer trans femininity as a cipher for how gender works at this historical moment when genitals and assigned sex no longer fully accounted for who might be caught in an association with the feminine. In *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905) Freud uses sexologists' distillation of the trans feminine invert and the earliest experiments with sex change to form his theory of inversion to explain the unconscious perversions of successful heterosexuals. The invert manifests the gender-confounding desires that the normal person sublimates or the neurotic represses. Thus, the *figure* of the invert that

sexology has distilled from a range of experiences of actual people, in Freud's treatment, *represents* the "perversion [that is] the original state [and] the universal predisposition of the human sexual drive" (Schaffner, 139).

Stemming from this direct metaphorical uptake of inversion, Freud develops the theory that sex identity itself hinges on the threat of castration, that is, by the threat that one could be made a woman. While every reader of Freud knows that woman has not been literally castrated, castration employed as a metaphor theorizes the social process that defines women by egoic injury. This figure of genital lack *represents* the social injury that is feminization. In these two metaphors—the lurking womanhood of the invert and the psychic catastrophe that becoming a woman represents—Freud is the first to task trans womanhood with clarifying the operation of cis sex.

The literary Modernist trans feminine had her most substantial foundation in these influential concepts and broad anxieties that Freud's writing expressed and inflamed. Part 1 then traces the development of the expert trans feminine from psychoanalytic metaphor to Modernist literary allegory. Trans femininity pervaded the culture of Modernist circles, in part because trans feminine people were visible on the streets and theater stages of cities where avant-garde milieus took shape. International vaudeville stars such as Julian Eltinge, the Rocky Twins, and Bert Savoy introduced female impersonation to mainstream audiences in the United States and Europe.<sup>6</sup> Among these performers, the American music hall performer Barquette was particularly influential in Modernist circles. She transfixed audiences in Paris with her performances and was the subject of a series of photographs by Man Ray that were commissioned by Jean Cocteau. The same Man Ray appeared in self-portraits as the female alter ego Rose Selavy, citing trans feminine style. Mainstream theatrical female impersonation waned in the 1920s as these kinds of acts migrated to become mainstays of gay clubs that produced their own stars such as Harlem's Lulu Belle (Wilson, 282). In an overlapping milieu, American blues songs evoked sissy men who serve as substitutes for cis women or, from the perspective of women speakers, steal away their men.<sup>7</sup> From London to Los Angeles, from the 1890s to the height of media attention in the "pansy craze" of the early 1930s, newspaper articles reported on the pansy resorts, fairy balls, and painted boys that marked the urban underbelly.<sup>8</sup>

These cultural formations came to prominence in a moment of historical change in fundamental understandings of bodies and sex roles

that occurred unevenly in accord with class and place. From the 1880s to World War II, the medical diagnostic conceit that inverts were sick collided with the working-class tolerance of same-sex acts and trans feminine identities that did not challenge the organization of society into the categories of man and woman. Throughout *The New Woman* I distinguish the former (the medical depiction of trans femininity) that I have called “the expert trans feminine” from the accounts of the many modalities of trans feminine life that I will call “the vernacular trans feminine.” This latter critical phrase refers to the identities and cultural practices of the fairies, mollies, and Maryannes who were visible members of working-class communities in the Modernist period. These trans feminine people often identified and were recognized as women. They wore dresses, plucked their eyebrows, used makeup, called themselves and each other by feminine names and pronouns, worked in feminized sectors (often as prostitutes), and engaged in sexual and other relationships in female roles.<sup>9</sup> Modernist writers measured the sexological accounts of inversion that promised to explain modern gender with the vernacular trans femininity of the street and stage.

Interwar literature reflected this cultural visibility of trans femininity in both expert and vernacular forms. Mina Loy’s unpublished play *The Sacred Prostitute* (1914) features a trans feminine character called Love who seduces and undermines a character called Futurism, a representative of Loy’s misogynist Futurist brethren. Mae West’s *The Drag* and *The Pleasure Man* (1927) both depict trans feminine characters, reflecting West’s own dramaturgical debt to the female impersonators who inspired her (Robertson, 58). Hemingway’s novels are peppered with references to trans feminine fairies and male concern over who might be a fairy.<sup>10</sup> Charles Henri Ford and Parker Tyler’s *The Young and the Evil* (1933) depicts fairy and camp culture and the negotiations that queer people made regarding their relation to this culture.<sup>11</sup>

From among the Modernist works that addressed the trans feminine, *The New Woman* identifies an allegorical strain in works of British Modernism. The book traces the development of this strain through the work of Aldous Huxley, James Joyce, T. S. Eliot, and Djuna Barnes. Their major Modernist works find a rich aesthetic and conceptual resource in the marriage of signifiers of vernacular trans femininity with Freud’s critical metaphors of inversion and castration. These works extend Freud’s sense that trans femininity could clarify theories of sex into stories in which trans feminine characters enable the rethinking of changes in sex over time. For Aldous Huxley, the story of the psychic

hermaphrodite represents the historical change in sexed categories produced by sexology, psychoanalysis, feminism, and the social changes provoked by World War I. For James Joyce, sex change is the ultimate figure for the feminizing effect of desire. For Djuna Barnes, the story of the trans feminine Doctor O'Connor's relation to her genitals reflects the experience of genital lack that defines woman. For T. S. Eliot, the Tiresian trans feminine represents the capacity to understand the sad effect of modern gender anarchy on eros. These Modernists were the first to claim that, although she might mean anything, trans woman must mean something.

The very diversity of the tenor of the allegory reflects that the Modernists understood the trans feminine to be affixed to the form of allegory as such. The appeal to the Modernists of the trans feminine is, in this sense, not only thematic but also formal. Peter Nicholls writes that Modernism is characterized by the presentation of the feminine as a “self-presence incarnate” that the writer captures in aesthetic forms (Nicholls, 3). It is the Modernists' desire to call attention to this aesthetic process that distinguishes the Modernist allegorical manipulation of the embodied, somewhat grotesque, sexual woman from the Romantics' outpouring of raw emotion in response to Woman as a “symbolic presence” representing nature and beauty. In this view, the Modernist writers' clinical examination and aesthetic manipulation position their women characters as “absolute otherness” and so she offers a figure that “[protects] the poet's self from the full recognition of identity with other people” (ibid., 4). Each writer considered in *The New Woman* evokes the trans feminine as just such an object through which to explore alienation from self and community.

The very form of allegory—its capacity to present a simple narrative as a means to investigate consequential and complex questions and to condense that narrative into a representative character—answers the Modernist desire to place in narrative the figure that sexologists distilled and that Freud infused with meaning. The trans feminine of literary Modernism is woman held in an essential state of figurality. Modernists ascribe to the character at the center of the trans feminine allegory the qualities of corporeality, essential sexuality, and enigmatic “absolute otherness” as naturalized features of her very status as a trans woman, just as the individual pilgrim always implies a meditation on faith and spiritual journeying. Put another way, these texts present any trans feminine character as an embodiment of the expert diagnosis of trans womanhood as an aspiration. Her presence implies her position within

a standard narrative of dysphoria and striving that addresses questions behind the specific iteration of that story.

What were the material shifts in the experience of gender during the period for which gender nonconformity became the symbol? The Modernist period saw profound changes in the daily experience of gender in the United States, the United Kingdom, and western Europe. The period saw the coming of age of the first generation to be born into the era of widespread middle-class women's higher education (Smith-Rosenberg, 247–49) and “employment in the expanding professional sectors of teaching, secretarial, nursing, and social work” (Terry, 62). Marriage reforms of the late nineteenth century gained recognition for “married women as civil individuals” (Pateman, 120). Labor militancy and leadership by women in labor organizing and new public leisure options for single women with their own income were prominent innovations in working-class life (Orleck, 31–52). The Women of the Left Bank, the first substantial community of cosmopolitan avant-garde single women “writers, book sellers, and *salonnières*,” moved between New York, Paris, and London (Benstock ix). Militant suffragists in the United States and Britain began engaging in acts of civil disobedience and property destruction, submitting to arrest and often continuing the struggle while incarcerated through the tactic of the hunger strike (Lyon 94; Rowbotham, 77–91).

The emblem of these changes was the transatlantic popular figure of the “New Woman” who “imbued women’s activity in the public domain with a new sense of female self, a woman who was independent, athletic, sexual and modern” (Peiss, 7), often in contrast with a phantasm of the harem-bound enslaved wives of “the East.” The American “New Negro Woman” represented the potential of bourgeois African American women to shake off the cultural backwardness these women attributed to the legacy of slavery.<sup>12</sup> The cultural texts that celebrated the New Woman in the United States, Britain, and Europe installed her as a mark of civilizational progress, often in contrast to regional or national populations that these same texts marked as civilizationally lagging or even constitutionally backward. This book understands the New Woman as the popular version of a female liberation that made its claim in the language of the new and the modern. This narrative promised women access to male spheres and activities while they prepared themselves to be companionate heterosexual wives.<sup>13</sup> Proponents of the New Woman contrasted this vision of freedom with the far-flung uncivilized societies of the present and with the Victorian patriarchy of the past.

This material and representational liberation for women corresponded historically with material shifts that men often felt deprived them of masculine freedom and priority. Economic shifts brought an unprecedented number of bourgeois men into offices that were heavily surveyed by bosses and did not require the physical labor that gendered work as masculine (Chauncey, 111). Women's social purity movements for temperance and against prostitution made "men [feel] that women were trying to feminize them" (Greenberg, 387). The actual complexity and material bases for these changing social dynamics (the fact of women's education, increased employment, and entrance into the professions) were mystified away by the popular understanding of these historical events as a simple case of "male domination [threatened] in the face of women's aspirations to equality" (ibid., 388). The threat was both that the barrier between men and women was breaking down and that the hierarchy of man over woman was being challenged from below; these anxieties fueled a social project to reestablish men's distinctiveness from women. This social project required the "[policing of] men who lacked [masculine] qualities just as much as women who exhibited them . . . continued male rule required that male effeminacy be repudiated" (ibid.). Trans feminine people, and their popular and medical typological representations, became the emblem of this repudiated effeminacy. For the Modernists, trans women as a figure for the new allegorized the relation between these two "New Women": the rights-bearing cis woman and the repudiated effeminate.

The First World War amplified this crisis of masculinity that had already been underway by 1914 and connected it to genital status. Sandra M. Gilbert observes that battlefield genital injuries became a figure for modern anxiety about white manhood and that literature was a primary mode of expressing this theme.<sup>14</sup> She writes that Modernism's "gloomily bruised antiheroes churned out by the war suffer specifically from sexual wounds [and] become . . . *not* men, *unmen*" (Gilbert and Gubar, 198). The unman found his complement in the mass of single women who in the postwar period adopted the bobbed hair and narrow dress cuts that cast them as "beings without breasts, without hips" (Roberts, 19–45).<sup>15</sup> In the literary works considered in part 1, the conceit that "masculine women and feminine men" were a modern invention provoked aesthetic examination, with the trans feminine as a crucial conceptual and aesthetic resource. This pair's bodily rearrangement indicates the seeping influence of the gender nonconforming types of the prewar period into the general population of normal men and women



after the war. By the 1920s, the trans feminine icon Quentin Crisp could report that all men “searched themselves for vestiges of effeminacy as they searched themselves for lice” (Crisp, 21). The novels that are the focus of *The New Woman* were written between 1914 and 1942. Each novelist finds trans femininity to be an apt figure for responding to these profound shifts in gender and sex.

Part 1 concludes by taking another pass through the Modernist period, this time focusing on life writing, including the texts by Case 129 and Jennie June with which we began. This vernacular material documents the lives of trans feminine people, in contrast to expert presentations of the trans feminine that the previous chapters outline. These texts offer examples of each woman’s understanding of bodily materiality: their sense of how body parts attain meaning in terms of sex, gender, and sexuality. Trans women reveal the relation between female identity and other kinds of feminized identities including girl-boy, fairy, wife, prostitute, and woman worker. Their words offer accounts of the material conditions of trans feminine life: the kinds of work that trans feminine people can do both when they are read as trans feminine and read as cis women, their options for housing and socializing, and their experiences of desire and gendered violence. In this way, part 1 concludes with a genealogy of trans women’s writing from the period that unknowingly pushes against the figural ascription of the Modernists. Trans feminine life in the Modernist moment offers resources for conceptual understandings of sex, but such an understanding requires consulting trans women as producers of their own accounts, not as figures in someone else’s literary or theoretical story. Part 1 concludes by tracing the reflection of these trans feminine material conditions and bodily logics in Jean Genet’s *Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs*, a late Modernist novel that engages trans femininity as a distinct cultural field and not as a figural wellspring.<sup>16</sup>

Part 2, “Materialist Trans Feminism against Queer Theory,” moves from the British, French, and German milieus that produced the trans feminine allegory to the largely American critical revival in the late twentieth century. Part 2 traces the installation of the trans woman as a figural cipher for the operation of sex into the foundations of Queer Theory. *The New Woman* argues that Queer Theory’s commitment to semiotic critical methodologies, a commitment inherited from the Post-Structuralist break that is the theoretical touchstone of Queer Theory, explains the reproduction of the form of the trans feminine allegory from its literary foundation. Texts from the 1970s by Barthes and Foucault that provided

the conceptual scaffolding for Queer Theory proper (beginning with the American formation of the field in the early 1990s) installed the trans woman as the proof of the social construction of the gender binary. Beginning with the 1990 publication of Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble*, the trans woman becomes the figure that provokes a move beyond woman as the subject of feminism. Subsequent work, including Butler's most recent monograph that focuses on gender, *Undoing Gender*, extended the installation of trans life as figure. *The New Woman* traces Queer Theory's figural engagement with trans femininity back to Foucault's inattention to the historical process through which male same-sex desire is distinguished from trans feminine sex identity in his theorization of the emergence of the homosexual as a modern species. This is the fundamental theoretical claim of *The New Woman*: the emergence of the trans feminine as a field distinct from both male homosexuality and cis womanhood is a weighty historical corollary to the emergence of homosexuality. In the period, even as the discovery of hormones informed a more accurate view of sex variance, genitals became the seat of sexed truth. In other words, in the Modernist period, sex became cis. Many, with Modernist writers among them, viewed trans femininity as the most visible violation of this modern dictate, and the centrality of trans femininity to Modernism stemmed from these writers' attempts to grapple with what this violation meant.

Part 2 concludes by presenting an archive of Materialist Trans Feminism after 1970. This work, like Modernist life writing, grows a theory from the logics, vocabularies, and concepts of trans feminine people and spheres.<sup>17</sup> The book identifies this body of writing as "Materialist Trans Feminism" and suggests that this intellectual and political tradition accounts for two fields of the operation of sex and gender for which Queer Theory cannot account. First, Materialist Trans Feminism clarifies the ontological operation of sex as a power relation that forms around the roles of penetrator and penetrated, an operation that moves easily between the gendered meaning of anal and vaginal penetration. Second, while Materialist Feminism defines the category of woman as the social category that bears a historical relation to unpaid domestic work, Materialist *Trans* Feminism expands that analysis to account for the relation between trans femininity and criminalized commercial sex.

The recent mainstream media presentation of the fact of trans women's existence reveals that the assumption of figurality forms the mode of addressing trans women and trans feminine people to this day. *Time* and *Vanity Fair* cover stories position trans women as new and eternally

enigmatic, requiring investigation and interrogation so that their explanatory potential can be unlocked by the interrogator.<sup>18</sup> The medical protocol for trans health care likewise remains stuck in this Modernist formulation, requiring individual trans people to embody a story template in order to be officially sanctioned as transsexual and approved for gender-confirming health care services.<sup>19</sup> Although many people, both cis and trans, experience alienation from their bodies based on experiences of sexual assault, gender, race, sexuality, illness, debility, conditions of labor, poverty, fatness, thinness, or other factors, *The New Woman* suggests that the diagnostic insistence that trans people are uniquely defined by alienation from the body denies the challenge to the cis understanding of sex that is posed by trans people who claim the right to determine the sexed and gendered meanings of their own bodies, with or without medical services.

#### MODERNIST STUDIES, QUEER THEORY, AND THE TRANS FEMININE

In her introduction to the anthology *Gender in Modernism* (2007), Bonnie Kime Scott identifies the recognition of transsexuality as a significant factor in expanding the focus of feminist literary criticism beyond the gynocritics' project to rediscover and recognize women Modernists (Scott, 2). This comment reflects the historical transition between two phases of critical engagement. First, gynocritical Modernist studies scholarship in the 1980s and early 1990s read depictions of trans femininity as a commentary on male power and female subordination. Shari Benstock's *Women of the Left Bank* (1986) argues that such depictions are "fantastic [parodies] of womanhood" whose rouging and powdering reflect "woman's role as *ornament* in society" (Benstock, 258). Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *Sexchanges* (1989) contrasts feminist Modernists such as Virginia Woolf and Djuna Barnes who aim to celebrate a "utopian ceremonial androgyny" with the "ritual transvestism" through which male Modernists such as Joyce and Eliot mock women and reinforce a strict distinction between the subordinated female and the empowered male. Majorie Garber's *Vested Interests* (1992) pathologizes trans feminine existence throughout and reads Barnes's Doctor O'Connor as "a cross-gender representation" who "seems inexplicable" (Garber, 389).

*The New Woman* observes that the terms of the gynocritical position require historicist and feminist revision. Trans feminine genders were

legible and understood in the period. Fairies and girl-boys were not only viewed as “crossing” from man and woman, but as trans feminine people, whose conditions of life were set by their association with cis women. Their depiction, therefore, is certainly formed by ideas about womanhood that a heteropatriarchal society has generated. What is required is an analytic that asks after the specific operations of misogyny and women’s experiences that inflect the writing and reading of these characters. One of the central fruits of that labor is the observation that Modernist novelists route engagement with trans femininity through the singular distillation of the psychoanalytic figure and so refuse the full implications of trans feminine experience, just as the sexologists and Freud did before them. *The New Woman* uncovers the trans feminine self-representation that is part of the recovery of women’s writing that the gynocritics made central to their critical project. Subject 129’s theorization of female embodiment, among many other investigations of trans feminine embodiment by trans women, expands the list of objects that gynocriticism must read.

Second, after 1990 scholars influenced by Queer Theory read the Modernist trans feminine as a mode of moving beyond binary sex. Ed Madden argues that Barnes’s and Eliot’s Tiresian figures provide meditations on ambiguous and changeable gender. Tim Armstrong inserts *Man into Woman*, the fictionalized account of Lili Elbe’s transition in Germany in the early 1930s, into a literary history of technologies of the body in the early twentieth century. Armstrong sees sex change as a significant component of this broader social change in the understanding of the body in the period that stemmed from a variety of scientific discoveries and technological innovations including prosthetics and plastic surgery, which he calls “Modernist Medicine” (Armstrong, 183). Armstrong suggests that in this field of changes in the understanding of the limits and potential of the body, “a new, more pragmatic answer to the question ‘What is a woman?’” emerges because “a woman [becomes] something you can *make* [in] this period which saw the first transsexual operations” (ibid., 159). For Armstrong, the newness of this procedure yokes trans femininity to the innovation of Modernist literary technique. In this frame, Lili Elbe’s life and medical choices are an example of “the literalizing fantasy of Modernism at the level of the organ,” that is, a figure for the Modernist project (ibid., 183).<sup>20</sup> In an article that cites Armstrong, Pamela Caughie suggests that “transsexualism . . . is engendered by modernist aesthetics,” a nexus of form and theme that she finds expressed in Woolf’s *Orlando*. For Caughie, *Man*

*into Woman*, in contrast, eschews the radical aesthetic and political potential of transsexualism by replicating “the wrong body narrative that dominates memoirs to this day” and so disappointingly “[downplays] the performative elements of gender” (Caughie, 510).

“[Modernism] is a kind of soul trapped in the gross body of modern industrial society,” writes James Knapp, characterizing (disapprovingly) a popular conception of Modernist aesthetics as the meaning in the meaninglessness of late capitalism. There is nothing in the passage to suggest that Knapp knowingly employed a transsexual metaphor, but as in Armstrong and Caughie, the availability of the figure of a refined soul struggling within a gross body enables the conceptualization of Modernism in this idiom. *The New Woman* attempts to break free of this critical channeling by viewing the Modernist trans feminine as a historicist object without the tautological application of Queer Theory, which is itself in the thrall of the Modernist trans feminine allegory. This book argues that, while Queer Theory repeats the Modernist habit of assigning an essential allegorical character to trans femininity, the field ignores the most significant aspect of the Modernist allegory: Modernists responded to the new modern mobility of femininity and feminization, not the breakdown of gender as in Queer Theory’s revival of the figure. Armstrong and Caughie, the only critics who have noted the centrality of trans femininity to Modernist aesthetics, repeat the trans feminine allegory present in literary Modernism through Queer Theory’s adjusted lens. *The New Woman* investigates the allegory.

## PART I: THE MODERNIST ALLEGORY OF TRANS FEMININITY

Chapter 1, “The Development of the Allegory of Trans Femininity: Sexology, Psychoanalysis, Gay Rights, and Literary Modernism,” begins with the sexologists who distilled a single figure of the trans feminine “extreme invert” out of the range of trans feminine experience expressed in sexological case studies. The first gay rights texts in the first decade of the twentieth century resisted the sexologists’ pathologizing of same-sex desire by proffering the trans feminine extreme invert as the perverse type in contrast to the normatively masculine homosexual. Freud engaged the discrepancy between the model of inversion and the model of homosexuality as he formed his theory of sexuality around sexological citations. Through this citational practice, he converted the sexological trans feminine into the critical metaphors of inversion and castration.

The chapter then reads Aldous Huxley's early novella *Farcical History of Richard Greenow* (1920) as a guide to the extension of the psychoanalytic metaphor into a literary allegory. Huxley's novella harnesses the Freudian trans feminine threat to produce a satirical "psychic hermaphrodite" as a fantastical figure for tortured shifts in the understanding of sex to accommodate the homosexual and the New Woman.

James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) departs from the pure figurality of Huxley's trans feminine. Chapter 2, "Blooming into a Female Everyman: Feeling like a Woman in *Ulysses*," reads the spontaneous sex change of the prototypical Modernist hero Leopold Bloom in the context of the instances of sex cross-identification that punctuate the entire novel. Joyce criticism that reads Bloom as a "womanly man" outside of sexual difference has long looked away from the gynecological specificity of the "pervaginal examination" that exposes Bloom's vulva to Circe's guffawing crowd. This chapter reveals Joyce's rendering of Bloom's *female* sensation in the form of sympathy pains, premenstrual complaints, and breast tenderness. Joyce posits this feminizing mirroring as the ultimate satisfaction of Bloom's masochism, the perversion that Freud identifies as supremely feminine. Bloom's experience with this gendering perversion detaches the psychic positions "male" and "female" from the somatic structures used to assign sex, even as his experiences reaffirm the relation between penetrability and feminization. His female feeling ushers in Molly Bloom's moment of trans masculine identification in the novel's final episode. This constitutes the Blooms as Modernism's twice-transsexual first couple.

Djuna Barnes's literary engagement with the trans feminine progresses further into serious investigation of the particular capacity of the trans feminine to illuminate elements of female experience *tout court*. Chapter 3, "The Flesh That Would Become Myth: Barnes's Suffering Female Anatomy and the Trans Feminine Example," addresses *Nightwood's* (1936) infamous transsexual Doctor O'Connor, who asks, "What is this thing?" as she bares her genitals before God. This vignette of trans womanhood retells Freud's account of the previously genderless child's first female experience: the traumatic recognition of the nonalignment between her castrated genital morphology and her phallic identity. Doctor O'Connor is the culmination of Barnes's oeuvre-spanning focus on traumatic bodily alienation as the quintessential female experience and female muteness as its lyric legacy. O'Connor's lack of lack, the phallic presence that she experiences as an injury, is marked by her lack of a word for her experience. Yet this wordlessness occasions her torrential Modernist monologues. This depiction is Barnes's adaptation of Eliot's

Tiresian allegory in “The Waste Land” to figure the “beauty in [the] permanent mistake” of trans woman’s double castration.

Chapter 4, “Ceased to Be Word and Became Flesh: Trans Feminine Life Writing and Genet’s Vernacular Modernism,” looks at the very material that the trans feminine allegory has effaced: the diversity of trans feminine self-representation during the period. The chapter reads life writing including case study narratives, memoirs, and letters, alongside Jean Genet’s *Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs*, the story of a trans woman living in a queer and trans Parisian demimonde akin to the New York scene that Jennie June describes in her memoir. Divine, Genet’s heroine, has the kinds of feminizing experiences that often feature in the life stories of women (both cis and trans) of the same time and class: sexual assault and abuse by male partners, solidarity and competition with other women, perilous sex work, and street harassment. She also lives under the definition of female embodiment that Case 129, Jennie June, and other trans women of the period present in their life writing. The chapter reads Genet’s novel as an aesthetic engagement with the vernacular reality presented in trans feminine life writing of the period.

## PART II: MATERIALIST TRANS FEMINISM AGAINST QUEER THEORY

The figurations of the trans feminine present in the largely European scientific and literary histories outlined in the first three chapters of part I establish the formal template for American theoretical treatment of the trans feminine in the late twentieth century. Chapter 5, “A Triumphant Plural: Post-Structuralism, Queer Theory, and the Trans Feminine,” begins by addressing two texts—Roland Barthes’s *S/Z* (1970) and Michel Foucault’s introduction to the memoirs of Herculine Barbin (1978)—that produce theories out of readings of trans feminine figures of the French nineteenth century. Barthes’s insistence that Balzac’s castrato Zambinella *is* castration and Foucault’s likewise strident claim that Barbin *is* the freedom of sexuality without sexual difference refuse the trans feminine content of Balzac’s and Barbin’s texts. This critical frame that installs an (always singular) trans experience as an example grounds Judith Butler’s field-defining treatment of trans femininity and masculinity in founding works of Queer Theory. The chapter explains the return of trans feminine allegory in Queer Theory as a result of the field’s singular reliance on Foucault’s theory of the emergence of sexual identities in the nineteenth century. Foucault’s inattention to the peri-

od's protocols of distinguishing the invert from the homosexual, the historical process that birthed the expert trans feminine, ensures that subsequent theoretical installations of trans femininity will further entrench the sexological, psychoanalytic, and literary figure.

Trans women express resistance to the figural meanings that doctors, theorists, and novelists have attributed to trans feminine existence. This book's final chapter, "Materialist Trans Feminism against Queer Theory," departs from queer theories that, in a sexological and psychoanalytic methodological tradition, center the individual, and in a Post-Structuralist theoretical tradition, foreground semiotic interpretation over materialist analysis. The political and intellectual formation that chapter 6 calls Materialist Trans Feminism and traces back to the 1970s is embedded in the political conditions of trans feminine people's lives, conditions that are organized by the political economy of "woman" and the political economy of "trans." The field is composed of political texts written by Trans Liberationists in the 1970s (for example, Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera's group Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries and Tommi Avicolti Mecca and Cei Bell's group Radical queens) and intellectuals who theorize from trans women's experiences and histories (for example, Sandy Stone, Emi Koyama, and Janet Mock). Their texts contain clarifying theoretical accounts of embodiment, gender, sex, race, coloniality, and the bureaucratic structures that seek to administer (and often end up threatening) trans people's lives.

This tradition builds on the Marxist feminist theorization of woman as the social category that emerges through a historical relation to reproductive labor, noting that the category of trans woman emerges at the intersection of this reproductive material basis and an a priori association with sex work, a form of criminalized labor. Although materialist analysis demonstrates that all social categories are historically changeable, comparison of the Modernist life writing of chapter 4 and the trans feminist writing of chapter 6 demonstrates significant consistency in the conditions of trans feminine life from the late nineteenth century to the early twenty-first century. This work denaturalizes the category of woman while recognizing that this social category orders women's lives: our affinities, solidarities, antagonisms, desires, and vulnerability to gendered violence. Materialist Trans Feminism obliges a society that remains mired in cis understandings of sex (and the academic fields that compose part of that society) to recognize a fundamental historical fact that literary Modernism and Queer Theory observe, but cannot adequately think through: woman has never been a cis category.



PART I

# The Modernist Allegory of Trans Femininity



# The Development of the Allegory of Trans Femininity

*Sexology, Gay Rights, Psychoanalysis,  
and Literary Modernism*

By the time Magnus Hirschfeld's Institute for Sexual Science began publicizing surgical sex change as the salvation and cure for "homosexual transvestites" in the early 1930s, the figure of the trans feminine person trapped in the wrong body had been in development for more than half a century. In an 1869 letter to Ulrichs, Karl Maria Kertbeny first coined the term "homosexual" to differentiate masculine men who desire men from trans feminine inverts (Stryker, *Transgender History*, 37). From the 1870s to the 1900s this distinction proliferated, distilling a trans feminine figure who was distinct from both homosexual men and cis women.<sup>1</sup> Psychiatric texts from the 1870s and 1880s deemed this "extreme effeminate" confused, isolated, and dissatisfied with her body and social role. These sexologists considered her mind delusional, her body degenerate, and her feminine gender expression exaggerated. By 1900 a new breed of sexological text that forwarded a gay rights agenda emphasized the rarity of the effeminate "male" invert, while affirming a strong correlation between masculinity and lesbianism. This evocation and disavowal of "the extreme effeminate" bulwarks the affirmation of the male homosexual as a virile and ethically refined citizen in the

first texts of gay rights proper (by Edward Carpenter, Andre Gide, and others) in the first decade of the twentieth century.

This chapter traces the figure of trans femininity that was produced at the nexus of sexology and early gay rights writing into Freudian metaphor and Modernist allegory. Freud's metaphors of inversion and castration explained the operation of gender as a structure of social power. The threat that one could be made a woman newly haunted men who, in the age of the homosexual, fretted about their potential feminization. Cis women, in contrast, were invited to seek social power through work and political representation. Aldous Huxley's little-known novella *Farcical History of Richard Greenow* is a guide to this redrawing of the definition of sex and the solidarities and antipathies that this redrawing produced. Huxley's figure for this historical realignment is a trans woman. The novella has none of the complex aesthetic forms of Joyce, Eliot, Barnes, and Genet, innovations that Modernists attributed, in part, to the shifts in narrative that psychoanalytic writing produced. The impossibility of writing after the shock of castration figured by trans femininity is, however, the subject of the novella. Thus, Huxley's camp satire provides a lens through which to view the conceptually and formally complex Modernist texts that the other chapters of part 1 engage.

#### THE STRANGE CAREER OF THE SEXOLOGICAL TRANS FEMININE

Reading across the early development of the sexological trans feminine reveals a tradition of sexological writers recasting the figure's meaning in order to meet conceptual or political goals. As we've seen, the figure began life as Karl Ulrichs's explanatory figure for the essential heterosexuality of love between men in the 1860s. In *The Riddle of Man-Manly Love* (1864), Ulrichs's *Urning* (English "Uranian"), "who [is] born with the sexual drive of women and . . . [has a] male [body]" (Ulrichs, 35), is marked by aesthetic, emotional, and civic genius and his pursuit of "*Dionings*" (heterosexual men) is the expression of a natural desire that results from a feminine sexual orientation that originates in embryonic development (ibid., 36–37, 47). This argument relies on the pseudoscientific claim that there is a biological origin for the *Urning's* sex feeling, and this explanation of the origin of "man-manly love" provides the basis for Ulrichs's ethical claim that the legal punishment of such "natural" feelings is illogical and unjust. In this way, the figure of

a woman trapped in a male body folds such men into heterosexuality and thus morality.

Richard von Krafft-Ebing and others working at the nexus of psychiatry and criminology in the 1870s and 1880s took many of the essentials of Ulrich's formulation but reinterpreted inversion not as grounds for acquittal for the crime of perversity, but rather as the mark of either pathology or criminality. Krafft-Ebing's model posited a spectrum of inversion that ran from the gender normative to the gradually more gender nonconforming. He considered it possible to develop inversion, either by being "seduced" into it as a youth, or by descending into it through participation in licentious urban cultures. In *Psychopathia Sexualis*, Krafft-Ebing bifurcates the category of invert into a congenital variant (a psychiatric pathology often stemming from a "hereditary taint") and an acquired variant (associated with sex work and therefore rightly criminalized).<sup>2</sup> The "congenital invert," Krafft-Ebing observes, often reports "the delusion" that they have changed sex (Krafft-Ebing 200, 216). He claims that those who "feel themselves to be female" feel a jealous antipathy for other trans feminine people and a strong attraction to masculine homosexuals and "normal men" (ibid., 253). Krafft-Ebing is particularly focused on the effeminate's desire to "always act like a woman" in sexual situations.

Trans feminine sex workers, who Krafft-Ebing considers more likely to have acquired their condition through degenerate living, use "the arts of coquetry" such as "ornaments, perfumes, feminine style of dress . . . to attract pederasts and homosexuals" (ibid., 392). Krafft-Ebing's text enjoyed great popular readership, with twelve editions published between 1886 and 1902.<sup>3</sup> This popular exposure and the work's status as a manual for courts and judges disseminated Krafft-Ebing's version of the expert trans feminine widely and with great consequences for public understanding and the real conditions of trans feminine life.

In his texts of the 1890s and 1900s, Havelock Ellis revived Ulrich's advocacy aim, but his texts betray the influence of the interceding decades regarding the essential pathology of trans femininity. In *Sexual Inversion*, published in 1896 in Germany and in Britain in 1897, Ellis claims more scientific precision than his predecessors in describing the "'sport' or variation" that sexual inversion represents in relation to "normal" heterosexuality (Ellis and Symonds, 133). This invert displays an "extravagance of . . . affection and devotion" that "frequently resembles the normal woman" (ibid., 108). This relation between the woman within the invert and living, breathing cis women became central to

the Modernist allegory. In Ellis's experience this femininity is a "widely prevalent" though not "universal" (*ibid.*, 119) characteristic of male inverts and, though abnormal and difficult for those afflicted, should not be punished or considered a grave malady.<sup>4</sup>

This sexological study of inverted desire had a hard-science complement in experimentation with animal sex change by the early years of the twentieth century. This period that saw the discovery of sex hormones was later referred to as "the endocrinological gold rush" and "the golden age of endocrinology" (Fausto-Sterling, 170). The most famous of these experiments were performed by Eugen Steinach, an Austrian physiologist and endocrinologist, who transplanted ovaries into the abdomens of male rodents and testes into female rodents. Steinach then observed sexed behaviors such as male animals that suckled their young and engaged in sexual behaviors associated with their new hormonal female sex, and he explained these changes in behavior as the result of the implanted organs' production of male and female sex hormones (Meyerowitz, 16). These experiments first introduced the concept of sex change to the public in the early 1910s (*ibid.*, 16).<sup>5</sup>

The 1920s saw the life story of the sexological invert attached to the possibility of surgical services for people seeking social recognition of their sex identity. Magnus Hirschfeld had visited Steinach in Vienna in the 1910s and helped to circulate the results of his research (Meyerowitz, 19). Hirschfeld's Institute for Sexual Science in Berlin was the first organization to offer sex change operations. Hirschfeld oversaw Dorchen Richter's castration in 1922, followed by the first surgical construction of her vagina in 1931. The institute began to publicize these services in the early 1930s, and the media attention surrounding the story of Lili Elbe, billed as the first person to achieve sex change, formed popular understanding of the procedure and the people who underwent it (Meyerowitz, 19–20).<sup>6</sup>

Hirschfeld, a gay man whose institute also contained a library of sexological material and served as a social center for queer and trans Weimar Republic Berliners, was the first to definitively distinguish "transvestites" from homosexual men and advocate for the specific needs of trans people. His theories, however, echo the analysis from sexological models back to Ulrichs. He focused on clothing and dressing as the primary interest of trans feminine people. His diagnostic abstractions extracted trans feminine people from the exigencies of their lives, for instance describing women's work as a preference that expresses gender rather than a necessity of living as a woman. In these and other comments,

Hirschfeld, like other sexologists, looked for symptoms of aberrant gender cross-identification and promised medical services to bring bodies into line with sex identity.<sup>7</sup> In his most straightforward claim, Hirschfeld writes: “No matter how much transvestite men feel like women when dressed in women’s clothing . . . they still remain aware that in reality it is not so,” affirming Ulrichs’s metaphor of entrapment (Hirschfeld, 182). This diagnostic then provided the medical justification for genital surgery and other medical services that the institute provided as the singular medical response to trans feminine life.

By the 1930s, stories of human sex change coming out of Hirschfeld’s institute were grafted onto this mounting sense that gender inversion and sexual perversion could hide in a seemingly normal person’s psyche or be acquired through loose living. This frame indicates the relationship between the perverse example and universal human experience in sexological thought, a relationship that Freud theorized and further circulated, as we will see. Across these works, sexological thought initiated the readings of trans feminine cultural signifiers as the manifestation of sexual secrets that might be hidden in others. This understanding defined trans femininity as the observable sign of desire for men rather than a sex identity in its own right. The sexological method also forwarded integration into normal gender and normal family life as the goal of seeking medical help and solicited family medical history and evidence of familial responses to the case study subject. This medicalization of queer life addressed the needs of bourgeois patients who didn’t have easy access to the working-class queer milieu in which trans women lived without the necessity of medical diagnosis or official authentication. By the early twentieth century sexologists understood the variable chemical life of sex for all people. Their texts, however, attached the scandal of this understanding to the personage of the trans feminine extreme invert. Early gay rights writing worked within this understanding to redefine the bounds of the normal, as we will see in the next section.

#### FEMININITY DISAVOWED: THE TRANS FEMININE REMAINDER IN EARLY GAY RIGHTS WRITING

These scientific and sociological parsings of same-sex object choice and gender nonconformity were further popularized through texts that made divergent ideological arguments based on these theories. Particularly influential was the philosopher Otto Weininger’s only book, *Sex*

*and Character*, published four months before his suicide in 1903. In it, Weininger outlines a “characterology” of men and women that in some ways detaches masculinity from the former and femininity from the latter. Women, he contends, are controlled utterly by sexuality and are therefore incapable of independent action, logic, self-control, or accomplishment of any kind. Men are capable of these things to the extent that they adequately cultivate masculinity. Weininger explicitly advocates the cultivation of masculinity in women as the sole avenue by which women can attain legitimacy and individuality. He writes that “a woman who had really given up her sexual self, who wished to be at peace would be no longer ‘woman.’ She would have ceased to be ‘woman’ . . . in that way only can there be an emancipation of woman” (Weininger, 349). In contrast, “woman-like female men” have relinquished their opportunity to achieve “genius” or individuality (*ibid.*, 188). He bases his argument for the repeal of antihomosexual laws on the potential of both male and female homosexuals to emancipate themselves through the practice of cultivating their masculinity.

Weininger was an influential thinker in the early twentieth century. According to Freud, he introduced “lay circles [to] the hypothesis of human bisexuality” (Freud, *Three Essays*, 9). The English novelist Ford Maddox Ford remembered that Weininger’s text had particular influence on writers and intellectuals, among whom it enjoyed an

immense international vogue . . . toward the middle of 1906 . . . one began to hear in the men’s clubs of England and the cafés of France and Germany . . . even in the United States where men never talk about women, certain whispers . . . a new gospel had appeared. I remember sitting with a table full of overbearing intellectuals in that year, and they at once began to talk about Weininger. (qtd. in Greenway, 32)

Weininger’s anti-effeminacy was the conduit between the sexological and psychoanalytic new thinking about gender and popular and literary representations. *Sex and Character* also provided the epigraph for Edward Carpenter’s *The Intermediate Sex: A Study of Some Transitional Types of Men and Women* (1908), the most influential of the early gay rights texts. In it, Carpenter integrates Weininger’s anxiety concerning effeminacy with a Hirshfeldian connection between gay rights and women’s rights. Carpenter inscribes the fear of trans femininity in the very arguments that introduced the idea that homosexuals were a class wor-



thy of rights and protections in the twentieth century and yokes this fear to claims for women's rights.

From Ulrichs on, sexologists interwove diagnostic nosologies with overt political claims for the abolition of sodomy laws and against the social ostracism of inverts. Carpenter's *The Intermediate Sex* politically affirms same-sex desire, but retains the pathologizing of trans femininity and colonized people as a way to soften the blow of the arguments for homogenic men. This text contains a detailed description of the physical and behavioral qualities that indicate inverted gender (that is, that constitute "femininity" in men and "masculinity" in women) in his effort to distinguish specific subsidiary "extreme" types of "the intermediate sex." These extreme types are rare; Carpenter contends that male Uranians (his term for homosexuals) are chiefly defined by their comradely masculine attachments, and only a small number display conspicuous femininity. His text betrays his belief that the viability of a gay male political future is tied to the promotion of a Uranian who expresses a limited number of qualities that Carpenter identifies as traditionally feminine (among them intuition and gentleness) but does not flaunt other feminine qualities (among them shrillness and jealousy). These terms in which Carpenter cleaves desiring attachments from gender characteristics in his project of championing the personal virtues and political potential of the intermediate sex express an ideological disavowal of the trans feminine "extreme homogenic type."

#### VERNACULAR TRANS FEMININITY IN THE MODERNIST PERIOD

In *The Intermediate Sex*, Carpenter states that "[extreme homogenic types], on account of [their] salience, everyone will recognize more or less" (*Intermediate Sex*, 231). This popular familiarity was not primarily formed by sexological and political writing, but rather by the highly visible presence of trans feminine people in working-class communities and in the salacious tabloid headlines and cartoons read across class lines. Social histories of the period identify this vernacular trans feminine life and its representations. In *Gay New York*, George Chauncey outlines the categories that ordered the social and sexual lives of men and trans feminine people in working-class New York from the turn of the twentieth century to World War II. Among these were trans feminine "fairies" and their cis male partners, who were sometimes called

“wolves.” These men maintained a self-image and community identity as “normal” men. Fairies were viewed as interchangeable with cis women in sexual and domestic pairings, and their femininity established the contrasting “normalness” of their masculine partners. These social roles indicated, in Chauncey’s terms, the “plasticity of gender assignment in the rough working-class culture in which the fairies operated” (Chauncey, 62).

In the 1910s and 1920s men begin to use another term, “queer,” to signal their male object choice and to distinguish themselves from the fairies who were primarily defined by female gender presentation. This project of distinguishing gay men from trans feminine people involved a class-based transmisogyny that echoes Carpenter: “middle-class queers blamed anti-gay hostility on the failure of fairies to abide by straight middle-class conventions of decorum in their dress and style” (ibid., 105). Chauncey’s ethnographic and archival sources demonstrate that sexual and social gender roles did not adhere to assigned sex or genital status during this period. During the period, ordinary working people understood that having a penis doesn’t necessarily make you a man. Gay men were increasingly influenced by the perspective, trickling down from middle-class culture, that this understanding was an aberration of the most debased classes. The first gay rights texts suggested that the survival of male homosexuals hinged on their dissociation from this debasement and this required the disappearance of trans femininity.

This non-determining relation between genitals and sex did not lead to the breakdown of the categories “man” and “woman” or the evacuation of meaning from these terms. Rather, fairies simply occupied the social role of women during this time. This operation extended to a popular recognition of the way trans femininity conditioned the interpretation and thus the experience of cis women. For example, a gay man who circulated in the queer and trans community of downtown Manhattan in the 1920s explains that “the secret of a woman’s appeal to man is not so much her sex as her effeminacy . . . nine out of ten [men] take favorably to the homosexual . . . they seek the eternal feminine in the homosexual . . . [and] feminine homosexuals naturally have the greater number of admirers” (qtd. in Chauncey, 62). This observation reflects the competition between fairies and cis women for male attention (ibid.). Chauncey’s study *Gay New York* also clarifies, however, that no single definition of femininity or masculinity existed in the period. Instead, there were particular iterations of “men” and “women” that varied according to class and ethnic group. Chauncey writes: “the

mixture of tolerance, desire, and contempt with which men regarded fairies . . . resulted from . . . the fairies' style [which] was comparable not [to] some ideal category of womanhood [but] to that of a particular subgroup of women or cultural type: prostitutes and other so-called "tough girls'" (ibid., 60–61). In this social sphere, in which there developed what Jeffrey Weeks describes as a "vast homosexual argot, often international in character," the categories "woman" and "trans feminine" conditioned each other as they shared a common social burden (Weeks, 41).

Consideration of the social history of the early twentieth century reveals that the understanding of sexuality in terms of homosexuality or heterosexuality was a largely middle-class phenomenon until the post-World War II period. Carpenter and others' project of disarticulating the gender normative homosexual from the trans feminine person occurred much earlier in bourgeois homes and workplaces than in the "fairy resorts" of Manhattan's Bowery and London's "major cruising area," Leicester Square (Chauncey, 188). In the British and continental European context, David F. Greenberg writes that

transgenerational homosexuality . . . was nothing new . . . doctors of the Old World could hardly have been unaware of it; it received too much publicity. It was new that patients were turning to doctors for advice on their condition. Their doing so reflects the belief not only that their condition was problematic, but also that doctors could help them with it. Neither the English mollies nor their doctors would have thought so. (Greenberg, 386)

These social histories reveal that the "new" sexological and psychoanalytic responses to trans femininity that this chapter has surveyed in fact intervened to subject to a logic of diagnosis and cure what had been a fairly simple social reality: trans feminine people had long lived as women.

Carpenter's disavowal of the trans feminine emerged in the radical political field in which he was participating, which combined socialist, anarchist, and women's rights perspectives. Like many other fin-de-siècle feminists, Carpenter connected the demands women made for egalitarian companionate marriages to the model of such relationships offered by Uranian relationships. He writes that "women are beginning to demand that Marriage shall mean Friendship as well as Passion; that a comrade-

like Equality shall be included in the word Love” (*The Intermediate Sex*, 18). Carpenter grounds the demand for the rights of the intermediate sex in the broader demand for a transformation of intimate social relationships that will reflect a more ethically considered understanding of the role of passion in human relations. This transformation will replace the heterosexual roles man/wife with a spousal relation that combines friendship, comradeship, passion, and love. Here Carpenter echoes the socialist conviction that the abolition of class roles would reorder interpersonal relations to feed intimate comradeships and starve outdated bourgeois marriages.<sup>8</sup> We glimpse Carpenter’s socialism also in his contention that, as Marx and Engels observe of proletarians, “Uranians are by no means so very rare . . . they form, beneath the surface of society, a large class” (*ibid.*, 21).

In reimagining Uranians as a class that must recognize their own numbers and power, Carpenter rejects the individualizing pathology that characterizes the sexological invert. He relocates the source of gay strength from the possibility of recognition by the biological family to the excellence of gay relationships and the collective political struggle that exclusion from bourgeois heterosexuality inspires. He distances Uranians from accusations of “disease and degeneration” by arguing that “many are fine healthy specimens of their sex, muscular and well-developed in body, of powerful brain, high standard of conduct, and with nothing abnormal or morbid . . . in their physical structure or constitution” (*The Intermediate Sex*, 23).

Within the class, however, Carpenter identifies his own “abnormal, morbid” types that are characterized by gendered behaviors. These “extreme specimens” are the effeminate male and the masculine female. He first identifies “the male of this kind” as

a distinctly effeminate type, sentimental, lackadaisical, mincing in gait and manners, something of a chatterbox, skillful at the needle and in woman’s work, sometimes taking pleasure in dressing in woman’s clothes; his figure not infrequently betraying a tendency towards the feminine, large at the hips, supple, not muscular, the face wanting in hair, the voice inclining to be high-pitched . . . while his dwelling-room is orderly in the extreme, even natty, and choice of decoration and perfume. His affection, too, is often feminine in character, clinging, dependent and jealous, as of one desiring to be loved almost more than to love. (*The Intermediate Sex*, 30)

This detailed catalog of movements, mannerisms, and physiological and psychological characteristics gives specific content to the category of “feminine.” This portrait of a passive “sentimental chatterbox” who is attached to frivolous adornment and prone to “clinging” and “jealousy” is culturally resonant with familiar misogynist depictions of women. In Carpenter’s political understanding femininity is a degraded state, but it is not necessarily the state of cis women.

Carpenter’s description of the female invert of the extreme type is short by comparison and markedly different in tone. The homogenic female is an “aggressive person, of strong passions, masculine manner and movements, practical in the conduct of life, sensuous rather than sentimental in love, often untidy, and outré in attire; her figure muscular, her voice rather low in pitch” (*The Intermediate Sex*, 31). Carpenter’s account of the masculine type does not have recourse to adjectives freighted with negative gender associations. The homogenic female of the extreme type, in fact, closely resembles the “more normal type of the Uranian man . . . possessing thoroughly masculine powers of mind and body” and is intuitive, sensitive, tender, and capable of “great pity” and “the love sentiment in its most perfect form” (*ibid.*, 33–34). Carpenter also does not emphasize the rarity of masculinity in homogenic women; rather, he seems to agree with Ellis’s claim that “the chief characteristic of the sexually inverted woman is a certain degree of masculinity” (Ellis and Symonds, 94).

Through these descriptions, Carpenter detaches misogynist associations from cis women and attaches them to “extreme homogenic men” whose demographic rarity he repeatedly emphasizes. Carpenter cites his colleague Albert Moll, who states explicitly that the “extreme case” will replace the (newly normal) homogenic type as a scientific oddity (*The Intermediate Sex*, 32). Moll claims that “a very large majority of [*Urnings*] do *not* exhibit pronounced Effeminacy . . . these extreme cases are of the greatest value from a scientific point of view as marking . . . limits of development” (*ibid.*). In her biography of Carpenter, Sheila Rowbotham uses the story of Carpenter’s encounter with a religious statue during a trip to India to illuminate his perspective on laudable versus sick gender transgression:

[Carpenter] recoiled from the dualistic Siva with male genitals and female breasts. The statue appeared to him as a “monstrosity.” He could accept androgyny as a psychological concept, but was revolted by the physical representation

of this hybrid God . . . Acceptable femininity consisted of lithe young men and supportive, tom-boyish sister figures. (Rowbotham, 160)

For Carpenter, the mixing of sex characteristics in female and feminized bodies is “monstrous.” The “effeminate chatterbox” is a pathological fringe that can be separated from the mass of a normal and healthy homogenic class and the masculine female helpmates of the class. While Carpenter’s expression of solidarity with women appears far from Weininger’s woman-hating, a focus on the historical origin of trans femininity as a distinct social formation reveals the historical perseverance of misogyny in the very milieu that most dutifully advocated for women’s civic equality. In this nascent transmisogyny, the trans feminine becomes the negative of the “tom-boyish” liberated woman and the new object of the misogynist aggressions from which feminism increasingly shields cis women.<sup>9</sup>

#### ATTENDANT DISAVOWALS IN SEXOLOGY AND GAY RIGHTS WRITING

Carpenter’s political disavowal of the trans feminine figure exhibits a previously unexamined facet of the web of colonial, racial, and class ideologies that scholarly work has identified as central to sexological writing.<sup>10</sup> All of the sexologists surveyed here participated in the eugenicist understanding of sex in terms of the future of “the race.” Krafft-Ebing suggests that antipathic sexual desire is a symptom of nervous degeneration that arises in civilized society and must be understood and addressed to ensure the future health of civilization. Ellis identifies “the question of sex—with the racial problems that rest on it” as the “chief problem” (Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, iv) that the coming generation must solve, and suggests that understanding the benign nature of inversion is part of that task. Carpenter rejects Krafft-Ebing’s negative view of inversion and goes beyond Ellis’s neutral one to propose that Uranians are agents of the social evolution that eugenics promises and to claim a role for them in the “care and guardianship of the future race” (*The Intermediate Sex*, 39). Carpenter imagines sexuality as socially productive; he claims that Uranian sex feeling “has not only a deep significance [but] social uses and functions which will become clearer to us, the more we study it” (*ibid.*). This claim that sex should be

useful to the race implies the need to reduce the fertility of those groups whose sex is “useless.” This logic contributes to the race-, ability-, and class-based arguments for which eugenics is chiefly remembered.<sup>11</sup>

However, Carpenter’s overt claims are utopic, offering a socialist democratic variant of the evolutionary promises of eugenics. He imagines a vital democracy to be the inevitable political future and finds its foundations in classical European thought and culture. Among the “social uses” of homogenic attachment are the egalitarian feminism of same-sex attachments and the modeling of a male comradeship that is the ideal social relation in a democracy. Carpenter notes that Uranian comradeships were a crucial component of the Greek foundation of democracy and that members of the “intermediate sex” and their relationships would be integral to democracy’s future. Carpenter retraces the cultural inheritance of homogenic love that Oscar Wilde first traced in his courtroom defense of “the love that dare not speak its name” in 1895. With Walt Whitman as the returned-to favorite, Carpenter surveys homogenic attachment from Homer and Catullus to Shakespeare and Michelangelo. He caps this literary examination with a review of “recent scientific investigations of the matter at hand,” citing the sexological work that this chapter has reviewed (*The Intermediate Sex*, 53).<sup>12</sup> From the old masters to the new, Carpenter tethers homogenic love to the European tradition of literary beauty and scientific rationality.

Both Carpenter’s political writing and sexological texts routinely distance this culturally celebrated and empirically sanctioned “useful” love from association with anal sex. Havelock Ellis concedes that “paedication” is exercised in “more than half” of cases of inversion but rarely in the passive role and “by no means [as] the habitual or even preferred method of gratification” (Ellis and Symonds, 118). Carpenter uses more circumspect language to make the stronger claim that “while bodily congress is desired, the special act with which [Uranians] are vulgarly credited is in most cases repugnant to them” (*The Intermediate Sex*, 58). Both because of its association with anal sex and the undemocratic power differential between partners that it symbolized, the prevalence of the pederasty model in Greek male sexual relations complicated the sexological embrace of the Hellenic. John Symonds’s *A Problem in Greek Ethics*, published as a companion piece to Ellis’s *Sexual Inversion*, solves this contradiction by claiming that “paiderastia in its crudest form was transmitted to Greeks from the East” (Ellis and Symonds, 170). Symonds’s identification of the “oriental importation” of “the vice of boy love” (*ibid.*, 171) allows the rarefied Hellenic cult of masculin-

ity to shine on contemporary homogenic attachments while distancing them from the feminizing implications of penetrative sex.

This logical gymnastics reveals the Orientalist component of the allergy to the feminine that Carpenter and his cohorts made part of their political claims. Afsaneh Najmabadi notes that across the nineteenth century, European (particularly British and French) scrutiny of the Iranian social practice of adult men admiring and partnering with beardless male youths intensified. Disgust with the “effeminacy” of the youth and the rejection of anal sex grounded this scrutiny (Najmabadi, 35–36). Najmabadi cites the British Orientalist William Ouseley, who in 1812 described a dancer who performed for his amusement as a “beardless boy of fifteen or sixteen years, wearing the complete dress of a woman and imitating, with most disgusting effeminacy, the looks and the attitudes of the dancing girls” and referred to Iran as that “rascally, beggarly b——gg-rly country” (Najmabadi, 36). In *The Adventures of Hajji Baba of Ispahan*, the British novel that Najmabadi calls “the most authoritative ‘guidebook’” for the late Victorian English interested in Persia, a character remarks to his English companion that “in our country we should soon teach [the beardless youth’s] mincing feet better manners, and he should soon limp” (qtd. in Najmabadi, 36).<sup>13</sup> Carpenter leaves out reference to “mincing effeminacy” and sodomy (as well as attention to any particular poet) when he cites “the great mass of Persian literature . . . whose marvelous love-songs . . . are to a large extent, if not mostly, addressed to those of the same sex” (*The Intermediate Sex*, 45). As with Symonds, Carpenter distances the intimacies and expressions he wants to affirm from those he wishes to disavow. Their texts activate a familiar Orientalist tautology in which femininity is degraded because it smacks of the East and the East is denigrated because it smacks of the feminine.

In his introduction to *Sexual Inversion*, Ellis extends this logic to explain that “the uncultured man of civilization is linked to the savage. In England, I am told, the soldier often has little or no objection to prostitute himself to the swell that pays him” (Ellis and Symonds, 9). This link between the prostitute and the boy beloved further explains the overlay of racial and class logic that operates in the disavowal of the trans feminine. H. G. Cocks writes that “in British cities throughout the nineteenth century, men were arrested and imprisoned for wearing women’s clothes in the streets. Some . . . were prostitutes, some claimed to be doing it ‘for a lark’” (Cocks, 121). He goes on to cite a late Victorian Manchester detective who remarks that “in society, there existed



a class of men, almost unknown to many gentlemen, who prowl the streets almost to the same extent as unfortunate women” and this attitude meant that “the cross-dresser was a regular feature in police court” (ibid.). This reality of British policing explains the fact that “effeminacy [was] particularly associated with low life and lower-class men, especially prostitutes,” an enduring association that is theorized in chapter 6 of *The New Woman* (ibid., 124). Carpenter’s desire to distance the Uranian from the “extreme” effeminate type carries with it the disavowal of the class associations of prostitution, underlining a strong extension of bourgeois social mores into socialist culture. His taxonomic attention to effeminate bodies and habits places him within the eugenicist sexological tradition of finding explanations for pathology in the useless sexuality of “primitive” and “degenerate” female or feminine bodies (Terry, 33–35).

Carpenter’s *The Intermediate Sex* begins by crediting the modern evolution of gender relations to the arrival of “the New Woman.” Later he extols “the movement among women towards their own liberation and emancipation, which is taking place all over *the civilized world* [and] has been accompanied by a marked development of the homogenic passion among the female sex” (*Intermediate Sex* 77–78, emphasis mine).<sup>14</sup> In the last pages of the text he prophesizes that, thanks in part to the example of egalitarian homogenic love, “we may see that the freedom of alliance and of marriage in the ordinary world will probably lead to the great diminution or even disappearance of Prostitution” (ibid., 127).<sup>15</sup> Carpenter identifies women’s emancipation as a project of the “civilized world” that would soon outgrow the degeneracy represented by prostitution. This frame expresses a colonial ethnocentrism and class supremacy inherent in his imagining of modern Uranians as the inheritors of the Western cultural tradition and exemplars of bodily and psychological health. Writing about the European nineteenth century, Afsaneh Najmabadi calls “feminism’s burden of birth . . . its disavowal of male homoeroticism” (Najmabadi, 8). I would add to her formulation early gay rights proponents’ disavowal of trans femininity, a disavowal shaded by colonial and bourgeois antipathies, as the burden of a political formation that operated like the homophobic culture it resisted: establishing the normalcy of the Uranian by offering the “effeminate chatterbox” as the new figure of degeneracy.

Carpenter’s offering up of the effeminate degenerate represents a significant strain in influential early gay rights writings. Marc-André Raffalovich’s *Uranisme et unisexualité* (1896), which he wrote in London

while part of the same dandy set as Oscar Wilde and published in French medical journals, distinguishes between a perverse acquired inversion marked by effeminacy and a “biologically ingrained” and “normal” unisexuality often marked by a high level of virility (qtd. in Rosario, 162–63). Raffalovich mocks prudish doctors who “discuss inverts as if they were newly imported savages that had been unknown in Europe” but ignore “what classical antiquity knew too well”: that same-sex desire is the height of nobility (ibid., 164). Raffalovich and Carpenter tether effeminacy to perversion and artificiality and resist the medical association of same-sex love with this savagery by citing its European classical origin.

In *Corydon* (1911/1920), André Gide’s series of Socratic dialogues on the subject of homosexuality, the narrator enters the apartment of the title character and has “none of the unfortunate impressions I had feared. Nor did Corydon afford any such impression . . . the way he dressed . . . was quite conventional, even a touch austere perhaps. I glanced around the room in vain for signs of that effeminacy which experts manage to discover in everything connected with inverts” (Gide, 4). Corydon recounts that his fearful recognition of his own desire for men provoked “extreme contempt for . . . effeminacy” (ibid., 15), while in contrast he observes that “sapphism actually enjoys a certain favor among us nowadays” and advocates focusing on “normal pederasty” (ibid., 18, 20).

Gide’s philosophical affirmation of homosexuality expresses perspectives that were perhaps latent in Carpenter’s strategic political argument. In the third dialogue of *Corydon* Gide argues that “the conspiracy” to enforce heterosexuality on young boys operates through “the adornment” of “the fair sex,” which is repulsive because it is artificial (Gide, 96). The beauty of men, in contrast, is unadorned and love between men is natural because no social coercion promotes it. Gide repeats Carpenter’s claim that Uranism grounds feminism because “we see the woman less honored as soon as she is more generally desired. You must see that this is a quite natural development” (ibid., 116). Gide evidences his claim that “Oriental” cultures support effeminacy by citing Gérard de Nerval’s account of his encounter with “two ‘seductive charmers’ whom he sees dancing in the finest café of the Mousky of Egypt . . . with their Arab eyes brightened with kohl, their full cheeks delicately tinted.” Nerval is about “to press a few gold coins on their foreheads, according to the finest traditions of the Levant”—when he realizes just in time that his lovely dancing girls are boys” (qtd. in Gide, 97). Toward

the end of the fourth dialogue Gide asks that “[we] leave the invert[s] aside for now. The trouble is that ill-informed people confuse them with normal homosexuals. . . . After all, heterosexuality too includes certain degenerates, people who are sick and obsessed” (ibid., 119–20). Gide here confirms Carpenter’s model for establishing the health and value of white masculine homosexuals through contrast with the sick and obsessed effeminate[s] of the Occident and the Orient. The artificiality of the effeminate represents the artificiality of cis women, demonstrating the mutual conditioning of the cis and trans feminine in this operation of misogyny that emerges in the texts that promote the rights of male homosexuals.<sup>16</sup>

#### FREUD’S CRITICAL METAPHOR OF TRANS FEMININITY

A nineteen-year-old Sigmund Freud arrived at the University of Vienna’s research station in Trieste in 1875 to begin his medical studies under the direction of his mentor, Carl Claus. Their research focused on determining the sex of eels that zoologists had previously considered to be hermaphroditic. Freud’s task was to examine his eel specimens’ gonads to determine whether they consisted of ovarian or testicular tissue. Later commentators speculate that it was the difficulty of sorting out the somatic difference between the sexes, a difficulty indicated by his anomalous specimen-species, that first sparked Freud’s interest in determining the process through which sex, gender, and sexuality develop in humans.<sup>17</sup> Nine years later, on October 15, 1886, Freud had just debuted his theory of male hysteria in a lecture before the Viennese Society of Physicians when a surgeon shouted from the audience, “My dear sir, how can you talk such nonsense? Hysteron [*sic*] means the uterus. So how can a man be hysterical?” eliciting a hearty laugh from the crowd (Gilman, 115).

These two vignettes reflect a tension in Freud’s professional life: the laboratory exposes him to the facts of biological diversity that ground his subsequent theorization of primary bisexuality. His publication of the clinical cases that confirm this theory provokes resistance in his audience that is also present in Freud’s own thought. He observes that sex is a social meaning ascribed to genitals that are themselves “bisexual,” but like Weininger and Carpenter, who also see the inadequacy of any easy binary between man and woman based on genitals, Freud recuperates the binary elsewhere in the social meaning of castration and its

differentiation of people in men and women. This critical maneuver establishes the metaphor of castration as a means for understanding that femininity is essentially degraded in a theory that moves away from a naturalized binary gender.

The following section charts a genealogy of Freud's theorization of castration, inversion, femininity and feminization, anal eroticism, and paranoia that contributes to the contouring of the medical and popular understanding of the trans feminine as essentially figural. At a political moment when cis women successfully pushed legislation and social change that allowed them to partially escape from the material conditions that bound them to feminization, Freud relocated feminization in the operation of castration. Freud identified the Phallic Woman as the figure for the delusional dream of freedom from castration. These elements of psychoanalytic theory contour the understanding of trans femininity as both the ultimate figure for woman (through the metaphor of castration) and as essentially distinct from woman (through the metaphor of inversion).<sup>18</sup>

Freud builds the theories outlined in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905) around a frame of citations of sexological writing and biological experimentation; chief among the former are the writings of Ulrichs, Krafft-Ebing, and Ellis, and chief among the latter is Eugen Steinach, whose animal sex change experimentation we have already considered. Their sexological distillation of an aggregate narrative that defines *the* invert is the basis of Freud's theory of sexuality; his writing abstracts this trans feminine figure into a critical metaphor for the operation of sexuality in all people. The notion of "sex change" becomes a biological confirmation of this theory. Freud connects the perverse example with the general operation, producing a characterological formula that his literary contemporaries understood to be uniquely adequate to the task of explaining modern gender relations. Novelists extended the figural operation of the psychoanalytic metaphor, placing the figure within a narrative of historical change: this is the trans feminine allegory of literary Modernism. Aldous Huxley's Freudian satire *Farcical History of Richard Greenow* (1920) is the purest literary example of the installation of trans femininity as a cipher for historical change in sex and for many of the central preoccupations of Modernist literature.

Trans studies scholarship has often engaged Freud's texts to articulate a theory of transgender or transsexual embodiment.<sup>19</sup> My reading of Freud does not set out to determine what the relationship between genital structures and sexed identities might be, but rather demonstrates

that Freud's use of the *example* of trans femininity to explain same-sex desire initiates the critical project of finding meaning in trans embodiment and experience as it has been singularly defined in sexological writing. Placing Freud's work among that of Modernist novelists reveals that Freud abstracts the trans feminine into a metaphor that his literary peers will extend into an allegory for historical change (Huxley), the operation of sexuality (Joyce), and the experience of being a modern woman (Barnes and Eliot).

Freud begins *Three Essays* by dismissing sexological and popular explanations for inversion. Among the dismissed theorists is Ulrichs, "the spokesman of male inverts," who defines the invert's physiological bisexuality, the familiar model of "a feminine brain in a masculine body" (*Three Essays*, 8). For Freud, this model represents an unscientific biological literalism which fabricates "an anatomical hermaphroditism" that, in fact, is not a distinguishing feature of the bodies of inverts (*ibid.*, 7–8). Krafft-Ebing's model, which he forms around the presence of "masculine and feminine brain centres," is equally unsatisfactory in its fabricated biological literalism. Freud observes that there are, in fact, residual somatic structures of "the opposite sex" in all people (male nipples, for example). Qualities that sexology assumes mark inverts as distinct in fact inspire Freud to offer observations regarding all people.

Further, the sexological theory of inversion fails to account for the "large proportion of male inverts [that] retain the mental quality of masculinity [and] possess relatively few of the secondary characters of the opposite sex" (*Three Essays*, 10). These masculine inverts seek "feminine mental traits" in their sexual objects, as evidenced by "the fact that male prostitutes who offer themselves to inverts—to-day just as they did in ancient times—imitate women in all the externals of their clothing and behavior" (*ibid.*). In this description, Freud debuts a figure of trans femininity whose feminine behaviors, self-styling, and physical features reinforce the masculinity of her partners. This attraction of the masculine to the feminine in this coupling disproves the sexological typology of male-male desire as reducible to gender inversion.

In Freud's account of the Greek model of same-sex love, his description of the trans feminine becomes more detailed and the conceptual derivation from this figure becomes more complex. In classical society, "the most masculine men were numbered among the inverts" and these masculine men partnered not with other masculine men but with boys. The boy's "physical resemblance to a woman as well as his feminine mental qualities—his shyness, his modesty and his need for instruction

and assistance”—identified him as a desirable (and socially acceptable) partner (*Three Essays*, 10). In this model

the sexual object is not someone of the same sex but someone who combines the characters of both sexes; there is, as it were, a compromise between an impulse that seeks for a man and one that seeks for a woman, while it remains a paramount condition that the object's body (i.e. genitals) shall be masculine. (*Three Essays*, 10)

Freud mines for figural value people whose genitals and social gender are considered mismatched. He notices that heterosexuality and homosexuality cannot retain their conceptual mutual exclusion because some gay men are attracted to trans feminine people—an attraction that is (in his reading) neither homosexual nor heterosexual. This observation grounds his theorization of sexuality as organized by psychical orientation rather than genital impulse. This operation, in which the trans feminine functions as the example that denaturalizes homosexuality and heterosexuality, resurfaces in Freud's later work, sometimes in overt descriptions like those just cited, but also in the abstraction of castration and genital anguish, histrionic femininity, and the theorization of gender identification and desire.

In the 1915 revision of *Three Essays*, Freud adds to the end of the paragraph cited above that the feminine social role and male genitals of the Greek boy beloved make him “a kind of reflection of the subject's own bisexual nature” (*Three Essays*, 10). This revision emphasizes Freud's view that abnormality must be studied because it helps us understand the normal subject's development. Freud replaces the sexological understanding of bisexuality as a literal attribute of inverts with a psychoanalytic understanding of bisexuality as a conceptual figure for the operation of sex and sexuality in all people. Freud marshals the trans feminine figure to effect this conversion: whereas the sexological invert *is* a bisexual subject, the psychoanalytic trans feminine “*reflects*” and therefore *represents* the bisexuality of “the subject's” psyche. In a footnote, also added in 1915, Freud is strident regarding this relation of inverted example to general psychic operation. He writes, “Psycho-analytical research is most decidedly opposed to any attempt at separating off homosexuals from the rest of mankind as a group of a special character. . . . all human beings are capable of making a homosexual object choice and have in fact made one in their unconscious”

(*ibid.*, 11). Later in the footnote Freud confirms that heterosexuality is as conceptually complex as homosexuality and like homosexuality is “a problem that needs elucidating and is not a self-evident fact based upon an attraction that is ultimately of a chemical nature” (*ibid.*, 12). Freud fashions the trans feminine into a concept to aid his elucidation of the “problem” of sexuality.

Freud published the fourth revision and expansion of *Three Essays* in 1920. This revision reflects Freud’s familiarity with Steinach’s experiments in sex change in 1912–13. Freud reports that castration and the “grafting of sex glands of the opposite sex” led “various species of mammals to transform a male into a female and vice versa” due, not to the organs themselves, but rather “the interstitial tissue,” in effect theorizing the existence of hormones (*Three Essays*, 13).<sup>20</sup> He then cites that similar efforts had been made with a man who lost his testicles to tuberculosis and thereafter “behaved in a feminine manner, as a passive homosexual, and exhibited very clearly marked feminine sexual characteristics, which were reversed when he has a testicle from another man grafted into his body” (*ibid.*, 13). Later in *Three Essays*, Freud again cites such experiments as he outlines his “chemical theory,” in which he speculates that “further investigation will show that [the] puberty-gland has normally a hermaphrodite disposition. If this were so, the theory of the bisexuality of the higher animals would be given anatomical foundation” (*ibid.*, 81).

Steinach’s success in “[transforming] a male into a female” (*Three Essays*, 81) is the ultimate confirmation of the theory of glandular hermaphroditism. Exposure to these instances of sex change bolsters Freud’s confidence in his theory of “the general bisexual disposition of the higher animals,” a theoretical frame that provides the foundation for the theory of castration (*ibid.*, 13). This theory abstracts sex change in two ways. First, because “it is self-evident to a male child that a genital like his own is to be attributed to everyone he knows,” the male child assumes that adult women have both penises and female social identities (*ibid.*, 61). Second, while children of both sexes come to believe that women have lost their penises, “little girls . . . when they see that boys’ genitals are formed differently from their own . . . are ready to recognize them immediately and are overcome by envy for the penis—an envy culminating in the wish, which is so important in its consequences, to be boys themselves” (*ibid.*). The threat of this loss animates adult sexuality, as people of both sexes search for “the substitutes for this penis which they feel is missing in women” (*ibid.*). In Freud’s move from citing the

sexological invert to crafting psychoanalytic theory, feminization attains meaning as the effect of castration. Trans femininity is the indicator of genital disidentification that represents the universal concern regarding woman's castrated condition.

This figure of trans femininity abstracted from the sexological invert returned as an explanation for homosexuality. In "Anal Eroticism and Castration" (1918[14]) Freud outlines the experiences and history of a patient who suffers severe intestinal complaints. Freud traces this affliction back to the patient's childhood identification with his mother, whose intestinal problems his child's mind connected with "what his father had done to her" ("Anal Eroticism," 78). Freud contends that this identification expressed itself through the anal zone and led to "a passive homosexual attitude" (*ibid.*, 78) and "feminine current" (*ibid.*, 84) in the adult patient. Castration is the explanatory figure for the persistence in an adult of anal sexual sensation and thus for male feminization.

By 1933 Freud reversed the analogy, suggesting that women's vaginal sexual sensation derives from anal sensation, the paradigmatic sexual sensation of the male homosexual. In *New Introductory Lectures* he affirms Lou Andreas-Salomé, who considers women's genital pleasure to be solely phallic/clitoral, claiming that to the extent that vaginal pleasure exists, it is a pleasure "on lease from the rectum" and thus from a period of sexual development before sex differentiation (*New Introductory Lectures*, 119). In this analysis anal sexual sensation grounds feminization and vaginal sensation attains its meaning only in reference to anality. Both pleasures stem from the desire to be penetrated, which is, in a psychoanalytic framework, the desire to be the object of men. In Freud's frame anality as feminization twins the trans feminine invert and the woman. Here, as in the earlier case of Gide, we glimpse the mutual conditioning of the cis feminine and the trans feminine as the very distinction between the two is drawn in the period.

Freud's work on femininity starting in the mid-1920s yoked feminine monstrosity to uncertainty regarding genital status. "Female Sexuality" (1931) provides a mature revision of his theory that considered the feminine and masculine experiences of the Oedipus complex roughly equivalent. By 1931 Freud emphasized the two distinct processes through which girls and boys are Oedipalized. For the girl, this process requires a reconceptualization of her body and sensations and a *renunciation* of her genitals: "We have long realized that in women the development of sexuality is complicated by the task of renouncing that genital zone which was originally the principal one, namely the clitoris, in favor of



a new zone—the vagina” (“Female Sexuality,” 184). This revision of the girl’s previous understanding of her body and her rejection of the phallic clitoris allows her to progress from the first phase of sexual life, which is “masculine,” to the second, “feminine” phase. Freud is very precise and insistent that this process requires the abandonment of the organ that the girl comes to understand as male:

The bisexual disposition which we maintain to be characteristic of human beings manifests itself much more plainly in the female than in the male. The latter has only one principal sexual zone—only one sexual organ—whereas the former has two: the vagina, the true female organ, and the clitoris, which is analogous to the male organ. (“Female Sexuality,” 187)

The girl, Freud tells us, “changes in sex [and] so must the sex of her love-object change” (“Female Sexuality,” 188). The boy child, in contrast, must experience the trauma of viewing another’s female genital lack and it is through this exposure that he confronts the precariousness of his own genitals. It is his “discovery of the possibility of castration, as evidenced by the sight of the female genital, which necessitates the transformation of the boy’s Oedipus complex, leads to the creation of the super-ego and thus initiates all the processes that culminate in enrolling the individual in civilized society” (*ibid.*). In each of these versions of Oedipality, the subject must contend with the image of a “castrated woman.” This image is an object of shame (for the girl) and derision (for the boy). For the little boy, Freud tells us, this derision is enacted throughout life as misogyny and in “extreme cases . . . inhibits object choice . . . [and] may result in exclusive homosexuality” (*ibid.*). The little girl directs the shame inward against her female body and herself (*ibid.*).

The most influential feminist theoretical intervention into the psychoanalytic account of maturation and sexual differentiation investigates Freud’s conceptual reliance on assigning sex roles to his figures of girlhood and boyhood. In “The Blind Spot of an Old Dream of Symmetry,” Luce Irigaray reads Freud’s essays on women, girls, and femininity to observe that Freud defines the feminine as void and lacking in his definition of woman as the social subject who is differentiated by the experience of castration. For Irigaray, Freud’s “girl” is really just “a little man” (Irigaray, 25). In the strictest sense, however, and in a significant sense, Irigaray’s reading is not accurate. For Freud, woman is initiated

from sexless childhood not by a male body or social identity, not by a relationship with the identity of man, but by a phantasmatic relationship with her genitalia that remembers a phallus where there never was one. Freud states explicitly that what distinguishes woman from man is that she “changes in sex” as she moves through the Oedipus complex and concedes to the necessity of becoming the object of male desire (“Female Sexuality,” 188). In this theoretical frame, cis women and trans women are thus also conceptually twinned, both defined by a melancholic dissatisfaction with their genitals.

This structure for understanding womanhood and the feminine was incredibly influential throughout the twentieth century, as the literary and theoretical objects that this book engages will demonstrate. In *Remembering the Phallic Mother*, Marcia Ian situates the theory and style of Freud’s writings in necessary, maybe even causal, relation to the themes and forms of British literary Modernism. At the center of both movements is the fantasy of self-sufficiency, represented most succinctly by a complete woman, the Phallic Woman that the theory of castration implies, a fantasy that Modernists express through their aspiration to “autonomous aesthetics” (Ian xi). Ian outlines the centrality of this trans feminine archetype in Freud’s theory: “The formidable image of the phallic mother—a grown woman with breasts and a penis—occupies the symbolic center of psychoanalytic theories of sex and gender . . . According to psychoanalytic doctrine, the phallic mother is the archetypal object of desire” (ibid., 1).

Ian builds on Judith Butler’s observation that Freud’s theory of bisexuality relies on the argument that in order for a woman to desire another woman she must identify with her father, and that in fact gender identification is primary to desire. Freud’s hierarchy rests on the absolute mutual exclusivity of being a woman and having a woman: “heterosexuality depends on—in fact, it could even be defined as—the enforced heteronomy of identification and desire” (Ian, 4). The subject then is stuck, drawn and quartered, pulled now by the requirement to imitate, now by the desire to possess. In contrast to this normative psychic disharmony, the phallic mother offers the “simultaneous ontological resonances of being and having as a fantasy of continuity” (ibid., 8). Freud’s identification of the utopian potency of this fantasy is his great theoretical contribution: the definition of the psyche as the realm where the “law of noncontradiction does not apply” (ibid.).

This chapter has demonstrated that Freud’s Phallic Woman is not *merely* a critical metaphor. She is the installation of a social type *as met-*

aphor, an abstraction of a group of people that builds on the sexological practice of distillation of social typologies. Her availability as a figure for a utopian noncontradiction rests on her being *merely* figural; to follow Butler, compulsory heterosexuality requires that she be a figure.

Freud's book-length engagement with an actual woman-identified and male-assigned person demonstrates that this theoretical abstraction of trans feminine case study material circled back to find confirmation in actual trans feminine subjects. This encounter occurred in his reading of *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness* by Daniel Paul Schreber, to which Freud turned his attention during the summer, fall, and winter of 1910 (Gay, 277–84). In *The Schreber Case* (1911) Freud reads the memoirs as a psychoanalytic case history of paranoia. In the memoirs, Schreber describes the onset of a nervous illness during which he has the impression that it would be “pleasant to be a woman succumbing to intercourse” (Schreber, 46). He is overcome with a feeling of voluptuousness through which he understands that he has been chosen by God to redeem and repopulate the world, a task for which he must and will become a woman. Freud reads the memoir as an account of “[Schreber’s] delusion of being transformed into a woman” and Freud is “concerned precisely with the meaning and the origin of this pathological idea” (Freud, *Schreber Case*, 34). Freud identifies “the cause of the illness [as] the emergence of a feminine (passively homosexual) wishful fantasy . . . this provoked an intensive resistance . . . that of a delusion of persecution” (ibid., 37). Freud traces Schreber’s identity as a woman to the desire to have children, which is itself a desire to occupy a feminine relation to his father. This desire explains his homosexuality (ibid., 45). For Freud, “the father complex . . . dominates Schreber’s case”; female identification is a symptom of homosexuality and not an identity or desire in itself (ibid., 50). It is in this text that Freud uses the critical metaphor that he developed through the use of the sexological figure, which itself was distilled from a selective reading of case study narratives. This application of figure to human subjects has had a consequential afterlife because Freud’s reading of Schreber has been “an important resource for transsexual researchers interested in the differential diagnosis of transsexualism from homosexuality, transvestism, and psychosis” (Lothstein, 54).

Freud bequeaths us the juxtaposition between the ubiquity of the figure of trans femininity and her literal impossibility. She is everywhere figural as the Phallic Mother, the castrated young girl, and in the amplified femininity of the homosexual and the paranoiac, yet when Freud encounters her in actual fact her female identification is read as a figure

for homosexual desire. This juxtaposition is at work in Freud's texts that have been cited here, which theorize the general psychic condition of primary bisexuality but cite specific reports of sex change and trans feminine people during the period in which the Modernist texts we will consider were written. Joel Fineman finds "the allegory of [Freud's] gender theory, with its unending quest for both heterosexes for the castrated phallus, powerful only in the division it teaches in its loss" (Fineman, 46). Modernist novels stage the collision between the allegorical operation of castration that Fineman identifies (that "teaches" the reader to understand sexual difference as a loss of original unity) and the depiction of actual sex change and female identification in these literary texts. Freud's figure defines woman as a castrated man, twinning trans woman and cis woman who, yoked together, are tethered to the absence of power symbolized by a profound insecurity born of their relation to the ontology of penetrability. Beyond the figure, literary texts wonder after the antagonistic alliance of this pair, the binding together of warring negatives that defines the totality of the feminine. Trans woman becomes the figure of an impossible subjectivity defined by wanting to be a woman. The mixture of bodily suffering, embarrassment, shame, and campy satire that characterizes the Modernist trans feminine in its various incarnations grapples with this supposedly impossible desire. Reading Huxley offers us a rubric to order all that is attributed to trans women in the Modernist texts that follow.

#### WINNING THE WAR

Aldous Huxley's unsubtle satirical novella *Farcical History of Richard Greenow* (1920) provides an orienting guide to the Freudian trans feminine as she was disseminated into the literature of the Modernist period. As in Freud, the literary trans feminine provided the explanatory figure for gender and sex in the period in which these concepts were being reordered in relation to physiological characteristics. But beyond this Freudian explanatory function, *Greenow* installs the trans feminine as the allegorical figure for the historical "sex change" emblemized by the homosexual and the New Woman. *Greenow* investigates gender expressions and relations that had been eminently British through the Victorian era, but at the fin-de-siècle became tainted by their association with homosexuality. Oxbridge classicism, aristocratic diletantism, the Romantic tradition of male aesthetic sensitivity and emotional lability:

these are all masculine social formations that, by 1920, had gone from being favorably defined in contrast to working-class masculine industry, domestic pragmatism, and ribald camaraderie to being uncomfortably associated with, as E. M. Forster put it in his gay novel *Maurice*, “[un-speakables] of the Oscar Wilde type,” and indeed Wilde’s precipitous fall from paragon to pariah is the historical paradigm for this change (Forster, 159).

In tandem with this historical process, the popular figure of the New Woman emerged as the political heroine who feminist legislative victories guaranteed the rights to freedom of dress, ownership of property and wages, child custody, and the vote. This modern gender reshuffling provided women with escape from the material bases of feminization, just as the emergence of the homosexual threatened men with a distinctively male feminization, as I argue in the introduction to this book. Huxley identifies the trans feminine as uniquely adequate to the task of explaining this modern gender inversion. Previous critical studies of trans femininity in Modernism merely repeated Huxley’s operation by suggesting that trans femininity as trans femininity *represents* the historical sex change underway in the Modernist moment. When the critic holds the trans feminine apart as a figure for this historical process, the critic occludes the fact that the medicalization of trans existence is part of this historical process and thus colludes in the medical and cultural program to contain trans feminine challenges to cis understandings of sex in stories that recoup her for these understandings. I argue that the Modernist appropriation of the psychoanalytic trans feminine examines the internal division that defines female experience and that a historicized study of this figure reveals, even in Huxley’s coarse satire, a new component of the feminine as an allegory for the modern that Benjamin found in Baudelaire’s barren women: prostitute, lesbian, and androgyne (Benjamin 119, 120, 166).

As we have seen, early gay rights arguments attempted to harness gayness to classical manhood and New Womanhood, in the process producing the trans feminine as the figure for the disavowed feminine qualities that were inassimilable with liberation for gay men or cis women. *Greenow* clarifies an added significance that she is assigned in both Freud and in Modernist literature. In these appropriations the trans feminine emblemizes the degradation that defines the feminine in this era in which men are blighted by their association with the feminine (homosexuals) and women glimpse an avenue of escape from the feminine (New Women). Following Freud, this figure for castration helps us understand

feminization as a process that is in intimate relation to the category of woman but is not reducible in its effects to people assigned female. In the novels that *The New Woman* examines in subsequent chapters, this allegorical function is attenuated because these novels *address* this degradation that affixes to woman through an exploration of the trans feminine, whereas in Huxley this degradation is simply mobilized. In this way, Huxley's trans feminine provides a model of pure figurality that can help us to index Joyce, Barnes, and Genet's departure from this pure figurality.

*Greenow* combines the generic conventions of a bildungsroman of (suspiciously Carpenteresque) "clever young men who discover Atheism and Art at School, Socialism at University, and, passing through the inevitable stage of Sex and Syphilis after taking their B.A., turn into maturely brilliant novelists" (Huxley, 417) and the sexological maturational narrative from amorous schoolboy to adult invert that Havelock Ellis outlines in *Sexual Inversion* (Ellis and Symonds, 38–42), focusing on "incidents of a difficult pubescence . . . which seem to throw a light on the future career of our hero" (Huxley, 417). In its opening scenes, the young protagonist Dick Greenow plays with the dollhouse that his practical sister Millicent has rejected. Huxley foregrounds the shameful youthful interest in girlish things that is a stock component of sexological narratives of inversion. Dick goes to great lengths to hide "his weakness" for this girl's toy and this, combined with his bookishness and general "mooning about," mark him as peculiar in his family (ibid., 416). Little Millicent, in contrast, is preternaturally efficient, "weeding in the garden, or hoeing, or fruit-picking" and also civically minded, "knitting mufflers for those beings known vaguely as The Cripples" (ibid.). This study in contrast between feminine brother invert and masculine sister New Woman establishes the main thematic structure of the novella.

Dick's self-consciousness is soothed as he moves into a social circle with other bookish misfits at one of the "Greatest Public Schools" (Huxley, 416). At Aesop College, adherence to preindustrial gender codes provides a context for Dick's qualities to be understood as refined rather than odd or girlish.<sup>21</sup> Among his new Aesop friends is a classicist with the suggestive surname Gay; the group "brought the art of being idle to a pitch never previously reached" and were "queer-looking," "small," "dark," "nervous," and "[round]" (ibid., 418). Huxley's taxonomic attention to the physical qualities of these public school social outcasts is an amalgam of Freud's feminine invert and Carpenter's effeminate extreme type: round, idle, small, nervous. It is these attributes that attract the derision of a teacher who "regarded himself as the per-

fect example of *mens sana in corpore sano*, the soul of an English gentleman in the body of a Greek god,” an inversion of Ulrichs’s formula and an implicit indictment of the psychological and somatic queerness of Dick’s friends (ibid.). In *Sexual Inversion* Havelock Ellis alludes to the familiarity among the English public with sex between boys away at school, which is indicated by the commonness of “letters in newspapers denouncing [them] as hotbeds of vice” (Ellis and Symonds, 37). Huxley puckishly points out that these vices arise in the public schools that represent the height of reserved and refined British manhood and winks at the classical model of inversion to underline this irony.

The serenity of this social landscape of “faithful friends” is interrupted when Dick meets Lord Francis Quarles, “a superb creature,” an aristocrat, and a staunch supporter of the Church of England against Dick’s band of, in Francis’s words, “yellow little atheists” (Huxley, 418–19). Huxley gives us Dick’s first encounter with Francis in the idiom of religious revelation. Francis emerges from a dark tunnel into the sunlight and “a violent emotion seized [Dick]; his heart leapt, his bowels moved within him; he felt a little sick and faint—he had fallen in love” (ibid., 419). Quarles’s apparent indifference devastates Dick, and his math tutor Mr. Skewbauld becomes fixated on the idea that his problem is constipation and prescribes the ingestion of a laxative paraffin wax. Skewbauld’s suggestion that Greenow’s melancholy relates to digestive and excretory health wades into the confluence of the biological and the psychological that Krafft-Ebing waded in before him. Huxley’s charting of desire through the movement of the bowels recalls Carpenter and his fellows’ demure disavowal of “the special act with which [Uranians] are vulgarly credited” (*The Intermediate Sex*, 58).

Dick’s attempts to rise to the notice of the querulous Francis result in despair when “Francis rather frigidly [refuses]” Dick’s offer of “a fag” and a tea, bringing him to tears (Huxley, 420). This romantic refusal provokes religious feeling in Dick that he expresses through a practice of masochistic self-punishment. He begins to

spend an hour on his knees every night, praying, praying with frenzy. He mortified the flesh with fasting and watching. He even went so far as to flagellate himself—or at least tried to; for it is very difficult to flagellate yourself adequately with a cane in a room so small that any violent gesture imperils the bric-à-brac. He would pass the night stark naked, in absurd postures, trying to hurt himself. And then, after

the dolorously pleasant process of self-maceration was over, he used to lean out of the window and listen to the murmurs of the night and fill his spirit with the warm velvet darkness of midsummer. (Huxley, 420)

Huxley moves through this scene as though moving through a campily inflated gay literary history. He overlays Dick's inexperienced attempts at masochist autoerotic self-injury with a fussy Proustian care for the precious bric-à-brac sunken in a sumptuous Wildean "velvet darkness."

Dick reroutes his frustrated desires into the composition of devotional love poems in the manner of Keats, only "more beautiful" (Huxley, 420). At a school dinner this poetic reverie is interrupted when, "cutting across his ecstatic thoughts came the sound of [the head master] Mr. Cravister's reedy voice. 'But I always find Pater's style so coarse,' it said" (ibid., 424). Heather Love characterizes Pater's style as emerging at an ambivalent historical passage from a homosexuality of privacy and code to one of public declaration and overt representation (Love, 53–71). It is the coded reference to homosexuality as an aesthetic that allows homosexuality to be censured even as homosexual acts or attachments can be preserved as unnamed and unthinkable. Just as Greenow could manage his attraction by exploring it in Romantic verse, so Cravister can safely proclaim his rejection of homosexuality as an aversion to Pater's "coarse" fin-de-siècle style while retaining his appearance of ignorance of actual gay people or practices. His elder's exclamation leaves Dick feeling indicted, indicating that the historical emergence of homosexuality makes such code ever less possible for the homosexual even as it retains its homophobic power to maintain distance while cutting close. Cravister's censure releases Dick from his obsessive desire for Frances Quarles, who he now views as likewise "coarse," and the peristaltic movements of his bodily humors resume: "life seemed to be flowing once more along familiar channels" and "he was himself again" (Huxley, 425). However, a final glimpse of Quarles at a school concert, appointed as a Wildean fop with an "enormous pink orchid in his buttonhole" and a "shirt-front [twinkling] with diamond studs," leaves Dick gutted by his inescapable longing for male beauty and not, he painfully realizes, "master of himself" (ibid., 427). Huxley insists that attempts to contain bodily intensification with the aesthetic indulgences of a British public school are a tactic of a bygone era.

The patrician program of containing male-male love in poetry and classical learning has failed. Dick retreats to London after graduation to



try a progressive form of sublimation, an effort given hope by Ellis who promises that “as the lad leaves school to mix with men and women in the world, the instinct usually turns into the normal channel” (Ellis and Symonds, 39). Freed from contact with the young man who so undoes him, Dick is able to pour himself into the presidency of “the Canteloup branch of the Fabian Society” and the cultivation of a socialist political circle (Huxley, 429). Huxley links the historical change in the interpretation of British public school homosociality to the changes in gendered social relations that socialists advocate. The novella connects the panicky response that new understandings of old socialities provoke with Dick’s desperate confusion regarding his gender inversion, desire for male beauty, and anal eroticism. The upheaval of social developments mirror those of his personal development and jointly, they represent a problem in need of an explanation.

The trans feminine explodes onto the scene of the novella as the worst fear suggested by Dick’s inversion but also as this needed explanation. This entrance begins when Dick wakes in the morning to find on his desk a fully completed manuscript of maudlin stories and jingoistic articles signed with the name Pearl Bellairs. First confused, soon he realizes that he, as Pearl, had written them, that he was “a hermaphrodite . . . not in the gross obvious sense, of course, but spiritually. Two persons in one, male and female” (Huxley, 433).<sup>22</sup> This realization comes over Dick all in a flash, like the revelation of his erotic passion for Quarles. It explains this love and his childhood gender difference and he resolves to capitalize, literally, on his double identity by

[devoting] the day to the disinterested pursuit of knowledge, to philosophy and mathematics, with perhaps an occasional excursion into politics. After midnight he would write novels with a feminine pen, earning the money that would make his unproductive male labours possible. . . . Like a gentleman of the East, he would sit still and smoke his philosophic pipe while the womenfolk did the dirty work. Could anything be more satisfactory? (Huxley, 433)

This Orientalist fantasy of the gendered division of labor allows Dick to explain and celebrate this internal division. Even as his status as a man is breaking down, the old association of femininity with servitude that is still honored in “the East” provides a secure ordering idiom. Far from being overcome by desire or inversion, he feels in control of

his compartmentalized bisexuality because “he possessed the secret of a strange inverted alchemy” (Huxley, 435). With this new control of his woman within and her relegation to nighttime toil, the narrative identifies Greenow as a “real Englishman” (ibid., 436). Here Huxley ironizes the familiar contrast between the ideal Occidental masculine and the disavowed Oriental feminine. Observe Huxley’s literary conceptual concordance with Weininger and Carpenter, who also teach us that the degradation attendant to the feminine can fit neatly in a schema that breaks down the sex binary.

Dick’s reconciliation with Pearl’s emergence is followed by the re-emergence of his sister Millicent as a university student and archetypal New Woman whose confidence and political efficacy throw her brother’s insecurity and sexist self-soothing into relief. She is “the biggest Force” at her university where “in her fifth term she organized [a] general strike, which compelled the authorities to relax a few of the more intolerably tyrannical and anachronistic rules restricting the liberty of students” (Huxley, 437). Millicent is becoming a modern, reasonable political agent who resists the pathologizing of liberated women (she contests a restriction on male guests by asserting that this restriction is “an insult to the female sex” since “we are a college of intelligent women, not an asylum of nymphomaniacs,” an introduction of another sexological term) while the “real Englishman” clings to anachronistic sex roles and, as we will soon see, breaks down (ibid., 438).

Dick’s diurnal-nocturnal double life begins to fatigue him and he retreats with Millicent to “[take] a cottage on the shore of one of those long salt-water lochs” (Huxley, 439). Dick escapes the clamor of modern life by retreating to the Gaelic countryside; he makes clear the aesthetic component of this choice when he declares that “‘*Nous sommes ici en plein romantisme,*’ [on] the day of their arrival, making a comprehensive gesture towards the dreamlike scenery, and for the rest of his holiday he acted the part of a young romantic of the palmy period” (ibid., 440). Dick’s efforts to convalesce and recalibrate in these Romantic environs are abruptly interrupted by “the declaration of war [that] took them completely by surprise” (ibid., 441). He and Millicent return to London and on the train “his nerves were twittering and jumping within him; he felt like a walking aviary” (ibid.). His condition is apparent to all; a child on the train asks, “‘What’s the matter with that man’s face, mother?’ . . . as though he were a kind of monster” (ibid., 442). Huxley uses this passage from the Romantic pastoral to London’s urban scene, a passage made under the mounting threat of World War I—a

passage that takes place on a train, the conveyance that carves up and speeds up the British countryside—to index the reemergence of Dick’s modern nervous condition, his psychical hermaphroditism. Here Huxley explicitly thematizes neurotic Modernism’s puncturing of Romantic illusion; the strengthening of Pearl’s influence over their shared body indexes that shift.

With the outbreak of war Pearl’s conservatism becomes more prominent and significant while Dick risks imprisonment by launching an anti-conscription campaign, like his historical socialist counterparts. During five “missing days,” in which Pearl’s consciousness comes to the fore and Dick’s recedes, she writes an “inspiring and patriotic” article entitled “To the Women of the Empire. Thoughts in War-Time” (Huxley, 445). Upon regaining consciousness Dick reads Pearl’s “shrilly raucous chauvinism . . . [that tramples] his dearest convictions, [and denies] his faith” and he declares her “a public danger” (*ibid.*, 445–46). Huxley’s depiction of Dick’s guilt and horror at being assaulted from within by values that contradict his own satirically comments on the place of the feminized Victorian within the progressive social movements of the early twentieth century, a socialism that, like Carpenter’s, bears bourgeois prudishness and romanticism. Huxley installs the sexological and Freudian invert as an exemplary and explanatory figure for this modern political formation.

Huxley further comments on his historical moment when Dick resolves to combat the needling and dangerous Pearl, to valiantly defeat the acerbic conservative lady within, through the psychic weapon of the modern age: psychoanalytic therapy. He hopes that his friend Rogers who “knew all about psychology . . . Freud, Jung, Morton, Prince . . . might help him to lay the ghost of Pearl” (Huxley, 446). What follows is a scene of failed free association that satirizes this faith in psychoanalysis as a key to unlocking human mystery (*ibid.*, 447–48). In analysis, “Mother” does not evoke meaningful associations from the patient. “Aunt” presents a possibility of an Oedipal suggestion, when Dick’s association leads to “Bosom” (*ibid.*, 448). Rogers attempts to make something of this by putting forth “Breast,” only to lead to Dick’s next association, “Chicken,” revealing the earlier lead to be a wild goose chase. This clinical practice frustrates Dick’s desire that Rogers “nose out [his] suppressed complexes, analyze [him], dissect [him]” as Dick continues to produce “dull answers all the time” (*ibid.*). Finally, Rogers decides to launch “a frontal attack on the fortress of sex itself. ‘Women.’ There was a rather long pause . . . and then Dick replied, ‘Novelist.’

Rogers was puzzled” (ibid.). Huxley indulges his anti-Freudianism and explicitly connects Dick’s frustrations with the victory of empowered women.<sup>23</sup> Dick has been doubly frustrated by his failed attempts at psychoanalysis and his increasingly unpopular pacifism. Millicent, in contrast, has “indefatigably” committed herself to war work by “[commandeering] a large house . . . from a family of Jews, who were anxious to live down a deplorable name by a display of patriotism” (ibid., 449). At this crucial historical juncture, ineffectual Dick’s power wanes and militant Millicent’s power waxes. Huxley presents this as an openly declared conflict: “‘Well’ said Dick, ‘you’re winning the war, I see.’ ‘You, I gather, are not,’ Millicent replied” (ibid.).

Dick’s failure at expurgation through the talking cure pushes him to despair; his mental fatigue and waning physical stamina correspond with Pearl’s ascendancy: “[She] was greedy for life; she was not content with her short midnight hours; she wanted the freedom of the whole day” (Huxley, 450). As the war drags on Dick works alongside his (suggestively named) anti-conscription confrere Hyman and again begins to feel depleted by his double life and unsure of the usefulness of his deeply unpopular pacifist work. He becomes afraid of “Pearl Bellairs, watching perpetually like a hungry tigress for her opportunity” (ibid., 451). She begins to “[leap] upon him and [take] possession of his conscious faculties. And then, it might be for a matter of hours or of days, he was lost, blotted off the register of living souls” (ibid.). Dick is worn down by a feminine threat posed by both the cis women in his life and the woman within; this is the political and social anxiety that Pearl allegorizes.

Greenow is called before a military tribunal to account for his resistance to conscription. The stuffy atmosphere in the court adds to the fatigue he’s developed from fighting Pearl: “He was tired—tired of all this idiotic talk, tired of the heat and smell . . . Tired of picking up very thistly wheat sheaves and propping them on stooks on the yellow stubble. For that was what, suddenly, he found himself doing” (Huxley, 458–59). Dick comes back to consciousness in a field, realizing that “he” had taken a term of farm labor, escaping the prison sentence that was the fate of conscription resisters who stuck by their antiwar stance (ibid., 459). This choice of punishment “was all Pearl’s doing,” selected so that she could write an article in “flamboyant feminine writing” describing “the delights of being a land-girl: dewey dawns, rosy children’s faces, quaint cottages, mossy thatch, milkmaids, healthy exercise” (ibid.). Pearl’s conscription of Dick into the task of fulfilling her pastoral dreams underlines her late Victorian Grundyism. Huxley’s trans femi-

nine ironizes the conflict between a “traditional” woman and a “progressive” man at war for the rule of the political body.

For all his progressivism, Dick is certain of his role as a male genius. He is a mind and not a body: “God had not made him a Caliban to scatter ordure over fields . . . his role was Prospero” (Huxley, 460). He is a master and not a slave, a man emphatically *not* a woman. The novella poses the woman question that goes unasked by socialists of Dick’s type when Millicent, the New Woman to Pearl’s Victorian Lady, arrives to announce her new position as the manager of “three thousand female clerks” at the “Ministry of Munitions” (ibid., 462). Millicent’s assuredness cows Dick, who nevertheless defiantly rails against her war-time collaboration. Dick again contains this aggression and anxiety in a familiar division of gendered labor. He envisions a postwar world in which women like Millicent will “continue to do all the bureaucratic jobs, all that entails routine and neatness and interfering in other people’s affairs. And man . . . will be left free for the important statesman’s business, free for creation and thought. . . . which will liberate all [his] best energies for their proper uses” (ibid., 462–63). Here Huxley points to the anxieties and ironies of the gender politics of the war, which killed and maimed millions of British men and directly employed and indirectly enfranchised millions of British women. Dick completes his term of labor unable to tell his sister and friend the reason for his seemingly cowardly escape from principled prison time for war resistance, saying dejectedly that “if I gave you the real reasons, you wouldn’t believe me” (ibid., 464).

The narrative jumps to summer 1918 and “a small dark man” entering the Wibley Town Council to “inquire about [the] vote” (Huxley, 465). When the clerk Mr. Hobart asks if he is registered, the figure replies that

“it isn’t long since the Act was passed giving us the right to vote. . . . I may not look it, but I will confess to you . . . Mr. Hobart, that I am a woman over thirty” . . . He looked at the bell . . . and wondered how he should ring it without rousing the maniac’s suspicions. . . . “You know my woman’s secret. I am Miss Pearl Bellairs, the novelist. Perhaps you have read some of my books.” (Huxley, 465)

Dick comes back to consciousness in the County Asylum at Belbury. He resolves to get out of his predicament by asking in a rational way why

he was being detained. He begins, “Pray I ask, may . . .” only to be cut off by the doctor. ““He called me May. He seems to think everybody’s a woman, not only himself . . . A bad case I fear” (Huxley, 467–68). Dick resorts to his only means of resistance; he refuses to eat and forcible feeding is ordered. This paradigmatic technique of suffragist resistance and forceful punishment leads Dick into a reverie in which he considers “infinities of pain pent within infinite bodies” (*ibid.*, 469).<sup>24</sup> His daily feedings lead to pneumonia and inflammation of the throat; his body is failing but his mind stays sharp; he realizes that he might die and so calls for a pencil and paper: “If die, send corp. to hosp. for anatomy. Useful for once in my life!” (*ibid.*, 470). This plea crystallizes the arch of Dick’s life, which has from childhood profoundly challenged the categories male and female. He wills his dead body to science in order to finally settle the genital basis of his manhood.

Upon finishing this sentence Dick loses primacy of consciousness to Pearl. From this point until the end of the novella, Huxley narrates the two selves—Dick and Pearl—warring for cognitive sovereignty over the body they share. Pearl’s control of their voice leads to her characteristically stodgy exclamation, “Get away, you beasts. Bloody humps. None of your non-conformist faces here” (Huxley, 471). Then Dick comes to the fore, “yelling and gesticulating (with his left hand only)”; meanwhile “his right hand was still busily engaged in writing” (*ibid.*). This conflict in which a female consciousness wars with a male consciousness for control of the writing that their shared body produces provides the final figure of the novella. Huxley’s novella imagines the early twentieth century as a moment when actual British women and men battle for control of the body politic while feminized Victorian prudery haunts modern male progressivism in the realm of political thought. The sexual invert with his mixture of almost primordial anachronism and scandalous society-shaking newness provides Huxley with the figure for this gender landscape. Huxley lands on the stock image of a cloying, mincing, and hysterical character as a figure for the primitive femininity within the male invert that is shaken loose by uniquely modern stresses and strains.

In the last lines of the novella the physical body of Dick/Pearl, which has been largely absent from the narrative since Dick’s swooning school days, becomes abruptly prominent once again. Pearl is using her last strength to pen an anti-German tirade that focuses on the instances of British girls flirting with “hun” soldiers when

suddenly her attention was caught by the last words that Dick had written—the injunction to send his body if he died, to a hospital for an anatomy. She put forth great effort. NO. NO, she wrote in huge capitals. “Bury me in a little country churchyard, with lovely marble angels like the ones in St. George’s at Windsor, over Princess Charlotte’s tomb. Not anatomy. Too horrible . . . too disgus . . .” (Huxley, 472)

The climax of Huxley’s farce is this play between Dick’s insistence on scientific verification of his male anatomy and Pearl’s “great effort” to conceal the anatomy that she finds “horrible and disgus[ting]” and thus affirm her womanhood. This last scene is the first in which the reader understands that Pearl is aware of Dick or troubled by her “male” body. Huxley’s joking reference to “horrible anatomy” recalls the tragedy of women trapped in the wrong bodies that, by 1920, sexology had firmly placed in a medical narrative and Freud had suggested explained the sex and sexuality of all people. This moment with its focus on bodily dissatisfaction is the emergence of the Modernist literary allegory of trans femininity.

*Farcical History of Richard Greenow* accesses satire’s ability to simultaneously express and critique an ideological formation. Huxley’s trans feminine figure (like her sexological foremother) explains same-sex attraction, but also satirizes the medicalization of same-sex attraction through the farce of Dick’s free association and the slapstick depiction of sadistic “care” given at the mental asylum. Huxley’s depiction centers the disavowed hyperfeminine characteristics that Carpenter worries about, but his campy inflation of that worry, as expressed by Greenow (like Carpenter a male socialist progressive), also mocks that worry. *Greenow* lays plain concerns about the reordering of gender around World War I as women entered civic prominence through war work, but it presents these concerns as anchored in conceptual anxieties around the very definitions of “man” and “woman” that subtend gendered social ordering. Huxley’s novella thematizes the upheaval in gender and sex provoked by the circulation of images and accounts of inverts, the gendered power shift occasioned by political women before and during World War I, the gender gap that the war created, the popular absorption of Freudian psychoanalysis, and the clash of a conservative Victorian femininity with a progressive “male” socialism. This web of themes centers around the figure of the male body with a female spirit berating

him from within and eager to gain control over their body. It is this *figure* that produces the satirical heft of the novella.

The Modernist writing that is the focus of this project engages all of these historical developments but with a difference; the work of Joyce, Barnes, and Genet reorients the trans feminine allegory, exposing the *double motion* of the historical advent of inversion and the subsequent development of sex change: each development both reaffirms and dissipates the difference between man and woman. If a person can be a woman trapped in a man's body then the category "woman" must have meaning; but if this meaning can fill a "man's" body then what is this stuff that fills the form? If a person can change sex from one to the other, then that distinction is both made meaningless and yet it is simultaneously proved to be so meaningful that a person would risk everything to cross over. If a homosexual *man* is abject because he is *like a woman*, where does the truth of either category reside? This complex operation is the occasion for the crafting of the trans feminine allegory after Huxley, which engages the central aesthetic and formal operations that characterize literary Modernism.

We've seen that *Greenow* is a capacious guide to the historical and thematic concerns of literary Modernism, particularly those that are understood through the popular circulation of psychoanalytic theory. Freudian psychoanalysis and its neurotic types, World War I and its somatic and neurological traumas, shifts in gender understanding and relations, and exploration of non-normative sexual practices and identities are key themes of both the best and the most canonized Modernist novels. *Greenow* also, however, *addresses* (but significantly does not *exhibit*) some central formal innovations of the psychoanalytically informed and inflected literature of this period. The novella's final figure—of Pearl and Dick fighting for control—offers us a resource for organizing the reading of the trans feminine in relation to Modernist formal features. *The New Woman's* critical account of the trans feminine grafts onto previous scholarly work on the cis feminine as related to Modernist narrative, character, and tone.

*Greenow's* final scene in which the writer-protagonist is literally rent internally by two competing selves (a masculine self with which he identifies and a feminine presence whom he experiences as an internal shadow self) represents the unconscious as a shadowy double of the writer's conscious life and consciously executed aesthetic and rhetorical aims. There are real-life tortured Modernists whom Huxley skewers in this moment. These writers are, in Peter Nicholls's analysis, "less con-



cerned with the problems of representing other people than with the ‘atrocious’ psychic drama, which the act of writing itself sets in motion” (Nicholls, 20). Nicholls employs a trans metaphor to describe the source of this anxiety. To recognize psychic doubleness is like, Nicholls writes, “being trapped *inside* the self, in its inchoate and unconscious driftings” (ibid., 256, emphasis in original). Huxley’s Modernist contemporaries respond to this anxiety-inducing psychic doubling by producing new narrative forms, by “[forging] a new language for the unconscious,” as Lyndsey Stonebridge puts it (Stonebridge, 269). Huxley satirizes that effort through the figure of trans feminine internal division. Precisely because he satirizes Freud and his Modernist champions, Huxley strips away genuine engagement with the complexity of psychoanalytic thought. Luckily for us, this leaves the installation of the trans feminine allegory denuded of conceptual complexity. Joyce, Barnes, Eliot, and Genet, in contrast, will craft forms that engage the limits of language that are exposed when a woman is called a man, the catachresis that defines trans feminine experience.

Modernist character also owes a debt to sexological and psychoanalytic generic forms, an influence that is both exemplified and revealed anew through consideration of trans feminine characters. Michael Levenson identifies the sexological case study as “a threshold . . . in modern narrative” because it “[presented] character as case, developed through a series of micronarratives built upon a few revelatory events” (Levenson, 78–79). This innovation in character, in which characters represent phenomena beyond their singularity, is a necessary pretext for the installation of character as allegorical figure. In the sexological and psychoanalytic genre of the case study the individual aberrant represents the aberrant type. For the Modernists, the aberrant type evoked through the individual character represents a historical process. *Greenow* doesn’t so much install sexological types as genuinely clarify figures for the historical change that Freud wrought (as Joyce and Barnes do), as much as it overtly stages that installation, poking fun at the Modernist faith that deep wisdom and broadly applicable social lessons could be gleaned from the excavation of the aberrant psyches of perverse individuals. The genital scandal of the trans feminine is, as we’ve seen, the figure on which this farce turns.

Beyond this knowing satire of psychoanalysis-inflected Modernist narrative strategy and character, *Greenow* addresses a central and incompletely understood quality of Modernist form: its relation to the feminine and the category of woman. In his touchstone history of early

twentieth-century Euro-American literary movements titled *Modernisms: A Literary Guide*, Peter Nicholls cites Benjamin, who identifies the treatment of the feminine during the period as a major Modernist innovation. Nicholls considers Baudelaire's poem "To a Red-Haired Beggar Girl" as the poetic object that most accurately represents the "complexity of tone" that characterizes this Modernist treatment (Nicholls, 1). For Nicholls, the poet's celebration of the lowly beggar girl's beauty and regal mien, her appeal, barely masks the true effect of the poem, which is to cultivate the distance between the poet and his object and to highlight the extent to which her nobility is only produced by the poem. Nicholls writes that the Red-Haired Beggar Girl's

paradoxical beauty [is] both alluring and somehow inadequate . . . she is self-presence incarnate; and while her body certainly exerts an "appeal" for Baudelaire's poet, that is primarily because she prompts him to create the ironic distance which is the foundation of this particular aesthetic. In submitting his desire to the discipline of irony, the poet thus achieves a contrasting disembodiment (he is absent from his words and the text says the opposite of what it seems to say). (Nicholls, 3)

Baudelaire's poem cannily stages an attraction that is frustrated by a corporeal presence that interrupts the symbolic abstraction of femininity. This depiction of a beautiful (yet also abject) young girl resists the conversion of her body into a symbol and instead, as Djuna Barnes puts it, "mov[es] toward [the love object] in recoil" (*Nightwood*, 3). Baudelaire's depiction cultivates and mines the abject dimension of physical attraction and suspends the conversion of that attraction into a stable symbolic relation, preserving both the fascinated pull toward the object and the revulsion that the desired physical proximity immediately provokes.

Nicholls observes that this central Modernist characteristic is achieved by the careful cultivation of a particular aesthetic attitude toward the feminine which "[makes] a representation of the feminine the means by which to construct an ironically anti-social position for the writer," a project that hinges on "the degree to which the [feminine object of desire] is finally objectified, for it is this which ensures the poet's separateness from the social world of which he writes" (Nicholls, 3). The Modernist allegory of the trans feminine produces an uncanny parallel

development to this history of the cis feminine. Pearl and Millicent are the first instance of this coupling; each work that this book reads depicts another. The aesthetic effect of this shadow sorority is uncanny in the strictest sense: it produces familiar/strange redoubling of the category “woman” that *represents* the distance between woman and her stable symbolic function, the redoubling of the allegory, which for Benjamin and Nicholls is at both the root and the center of literary Modernism.

A second and related concern is the misogyny and masculinity that certain male Modernists identified as a formal aspiration because they “understood creative activity in terms of masculine aggression and spermatogenic fecundity” (Levenson, 42). Michael Levenson describes this “gendering of modernist aesthetics” as stemming from “the often explicitly masculine rhetoric of ‘break through’ associated with the avant-garde” (ibid.). This association of masculinity with genius was predicated on “a commonplace of biological thinking: women were more conservative and ‘primitive,’ the extension of human capacities was a masculine activity” (ibid.). This masculine avant-garde Modernism defined itself against “two associated hate objects: women, and the sentimental mass culture they are said to passively consume” (ibid.). Pearl’s florid stories and sentimental articles certainly conform to this Modernist definition of the feminine aesthetic and Dick’s serious politics and lofty philosophy with Modernist masculinity. Pearl’s feminine qualities dog Dick. They berate, offend, and threaten him with triviality and saccharine lowbrow popular culture. The feminine accomplishes these things from *within* the man, just as Weininger taught the moderns to fear that she would.

This Modernist tethering of women to sentimentality and weakness correlates with Freud’s theorization of castration. As we saw in the reading of Freud, feminine weakness is represented and explained through genital lack. Huxley’s translation of castration into a literary figure in the last scene of *Farcical History of Richard Greenow* installs trans femininity as redoubled lack: to want to be a woman but to be encumbered by an embarrassing penis. Huxley installs this figure in order to laugh at Freud. Joyce, Barnes, and Genet will each investigate this trans feminine redoubling of the paradigmatic female injury as a serious conceptual question. Even as woman is utterly defined by her injury, she is also a threat, a doubleness that Freud expressed through the relation between castration and the Phallic Woman. Nicholls writes that the “aesthetic form and ironic tone” that characterize Modernist aesthetics “are necessary defenses against the other. If the feminine seems a suitable surrogate for social relations in general it is because the illusion of some

absolute otherness is required to protect the poet's self from full recognition with other people" (Nicholls, 4). This layering of injury suffered and threat posed, of attractiveness and repulsiveness, a layering that defines the feminine in Modernism, is redoubled in the Modernist trans feminine. Pearl Bellairs, who waits "like a hungry tigress," represents this layering, while the trans feminine heroines of *Ulysses*, *Nightwood*, "The Waste Land," and *Notre-Dame-des Fleurs* investigate its effects (Huxley, *Greenow*, 451).

The Modernist negotiation of internal division and the resultant vexed relation between private truth and social identity is uniquely represented by the allegorical vehicle of the trans feminine, which literalizes this internal divide, this internal difference, and holds the experience of internal division as an essential, eternal component in the allegorical figure. Observe Nicholls's parsing of this Modernist preoccupation: "the sense of personal difference, coupled with . . . speaking 'a special language'" in the Modernist moment complicates "the Romantic concept of uniqueness by locating the trauma of division and separation within subjectivity rather than in the external relation of self to other . . . the other, we might say, was now inside" (Nicholls, 18). Modernists install the trans feminine to represent this "internal division." Huxley does so in order to satirize modern gender roles. Subsequent Modernists resist their contemporaries' formal masculinism by identifying this internal division as an essentially feminine condition of which the trans feminine is an absolute limit case.

In a letter to his friend Eduard Silberstein during his research residency in Trieste when he was a young student, Freud describes the mania that his pursuit of the truth of the eels' genitals inspired in him:

I take a walk in the evening at 6:30, my hands stained from the white and red blood of sea animals and in front of my eyes the glimmering debris of cells, which still disturb me in my dreams, and in my mind nothing but the big problems connected with the names of testicles and ovaries—universally significant names—so when I take my walk at night after work, I only see very little of the physiology of the Triestians. (qtd. in Gilman, 14)

Freud is preoccupied with these genitals that resist easy sex classification and as a result he sees testicles and ovaries differently. In *Ulysses*, whose

author spent a substantial period in Trieste during its composition, the “universal significance” that adheres to genitals and reproductive organs is not decoded through dissection and scientific inquiry. The truth of these bodily features resides, rather, in the sensations that arise from them. Joyce’s fiction exposes genitals and other bodily structures that attain meaning through the names given to them and the powers and pains attributed to them. Chapter 2 attends to this literary exploration.



## Blooming into a Female Everyman

*Feeling like a Woman in Joyce's Ulysses*

James Joyce read the work of the sexologists surveyed in chapter 1 and, like Huxley, laughed at Freud, whom he called “the Viennese Tweedle-dee” in a 1921 letter to Harriet Weaver Shaw (*Selected Letters*, 280).<sup>1</sup> Joyce’s novel *Ulysses* documents its hero’s pseudoscientific investigation of sexual difference, a meditation that is inspired and informed by Leopold Bloom’s observation of his own body and those of his female intimates. This chapter argues that Joyce punctuates his novel with moments of Bloom’s somatic cross-identification with women. In these moments, Joyce defines breasts, vaginas, and hormonal flux as somatic structures whose meaning is produced through their social inscription. These fleeting moments culminate in the Modernist convention of the trans feminine allegory when, in the “Circe” episode, Bloom spontaneously becomes a woman. He experiences invasive gynecological exams and childbirth and is prodded by a doctor who applies diagnostic terms that bridge sexology and Freud. Like those of Huxley and (as we’ll see) Barnes, the Joycean trans feminine cites the rhetorics of both psychoanalytic and early feminist political reorderings of gender. The figure is unique in that a briefly female Bloom arises out of Joyce’s exploration of the heterosexual relation. Joyce attributes the breakdown of the distinction between male and female lovers to the penetrating, pleasantly injurious, and feminizing effects of their mutual desire. This chapter fol-

lows the development of this theme through several episodes—“Lotus-Eaters,” “Nausicaa,” and “Circe”—that elaborate a multiplication of the feminine and the unraveling from within of the most totalizing feminine types (the mother and the prostitute). This project culminates in Leopold’s blooming, fleetingly, into a woman.

In contrast with critical accounts that interpret this moment as a culmination of the text’s focus on Bloom’s androgyny,<sup>2</sup> I argue that Bloom’s trans feminine identifications rely on Joyce’s commitment to female sexed specificity, a distinction that allows Bloom to cross the divide. These representations revivify rather than dissipate sexual difference, rebirthing female sensation in a body that was previously understood to be male. Joyce’s depiction of this model of sexual difference suggests that penetrability and softness are features of all bodies, a perspective that the trans feminine life writing of chapter 4 elaborates. Bloom’s brief perspectival alignments with women provoke these moments, suggesting that both he and women generally live sex as a social experience, with the demands and limits that the social produces. As chapter 4 will also demonstrate, to be a woman can mean to be seen as a woman, to feel in common with women, or to be treated like a woman. These are modalities of female being that Joyce investigates via Bloom. Using the scene of sex change as an anchor, this chapter will look both forward and back. The earlier episodes “Lotus-Eaters” and “Nausicaa” feature eruptions of the trans feminine moment. The novel’s final episode, “Penelope,” depicts the Blooms in bed and is the culmination of this somatic meditation that punctuates the episodes of Joyce’s Modernist epic.

This argument departs from the two primary feminist models of reading Joyce.<sup>3</sup> In *Sexchanges* (1989), Susan Gubar and Sandra Gilbert briefly address the scene of Bloom’s transformation into a woman in the fantasy episode of “Circe.” Gilbert and Gubar read a degraded feminized Bloom as the limit case of the association of femininity with powerlessness. They read Joyce’s depiction of Bloom’s sex change as a parody that emphasizes that “to become a female or to be like a female is not only figuratively but literally to be de-graded, to lose one’s place in the preordained hierarchy that patriarchal culture associates with gender” (Gubar and Gilbert, 333). This analysis locates the primary operation of the “Circe” episode as the staging of parody, as a case of Joyce’s depiction of the experience of “being like” a woman. For Gilbert and Gubar, it is precisely because the subject who is “like a woman” is *not* a woman that the depiction is a supreme example of the intransigence of patriarchal equations of woman with degradation in *Ulysses*.



This perspective builds on a feminist tradition initiated by Carolyn Heilbrun, who, in the introduction to *Toward a Recognition of Androgyny*, attaches great hope to the end of sexual difference. She claims that “our future salvation lies in a movement away from sexual polarization and the prison of gender toward a world in which individual roles and the modes of personal behavior can be freely chosen. The ideal toward which I believe we should move is best described by the term ‘androgyny’” (Heilbrun, ix–x). Heilbrun, like Gilbert and Gubar, places herself in the intellectual tradition of Virginia Woolf, who famously proposed in *A Room of One’s Own* that a measure of mental androgyny is necessary for creativity. Heilbrun does not include Joyce among the examples of such a mind. Rather, like Gilbert and Gubar, she contrasts Joyce’s womanly man with the genuine androgyny of women Modernists.

Helene Cixous has an opposite account of Joycean language and its relationship to gendered power. Cixous celebrates the antiphallocentric quality of Joyce’s language and the essential vulnerability of his characters. These qualities ensure that

it is impossible for the narrator to constitute himself as an imaginary unity by gaining assurance from a language which echoes mastery . . . the nascent revolution put into practice by Joyce takes effect, a revolution which shakes the foundations of “the metaphysical enclosure” dominated both really and metaphorically by the discourse of the master (the master of God’s discourse, struck down, dying, aphasic). (Cixous, 26)

Here Cixous reverses all the values that subtend Gubar and Gilbert’s reading. For Cixous, paralysis, distance from mastery, and echo “[shake] the foundations of ‘the metaphysical enclosure’” to the point of silencing God (Cixous, 26). The opposition between the feminism of Gilbert and Gubar and that of Cixous might be characterized as a case of incommensurate ontologies. For Gilbert and Gubar, it is for women to explore female debasement and to decouple debasement from womanhood. To find female debasement in a female man is to redouble the strength of misogynist debasement of the female body. For Cixous, in contrast, the debasement attendant to the female body is a tool of an anti-patriarchal “nascent revolution” when that debasement is raised to the status of art. Julia Kristeva confirms this account with a psychoanalytic emphasis, attributing to Joyce’s work the status of a “semiotic discourse” that

poses, as Ann Rosalind Jones parses it, an “incestuous challenge to the symbolic order, asserting . . . [his] return to the pleasures of his preverbal identification with his mother” (Jones, 371). For these feminists, the feminine and not androgyny is the conceptual center of feminist inquiry.

Both of these broad schools of feminist literary critique betray a conspicuous inability to read the moments that are the chief interest of this chapter. Gilbert and Gubar’s liberal desire for positive images of women betrays a strange illogic: they say everywhere that woman is degraded and yet balk at Joyce’s exploration of the female as degraded object because the character to which he applies this quality is in their reading male. Cixous’s account of revolutionary semiotics, by contrast, gains its inspiration and momentum from Joyce’s constant undercutting of his hero’s “imaginary unity,” and yet how then to account for this essential woman which is Bloom’s object of desire and then, suddenly, also he? To say that this woman is incoherent because she arises in the form of a Leopold Bloom betrays an a priori assumption regarding the relation between assigned sex and sexed social experience, a supposition that this chapter, as do all the chapters of this book, rejects. What is required here is a new phase of gynocriticism that recovers still more female and feminine material. This is a trans feminist analytic that recognizes that when most detached from somatic metaphor, sex can persist and make meaning. It is on this reality and experience that we must train our attention to read these Joycean moments.

This chapter fundamentally revises previous feminist Modernist studies approaches. In Cixous’s and similar Post-Structuralist accounts the linguistic and semiotic innovation of Joyce’s text is the seat of its association with the feminine. To depict a male hero experiencing sensations that align him with women is, for Cixous and Kristeva, a conceptual investigation of gender through linguistic innovation. *The New Woman* observes that it is in fact Joyce’s citation of the sexological and the vaudeville image of trans femininity that provides the provocation in the meaning of gender that Joyce recasts as a literary figure. This is what Gilbert and Gubar decry as “transvestism.” This is the cultural landscape that constitutes Carpenter’s trans feminine remainder. He, like the gynocritics, celebrates androgyny. Despite the gynocritics’ rejection of him, Joyce does offer “androgyny” as they celebrated it: as a figure for the heterosexual resolution of the gender antagonism. This is the limit of Joyce’s engagement with the trans feminine. He offers an aesthetic and conceptual investigation of the way sensation produces gendered meaning that rhymes with trans feminine understandings of

sex in the period that we'll encounter in chapter 4. Ultimately, however, Joyce engages this figure of the trans feminine in order to represent the internal instability of the sexed categories that underwrite heterosexuality. Neither celebrating Joyce as the most adept Modernist writer of sexual difference nor rejecting him as the emblem of Modernist patriarchal caricatures of womanhood can account for this operation. This chapter explains the conceptual work that Joyce performs on the categories "woman" and "the feminine" when he renders his hero blooming into womanhood.

### *QUIS EST HOMO?*

As he anticipates the lazy fragrant tactility of a Dublin public bathhouse, Leopold Bloom—who from the first has been associated with the organs and excretions of the body—is laid bare. In "Lotus-Eaters," Joyce initiates the novel's meditation on sexual difference and genital transformation through the seemingly straightforward presentation of Bloom's naked body. This encounter between the protagonist and his nakedness, however, reverses the sexological assumption that examination of the body reveals the truth of sex by weaving together religious, artistic, political, and metaphysical challenges to the constancy of bodies as material objects. That Joyce should launch this thematic exploration in a public bathhouse is meaningful when we consider the role that these meeting places played in the public policy of social hygiene in the (until recently) Victorian United Kingdom.<sup>4</sup> Far from an agent of social control in which the masses come to be physically and morally purified, the house of the Lotus-Eaters invites the expression of perverse activities and the perverting of the sex categories that underwrite uprightness.

The first trace of this intoxicant effect is Bloom's revival of the, by this point, lightly worn question of transgressive Shakespearean eros. Elsewhere, Buck Mulligan and Stephen speculate about the bard's gay exploits and Anne Hathaway's shrewish domination of her husband.<sup>5</sup> While walking into the bathhouse, Bloom notices an advertisement for a play starring "Mrs. Bandmann Palmer. Like to see her again in that Hamlet she played last night. Male impersonator. Perhaps he was a woman. Why Ophelia committed suicide" (*Ulysses*, 5.194–96). Hamlet, the play which Stephen has relentlessly revisited in search of familial parallels, is here converted through Bloom's less scholarly treatment into an instance of life retroactively rescripting art. The long Shakespearean

tradition of dramatic cross-dressing, initiated in the Elizabethan theater as a way to circumvent the exclusion of women from the stage, has met its modern counterpart in the fin-de-siècle tradition of women playing Shakespeare's most iconic leading man.<sup>6</sup> This consistent lineage of Shakespearean cross-dressed thespians from the old male in petticoat and stays to the new female in tights and doublet leads Bloom to speculate about the possibility that Hamlet might have been female. Joyce repeatedly stages sex changes in different spheres in which gender roles have been loosened; here, through dramatic license and a woman virilized through male casting.

The second way in which the constancy and transparency of sex is explored in this episode is in a different theatrical context: through the figure of the castrato. Bloom, the husband of a female singer, remarks on the practice of using castrati as sopranos in liturgical choirs:

*QUIS EST HOMO.*

Those old popes keen on music . . . Still, having eunuchs in their choir that was coming a bit thick. What kind of voice is it? Must be curious to hear after their own strong basses. Connoisseurs. Suppose they wouldn't feel anything after. Kind of a placid. No worry. Fall into flesh, don't they? Gluttons, tall, long legs. Who knows? Eunuch. One way out of it.  
(*Ulysses*, 5.402–12)

Suspended above this meditation on the bodily particularities of castrati<sup>7</sup> is this interrogative with the punctuation of a statement. *Quis est homo* (Who is man), when the question is asked of a castrato? What kind of voice does he have? Ethereal is the most common adjective applied to the voice of the castrati, a voice which is produced by the prodigious lung capacity of a man expelling air through the small flexible vocal chords of a child or woman.<sup>8</sup> This contrasts sharply with the strong bass of the male priests, as Bloom notes. What kind of limbs does he have? The limbs of castrati continued to grow after puberty in the absence of the testosterone that results in the hardening of the joints. What kind of life do they have? For Bloom, the cuckolded husband, unmanned man, the Catholic Church's policy that led to the recruitment of young boys to serve the church as castrati strikes him first as a political injustice, perpetrated by the church against castrati and women alike. Second, he considers this life as a possible "way out" of the tricky question of sexuality through a removal of the prop of sexual difference. The

gluttonous, fleshly castrati, artists and connoisseurs of their own art, monastic as he imagines them to be, are “placid” and free of the main source of tension in Bloom’s own life: the temptations and frustrations of the flesh. Here Bloom’s curiosity leads him to briefly identify with a feminized body and this opens up possibilities for an alternate, more harmonious life free of his shameful perversion, sexual betrayal, and workaday husbandry.

Bloom has considered another area of Catholic practice in which bodies are transfigured, the Eucharist:

The priest bent down to put it into her mouth, murmuring all the time. Latin. The next one. Shut your eyes and open your mouth. That? Corpus: body. Corpse. Good idea the Latin. Stupefies them first. Hospice for the dying. They don’t seem to chew it: only swallow it down. Rum idea: eating a bit of the corpse. Why the cannibals cotton to it. (*Ulysses*, 5.348–52)

The disintegration of bodies into corpses is on Bloom’s mind because he is to go to his friend Paddy Dignam’s funeral after his bath. The focus on feeding and being fed recalls Molly and Bloom’s love-game, in which Molly inserts her chewed food into Bloom’s mouth like a mother bird. These resonances of bodies decomposed and sensuously intermingled are the context in which Bloom contemplates the Catholic tradition that promises the endurance of being after the body has become dust. This process is converted into sacred allegory in relation to the most important human death in Christian tradition. When the priest blesses a wafer or a decanter of wine, the church allows a communion with the spirit that has been briefly breathed into a physical object. Thus the ritual allows the incorporation of another’s body into your own. In the waters of ritual purification, this contemplation of the Eucharist as a rite of transubstantiation welcomes the episode’s meditation on bodily becoming.

This episode in which bodies are refashioned, rent apart, decomposed, and imbibed ends with a return to the material somatic fact closest to hand: Bloom gazes downward at his body and forward toward its immersion in the bath:

This is my body.

He foresaw his pale body reclined in it at full, naked, in a womb of warmth, oiled by scented melting soap, softly laved. He saw his trunk and limbs riprippled over and sus-

tained, buoyed lightly upward, lemonyellow: his navel, bud of flesh: and saw the dark tangled curls of his bush floating, floating hair of the stream around the limp father of thousands, a languid floating flower. (*Ulysses*, 5.566–72)

Here again, suspended over the passage is a statement of bodily certainty (“This is my body”).<sup>9</sup> Just as “*Quis est homo*” in its declarative form contours the question as a subject of truth, implying that there is a Being to man that Bloom can access if he just applies his wits, so this declarative might seem to establish and underline the boundaries of the body as fixed and certain. Just as the metaphysical certitude of the first question is undercut by its exploration through the body of a castrato, here the certitude of Bloom’s statement is challenged by his bodily estrangement, revealing his statement to be not a matter of fact, but just a manner of speaking. Here too, the declarative borrows from an implied interrogative, poised as it is here at the end of a chapter in which bodies have been thoroughly taken apart.

Bloom’s simple observation is also supplemented by a sense of wonder that is exposed and developed in the paragraph that follows the statement.<sup>10</sup> Looking down and forward, Bloom sees his body stretched to full length, oiled and suspended in water, scented by something melting, laved softly by uterine warmth. He sees his body, “rippedpled,” distorted, and buoyant, floating and discolored, naked but strange, material but blooming. The discreet evidence that his body was once tethered to another body, on which it depended for barest life, within the female organ which bears resemblance to his current location, comes into focus in the metaphor of a “navel, bud of flesh.” Floating below are his genitals nestled within pubic hair, which is a feature of all adult bodies.

Teresa De Lauretis demonstrates the “sexual subtext of the so-called Language of Flowers,” which “by a long Western tradition associated women with flowers . . . and in particular with clitoral and vaginal imagery” (De Lauretis, *Practice of Love*, 265). In particular here, “father of thousands” is a reference to *Saxifraga stolonifera*, “mother of thousands,” a common ground cover in the British Isles (Gifford, 100). The clitoral bud of the navel and the floral opening of the genitals perform a rhetorical recoding of Bloom’s genitals as female. The seemingly straightforward statement “This is my body,” which lies suspended above the final paragraph of the episode, is undone through this recoding. Here, in Bloom’s mikva bath, at the moment of bodily contemplation, Joyce’s careful language initiates his hero into womanhood.

## GERTRUDE'S INTERWEAVINGS: RED, BLUE, AND PURPLE

In "The Lotus-Eaters" rhetorical recoding affects a change in the understanding of gender. Joyce reverses these terms in "Nausicaa," in which bodily intensifications undo rhetorical tropes of gender that originate in both the sacred-mythic realm and in the vernacular-profane one. In this episode, as in "Lotus-Eaters," this operation signals, initiates, and propels experiences of sex cross-identification in Bloom. The Virgin Mary and the heroine of the women's magazine, the figures addressed in this episode, are perhaps the most influential figures of femininity in the Dublin of 1904. Margot Norris reads the episode as the weaving together of Homer's Nausicaa with the countermyth of "The Trial of Paris." John Bishop's reading resists the critical tradition of positing an absolute opposition between the first half of the chapter voiced by Gerty and the later half voiced by Bloom, the structure of a she-said/he-said, to reflect on the reflective quality of the episode, the way in which the two characters form a mirroring duo or a pair.<sup>11</sup> My reading of the episode is propelled by and departs from Norris's and Bishop's accounts to argue that myths in Joyce are not only woven together, but unraveled from within, even as the episode's two protagonists get all tangled together and so take each other apart.

As changeable as Homer's grey-eyed goddess, at times manifest and at times latent in the scenery, the Virgin Mary presides over this episode of Joyce's epic. She first enters the scene in the opening lines as she "who is in her pure radiance a beacon ever to the stormtossed heart of man." Here she resides in her vessel which towers over the Sandymount Strand where the episode's action takes place, the church called "Mary, star of the sea" (*Ulysses*, 13.09). Mary's building looks out over the vista where blue sky meets blue sea and Mary's color suffuses the scene, signaling her presence. Joyce also fashions Gerty in the Holy Virgin's visual idiom. Gerty's eyes are the "bluest Irish blue" (*ibid.*, 13.108), she wears "a neat blouse of electric blue" (*ibid.*, 13.150), "a hat . . . with an underbrim of eggblue chenille" (*ibid.*, 13.157), she "blued [her nighties] when they came home" (*ibid.*, 13.176). She hopes to meet her crush object Reggie Wylie on the Strand and so wears "blue for luck, hoping against hope, her own colour and lucky too for a bride to have a bit of blue" (*ibid.*, 13.179–80). In her future fantasy as Mrs. Gertrude Wylie she wears "a sumptuous confection of grey trimmed with blue fox" (*ibid.*, 13.198–99). When she leans back to please a peeping Bloom, she shows that her "garters [are] blue" (*ibid.*, 13.716).

But shining through Gerty's donning of the blue mantle is her constant rosy companion, her blush. This tendency is one of the qualities that Gerty refers to the wisdom of women's magazines to manage:

Woman Beautiful page of the Princess Novelette, who had first advised her to try eyebrowline which gave that haunting expression to the eyes, so becoming in leaders of fashion, and she had never regretted it. Then there was blushing scientifically cure and how to be tall increase your height and you have a beautiful face but your nose? (*Ulysses*, 13.10–13)

Again and again in the episode Gerty's blush is provoked by the illicit and the vulgar. Her embarrassment marks the episode: embarrassment regarding her lame leg, Reggie Wylie's indifference and her companions' awareness of it, and as the episode progresses, her increasingly intense flirtation with Bloom. Gerty borrows from the most consecrated object of libidinal investment to provide an alibi for her amorous exchange. When Gerty imagine herself as a love object, she casts her man as suppliant, "literally worshipping at her shrine" (*Ulysses*, 13.564). In *The Ego and the Id* Freud offers us one of the most fanciful images in all of psychoanalytic theory. Here he analogizes the ego to a man on horseback: the horse is the id and the man (ego) desperately attempts to check the superior strength of his beast. Unlike the horseman, however, the ego employs not its own strength but that of "borrowed forces" (*The Ego and the Id*, 19). Freud extends the analogy to claim that "often a rider, if he is not to be parted from his horse is obliged to guide it where it wants to go; so in the same way the ego is in the habit of transforming the id's will into action as if it were its own" (*ibid.*). Here Gerty's erotic interest is guided by the accepted vocabularies of maudlin popular religious devotion. In this way, Gerty's blush, the evidence of a scarlet intensification, shining through and exposing the eroticization of the virgin blue that she wears, makes for a purplish prose in this episode, "beautiful thoughts" written by Gerty in "violet ink" (*Ulysses*, 13.642).<sup>12</sup>

This purple prose borrows idioms from the cult of the Virgin and from women's magazines, as we've seen. The style is also, most directly, influenced by Gerty's scripting of her monologue that makes up much of the first half of the episode in the idiom of the pulp novelette *The Lamp-lighter*. These three cultural institutions work in tandem to outline the appropriate enactment of spiritual practice, hygiene and self-care, and sentimental feeling. The Irish Catholic (but not only, of course) cultural



tendency to link Mother and Woman, a connection scripted in accordance with the Virgin Mary and maintained through the advice of magazines and sentimental fiction marketed to women, is the next mythic connection to be undone from within in the episode. Joyce accomplishes this through the creation of an anti-taxonomy of the feminine, a catalog that is done and undone through the canny interweaving and unraveling of the concepts of “womanly,” “ladylike,” and “motherly.” Joyce tells us that the three friends Gerty MacDowell, Cissy Caffrey, and Edy Boardman gather at the Sandymount Strand to “discuss matters feminine” (*Ulysses*, 13.11). The matter of the feminine, what and whom it means, is the central strand of this discussion in Gerty’s mind.

This narrative arch begins by noting “Cissy’s quick motherwit” (*Ulysses*, 13.75). This tendency is given further shape by her gentle diffusion of a conflict between the children in her care and her willingness to talk baby talk with Baby Boardman: “Say papa, baby. Say pa pa pa pa” (*ibid.*, 13.385–88). In contrast, “Gerty was womanly wise” (*ibid.*, 13.223), a “girlwoman” (*ibid.*, 13.430), “a womanly woman” (*ibid.*, 13.435), and possessed of a “woman’s instinct” (*ibid.*, 13.518). This is followed later by the narrative’s observation that “[Gerty] was ever ladylike in her deportment” (*ibid.*, 13.619). These attributions of womanhood are adjudicated by Gerty, who worries when Cissy displays bawdy behavior, particularly in the earshot of her object, Bloom:

—I’d like to give him something, she said, so I would where I won’t say.

—On the beeoteetom, laughed Cissy merrily.

Gerty MacDowell bent down her head and crimsoned at the idea of Cissy saying an unladylike thing like that out loud she’d be ashamed of her life to say, flushing a deep rosy red, and Edy Boardman said she was sure the gentleman opposite heard what she said. But not a pin cared Ciss. (*Ulysses*, 13.262–66)

Cissy’s tendency for little vulgarities reflects her masculinity, for “there was a lot of the tomboy about Cissy Caffrey and she was a forward piece” (*Ulysses*, 13.480–81). This masculinity also has an element of showmanship. Gerty remembers fondly one of Cissy’s racous displays: “Cissycums. O, and will you ever forget the evening she dressed up in her father’s suit and hat and the burned cork mustache and walked down Tritonwille road, smoking a cigarette” (*ibid.*, 13.275–77). So the

most motherly of the young women assembled on the Strand is also the most public, daring, and self-consciously masculine. Her motherly ability is not an essence but an aptitude, a “wit.” Gerty, in contrast, the womanly wise among them, is self-consciously demure and prudish; her wisdom in this arena is a fluency in virginal scruples. She is embarrassed at Cissy’s antics, and her interaction with Bloom begins to produce a self-censure that articulates itself as censure of other profligate women: “She loathed . . . the fallen women off the accommodation walk beside the Dodder that went with the soldiers and coarse men with no respect for a girl’s honour, degrading the sex and being taken up to the police station. No, no: not that. They would just be good friends” (ibid., 13.660–67). In contrast to Tomboy Cissy, who tends the children ably, Gerty, who is the most careful to maintain her status as virtuous woman, is no mother.<sup>13</sup> Her fantasy of spousal communion apparently doesn’t include children and her reaction to the two little boys, Jacky and Tommy, is marked by annoyance:

The exasperating little brats of twins began to quarrel again and Jacky threw the ball out towards the sea and they both ran after it. Little monkeys common as ditchwater. Someone ought to take them and give them a good hiding for themselves to keep them in their places, the both of them. And Cissy and Edy shouted after them to come back because they were afraid the tide might come in on them and be drowned.

—Jacky! Tommy! (*Ulysses*, 13.465–71)

As her flirtation with Bloom intensifies so does her frustration with the antics of the boys and the girls’ tolerance of them. She tries to get rid of them as dusk falls: “Gerty wished to goodness they’d take the snottynosed twins and their baby home to the mischief out of that so that was why she gave the gentle hint about its being late” (*Ulysses*, 13.529–31). Joyce contrasts a ribald, manly mother with Gerty’s virtuous virginity, punctured as it is by an “unfeminine” loathing of children and a scandalous love of men. This puncturing runs parallel to Gerty’s exposure of the latent erotics of the cult of the Virgin outlined above.

And yet, despite these many contortions and catachreses, and all the apparent insistence on the activation of the mimetic suffix “-like” in the term “ladylike,” binary gender and notions of essentialized sex remain the most central concepts that order Gertrude MacDowell’s life. The expectation to meet a “manly man” (*Ulysses*, 13.210) and “a real man” (ibid., 13.439) and be his “little wifey” (ibid., 13.241) and his “ownest

girl” (ibid., 13.440) are the chief concerns and desperations of her young life. The most common reading of this fact in Joyce scholarship is that Gerty’s desires and her worries are evidence of her simple-minded susceptibility to the lure of popular media, among them the magazines and mass-produced fiction discussed above. This reading posits Gerty as an early “media victim.” Joyce’s text suggests another critical trajectory to this question of woman’s collusion in her own idealized entrapment. As the day on Sandymount Strand winds down, the attendees of “a men’s temperance retreat conducted by the missionary” stream out into the evening air (ibid., 13.283). A lengthy quotation demonstrates the symbols and practices that accompany and enable the drunkards’ renunciation:

They were gathered there without distinction of social class . . . Our Lady of Loreto, beseeching her to intercede for them, the old familiar words, holy Mary, holy virgin of virgins. How sad to poor Gerty’s ears! Had her father only avoided the clutches of the demon drink, by taking the pledge or those powders the drink habit cured in Pearson’s Weekly, she might now be rolling in her carriage second to none. Over and over had she told herself that as she mused by the dying embers in a brown study without the lamp because she hated two lights or oftentimes gazing out of the window dreamily by the hour at the rain falling on the rusty bucket, thinking. But that vile decoction which has ruined so many hearths and homes had cast its shadow over her childhood days. Nay, she had even witnessed in the home circle deeds of violence caused by intemperance and had seen her own father, a prey to the fumes of intoxication, forget himself completely for if there was one thing of all things that Gerty knew it was that the man who lifts his hand to a woman save in the way of kindness, deserves to be branded as the lowest of the low.

And still the voices sang in supplication to the Virgin most powerful Virgin most merciful. And Gerty, rapt in thought scarce saw or heard her companions or the twins at their boyish gambols or the gentleman off Sandymount green that Cissy Caffrey called the man that was so like himself passing along the strand taking a short walk. (*Ulysses*, 13.288–307)

Here the great tenderness, the nascent political tenderness that Gerty might feel for the Virgin, is exposed. It is She, and her mythopoeia, that might save the MacDowell family, the subordinate members beaten by

their father/husband, all victims of the “fumes of intoxication.” The discursive tactics of the temperance movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries relied heavily on the notion of female suffering and idealized femininity and maternity. Joyce’s insertion of this scene into a chapter in which sex and gender are negotiated presents another way that sex and gender essentialism are exposed and instrumentalized, and thus undone, here in the quest to satisfy a political yearning.<sup>14</sup> If collective political action taken to improve the lives of women and girls is one definition of feminism, we might characterize this moment in which Gerty strongly condemns male violence as a moment of feminist insight. This moment punctures the “namby-pamby, jammy marmalady drawersy” style that Joyce reported consciously giving to Gerty’s chapter (qtd. in Gose, 159). Her next moment of feminist insight is the opposite of this first one in terms of political motivation, political register, and political effect. As Gerty loses herself in her erotic reverie with Bloom she abandons her ladylike scruples because

this was altogether different from a thing like that because there was all the difference because she could almost feel him draw her face to his and the first quick hot touch of his handsome lips. Besides there was absolution so long as you didn’t do the other thing before being married and there ought to be women priests that would understand without your telling out . . . (*Ulysses*, 13.706–10)

This movement from a liberal feminist claim that produces strategies to protect women from violence through the reinforcement of the idealized feminine, to this later radical feminist claim that affirms both relations between women and women’s sexual freedom (within certain limits), is one meridian along which to navigate the feminist arch of this chapter and to welcome Bloom’s reworking of the somatic bounds of what I have called “women’s sexual freedom.”

#### BOYS WILL BE BOYS

Bloom’s orgasmic pyrotechnics correspond with Gerty’s face reigniting, “suffused with a divine, an entrancing blush” (*Ulysses*, 13.723). As Bloom recomposes himself, her blush becomes his, through his acknowledgment of her censure:

She glanced at him as she bent forward quickly, a pathetic little glance of piteous protest, of shy reproach under which he coloured like a girl. He was leaning back against the rock behind, Leopold Bloom (for it is he) stands silent, with bowed head before those young guileless eyes. What a brute he had been! HE of all men! But there was an infinite store of mercy in those eyes, for him too a word of pardon even though he had erred and sinned and wandered. (*Ulysses*, 13.744–50)

This narrative arch from eroticized reproach to eroticized pity and its resultant blush, the apotheosis of the eroticization of the Virgin's story, begins Bloom's series of observations of the similarities between his own body and female bodies and their secondary sexual phenomena, the oneness that results from twoness that John Bishop notes. Joyce has already suggested similarities between the two tryst-fellows. Bloom, whose floral name and nature have already been shown to be significant, is reflected in Gerty's "rosebud mouth" (*Ulysses*, 13.88) and her face which "[becomes] a glorious rose" (*Ulysses*, 13.520). Her perfume, "the whiterose scent" that stands on her toilet table (*ibid.*, 13.640), washes over to Bloom after she's gone, causing him to wonder "What is it? Heliotrope? No. Hyacinth? Hm. Roses, I think" (*ibid.*, 13.1008–10). Her blush, which is "a telltale flush, delicate as the faintest rosebloom" (*ibid.*, 13.120), suffuses "her sweet flowerlike face" (*ibid.*, 13.764). When considering the amorous effect that the evening air has on women, Bloom remarks that they "open like flowers" (*ibid.*, 13.1089). Another little Joycean connection imagines them as a set of stemware or coins for "a sterling good daughter was Gerty" (*ibid.*, 13.325) and Bloom "a sterling man" (*ibid.*, 13.694).

Joyce's little rhetorical winks that suggest Gerty and Bloom's common material and discursive qualities are fleshed out in a more significant identification. Bloom's consistent meditation on menstruation<sup>15</sup> beckons the scene of his own cross-identification when he observes and wonders, "that's the moon. But then why don't all women menstruate at the same time with the same moon I mean?" (*Ulysses*, 13.783–85). His concern extends to identification when he remarks that "devils they are when that's coming on them. Dark devilish appearance. Molly often told me feel things a ton weight. Scratch the sole of my foot. O that way! O, that's exquisite! Feel it myself too. Good to rest once in a way" (*ibid.*, 13.820–25). Here Bloom's premenstrual irritation and fatigue are something like sympathy pains, as is his identification with Mina Pure-

foy, but also reflect the simple fact that male bodies experience monthly fluctuations in hormone levels.<sup>16</sup> This concern with feminine discomforts is echoed when Bloom contemplates Gerty's bottom, which has been rocking back and forth on her rock: "Wonder how she's feeling in that region" (ibid., 13.997). Still later, considering the other young woman in his life, his daughter Milly, he recalls that she had "little paps to begin with. Left one more sensitive, I think. Mine too. Nearer the heart?" (ibid., 13.1200–1201). These eruptions in Bloom's own body of the sensations experienced by his female intimates recode his organs and adipose deposits in the female and feminine ontological idiom.

This process of the interweaving of bodies, of the surprising eruption of the other within your skin, is embedded within Bloom's consistent interest in and exploration of sameness and difference between lovers. Reflecting on his and Molly's joint status as only children, Bloom observes of love that you "think you're escaping and run into yourself" (*Ulysses*, 13.1110). Here, in this most distant and anonymous of sexual encounters, with a partner so different from himself in every particular, his purest opportunity for an experience of pure fantasy and escape, Bloom is recalled to his body through sensation. But it's through these very sensations that arise in association with the sensations he attributes to women that make his body anew. Joyce redoubles his description of the act of love as an act of running into yourself when Bloom both encounters himself in the other and the other in himself.

As Bloom gathers himself to leave the Strand, he wonders if Gerty might return the next day and contemplates leaving her a message carved in the sand with a stick. He wants to leave a message, but "What?" (*Ulysses*, 13.1257). "I." he begins and Joyce suspends the beginning in its own line (ibid., 13.1258). Bloom pauses and worries that the message will be trod on or washed away. He continues, "AM. A." again suspended in its own line, but unable to finish the sentence, he decides that there is "No room. Let it go" (ibid., 13.1264–65). His efforts at self-definition recall his statement of bodily certitude at the end of "Lotus-Eaters," but in this episode in which nothing important or true is spoken and everything important is seen, smelled, felt, heard, and tasted, Bloom chooses not to convert sensation into conversation. Bloom describes his wordless interaction with Gerty as "a kind of language between us" (ibid., 13.944).

Marcia Ian reworks Freud's account of the dialectal movement within desire between the "polarities, the antithesis Subject (ego), the Object (external world), Pleasure—Unpleasure, and Active—Passive" (qtd. in

Ian, 10). In Freud's account, the scopophile and the exhibitionist provide the perverse case study by which this general psychic operation is exposed. Ian's extension of Freud's theory, in effect, outlines a "linguistic" theory of Gerty and Bloom's common language:

I could rewrite Freud's scenario as follows: the scopophile looks desirously at an object (or other), identifies with that object, becomes the object, sees him or herself as object; and then seeks a subject to behold him or her in turn as object. At that point the object becomes subject again by watching others watch. (Presumably the other subject is oscillating analogously.) In this manner the ambivalent poles of identification and desire structure erotic need nonhierarchically. (Ian, 11)

Each of these sight vectors and reversals corresponds with a seme of meaning that communicates the narrative of Bloom and Gerty's exchange. Even as each participant maintains her or his own lexicon of eroticized word-images, the reciprocal visual exchange of voyeur/object establishes a common language that is felt. Bloom has trouble with and is troubled by the "I" because in this psychic relation, the object relation between Me and the You, each term of address establishes itself, but just as quickly performs a reversal and merges. What is represented in this episode is a "between me and you" that welcomes a fissure within the "I." Princess Nausicaa enables Odysseus's return home; Princess Gerty of *The Lamplighter* novelette and the Sandymount peep show perhaps also does so in her way. Thoughts of Gerty's body bring Bloom back to thoughts of Molly's body. Both women set up inside his own body, recoding its structures with new sensation. Public, anonymous, fantasy-laden: Gerty and Bloom's is the love that need not speak its name, and has no single I to speak it.

Joyce's representations in "Circe" unfold between the as yet uncastrated little non-girl and the Phallic Woman that is every person's unconscious ideal object. The following reading proceeds against a common reading that argues that this episode represents the loosing of misogynist male erotic fantasies in the homosocial misogynist sphere of the brothel.<sup>17</sup> I contend that Joyce stages a psychic carnival that has as one of its chief tropes the psychic spectacle of desiring to become female, a psychic position that for Freud does not exist.<sup>18</sup> As Irigaray demonstrates, identifying as a woman or experiencing desire as a woman are psychically impossible for Freud, even for those who are assigned a female sex by medical

and state authorities. In this reading I again depart from an analytic that focuses on the way in which sex and gender are narrated or constructed to consider Joyce's staging of ontological eruptions that supplement and interrupt the best-laid plans of sexual and gender performance in both its upright and perverse incarnations. I will argue that Joyce, cannily, and against all possible psychoanalytic models, insists that Bloom is not castrated by his inadequacies and his embarrassing experiences in Nighttown. In contrast to theories that would characterize castration and by extension women as an absence, female genitals are a presence for Joyce and femininity is a desired position. This bringing to presence of the female body and psyche is what is so deeply anti-Freudian or mock Freudian about "Circe." Masochism, the sexual proclivity associated with the passive and attributed to the feminine in Freud, is here rendered in Circe's theater, as elsewhere in *Ulysses*, as an experience of passivity that one must actively seek, that one might solicit and write away for by post. Joyce satirizes Freud's attempts to fix these polymorphous experiences in the rules of a science. Lest the reader should miss this satirical play on Freud's knowledge system, Joyce leaves writing on the wall. As Bloom descends into Nighttown, "he gazes ahead, reading on the wall a scrawled chalk legend Wet Dream and a phallic design" (*Ulysses*, 15.369). This reference to the most popularized emblems of Freud's theories prepares the reader for the dreamscape and the circulation of the phallus in this episode, but these themes will develop like this lewd graffiti, as public embarrassments, the masochist's great pursuit. Joyce stages not an instance of the utopian intersection of Being and Having, the citation of the -phalic/-phobic fantasy of the Phallic Woman, but the doing and undoing of being and having, a process that happens on the palette of the body. Bloom's difference, which is like all difference a distinction against the economy of the same, takes the form of a Deleuzean repetition, which is a feminine repetition, which is not to say that it is a repetition of the feminine, but a repetition that *is* the feminine, the repetition of difference against the economy of reduction that the Phallic Woman promises.<sup>19</sup>

#### LEOPOLD'S TRANSUBSTANTIATION, OR THE TAMING OF THE SHREW

In Bloom and Stephen's trip through Nighttown, an epic in an epic, the tendencies and techniques outlined in the discussion of "Lotus-Eaters"



and “Nausicaa” explode, magnified as they are by their enactment on the capacious stage of the fantasy. If in these earlier episodes Bloom’s somatic unity is undercut by rhetorical flourishes and fleeting reflections, in “Circe” we encounter Bloom fully transfigured and transsexed under the enchanted auspices of a modern Circe and the rules of her dominion. Joseph Allan Boone’s study of “Circe” in *Libidinal Currents* divides the content of the episode into two portions: one in which Joyce consciously stages an index of perversions and another in which Joyce represses his own fantasy even as he writes. In this latter category of repressed material Boone places the masochistic scene with Bella/o Cohen:

Fearing that by the standards of Dublin’s world of male camaraderie he isn’t enough of a man, Bloom subconsciously punishes himself for his inadequacies by imagining himself transformed into his culture’s icon of object submission: the dominated, cowering, but delighted female. In the fantasy of sex-reversal that ensues . . . Bloom’s internalization of his society’s sexual values is at its greatest; summoning up the nightmarish fantasy of Bella-as-Bello, his subconscious exacts its revenge, masochistically whipping him for his supposed masculine failures. (Boone, 155)

Boone’s analysis suggests that Bloom’s transformation into a woman is the culmination of his “internalization” of society’s denigration. My analysis, in contrast, reads Bloom’s transformation as the ultimate satisfaction of his masochistic desires. Bloom’s pleasure in his own denigration revalues the experience of becoming woman and expands and multiplies the kinds of people that are included in the category of “the feminine.” If in earlier episodes we witnessed a subtle reordering of the categories that compose “the feminine,” in “Circe” we encounter an unsubtle taxonomic explosion that propels the categories of woman, mother, and lady into the infinitely and monstrously plural.

First we will outline the female cast that composes this taxonomy, the supporting roles that provide the context for the performance of our lead, Bloom. “Circe” reintroduces most of the women characters who have previously appeared in the novel: Mary Driscoll, the maid with whom Bloom flirts; Martha Clifford, his adulterous pen pal; Mrs. Breen, the girlfriend of his youth; his wife Molly; Gerty MacDowell and her Sandymount coterie; and Ellen Bloom, Leopold’s dead mother. Each of these women makes a contribution to the heap of remonstrance

and accusation that falls on Bloom's head. A catalog of types that represent the mystical threat of the feminine runs alongside these disapproving female characters. We see in "Circe" "A crone" (*Ulysses*, 15.30), "The Virago" (*ibid.*, 15.51), "The Bawd" (*ibid.*, 15.80), "The Whores" (*ibid.*, 15.599), "A Noblewoman" (*ibid.*, 15.1463), "A Feminist" (*ibid.*, 15.1465), "The Veiled Sibyl" (*ibid.*, 15.1735), "A Hag" (*ibid.*, 15.1758), and most prominently the dominatrix Bella/o.

Ewa Plonowska Ziarek argues that "Circe" "explicitly heralds the aesthetic counterdiscourse of modernity as a certain relation to 'the other of reason' while, at the same time, it confines this irrationality to the excess of female sexuality and the spectral figures of maternity" (Ziarek, 151). Citation of the parallel lists of shrieking and babbling women and "women" outlined above certainly supports Ziarek's claim that the feminine is at the center of the Modernist negotiation of the Unreason of language, and yet only when and as the feminine is held to its eternal excessive and spectral nature.

The reading that follows, however, foregrounds the moments in "Circe" when Bloom becomes a woman in order to argue that in this depiction Joyce simultaneously mines the figure of woman as proliferating Unreason and critiques that equation. That is, Joyce must depict misogyny in order to resist misogyny. Bloom's is the embarrassment of the suffragette on the table being force-fed and the woman accused of prostitution who undergoes a nonconsensual gynecological exam.<sup>20</sup> Bloom's is the degradation of a woman who gives birth to fifteen and dies unable to elicit the most basic courtesy from her son, as Stephen's mother did.

These spectacular instances of female oppression are only the culmination and distillation of a certain common experience of degradation, a certain prosaic, daily limitation which is placed on the female characters in *Ulysses* and their fleshly counterparts in the early twentieth century. As feminists organized around these experiences, the spectacular and the everyday, they produced an affirmation. Political powerlessness and mockery are experiences that one can say yes to; not the false yes of submission, but the "yes" that Derrida reads as Molly Bloom's (Derrida, 272). This yes is the yes of suffragettes smashing windows as an unleashing of an extra-political unreason that fueled their political action, the repetition of which is the "a priori confirmation, repetition, safekeeping, and the memory of the yes" (*ibid.*, 288). Janet Lyon outlines the link between feminist rage and early Modernist aesthetics through the relationships between the British suffragists and the British Vorticists and the Italian Futurists.<sup>21</sup> The excessive irrational pleasures

and injuries that Bloom endures as a woman in the theater of Modernist fantasy reflect a legacy of this feminist-Modernist cross-pollination.

Bloom's transformation begins in a way that recalls his transformation in "Nausicaa," with the revelation of menstrual trouble, "That awful cramp in Lad lane. Something poisonous I ate. Emblem of luck. Why? Probably lost cattle. Mark of the beast. (he closes his eyes an instant) Bit light in the head. Monthly or effect of the other. Brainfogfag. That tired feeling. Too much for me now. Ow!" (*Ulysses*, 15.356). Here Bloom imagines his "monthly" fatigue as a menstrual blight and he imagines this blight in the idiom of the mark of the Antichrist and the mark of the female. This first instance of Bloom's cross-identification in "Circe" establishes the operation that will be repeated in the rest of the episode.

The representation of Bloom's identification with feminized bodily sensations is concerned with the feminine as an experience of injury. This cumulative figure of injury is composed of successive focus on a series of physical experiences—menstruation pain, birth pain, and the bodily experience of offering sex for hire—that come to allegorize the general condition of woman as a suffering or degraded object. These moments satirize these female experiences to be sure, but satire, the instrument of embarrassment, the coveted state of the masochist Bloom, in these scenes produces both the instance of the essential feminine and its undoing. Bloom's masochistic desires, which well up unbidden and with no respect for the inappropriateness (according to Freud's science) of such desires existing in a body sexed and gendered male, here explode in the anarchistic stage of fantasy to both forward the essential feminine and in the same stroke de-essentialize the feminine as injury by doubling it in Bloom's body.

This presentation produces not a mocking of the feminine but mocking *as* the feminine, as the operation of injury that initiates the category of the feminine as something to organize around. It is the fact that Bloom is a "he" that redoubles the mortification of having his vagina, hymen, and vulva exposed to public scrutiny. The fact that he so enjoys this degradation produces the resistance that is immanent and simultaneous with the operation of injury. This representation then is the unruly feminine mocking and taunting misogyny and its enactors' presumption that their power to inflict misogynist degradation will not contain the kernel of the strategies for resisting it.

Bloom's menstrual moment is quickly followed by the first in a long series of accusations that culminate in the trial that is the scene of the first instance of Bloom's bodily transformation. This first accusation is

leveled by his dead father, Rudolph, who castigates his son for leaving the Jewish faith and for being a drinker and a spendthrift. Rudolph conjures his wife, Ellen, who in turn brings forth Molly, both women taunting Bloom. Soon Gerty joins the chorus, berating the “dirty married man” (*Ulysses*, 15.385). Mrs. Breen then comes forth to tempt Bloom into further infidelities. Mary Driscoll, with whom he’s flirted, comes forth to report this indiscretion. Bloom is accused of being a “thief” (*ibid.*, 15.1040), “a pigeonlivered cur” (*ibid.*, 15.1082), “a cuckold” (*ibid.*, 15.1116), and “a Judas” (*ibid.*, 15.1176). His accusers suggest “flaying” (*ibid.*, 15.1183) and “vivisection” (*ibid.*, 15.1106) as punishments, Bloom requests “spanking” (*ibid.*, 15.1196) and “birching” (*ibid.*, 15.1197). This vigilante set of witnesses and judges finally brings the case of Bloom’s general repulsiveness before an expert, Doctor Buck Mulligan. Mulligan’s mean-spirited boorishness, established in his first interactions with Stephen and underlined by his lewd drunken misogynist display in “The Oxen of the Sun,” is again demonstrated through his examination of and testimony against Bloom:

DR MULLIGAN

(in motor jerkin, green motorgoggles on his brow)

Dr Bloom is bisexually abnormal. He has recently escaped from Dr Eustace’s private asylum for demented gentlemen. Born out of bedlock hereditary epilepsy is present, the consequence of unbridled lust. Traces of elephantiasis have been discovered among his ascendants. There are marked symptoms of chronic exhibitionism. Ambidexterity is also latent. He is prematurely bald from selfabuse, perversely idealistic in consequence, a reformed rake, and has metal teeth. In consequence of a family complex he has temporarily lost his memory and I believe him to be more sinned against than sinning. I have made a pervaginal examination and, after application of the acid test to 5427 anal, axillary, pectoral and pubic hairs, I declare him to be *virgo intacta*. (*Ulysses*, 15.1774–86)

This collapsing of the juridical and the medical scene reflects the tautological structure of sexological diagnoses and juridical definitions of deviant sexuality. Deviant sex acts in the early twentieth century were sick because they were illegal and illegal because they were sick. Mulligan’s contortion of medical terms and causalities, associating paternal

illegitimacy with hereditary epilepsy and baldness with masturbation, for instance, emphasize this juridico-medical illogic. The doctor's diagnosis of mental and behavioral characteristics through the notation of physical symptoms furthers this satirical trend.

Joyce exposes the extent to which these technologies of medical and juridical partnership were founded and practiced on the body of women when, suddenly, Bloom's examination becomes a gynecological exam. The pseudoscience of establishing the status of the hymen is here put forth as the ultimate example of the mystical art of establishing spiritual or moral rectitude through physiological examination and extraction of evidence from the body, an attitude towards women's bodies that influences the treatment of male homosexuals and trans feminine people.

A colleague of Doctor Mulligan's then steps forward to offer his expertise:

DR DIXON

Professor Bloom is a finished example of the new womanly man. His moral nature is simple and lovable. Many have found him a dear man, a dear person. He is a rather quaint fellow on the whole, coy though not feeble-minded in the medical sense. . . . I appeal for clemency on the name of the most sacred word our vocal organs have ever been called upon to speak. He is about to have a baby. (*Ulysses*, 15.1798–1810)

Dixon's defense of Bloom, his appeal for clemency on his behalf and on behalf of "the baby," the most sacred of human creations, provides the (ironic) compensation for the indignities of his recent virginity test. Bloom embraces this gift bestowed by the doctor, announcing that he "so want(s) to be a mother" (*Ulysses*, 15.1817). The birth is scary and difficult, as births tend to be, and Bloom's attendant "Mrs. Thornton (in nursetender's gown)" helps him through the delivery. She coaches him to "embrace [her] tight, dear. You'll be soon over it. Tight, dear. (Bloom embraces her tightly and bears eight male yellow and white children)" (*Ulysses*, 15.1818–22). This multiple birth is the first in a series of Christlike miracles that Bloom performs. This miracle of virgin birth is Bloom's great purgation of his laboriously articulated sins and also, simultaneously, his great reward for the indignities he has suffered. This process condenses the piety of the Virgin with Woman as original sin, suffering together but apart. Mulligan's and Dixon's courtroom drama

is the stage for a crucifixion, but it is Mother Mary's body and not her son's that is displayed on the cross.

In contrast to this first example of Circe's transmogrifications, Bella Cohen's ministrations over a female Bloom occur in the brothel and on the other side of the Catholic feminine archetype. Having outfitted Bloom in female dress, the Madam whose name and pronoun have been contrary-wise outfitted in the masculine, looms over her/his prostitute-victim and provides commentary and tips concerning their joint occupation's standards of deportment:

BELLO

My boys will be no end charmed to see you so ladylike, the colonel, above all, when they come here the night before the wedding to fondle my new attraction in gilded heels. First I'll have a go at you myself. A man I know on the turf named Charles Alberta Marsh (I was in bed with him just now and another gentleman out of the Hanaper and Petty Bag office) is on the lookout for a maid of all work at a short knock. Swell the best. Smile. Droop shoulders. What offers? (he points) For that lot. Trained by owner to fetch and carry, basket in mouth. (he bares his arm and plunges it elbowdeep in Bloom's vulva) there's fine depth for you! What boys? That give you a hardon? (he shoves his arm in a bidder's face) Here wet the deck and wipe it round. (*Ulysses*, 13.3081-91)

Bloom's second vaginal exam, which again establishes Bloom's body as female and thus a body with which men can have sex, recalls the first exam. This second instance, however, is inserted in the novel as a whole, in relation to Bloom's already established desire for sadomasochistic domination. The fact that Bloom, in both his feminine and his masculine forms, desires a certain staging of a scene of symbolic injury, recodes this last instance of his transsexual journey as a representation of his already established psychic willingness to inhabit the position that Freud has defined as "the feminine." This second scene of transsexual transformation, in which a character who was introduced in the idiom of female domination, of shrewishness, becomes male in order to tame the willing newly female character who was introduced as male, laughs back at the operation of misogyny in the scene of medical violation.

In *Male Subjectivity at the Margins*, Kaja Silverman introduces the idea that, for the Freud of the *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*,

perversion is defined by a false prosthetic sense of the body, in which the subject engages in “sexual activities which either (a) extend, in an anatomical sense, beyond the regions of the body that are designed for sexual union, or (b) linger over the intermediate relations to the sexual object which should normally be traversed rapidly on the path toward the final sexual aim” (Silverman, 185). Silverman goes on to outline the role that metaphors of cross-identification play in Freud, in particular in the analytic of male masochism described in *New Introductory Lectures to Psychoanalysis* as both “an unusually dangerous libidinal infraction and as one of the ‘kindest’” (qtd. in Silverman, 188). This danger and the kindness result from the fact that the operation of masochism reorders gender: “[For Freud] feminine masochism is a specifically male pathology, so named because it positions its sufferer as a woman” (ibid., 189). It is this inversion of gender positions that makes masochism legible as a perversion; it is “only in the case of men that feminine masochism can be seen to assume pathological proportions” (ibid.). This inversion of gender arises through the association in the mind of the masochist of the experience of sexual domination and physical abuse with femininity and femaleness; according to Freud, “We know that the wish, which so frequently appears in phantasies to be beaten by the father stands very close to the other wish to have a passive feminine sexual relation to him” (qtd. in Silverman, 191). In *Civilization and Its Discontents* “[Freud] described a situation where the ego comes to take pleasure in the pain inflicted upon it by the super-ego—where fear of punishment gives way to the wish for it, and where cruelty and discipline come to stand for love” (ibid., 195). Joyce capitalizes on all of the vexing of gender—and by extension sexual—roles that masochism implies; his implication of female genital structures and functions in this vexing of gender explores the role of bodily structures and sensations in the psychic operation of masochism.

Silverman cites Theodor Reik’s discussion of masochism in *Sex and Society*, a work that according to Silverman “manifests so extreme a sensitivity to the formal features of that pathology” (Silverman, 195). One of these formal features is an audience:

In no case of masochism can the fact be overlooked that the suffering, discomfort, humiliation and disgrace are being shown and so to speak put on display . . . In the practices of masochists, denudation and parading with all their psychic concomitant phenomena play such a major part that one

feels induced to assume a connection between masochism and exhibitionism. (qtd. in Silverman, 197)

Freud's assessment of the knot binding femininity and display in this description of the psychic life of the masochist elucidates not only this scene of literal exhibitionism, but all of the scenes that are of interest to this chapter. "Circe" is the only episode among those considered here that explicitly depicts masochism. But in Huxley and (as we will see in the next chapter) in Barnes, the display of the trans feminine body for the reading audience is a central component of the depiction. Each writer accesses the fundamental connection between femininity, degradation, and display that Freud forwards as constitutive of the trans feminine as it is lived by the masochist. Joyce's novel, however, amplifies this connection between degradation and cross-identification; it is *primarily* through this connection that Bloom, as masochist, experiences cross-identification. Joyce reflects Freud's observation that masochism is not merely a sexual practice and that female identification permeates the masochist's self-concept:

Freud maintains that it not only at the level of his sexual life, but at that of his fantasmatic and his *moi* that the male masochist occupies a female position. In "A Child is Being Beaten" he writes that femininity assumes the status of a "subjective conviction" for the male masochist . . . he suggests that is, that the male masochist believes himself to be a woman at the deepest level of his desire and his identity. (Silverman, 197)

Joyce crafts Bloom as a masochist whose female identity glimmers through the novel, surfacing in bodily intensifications and pains.

Silverman cites Freud's identification of the feminine masochist as the subject for whom psychoanalysis offers no cure: "His sexuality, moreover, must be seen to be entirely under the sway of the death drive, devoid of any possible productivity or use value. It is no wonder that Freud pulls back from promising a psychoanalytic 'cure' in the case of the feminine masochist" (qtd. in Silverman, 210). I contend that Joyce goes beyond this interest in rendering the Freudian metaphor of gender cross-identification in the "Circe" episode. He is not merely interested in rendering a psychic recoding of Bloom as female through the narration of his psychosocial investment and evident pleasure in experiences of denigration and masochistic relation. Joyce insists on the physical



transformation of Bloom into a woman, installing trans femininity as a figure for the material physical threat that the concept of “man” is undergoing—this is not unrelated to the conceptual threat that Freud’s theories pose to the category “man”—but more broadly through the biological and medical transformations that the category undergoes. It is this intersection of the reality that “man” was always an unstable category with new discoveries and innovations that contest the *physical* stability of the sexes as discrete entities that the Joycean allegory of trans femininity accesses. This anxiety is also reflected in the critical attempts to account for the operation of masochism. The first lines of Kaja Silverman’s investigation of homosexuality and femininity read:

I have hesitated for a long time before beginning this chapter. The question which provokes it is of crucial importance to the analysis of sexual difference, yet it seems politically impossible to ask at this moment in the history of representation—impossible not only because I am both heterosexual and a woman, but because the question itself appears to solicit a cultural stereotype which many homosexual men have struggled to put behind them. My query, which I dare to pose only because a few gay male writers have recently begun to do so, is this: What is the place of femininity within male homosexuality? (Silverman, 339)

It is perhaps this discomfort with noting the relation—historical or theoretical—between gay men, femininity, and women that has hampered the critical accounts of this and other depictions of the trans feminine.

In Homer, Circe sends Odysseus on to the twice-transsexual prophet Tiresias who verbally maps the route that the Ithacans will use to return home. Reflecting on his experience with Gerty MacDowell in “Nausicaa,” Bloom calls the first kiss between lovers “the propitious moment.”<sup>22</sup> A sense of the propitiousness of the moment, of his destined return to Ithaca, is the gift of insight and foresight that Tiresias bestows upon Odysseus immediately after the hero’s departure from Circe’s dominion. The extent to which the erotic, the first kiss, is the perpetual return to the propitious scene is put forth through Joyce’s use of this important classical term in “Nausicaa.” Bloom and Bella’s fantasy enactment of this particular scene of the propitious moment positions the prophecy of Tiresias, the question of a return home, within the operation of the erotic. Tiresias’s bodily form, which he wears as a mark of the history

that produced his prophetic knowledge, is refashioned in the form of Odysseus's heroic counterpart, the enactor of that prophesy, a trans feminine Bloom. Joyce's reimagining of the Homeric scene condenses fate, psychic past, and erotic practice in the figure of the female everyman. The blind prophet also instructs Odysseus on the way to accept the word of his dead mother who gives the hero news of home and further beckons his return. Joyce imagines the return of the mother as Telemachus's experience, as Stephen's first real remorse for the wrong he's done his mother. Ewa Ziarek characterizes a common reading of "Circe" as "a purgation of characters' obsession which prepares them for the meeting of the son (Stephen) with his father (Bloom)" (Ziarek, 151). I suggest another figure of a pairing, the *pietà*, refigured through the novel's refashioning of the maternal-feminine, as the appropriate figure for the solicitous parent and the bruised and abandoned child who exit Circe's realm together and turn their thoughts and boots toward Bloom's home.

THE ECSTASY OF LADY MARION,  
OR ARE YOU SURE ABOUT THAT, VOGLIO?

Silverman places above chapter 8, "A Woman's Soul Enclosed in a Man's Body: Femininity in Male Homosexuality," an epigraph taken from Proust's *Sodom and Gomorrah*:

There are some who, should we intrude upon them in the morning still in bed will present to our gaze an admirable female head, so generalized and typical of the entire sex is the expression of the face; the hair itself affirms it, so feminine is its ripple; unbrushed, it falls so naturally in long curls over the cheek that one marvels how the young woman, the girl, the Galatea barely awakened to life in the unconscious mass of this male body in which she is imprisoned has contrived so ingeniously, by herself, without instruction from anyone else, to take advantage of the narrowest apertures in her prison wall to find what was necessary to her existence. (qtd. in Silverman, 339)

This description of the Modernist transsexual is couched in the terms of Aestheticism. Here Galatea's marble prison is a male body; her female

self is glimpsed by the artist. Early on June 16, in the Lestrygonians episode, Bloom imagines a relation between himself and his wife Molly in the same idiom: "Suppose she did Pygmalion and Galatea, what she would say first? Mortal! Put you in your proper place" (*Ulysses*, 8.925–26). Joyce, but not of course Bloom, would have the resonances of George Bernard Shaw's restaging of the myth in his mind in this imagining of the relation between Leopold and Molly. Significantly, Bloom imagines the first speaker and the pedagogical force to be the woman, Galatea, Molly. It is this transformation of roles, a transformation also central to the operation of masochism already discussed, that provides the context for the final instance of transsexual identification in the last episode of the novel.

*Ulysses* ends, famously, with an episode voiced by Molly Bloom who worries away the wee hours of June 17, 1904, in the supine position from which she has barely moved during the epic course of the previous day. Her mind is preoccupied with concerns about her relationships with her husband Leopold, her child Milly, her lover Hugh "Blazes" Boylan, and her own past and future as a singer and a woman. Her body, meanwhile, is busy with sensory occupations both erotic and menstrual. Her narration weaves these social worries with bodily feelings and the bodily feelings with social worries. This figure, Mother Molly, eternally, in this novel's staging of a synecdoche of eternity, static in her bed, has provoked many critics from a variety of critical perspectives to equate Mrs. Bloom with the eternal feminine, and thus characterize her as an essentialized and antifeminist figure.<sup>23</sup> But interwoven into Molly's meditations on female caprice and male inanity is a consistent return to the eroticizing of the female body that casts Molly herself as the male lover of women. In her reflection on the subject, her eroticization of her own body occasions her trans masculine identification: "He couldn't resist they excite myself sometimes it's well for men all the amount of pleasure they get off a woman's body were so round and white for them always I wished I was one myself for a change just to try with that thing they have swelling up" (*Ulysses*, 16.1380–83). Molly's little moment of trans masculine desire, a desire that Freud defines as the universal "female" experience of desire, emerges as one possible erotic articulation at the end of a novel in which the impossible psychic position of being female has been thoroughly foregrounded, sometimes in the person of Mr. Bloom.

Molly also suggests an ontological explanation for the experience of womanhood. Dropped in between her reflections on her sexual encoun-

ter with Boylan and her sympathetic concern for Mina Purefoy, who is “[filled] up with a child or twins once a years as regular as the clock,” she asks, “what’s the idea making us like that with a big hole in the middle of us” (*Ulysses*, 16.1327). Molly’s question conveys the essence of the interest of the feminine in Joyce’s novel that this chapter has traced. Molly’s idea that female genitals provide the allegorical cipher for woman’s condition clarifies Joyce’s return to the depiction of female sensation arising in Bloom’s body as the occasion for his identification with women’s experience. Shortly after her question Molly reflects on that “nice invention they made for women for him to get all the pleasure but if someone gave it a touch of it themselves they’d know what I went through with Milly” (*ibid.*, 16.1329). Here Molly suggests that male bodies could be transformed into female bodies if they “got a touch” of the kind of physical experience that women have of sex and childbirth. In her reveries Molly also reflects back on the woman that her husband has been, in fact, “yes, that was why I liked him because I saw he understood or felt what a woman is” (*ibid.*, 16.1330). This parsing of Leopold’s virtue has several possible interpretations. Does Molly mean that her husband understood in some purely intellectual sense “what a woman is” through the commitment to observation and reasoning that has been widely noted? Does Bloom consider woman at arm’s length in order to add her to the objects of study that have attracted his interest throughout the novel? The moments that this chapter reads indicate that, rather, Molly means precisely that Bloom knows experientially what women feel in a physical sense and that this experience of female sensation grounds his identification and sympathy with female experience.

In the *Symposium* Plato recounts the history of human bodies. Once male and female were joined together as a unit before the gods rent them apart and the battle of the sexes commenced. This person looked both forward and back, walked upright, and formed a circle with its four arms and four legs in order to move. The Hermaphrodite, associated with lunar energies, was the other bodily form that human beings assumed. The Blooms in bed bathed in the hermaphrodite’s lunar light form a figure of the recently detached woman and man—nose to toe—still circular. Freud teaches us that the distinction between the ego and the object dissolves only in the first throes of love.<sup>24</sup> This is another theory that attempts to suture the cut that separates any two people. This chapter has argued that Joyce’s consistent return to the trans feminine moment, to Bloom’s fleeting experience of his body as female,

works as an elegy to the possibility of sameness in love, to the dead hope that unity, not discord, could order desire, that Eros could finally and unequivocally defeat Thanatos. In the absence of such a unity, the power differentials that order the real disunity can and will be made useful and can and will be reversed and refashioned. This reordering will not happen between the sexes, but within them, with feminine difference as the paradigm.

This reading assesses Joyce's sense of the potential of heterosexuality. Are the terms of "unity and disunity" really reordered here? Let's return to the sexological texts that provided James Joyce with the concept "bisexually abnormal" and the feminine people whose actual experiences of gynecological examination provide "Circe" with the material for satire. The trans feminine in this novel serves to illuminate changes in heterosexuality and cis sexed identity. Both Blooms go out into the light of day free from the taint of association with perverse gender and sexuality that, through literary treatment, clarifies their nocturnal fantasy identities. This is the role of the trans feminine allegory in *Ulysses*: to enable the exploration of changes in the categories of man and woman while avoiding the provocation of trans femininity. In other words, Joyce engages the idea that a man could be made into a woman in order to figure the relation between men and power, but stops short of engaging the reality that some women have penises.

The next chapter will turn toward another stage in the development of the Modernist trans feminine allegory. Joyce viewed the trans feminine from the vantage of a man and from the distance allowed by the mediation of the sexological text and the vaudeville stage. Djuna Barnes engages the trans feminine from a terrible proximity of shared feminine experience. *Ulysses* is about men, *Nightwood* is about women. *Ulysses* explores pleasure, *Nightwood* suffering. *Ulysses* addresses feminine plenitude, *Nightwood* feminine lack. *Ulysses* examines the hidden perversions of one everyman; *Nightwood* depicts the manifest perversions of a full cast of degenerates. *Ulysses* examines heterosexuality; *Nightwood* expresses the experience of sexual difference in a world without heterosexuality. *Ulysses* strains toward queerness; *Nightwood* suggests from a narrative that is inscribed within queer desire that there's nothing there but sweeter and deeper suffering.



## The Flesh That Would Become Myth

*Barnes's Suffering Female Anatomy  
and the Trans Feminine Example*

From the half-open drawers of this chiffonier hung laces, rebands, stockings, ladies' underclothing and an abdominal brace, which gave the impression that the feminine finery had suffered venery.

—Djuna Barnes, *Nightwood*

And I Tiresias have foresuffered all / enacted on this same divan or bed.

—T. S. Eliot, "The Waste Land"

When the universality of this negative character of [the female child's] sex dawns upon her, womanhood, and with it also her mother, suffers heavy loss of credit in her eyes.

—Sigmund Freud, "Female Sexuality"

In conversation [Barnes] is often great with her comedy, but in writing she appears to believe she must inject her work with metaphysics, mysticism, and her own strange version of a "literary" quality. In her *Nightwood* she has a well-known character floundering in the torments of soul-probing and fake philosophies, and he just shouldn't. The actual person doubtlessly suffered enough without having added to his character this unbelievable dipping into the deeper meanings. Drawn as a wildly ribald and often broadly funny comic, he would have emerged more impressively.

—Robert McAlmon, *Being Geniuses Together*

This chapter will argue that Djuna Barnes's depiction of the trans feminine character Doctor O'Connor disrupts Freud's account of how women come into being in the maturational narrative of psychoanalysis. Doctor O'Connor is by her own assertion the limit of woman, the "last woman left in the world," and her monologues refigure the process through which Freud argues that all female subjects come to be female: through the recognition of genital lack (Barnes, *Nightwood*, 88). If femininity suffers lack, Doctor O'Connor is the female who lacks lack. Barnes elevates this particular transsexual corporeal experience as an allegory for the general way in which sexed identity is formed in the psychic history of females. Crucially, beyond simply redoubling the general female condition of genital lack, Doctor O'Connor's monologues voice the very desire that Freud casts throughout his oeuvre as impossible: Doctor O'Connor desires to be a woman; she aspires to the castrated condition that every person longs to escape. Through this allegorical elevation, O'Connor's particular experience of embodiment exposes the psychic fissures within the general experience of embodiment.

Doctor O'Connor begins to invert the supposedly universal narrative of "penis envy" when she exclaims that among other female bodily attributes she wants "a womb as big as a king's kettle," a comically distended image of the injurious hole of femininity (*Nightwood*, 91). This description of female anatomy evokes an aesthetic history of lyrically portraying—and addressing—women as mute vessels. In "Muteness Envy," Barbara Johnson identifies the example of the Keatsian urn as a paradigmatic object that forms a "recurrent poetic condition" of void objects symbolizing "the body of woman" (Johnson, 132). Johnson argues that this "gynomorphic" quality of the object of poetic address produces a naturalizing link between female bodies, feminine silence, and lyric beauty. The masculine speaker suffers when he encounters the feminine object's beauty, a suffering that he experiences as a kind of vocal inhibition. Through this process he claims the feminized object's muteness as his own. Johnson reads the phallic speaker's desire to claim that he is "wounded, burned, enslaved and penetrated" by the object that he addresses as "muteness envy" (*ibid.*, 188). Johnson's account of the condition maps aesthetic structures of sexual difference onto psychoanalytic accounts of sexual difference: muteness is analogous to female genital lack and speech to phallic presence in the history of lyric. Johnson's overlaying of psychoanalytic terms onto traditional literary structures of address demonstrates the double-strong law that Doctor O'Connor violates with her torrential *vocalization* of her desire for a monstrously large womb.



Barnes repurposes the paradigm of the suffering mute female in her depiction of Doctor O'Connor's redoubled female lack, which represents a limit case of female suffering, the theme to which Barnes returns most often in her journalism, poems, novels, and plays. Doctor O'Connor's muteness results from a literal lack of language; there is no word for the experience that she narrates. It is this very hole in language, however, that is the *aporia* from which Barnes produces the explosion of gorgeous speech that composes O'Connor's narration of a trans female somatic experience. This chapter traces Barnes's exploration of the theme of female suffering across her oeuvre in order to demonstrate that her work decouples sex from genitals. She defines female sex as an experience of suffering dispossession of the body. This is an experience of suffering that detaches the female from her body and forces her to encounter that body as a thing apart from herself. This frame recasts the famous scene of Doctor O'Connor's apostrophic address to her anthropomorphized penis "Tiny O'Toole" in *Nightwood* as only a particular *transsexual female* iteration of the *universal female* experience of bodily dispossession that Barnes depicts throughout her work. Doctor O'Connor's Modernist monologues that catalog the pain of womanhood are the consummate example of the Barnesian aesthetic strategy that repurposes the literary history of female muteness by vocalizing female injury in beautiful lyrical prose.<sup>1</sup>

This reading of O'Connor participates in a genealogy of feminist critics who go to *Nightwood* to learn about the feminine. Teresa De Lauretis concentrates her reading of *Nightwood* on the lesbian relationship between Nora and Robin as the emblem of the trauma of female sexuality, whereas I argue that Doctor O'Connor is the suffering female center of *Nightwood*. It is hers, O'Connor's, body in its particularity that most precisely addresses the enigma, to use Freud's term, of the dysphoric nature of female embodiment.<sup>2</sup> In an important scene in the novel Nora Flood, who has been abandoned by her lothario lover Robin Vote, visits O'Connor's fetid garret to seek sympathy for her "broken heart." O'Connor scoffs and catalogs the physical ailments that she suffers in addition to a broken heart: "flying dandruff, a floating kidney, shattered nerves and a broken heart!" (*Nightwood*, 164). In this scene the suffering female and the trans feminine person come together to compare their egoic injury expressed in somatic metaphors. I agree with Monique Wittig's assessment that in *Nightwood* "Djuna Barnes makes the experiment (and succeeds) [of] universalizing the feminine" (Wittig, 67). This chapter presses beyond Wittig's imagining to consider the trans feminine as part of Barnes's universalized feminine. The chapter pro-

ceeds through the major stages of Barnes's writing, beginning with the article "How It Feels to Be Forcibly Fed," an example of the journalistic work she produced in New York City in the 1910s. This article perhaps most clearly articulates the connection between female muteness, female bodily dispossession, and female genital morphology that Barnes gradually develops through her writing career and eventually finds most perfectly embodied in the transsexual female Doctor O'Connor.

Djuna Barnes first worked in New York City as a cubby reporter producing first-person essays whose popularity, like that of the Hearst Company's "serial queen," revealed the American public's desire to laugh at images of young single daring women in perilous positions. Among other sensational pieces, she wrote accounts of the freak shows of Coney Island and the Manhattan cabarets, arranged to have herself lowered from a building in a re-creation of a fireman's rescue, and "interviewed" a chimpanzee at the Bronx zoo.

Barnes also published darkly satirical quasi-literary essays, including a mock etiquette column "What Is Good Form in Dying?," which advises women on the proper way to die depending on hair color. This essay redirected the ominous danger that Barnes imposed on herself in the investigative pieces by scripting comely deaths, translating the actual threat implied by intrepid journalism into purely rhetorical terms in the satire of ladies' magazines' values. All of Barnes's literary work bears the formal trace of autobiography, and we begin a survey of Barnes's many returns to the theme of female suffering by considering an example of journalistic writing that foregrounds the autobiographical mode. Barnes's journalism also shows the writer developing the vividly macabre style that she uses to depict women in pain in her subsequent literary work, a style that almost always links female beauty and female pain.

Barnes published "How It Feels to Be Forcibly Fed" in the September 6, 1914, issue of *New York World Magazine*. To write this article the newspaperman (as she called herself) underwent a voluntary forced feeding "in order to tell what it felt like," at a moment when "her British sisters," suffragettes on hunger strike, were being subjected to this process in English prisons (Herring, 88).<sup>3</sup> Although at first Barnes calls the experience "playacting," she quickly moves toward a recognition of the importance of the experience, calling it "the most concentrated of [her] life" ("How It Feels to Be Forcibly Fed," 460). The article untangles the threads of sensation and thought that constitute this concentrated moment. For the purposes of this chapter, the most significant of these threads reveals that the term "feels" in the title of the article, "How It

Feels to Be Forcibly Fed,” signifies the border between the somatic and psychic experience. This border is the “place” that was named by and most interests psychoanalytic thinkers. In Barnes’s telling, somatic experience revivifies memories of trauma and reinvests traumatic experience with meaning during the moments, elongated through narrative, that she spends tied to the doctors’ table.

“I have been forcibly fed!” Barnes begins, and this concatenation of passive verb construction and exclamation contains the kernel of the experience that the article narrates: what follows is a blow-by-blow narration of the title experience that interweaves a sensory account of physical violation, of having things done to one’s body, with the triumphant feelings of political solidarity with other women who have shared the experience of physical violation (“How It Feels to Be Forcibly Fed,” 460). This experience, though “only tragic in my imagination . . . offer[s] sensations sufficiently poignant to compel comprehension of certain of the day’s phenomena” (ibid.). Barnes narrates the mental process through which the shock of the present recalls past bodily violation and extracts collective consciousness from this experience of immediate and remembered instances of compromised autonomy.

The narrative of the forced feeding begins with the group of male doctors leading Barnes into the amphitheater where the procedure will take place. She interprets their footsteps as conveying a sadistic “suppressed satisfaction” as one by one the “four men” look back at “her, a woman” (“How It Feels to Be Forcibly Fed,” 461). The table that awaits is in her mind “pregnant with the pains of the future,” this first sensation already foregrounding the female somatic metaphor that the article will develop (ibid.). Barnes’s body is then bound in a sheet, “arms tight to my sides, wrapped up to my throat so that I could not move. I lay in as long and unbroken lines as any corpse—unbroken definite lines that stretched away beyond my vision, for I saw only the skylight. My eyes wandered, outcasts in a world they knew” (ibid.). Barnes focuses on the contrast between the mob of knowing male doctors and her solitary uncertain female body, as they hold her down, “one by the head, one by the feet; one sprawled above me, holding my hands down at my hips” (ibid.). Her nostrils are swabbed with anesthetic cocaine and disinfectant, the resultant burning spreading through her sinuses to her throat. Barnes narrates the engagement of all of the senses in the experience of violation. From this painful position of “passive revolt, a quizzical thought wandered across my beleaguered mind: This, at least, is one picture that will never go into the family album” (ibid.). This

evocation of her family at this moment, to the knowing reader, recalls Barnes's memories of adolescent sexual abuse that was condoned, and perhaps even inflicted, by her father, a theme that is paramount in her first novel *Ryder* and her last play *The Antiphon*, as this chapter will discuss later. Even for readers ignorant of her biography, the similarity between this experience and rape is clearly implied throughout the text, with its interest in the bodily experience of being forced, being held immobile with "hands . . . tightened like vises," and the "anguish" of the red tubing inserted into her nose and forced through her sinus to her throat (ibid.). From this mute and immobilized position, which recalls previous sensations of violation, Barnes narrates a mounting mental resistance, the piquing of "the outraged will" (ibid., 462). Barnes narrates her thoughts during the ordeal, interrupting the minute detailing of the vivid and violent bodily experience to remark on the connection she felt to other women who had undergone similar experiences:

I saw in my hysteria a vision of a hundred women in grim prison hospitals, bound and shrouded on tables just like this, held in the rough grip of callous warders while white-robed doctors thrust rubber tubing into the delicate interstices of their nostrils and forced into their helpless bodies the crude fuel to sustain the life they longed to sacrifice. . . . Science had, then, deprived us of the right to die. ("How It Feels to Be Forcibly Fed," 462)

Barnes describes this imagined connection to other women, occasioned by the doctors' violation, with reference to both the feminized condition of hysteria and the particular contemporary history of female forced feeding. She emphasizes the delicacy of the tissue of the sinus and the helplessness of the female body prone in this position and arrives at a somewhat shocking political conclusion: it is not that science is killing the female but "depriving [her] of the right to die" ("How It Feels to Be Forcibly Fed," 462). This formulation names the deadening effect of the biopolitical mandate to live, and through this narrative structure in which violent hands are forcing life, Barnes reorders liberal assumptions about the absolute value of thriving and the absolute tragedy of failing to thrive. This reordering of values—the feminine shucking off of the mandate to live and promulgate life, the recognition that this mandate compromises female autonomy—saturates Barnes's subsequent work and is the seat of the political forms that haunt her words. It is in this early journalistic work that this politics is laid bare, expressed

forthrightly as a political solidarity with women engaging in resistance against the limits of female political autonomy.

This section has suggested that Barnes's journalism links the somatic experience of female suffering to female identity and thus to the possibility of female collectivity. "How It Feels to Be Forcibly Fed" ends with the doctor's address to his silently gagging patient:

"Be careful—you'll choke," shouted the doctor in my ear. One could still choke, then. At least one could if the nerves did not betray. And if one insisted on choking—what then? Would they—the callous warders and the servile doctors—ruthlessly persist, even with grim death at their elbow? The four men, having finished their minor roles in one minor tragedy, were already filing out at the door. ("How It Feels to Be Forcibly Fed," 462)

Barnes's gagging is both the bodily violation enacted by the doctor and her bodily, epiglottal resistance to this violation. The article renders the claustrophobic physical sensation of being held down and forcibly fed with a precision and evocativeness that exposes the violence of "muteness," the condition that literary representations of femininity idealize. This violence is experienced on the border between the female body and the word "woman," "a borderland between the somatic and the mental capacity for representation . . . that is the psyche," as Teresa De Lauretis parses it (*Freud's Drive*, 66). When Barnes navigates this border she exposes that traumatic experience will be made narrative and stories of violation will be recalled through the sensations of the body.

In this piece Barnes stages the scene in which she will suffer as a woman. As author of this scene, Barnes both produces and is the victim of a degrading depiction. In future work Barnes renders powerful women. These women too, however, are forced to recognize the somatic specificity of their female bodies and these moments resubmit these female characters to their role as Barnesian—that is to say suffering—women. Through her depictions, Barnes inflicts the somatic shock that unites her women. This suffering sorority makes for a peculiar brand of textual political solidarity: Barnes catalogs and addresses a tradition of female suffering, but she does so without participating in the aesthetic history that—from the Virgin Mary to the Victorian Angel of the House—valorizes feminine pain. Barnes both demonstrates the histories that have taxed female bodies with powerlessness and renders the resistance to this state, not by depicting women speaking truth to power,

but by producing characters that narrate the effects of their silencing and abjection.

Barnes kept original photographs from the forced feeding in her scrapbook; she captioned a page with close-ups of the scene with the phrase “During Suffrage.” (See figure 1.) The relation between this heading and the scene that the photographs depict indicates the point at

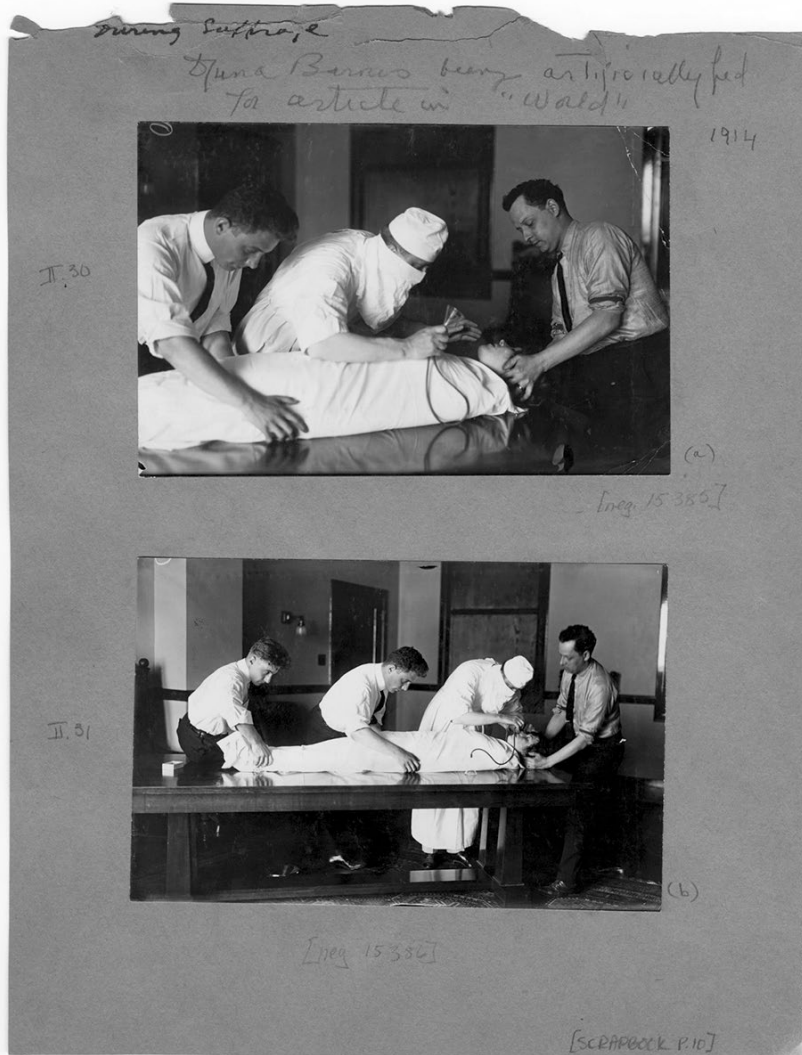


Figure 1. Page from Djuna Barnes's personal scrapbook (University of Maryland, College Park)

which a Barnesian politics of female subjection and a liberal representative politics of suffrage diverge. In “How It Feels to Be Forcibly Fed” Barnes depicts the social condition that has been inflicted on woman but does not make a request for redress for this condition in the form of the vote.

We now move to a lyric instance of the woman in pain. The next section of this chapter reads a series of poems that compose a grotesque portrait of the New Woman as undressed, degraded, and finally dead. Like her journalistic self-portrait on the forced-feeding table, in these poems, Barnes submits woman to bodily contortions in order to reveal the effects of enforced muteness, here in an inversion of the idealized woman of traditional lyrics.

THE BOOK OF REPULSIVE WOMEN:  
AN UNDISTINGUISHED MOISTURE

Barnes supported herself with journalistic writing during the 1910s and her financial independence allowed her to produce plays, poetry, and drawings and paintings. Her first published literary work, a slim chapbook, *The Book of Repulsive Women: Eight Rhythms and Five Drawings*, published by Guido Bruno in 1915, contains a cycle of poetic portraits of eight Manhattan women accompanied by “Beardsleyesque” ink drawings that depict these women as distorted and distended (C. Burke, 69). This section will consider four of these poems, two of which have titles that signal the position from which the reader “views” these women, “From Fifth Avenue Up” and “Seen from the L Train.” The cycle ends with a pair of poems jointly titled “Suicide” and composed of “Corpse A” and “Corpse B.” The cycle moves from the street to the bedroom to the coroner’s table, providing a kind of poetic survey of the female body in various stages of undress and a catalog of the lurid female places of Manhattan: the street, the single woman’s bedroom, and the far reaches of Central Park.

Like Barnes’s journalism, the word and image vignettes that compose *The Book of Repulsive Women* were produced and consumed in vexed relation to the image and experience of their creator. According to Carolyn Burke, these poems and drawings compose a depiction of the New Woman that Barnes herself was (ibid., 71). The grotesquely corporeal and, ultimately, violent poetic treatment of these eight women recalls the image of Barnes on the doctors’ table, but here, as poet, Barnes herself

violates the mute female objects. From Barnes's rendering of her own gagging, we move to the "repulsion" that the poems' objects generate.

Like the narration of forced feeding, these poetic images refuse the connection between mute female bodies and feminine beauty. Burke locates Barnes's poetic resistance in relation to the more immediate context of her own aesthetic influences, identifying in these poems "an implicit critique of the pre-Raphaelite and Symbolist aesthetics that they had imbibed in art school, and in particular, a demystification of stock images for the representation of women" (C. Burke, 69). Barnes accomplishes this resistant conversion of the female muse from the poetic object of aesthetic pleasure to an erotic threat by lyrically contorting the female body to underline her grotesque corporeality. The traditional excretions of the female body in lyric—gentle breath and pleasant scent—become putrid. The traditional lyric loci of female beauty—hair, cheek, voice—become harsh and frightening. In these poems the female body is excessive and embarrassed, pregnant with fluids, suffering under the monstrous operation of her own somatic structures. Louis Kannenstine connects this thematic dimension to the form of the poems, characterizing them as possessed of "stylistic excess" (Kannenstine, 32).

In the first poem in the chapbook the voyeuristic speaker views "From Fifth Avenue Up" a woman who is enticing and enigmatic: "Someday beneath some hard / Capricious star—/ Spreading its light a little / Over far, / We'll know you for the woman / That you are." In this first line of the first poem Barnes's choice of pronouns establishes the structure of address that remains consistent throughout the cycle. The speaker of each of these subsequent poems dissolves herself into a general "we," and the object of each poem is a woman who is dissolved into the general "Woman." The structure of address in these poems establishes the relation between the general speaker and our object "Woman" as a desire to "know" this object for "the woman that [she] is."

The speaker interweaves rhetorical violence—words and phrases that shame and embarrass—with words and phrases that suggest actual physical violence. In the second stanza of "Fifth Avenue," the narrative takes hold of the unknowable woman and laments that even her most extreme efforts to know her would only produce new enigmas: "For though one took you, hurled you / Out of space / With your legs half strangled / In your lace, / You'd lip the world to madness / On your face." Barnes provides an image of this woman as taken and hurled, her limbs constricted in their lace hosiery, her body thrown and "strangled."



The next line overtly sexualizes the violent depiction through another rhetorical “stretching out” of the female body for collective viewing:

We'd see your body in the grass  
 With cool pale eyes.  
 We'd strain to touch those lang'rous  
 Lengths of thighs,  
 And hear your short sharp modern  
 Babylonian cries.

In these lines the speaker reaches first with her eyes and then hands with strenuous effort toward this female object who is identified by her “cry.” She is the newly mythic woman who issues cries that are at once “modern” and “Babylonian,” which suggests that the attractive force that she generates in this moment of modern womanhood has its origin in the humid terraces of the ancient gardens of Babylon. It is unclear whether her cries arise from pleasure or from pain, an ambivalence that suggests that these two experiences are imbricated rather than opposed.

This lyric presentation of the sexualized body teetering on the brink of pleasure and pain arises within the poem's broader presentation of the female body, which is presented as both monstrous and alluring. The poem locates the pleasure/pain in the structures and functions of the female body. This body heats up and moistens as “We see your arms grow humid / In the heat; / We see your damp chemise lie / Pulsing in the beat / Of the over-hearts left oozing / At your feet.” The body of the female object “grows humid,” heats up, becomes damp, pulses, and inspires the oozing of hearts. The body has become a figure of abjection, flowing and excreting fluid from arms and chest.

As the poem progresses it moves down its object as that body, laden with fluid, begins to “sag” and “bulge”: “See you sagging down with bulging / Hair to sip, / The dampled damp from some vague / Under lip, / Your soft saliva, loosed / With orgy, drip.” In “From Fifth Avenue Up,” as in the journalistic prose of “Forcibly Fed,” Barnes's language connects female orifices; the phrase “Under lip” produces an association between the mouth and the vagina. Through this association the poem remaps the female body as a circuit of moist holes, which in their very structure and functioning invite penetration; sexual receptivity here is figured as “orgy drip.”

Melissa Jane Hardie identifies the female object of this first poem as “the figure of the lesbian as a meta-woman” and finds in these poems a

formal analogue to this thematic treatment of female bodily structures as both attractive (in the literal sense of productive of attraction) and repulsive (in the figural sense of disgusting) (Hardie, 123). She writes that in these poems

repulsion figures the trope as a “turn” or a repulsion, but also figures the “repulsive” women as corporeal representatives in the text of a troping that is also a repulsion or anti-troping. In this sense, the effect of repulsive woman is in dialectical relationship to the function of the figure as tropism, as a form of inclination or attraction. They both participate in, and are differentiated from, a reading of the trope that relied upon the phallus as its transcendental signified, the subject of inclination or desire. The “repulsive” women are turned, but also turn away, their bodies acting as both the ground of representation and as apotropaic, a “turn off,” guarding against the very figurative strategies through which they are described. (Hardie, 123)

In “Seen from the ‘L,’” Barnes repeats and extends this female trope that figures anti-troping by playing with the double motion of erotic attraction and repulsion. Barnes gives us a naked (and no longer youthful) woman viewed through the window of her apartment. The image is both explicit and mundane as “she stands—nude—stretching dully.” Barnes’s speaker notes the ruined remains of the gaudiness of the woman’s young face: “her lips were vague and fancy / In her youth / They bloom vivid and repulsive / As the truth. / Even vases in the making / Are uncouth.” Barnes selects the “vase” to figure this woman, this most common trope for the female poetic object in lyric history that figures woman as representative of classical beauty, concavity, and muteness (Johnson, 45). In Barnes’s Modernist poetics, however, the dumb hollow female possessed of compromised humanity carries with her the fascinating threat of the living dead. Like the naturalized woman of Romantic lyrics she is reduced to a bodily form, but one that like our own is as “repulsive / As the truth.” It is precisely because of her mute corporeality that this lyric woman is frightening and unpredictable.

In “Twilight of the Illicit” Barnes renders the female poetic body/object, the mute vessel, in still more explicitly degrading language. Again the speaker addresses the poetic object directly. In emphatic capital letters, she evokes, “YOU, with your long blank udders / And your calms, /

Your spotted linen and your / Slack'ning arms. / With satiated fingers dragging / At your palms. / Your knees set far apart." Barnes drains the breasts of her female object, reducing them to animalistic "blank udders." She dirties the linens and places atop them a woman sated and splayed. Barnes repurposes the sacredness, emptiness, and depth that recommend the urn as a Romantic symbol of poetic femininity to indicate deep-seated depravity. The speaker abstracts herself through the use of the impersonal pronoun, asserting that "One grieves that the altars of / Your vice lie deep." The female enigma that the poem sought to address in its opening lines is revealed in these last lines as a "vice" that the poem, like a physiognomic cipher, interprets as the essential characteristic of the female body.

The cycle ends with twin poems jointly titled "Suicide." Barnes renders the first anonymous corpse, identified by the subtitle only as "Corpse A," with metaphors of ruined feminine beauty. The first-person collective "we" subject of the earlier poems extracts itself from the scene. It is "THEY [who] brought her in, a shattered small / Cocoon, / With a little bruised / body like / A startled moon; / And all the subtle symphonies of her / A twilight rune." The female body, which throughout the poems has been monstrously alive, has degenerated in death back to the abject form of a pupa, a "shattered . . . Cocoon." As the poems progress, the shading of the female body has been transformed from surface to subcutaneous, and the cosmetic palette of the earlier poems becomes bruising, indicating that choosing rouge and lipstick will lead to more violent markings. The lunar simile compares the woman to a "startled moon" and the music that she produced in life has become in death witchy "runes" that provide new postmortem disquietude and enigma. The second body, "Corpse B," reproduces the scene of the first, in which anonymous others abuse the female victim: "THEY gave her hurried shoved this way / And that. / Her body shock-abbreviated / As a city cat. / She lay out listlessly like some small mug / Of beer gone flat." This final word deflates the female body that throughout the cycle of poems has been distended and full to the point of dripping.

Suicide, at the end of *The Book of Repulsive Women*, provides the metaphor for vexed authorship that connects these poems to "How It Feels to Be Forcibly Fed." In this earlier piece, Barnes nominates self-annihilation as the last agential act that power can "deprive us of." In *Repulsive Women*, the female poet assumes the lesbian collective voice to inflict sexualized sex-specific rhetorical abuse on female objects and then renders images of these women authoring their own deaths. Car-

olyn Burke summarizes her critical attitude toward these poems when she claims that Barnes “published *The Book of Repulsive Women* almost as if it were necessary to kill off the old images of women before a different vision might become possible” (C. Burke, 70). The female speaker is in a strange collaboration with her degraded object who desires to die. These poems represent a purposeful lyric suicide in which the poet both inflicts and receives the abuse of the feminine. The female flagellation of the feminine, the textual masochism again troubles the concept of the author of violence: is it the abuser or the female body at the level of her physical morphology that produces female pain?<sup>4</sup> This is the mechanism for the asexual and nonreproductive regeneration of the new lyric female from the old lyric lady, a phoenix-like death and rebirth that will effect new provocation as the structures of the female body are reworked in Barnes’s later texts.

A final example specifies the place that these lyric reorderings occupy in the history of Modernist literature. In a story entitled “The Rabbit,” published in *Spillway*, the collection of stories in which Barnes developed her prose style, an Armenian émigré to New York City promises to prove to his intended that he is a “real man” by learning to kill. In the final scene, in which the protagonist contemplates his murderous task, Barnes offers another repulsive tropological deployment of a woman’s body exposed. The protagonist exits his tailor shop and ventures across the street:

Exactly opposite, two bright lights burned in the butcher’s window. He could see sides of beef hanging from their hooks, the chilled lakes of blood in the platters, the closed eyes of the calves’ heads in ranks on their slabs, looking like peeled women, and swaying in the wind of the open door, with legs knocked down. (Barnes, “The Rabbit,” 69)

This simile connects animal bodies on display for consuming passersby, slung and strung up, hanging and drained of blood, “swaying” in the wind and fully denuded, to the bodies of women in the mind of the omniscient narrator. This simile recalls the sight with which Barnes leaves us at the end of *The Book of Repulsive Women*. For a female reader, or for the feminine as a position that the female reader can readily occupy, this easy passage between meat and female flesh is the base-unit image of the body alienated from the self, the most extreme rhetorical mortification of flesh; the image harnesses the female with muteness and by ex-

tension with objecthood. Here, as in the poems, Barnes resists the image of woman as object not by countering this imagining but by pushing it to garish extremes. Here, as in her journalistic work, Barnes pressures the kind of alienation that literature can produce. Barnes offers *Repulsive Women*, a collection of poetic portraits of overexposed, X-ray viewed, “peeled,” and ultimately self-annihilating women as the watery female counterpoint to the “distinguished aridity” that T. S. Eliot championed as the proper poetic attitude for the challenge of rendering the modern subject in verse. Carolyn Burke’s observation that these poems arise in resistance to the traditional lyric version of womanhood can be extended to consider the specific challenge that these poems present to the emerging Modernist version of individual personhood being developed in the 1910s by her future poet-colleagues. Barnes articulates this lyric model of impersonal personhood through rhetorical denigration of the specifically female body. The erotically explicit aspects of this denigration reinstate the female threat that saccharine depictions of femininity neutralize; the poet teases out the threat that remains latent in such depictions, and this process is repeated in Barnes’s subsequent work. Barnes selects subjects whose bodies bear the rhetorical residue of histories of denigration, and this female “particularity” of her subjects shifts the representational field in relation to the “general” universal subject whose universality knows no historical mark of denigration and so offers Eliot and his fellows the unique opportunity to author their characters’ alienation.

These depictions recall Peter Nicholls’s nomination, already discussed in the introduction, of Baudelaire as the poet most responsible for the redefinition of the feminine in proto-Modernist aesthetics. When describing Baudelaire’s “Red-Headed Beggar Girl” Nicholls identifies this title lyric heroine as “self-presence incarnate; and while her body certainly exerts an ‘appeal’ for Baudelaire’s poet, that is primarily because she prompts him to create the ironic distance which is the foundation of this particular aesthetic. In submitting his desire to the discipline of irony, the poet thus achieves a contrasting disembodiment” (Nicholls, 3). For Nicholls, Baudelaire’s poems produce a counterintuitive play between proximity and distance, which the poet effects by making us intimately acquainted with the body of the female subject and then rendering this body as threatening or monstrous so that our very intimacy produces our distance. Following Nicholls on Baudelaire, it is this repulsion that is also the attraction, and as the last line of Barnes’s poem “To a Cabaret Dancer” reveals, despite her menacing quality, that “you need her still” (*The Book of Repulsive Women*, 31).

## LADIES ALMANACK: TO BE BOTH ONE AND NEITHER

By 1928 the new vision that emerges from the ashes of the traditional image of poetic femininity has migrated and morphed. Barnes trades the arch abuse of the Manhattanite female body that the poems and drawings inflict in *The Book of Repulsive Women* for an arch satire of the expatriate lesbians of Paris in *Ladies Almanack*. Just as the Barnesian chapbook contorts the form of Romantic courtly lyric address, so the Barnesian almanack plays with the conventions of that genre. Barnes reimagines the book that typically provides the farmer with information on the sober topics of weather patterns and crop blights as the record of sapphic ladies' biorhythms, "showing their Signs and their tides; their Moons and their Changes; the Seasons as it is with them; their Eclipses and Equinoxes; as well as a full record of diurnal and nocturnal Distempers" (*Ladies Almanack*, 3). In this almanack, it is woman's bodily seasons that will be cataloged and mapped. In this work too, Barnes foregrounds female corporeality, and here too she does so in resistance to a literary tradition of depicting women's appeal in a desexualized and sentimental way, but now she does so by way of her protagonist's cross-gender identification.<sup>5</sup>

Barnes introduces the hero/ine of the *Almanack*, Evangeline Musset, who is the fictional version of Barnes's friend and notorious Left Bank salonière Natalie Barney, with Musset's disavowal of the aesthetic history of sentimental depictions of women. Musset rejects this representational history that has led to a condition in which "women have in them the Pip of Romanticism so well grown and fat of Sensibility, that they, upon reaching an uncertain Age, discard Duster, Offspring and Spouse, and a little after are seen leaning, all of a limp, on a Pillar of Bathos" (*Ladies Almanack*, 7). Here Barnes traces the dull lives of ladies back to a core source of inferior aesthetic tastes, but Evangeline Musset evades these twin foibles of eighteenth and nineteenth-century literary artistic effeminacy. Her resistance to blubbery sentiment and bathetic Romanticism reflects her anomalous biological characteristics.<sup>6</sup> Women might generally indulge in this kind of emotion, but Evangeline Musset

was not one of these, for she had developed in the Womb of her most gentle Mother to be a Boy, when therefore, she came forth an Inch or so less than this, she paid no Heed to the Error, but donning a Vest of superb Blister and Tooling, a Belcher for a tippet and a pair of hip-boots with a scarlet

channel (for it was a most wet wading) she took her whip and calling her Pups about her, and so set out upon the Road of Destiny. (*Ladies Almanack*, 7)

Musset is indifferent to her nontraditional process of biological maturation from a male fetus to a transgender horseman. She is not in the least bothered by her physical “shortcomings.” Indeed, when her father, following Evangeline’s insistent flirtations with the sapphically named “Dutchess Clitorea,” worries over the trouble that the apparent contradiction between Evangeline’s status as his daughter and her masculine “fatherly sentiment” will pose in leading her “to the altar,” she assures him of her confidence in her sexual prowess and counters his censorious worry with an affirmation of her masculine triumph over her anomalous genital situation:

“Thou good Governor, Wast expecting a Son when you lay atop of your Choosing, why then be so mortal wounded when you perceive that you have your Wish? Am I not doing after your Desire, and is it not the more commendable, seeing that I do it without the Tools for the Trade?” (*Ladies Almanack*, 8)

When the *Almanack* begins Evangeline Musset is fifty years old, the narrative tells us, and Barnes suggests via lesbian double entendre that she still amply compensates for her lack of “tools for the Trade” with her skills, her “genius at bringing up by hand” and her “[noteworthy and esteemed] slips of the Tongue” (*Ladies Almanack*, 9).

Barnes suggests a link between these sapphic skills and Musset’s resistance to the femininity that is prescribed by the sentimental and Romantic literary traditions. Another character, Patience Scalpel (fictional avatar of Barnes’s friend Mina Loy), strengthens this connection between generations of aesthetics and sexual practices in a monologue that notes the modern timeliness of her sisters’ lesbic lifestyle and expresses her envy-laden derision of these countercultural lives:

“And what,” she said, “the silly Creatures may mean by it is more than I can diagnose! . . . I must die in my Time, and never know what it is in the Whorls and Crevices of my Sisters so prolongs them to the bitter End? Do they not have Organs as exactly alike as two Peas, or twin Griefs; and are

they not eclipsed ever so often with the galling Check-rein of feminine Tides?” (*Ladies Almanack*, 11–12)

Scalpel insists upon her consummate modernity, that she is wholly “of her time,” nonetheless she petulantly bemoans that she is barred from this timely experience and its attendant knowledge: she will not know her sisters as they know each other. In sly compensation for what she is missing, however, she forwards the image of female genitals in lesbian proximity as “twin Griefs” and extends the lachrymose metaphor by remarking on the gall produced by the doubling of the potential for menstrual complications to sexual life, the redoubling of the weeping “feminine Tides.”

Scalpel’s figuration of female genitals as grieved and weeping recalls its fellow figurations in “Forcibly Fed” and *Repulsive Women*. In each case the modernity of the modern woman involves the compromising—rhetorical or actual—of female genitals. Scalpel’s figuration portends the moment in Barnes’s oeuvre that will clarify for the first time the formal comment that this coupling of female modernity with female genital injury produces. Cutting into a triangular conversation in progress between Lady-Buck-and-Balk, who advocates for the elimination of men all together; Tilly Tweed-in-Blood, who advocates their preservation for the purposes of lifting and carrying; and Patience Scalpel, who is roused by the talk of men to hope that there are some nearby, Evangeline Musset destabilizes the terms of this conversation. Already identified to the reader as male, Musset recalls the experience that made her female, only once and briefly:

“When I really desire to wallow in impersonal Tragedy,” . . .  
 “I think of that day forty years ago, when I, a Child of ten,  
 was deflowered by the Hand of a Surgeon! I, even I, come to  
 it as other Women, and I never a Woman before nor since!”  
 (*Ladies Almanack*, 24)

Musset achieves the status of “impersonal Tragedy,” the doctrinal lyric goal of Barnes’s contemporary poets, Eliot (her great champion) and Pound (her great detractor), when she recalls and forwards the experience of the breaking of her hymen by a male doctor, a particularly violent version of an experience which is universal among women. It is this experience of tragic genital violation that constitutes the sum total of Musset’s female experience. Here Barnes redefines the general and the impersonal, not by replacing a male experience of alienation with a female



one, but by distilling the experience of alienation as the experience of the body and the self being violently rent apart; the paradigmatic instance of this rending is violently enforced genital disidentification. Musset suffers from this dysphoric condition that Barnes names as a universal female experience, the theft of the body from the self. Barnes's work will lead us shortly to the recognition that this violent experience returns belatedly from its origin in the mythic psychic past. This shared experience, which is handmaiden to the female modern, then is revealed as a rendering both within and against Modernist aesthetic strategies as defined by Barnes's contemporary literary authorities. *Ladies Almanack* provides the second occasion to measure Barnes against the self-canonizing critical account of Modernism. In this work as in *Repulsive Women*, Barnes produces what Tyrus Miller describes as the satirization of Eliot's poetic tradition by pushing "the surrender of self" to chaotic extremes and locating that surrender in female genital morphology. The organs and structures of women's bodies, at the level of physical form, surrender.

The triumph that Musset claims in the name of her own masculinity is soon restored. In response to the keening of her friends, who promise to revenge the doctor's violation, Evangeline's command is clear: "Peace!" said Dame Musset, putting a Hand upon [Scalpel's] Wrist, 'I am my Revenge!" (*Ladies Almanack*, 26). This exaltation is echoed and generalized later when the journalist Nip (alias for Janet Flanner, writer of the *New Yorker's* "Letter from Paris") remarks that "no Man could be both one and neither like us" (*ibid.*, 37). Evangeline Musset's revenge-existence ends when she dies in December, the final month described in the *Almanack*. Her body is burned: "And when they came to the ash that was left of her, all had burned but the Tongue, and this flamed, and would not suffer Ash, and it played about upon the handful that had been she indeed" (*ibid.*, 84). It is the phallic tongue, in its very morphology, that refuses feminine suffering, just as it is Musset in her very affirmation of herself and her life that "is [her] revenge." In this depiction Barnes reaffirms the association of vaginal morphology with female injury but also suggests that not all "women" necessarily suffer from this association because, as Evangeline Musset proves, "not all women are woman all" (*ibid.*, 88). Barnes's transfiguration of genitals in *Ladies Almanack* is largely figural and lightly comic. A more conceptually weighty and realist exploration of this experience of transfiguration emerges in her two novels—*Ryder* and *Nightwood*—both of which orient their narrative to a lesser and then greater extent around the transsexual figure of Doctor Matthew O'Connor.

## RYDER: DYING WOMAN

Suffering is one long moment. We cannot divide it by seasons. We can only record its moods, and chronicle their return. With us time itself does not progress. It revolves. It seems to circle round one center of pain. The paralyzing immobility of life, every circumstance of which is regulated after an unchangeable pattern, so that we eat and drink and walk and lie down and pray, or kneel at least for prayer, according to the inflexible laws of an iron formula: this immobile quality, that makes each dreadful day like its brother, seems to communicate itself to those external forces the very essence of whose existence is ceaseless change. Of seedtime or harvest, of the reapers bending over the corn, or the grape-gatherers threading through the vines, of the grass in the orchard made white with broken blossoms, or strewn with fallen fruit, we know nothing, and can know nothing. For us there is only one season, the season of Sorrow.

—Oscar Wilde, *De Profundis*

Barnes's first novel, *Ryder*, published the same year as *Ladies Almanack*, is a Modernist reinvention of the genre of the family chronicle. As was the case with *Repulsive Women*'s grotesque descriptions of female muses and the *Almanack*'s defiance of the generic expectations of seasonal accounts of pastoral life, Barnes contorts the conventions of the chronicle genre to suit her objectives. In each of these cases, it is as if the suffocating history of these generic conventions—and the cloying characterizations of women that accompany these conventions—spur Barnes's response. Her generic rebellion is especially meaningful in the case of the genre that historically lauded the greatness of families in the genealogical scope of history, a narrative frame that surely papers over the particular instances of violence and conditions of life within the chronicled families.

It is a question of spirit and not of form, then, when Louis Kannenstine asserts that Barnes's polyvocal and polystylistic novel that apes the textures of English literature from Chaucer to Shakespeare to Robert Burton "kills the domestic novel" (Kannenstine, 17). *Ryder* is a barely disguised version of the life of her own family: beginning with her father's mother, the matriarch Zadel Barnes (whose fictional avatar is Sophia), her father Wald Barnes (Wendell), her mother Elizabeth Chappell Barnes (Amelia), and her father's mistress Fanny (Kate Careless). She,

Djuna, appears intermittently as Julie, one of the Ryder daughters. This first novel anticipates *Nightwood* in the points of most interest to this chapter's inquiry: *Ryder* surveys one family's measure of female suffering and outlines a sorority between this female experience and the trans female experience.

The novel's first chapter is a brief, blasphemous, catechistical induction entitled "Jesus Mundane" that instructs the reader to avoid fanaticism, seek pleasure in "small comforts" rather than hope for the "Last Station," and above all to follow the devotional and redemptive practices of her neighbors. The chapter directs the reader away from too great a belief in her own conviction. In the last paragraphs, the narrative voice reveals itself to be that of Jesus who details all of the things that the reader "knowest not" and calls the mysteries of God "these things [that] are as the back of thy head to thee. Thou hast not seen them, naming intellectual humility as the seat of spiritual correctness" (*Ryder*, 5). The line that follows is haunted by this holy conviction and its lifelong and posthumous implication. This spiritual and intellectual correctness will be revealed as "that which thou art, that in the end must thou bring as a sign against thy body" (*ibid.*, 5).

This line hangs like an epigraph over the novel, which returns to scenes of last reckoning and death, of measuring the self "against" the body. The second chapter, the first of the novel's plot, narrates the first of such deathbed scenes. In it, the adolescent Sophia Ryder (she will maintain her family patronymic after marriage, as did Barnes's grandmother Zadel) attends to her mother Cynthia in the final moments of the childbirth that will kill her. Cynthia, late in this process, lies in bed in physical and mental agony. She beckons her daughter to ask:

"Sophia, how many children have I?" And Sophia said: "Thirteen and me." Cynthia perhaps because she was a little wandering and no doubt but that she thought it a wise gift to a child, said: "Your father is a hairy atheist, but a penitent for all that; all nature lovers are, especially these. Remember." She groped among the blankets. The room was dark, only the canopied bed stood out (whereon were stamped birds of a gusty wing), a terrible suffering centre without extremities. (*Ryder*, 8)

Barnes identifies the bed on which Cynthia's fourteen children have been born as the suffering center of the home, and this experience is the center of the female suffering that will mark the following chapters. Cynthia

symbolically passes this suffering to her daughter in her last moments of life. Sophia approaches the bed and

her mother looked upon her, noted her swelling bosom, put a hand thereon. “You have a child. One breast shall be for my son, and one breast shall be for thy son.” . . . Sophia took up the new-born all in its long clothes and put it to the sister breast, for she remembered her mother when she was beginning and when she had finished. (*Ryder*, 8)

This is the reader’s first experience of the woman who will bear the patriarch of the *Ryder* family, Wendell *Ryder*. Here Sophia takes on the overflow of her mother’s brood as her own, literally offering her breast for the sustenance of her brother and her son simultaneously. This scene establishes women’s sacrifice and suffering through childbirth as the emblematic instance of suffering, and this suffering as the peculiar destiny of the female body. What follows is an excavation of that suffering, its origins and effects, its victims and monstrous perpetrators in this novel that Louis *Kannenstine* describes as “a tragedy of women” (*Kannenstine*, 40).

The primary agent of the tragedy of the *Ryder* women is their son, husband, and father *Wendell* who *Kannenstine* identifies as he “who is equated in his role of fecundator, with all of nature, stands as the agent of woman’s suffering” (*Kannenstine*, 45). Chapter 13, “Midwives Lament the Horrid Outcome of *Wendell*’s First Infidelity,” is composed of eleven short lines of verse. The poem stands in elegy to the first young woman that *Wendell* taxes with an illegitimate pregnancy and provides the second instance of fatal childbirth in the novel. The young woman is not named but is identified by her characteristically female death as she

Who died as women die, unequally  
Impaled upon a death that crawls within;  
For men die otherwise, of man unsheathed  
But women on a sword they scabbard too.  
And so this girl, untimely to the point  
Pricked herself upon her son and passed  
Like any Roman bleeding on the blade. (*Ryder*, 77)

As we have seen elsewhere in *Barnes*’s work, these lines suggest that women are physiologically suited to die. These lines suggest that she will

die “unequally Impaled,” because this death emanates from “within” the structures of her body. This particular too-young woman is “a girl untimely to the point” and that point is her male child with whom she pricks herself internally and so is left crucified, the second such sacrifice of the novel.

Amelia questions the lyric assertion of the immemorial and inevitable quality of this fate of female bodies as she contemplates her own imminent death by childbirth. She and Wendell’s mistress Kate Careless go into labor simultaneously and Amelia turns to her daughter Julie who is crying and says:

The birds are singing and caring nothing of the matter, and I shall die this time, and there’s no doubt about it, my darling. Don’t cry, for you were not a girl when I was a girl, and what can you know? Once I was safe enough and I could not let well enough alone, I just get myself in the way of doom and damnation by being natural. So take warning by my size and don’t let a man touch you, for their touching never ends, and screaming oneself into a mother is no pleasure at all. (*Ryder*, 95)

Amelia’s warning indicates that it is possible to escape the death sentence of wifehood and motherhood, of “doom and damnation,” but only by taking the route of the ladies of the *Almanack*, by consciously resisting “being natural,” and avoiding the “touch” of men altogether. Wendell punctuates this warning humorously by boorishly wandering into this scene of double painful childbirth and asking with irritation, “Why all this tumult?” (*Ryder*, 95). Amelia doesn’t die and it is toward the end of this scene that we are first introduced to Doctor O’Connor, who is sent for to humanely assist in the successful birth. It is the Doctor who disappoints both Amelia and Julie by “[turning] it over, glancing” and deeming the baby to be “a boy!” (*ibid.*, 97). This medically underwritten certitude on the subject of sex will be questioned by the words of this same doctor upon Matthew’s return in the novel.

In chapter 28, “If Some Strong Woman—,” we are more fully introduced to Doctor Matthew O’Connor, the primary object of the rest of this chapter. We learn that he is the local gynecologist and obstetrician, a fact that accounts for his summoning to the Ryder births, and “as nice and as good a man, and as pleasant spoken, outside of the confessional, as one would wish to meet” (*Ryder*, 123). In contrast to the

brutal physicians that we've seen in Barnes's previous work, O'Connor is kind and gentle: "with children he was a jewel; all mothers whomsoever he has helped in child-bed swore by him, saying that he was a gifted creature, and as comforting as silk; and that his ways with the new-born were nothing short of magnificent" (ibid.). His gentleness extends even to actions that require some force: "To see that man slap an unaccustomed bottom, is a lesson in tenderness" and he is a man, in contrast to Wendell, who brings wife and mistress into agreement: "said Amelia to Kate Careless, and Kate agreed that indeed and indeed Doctor O'Connor was a man in a million" (ibid.). Indeed, Matthew mirrors the Ryder women in maternal skill, which he applies to the care of all things dear and tiny: "Doctor O'Connor was gentle with animals. He loved Molly's kennel to a dog, he stroked all cats within range, inquiring of every woman in a twelve miles how her young sows did, and how her ducks and drakes" (ibid.). The women repay his kindness and appreciate his skill not through recognition of their common feminine skills but by expressing their marital aspirations for the Doctor. They "smiled to see him coming, and shook their heads as he departed. "For," said they," such a pattern of the virtues should have him a wife" (ibid.). The women of *Ryder*, so unhappy in love themselves, attach hope to the possibility that this gentle person will compose the male half of a heterosexual unit.

Matthew responds to their solicitous attention with sadness. Kate Careless approaches him and expresses the view that the women have hereto expressed to each other:

"Matthew, it's time that you were assisting at the birth of your own, for never saw I such a man for loving-kindness, and such a way with little things. So if some good woman . . ." But she got no further, for Doctor Matthew O'Connor had burst into tears. "It's always been my wish," he said, struggling with his emotions, "to be called Hesper, first star of evening." And with that he arose and went away. (*Ryder*, 124)<sup>7</sup>

Matthew is driven to tears by the suggestion that he might find a woman to wed but foregoes explaining the reason for his tears. In place of such an explanation, he expresses a wish for self-naming, a wish that he might be rechristened with the feminine name for the first star to rise and the first to disappear from the night sky, and with this enigmatic wish hanging in the air, *he* himself disappears.

In chapter 32, “The Soliloquy of Doctor Matthew O’Connor (Family Physician to the Ryders) on the Way to and from the Confessional of Father Lucas,” O’Connor reveals the reason for his negative response to the ladies’ attempts at matchmaking by recounting the content of the unpleasant things he might tell in the confessional. The chapter is composed of Doctor O’Connor’s wild ungainly confession, narrated in the kind of rambling unhinged soliloquy that characterizes his depiction in both *Ryder* and *Nightwood*, where he will return. O’Connor describes her first entry into Father Lucas’s church:<sup>8</sup> “came down the aisle swinging my tin hips, see me, Matthew O’Connor, holding my satin robe about my backsides, tripping up to God like a good woman, and me only seventeen and taking on something scandalous for the ways my sins were with me!” (*Ryder*, 137). O’Connor emphasizes her shapely and audacious tinny hips and dresses them in draping satin in this joyous recounting of her confessional adventure. She approaches God brashly with sins in full view. O’Connor goes on to express that she doesn’t feel that her life or actions are sinful. She “come[s] to it with a free heart, once a lady always an acrobat, and him breathing in the dark of the box, our four knees with each other for the glory of God” (*ibid.*). Here O’Connor the confessor places herself in a relation of equality with the priest who receives her confession; both have knees on which to kneel before God, and thus she inducts the cerebral and chaste priest into her own and “the common” condition of having a body: the priest begins to “breathe hard.”<sup>9</sup>

If her personal sense of innocence has already been established on her way to the confessional, she is still a Catholic and so must produce her sins in narrative before they can be assessed for penance and absolved officially. The confession that she recounts includes evidence of her sexual familiarity with the bodies of men: “me with my susceptible orbs staring down into and up through the cavities and openings and fissures and entrances of my fellowmen” (*ibid.*). The bawdy and sly tenderness of this description joyfully and archly uses language that at once—to the careful listener—explicitly states the nature of the sexual practice that allows her to “stare down” the “openings” of men but also lightly covers the plain declaration. Eyes become “orbs,” a man’s mouth and anus become “fissures and entrances.” The Doctor’s confession is a species of camp speech, the expression of the most explicit facts hidden in plain view by the dazzling effect of the verbal display in which they are revealed.<sup>10</sup> The Doctor is absolved and leaves with the Priest’s transsexual benediction: “Go, my daughter, he says, and love thy fellowmen” (*ibid.*).

O'Connor occupies the place of priest and extends this specific holy acquittal to make happy the spiritual fate of all women. In performing this general absolution she cites the precision of the gestures of the body over the imprecision of verbal language and the redemption of the here-after over the conditions of the present:

[Woman's] feet go with [her], saying, Matthew O'Connor, you'll come to no bad end, for I'm a woman of a few thousand gestures and a hundred words, and they are going one by one into the ranks of the seraphim, and amid the mighty army of the church, and one by one they'll fly away into forgiveness, stock and shirt and breech, redeemed into the kingdom of heaven, and who am I that I should be damned forever, Amen? (*Ryder*, 139)

It is in this chapter's long soliloquy that Doctor O'Connor first identifies herself as a woman. Despite O'Connor's (and Barnes's) access to an elaborate and commonly used lexicon of gay and queer vocabulary for naming effeminate gay men—the term “pansy” being the most common—O'Connor consistently hereafter names herself as female. Barnes outlines an opposition between the womanly care of Doctor O'Connor and the brute carelessness of Wendell. But readings of the novel have stopped at the adjectival modification of “womanly” and have read around the female identity that Doctor O'Connor repeatedly asserts. Kannenstine, for example, argues that, “by default, the man of *virtu* in *Ryder* became the homosexual O'Connor. And in *Ladies Almanack*, *virtu* becomes a sapphic trait, the property of women alone (Kannenstine, 48). “But, all women are not women all” writes Barnes in *Ladies Almanack* and this logic subtends the depictions of *Ryder*, although working in “the opposite” direction. In this novel, woman is defined in relation to the somatic history of injury; Doctor O'Connor claims this identity.

Doctor O'Connor is not the only person in *Ryder* to undergo transsexual rhetorical conversion.<sup>11</sup> Chapter 39, “Wendell Discusses Himself,” is composed of speech that is a sort of degraded parallel piece to Matthew's confessional chapter. Into this project of self-definition, Wendell includes a vignette that recounts his experience of seeing Oscar Wilde in the midst of the sorrows of his 1895 trials and resultant public shunning. The arch of this description makes the fallen playwright and ruined Decadent a dandy transsexual. To begin:



Oscar Wilde was a man of beauty, who looked through a privy-ring at the stars. A man of imagination, a man of parts, a man's man. I saw him once, and was less a one myself, for that I, seeing him lean from out of a cab in the days of his trouble, turned my head away and listened unlistening to that voice that had slid over every woman's blandishments, from Oxford to Reading, like a mighty cod on his way to sea. I turned away, my hams shrinking, the scandal had burst, and though he was the core, the gallant center of a rousing stench, in a month he was a changed man, not changing, sitting within his cell, weeping, writhing, plotting "De Profundis," . . . shuddering in all his soft female body, direct suffering in his breasts; a bull caught and captured, sentenced, hamstretched, marauded, peered at, peeped upon, regarded and discovered to be a gentle sobbing cow, giving self-suck at the fountain of self, that he might die in his own image, a soft pain chattered she, a girl cast out of heaven, harnessed for a stallion's turns tremolo to his own swan-song. I turned away . . ." (Ryder, 166)

Wendell's narration has Wilde calling to him from the cab and—despite Wendell's avowed reverence for this beauty, this "man's man"—he refuses to acknowledge him with his ability to make his "listening" ears "unlisten," allowing him to "turn away." He fears the scandal that surrounds Wilde. He recognizes that succumbing to this fear makes him "less of a man," but conveys through his disparaging description of Wilde the primary reason for his inattention: Wendell tells us that prison and infamy have remade Wilde into a woman. The formerly invincible wit now "[shudders] in his female body" and holds "his suffering in his breasts." Transformed from "bull" to "cow giving self-suck at the fountain of the self," he has become "a girl cast out." Wendell's description of his own homophobic and misogynist rejection of the feminized Wilde recalls a moment in *De Profundis* in which Wilde describes the significance of his friend Robbie Ross refusing to look away when he saw the sentenced writer in disgraceful custody:

I was brought down from my prison to the Court of Bankruptcy between two policemen, Robbie waited in the long dreary corridor, that before the whole crowd, whom an action so sweet and simple hushed into silence, he might

gravely raise his hat to me, as handcuffed and with bowed head I passed him by. Men have gone to heaven for smaller things than that. (Wilde, 49)

Ross's generosity, bravery, and genuine feeling contrast with Wendell's base fears and willingness to demean through misogynist tautology both the broken homosexual Wilde and all women. "Suffering is one long moment. We cannot divide it by seasons. We can only record its moods, and chronicle their return. With us time itself does not progress. It revolves. It seems to circle round one center of pain," writes Wilde in the passage that supplies this section's epigraph (Wilde, 43). Wendell produces such an atemporal suffering center in *Ryder*, functioning for women just as the prison does for Wilde. It is central to the operation of his character that he recognizes his role as pain-giver and at times even regrets it, but he doesn't apologize for it or seek to reform. Wendell caps his chapter of narrative self-definition by explaining to his mother Sophia their relative positions in the world. He says, "I am the life, you are the suffering, I am the insulted, you are the injured, I am the note, but you are the instrument" (*Ryder*, 169). In each iteration, the son installs himself as the primary term and the mother as the secondary. Through this confident refrain Wendell proclaims that this hierarchy of man over woman is simply and eternally natural.<sup>12</sup>

As we near the end of the novel in chapter 45, "Doctor O'Connor Talks to Wendell," the epigrammatic line from Jesus Mundane with which we began again rings in our ears: "that which thou art, that in the end must thou bring as a sign against thy body" (*Ryder*, 5). "'All women,' said Wendell . . . 'are equal, until one dies in child-bed, then she becomes as near to the saints as my mind can conceive'" (ibid., 202). When Wendell fetishizes death in childbirth, he presumes to adjudicate women's death-reckoning and tries in so doing to rob women of their own death. He continues by asking, "'How would you die, Matthew?'" . . . And Matthew answered, 'I should die like a woman'" (ibid., 204). Woman is what Matthew O'Connor "art," and this central component of her being will become manifest at the end of her life. In this passage, she demands to be known by this "sign" that will be brought to determine the future of her body beyond life.

In contrast with Doctor O'Connor's brave willingness to die as a woman, the identity that in this novel means suffering, Wendell says that he will "die a child" (*Ryder*, 205). He demonstrates the significance

of his child's death when, in the wake of his mother's death, he contemplates the idea that he will one day die: "I am born, don't you understand, I am born and must die, that is so, is it not? That is so of everyone, but I am born and I must face everything and I must die and I cannot" (ibid., 241). Wendell's fearful whimpering echoes the cowardice with which he turned away from Oscar Wilde and belies the crowing assertion of supremacy that he restates often in this text. "I, my love, am to be the Father of All Things," he proclaims with the certitude of a Modernist manifesto (ibid., 242). Wendell exposes the male need that is the cause of the female suffering when as the novel concludes he worries that motherless, he is directionless because he doesn't know "whom should he disappoint now?" (ibid.). This thrice-repeated last line of the novel echoes back to the scene of the son and brother taking to Sophia's breast; beginning her life as a mother with a figure for double depletion. The phrase functions as a concise epitaph to the Ryder family chronicle reaching further back to the last line of "To a Cabaret Dancer" in *Repulsive Women*, in which Barnes warns the reader that despite the garish repulsion of the female, "you need her still."

#### NIGHTWOOD: PROPITIOUS BODIES, OR L'AVENIR DU CORPS

Djuna Barnes's masterpiece opens in Vienna in 1880 with a rendering of an inverted family romance. The narrative moves quickly over the masculine Hedvig Volkbein, a "Viennese woman of great strength and military beauty," in the act of giving birth in a bed bearing the patronymic "valences stamped with the bifurcated wings of the House of Hapsburg" (*Nightwood*, 1). Barnes evidences Hedvig's militaristic masculinity by attributing to her a "goose-step stride," a "manly stroke" at the piano, and a gait that describes a "tactical maneuver" across the dance floor (ibid.). These appellations place Hedvig in an early twentieth-century convergence of Fascist political and Futurist aesthetic discourses that decouple gender from sex organs by suggesting that virility and femininity are qualities that both men and women can possess. Her surname positions her standing (*bein* is German for leg) among the *Volk* (German for people, as Hitler made common knowledge). Barnes's description of Hedvig's haleness recalls the Futurist feminist tracts written by poets such as Valentine de Saint Point which claimed that women have an equal capacity for virility, the most prized Futurist trait.<sup>13</sup>

In contrast, Hedvig's husband, Guido, who precedes her in death, had been both a "gourmet and a dandy," the emblem of late nineteenth-century effeminacies (ibid., 3). His rotund body bears the feminine "obstetric line seen on fruits" and he carries an "exquisite handkerchief" that symbolizes his Italian Jewish ancestry (ibid., 2). Outfitted in this perpetually parturient body and with these dainty accouterments, Guido cuts the figure of the Decadent effeminate. This couple, composed of a purposeful, forward-looking, masculine female and an almost coyly false, backward-looking, effeminate man, inverts the terms of gender in a figure that neatly summarizes how the aesthetic schools of the late nineteenth century did the same. Both Hedvig, the ironic female Germanic D'Annunzian and Guido, the Italianate defanged Wildean, are dead by the third page of the novel, but not before establishing the vexed primal scene (and the gender-inverted Decadent and Futurist formal ferment) from which the novel's high Modernist language grows.

Hedvig and Guido's son, Felix, is the progeny of his mother's death-effort; here as elsewhere in Barnes's prose, even the most virile woman suffers her genital condition. This matricidal childbirth follows Father Guido's death, leaving Felix parentless. His resultant rootlessness, one in a string of anti-Semitic caricatures that pepper Barnes's rendering, is redoubled by the efforts his father made during life to evade the Jewish identity that "made Guido, as it made his son, heavy with impermissible blood" (*Nightwood*, 3). Guido produced a mock Aryan lineage through the purchase and display of portraits that he claimed were his ancestors but were in fact "reproductions of [portraits of] two intrepid and ancient actors," copies of renderings of actors playing roles (ibid., 7). Felix has only this fabricated genealogy on which to mount an identity and so in spite of his felicitous name, "Felix had become the accumulated and single—the embarrassed" (ibid., 9). This embarrassment is the "accumulation" of experiences of racialization that the novel both identifies as such and simultaneously perpetuates. Felix attempts to salve the wounds of anti-Semitic denigration as his father had by cultivating and expressing a taste for "Old" Europe and by calling himself "Baron as his father had before him" (ibid.). Orphaned, the adult Felix finds foster in a fittingly ersatz temporary family; he finds himself drawn to the debauched bustle of the circus, whose performers take royal titles as stage names. Barnes introduces the Christian and Aryan but nonetheless motley and lumpen circus folk, the "Baroness Von Tink" and "Duchess of Broadback" (ibid., 14). Through this satirical misappropriation of royal titles Barnes both generalizes the practice of falsifying identity and sets

Felix up as the pathetic believer in the signifiers of origin in a company that bastardizes them.

A central component of Baron Felix Volkbein's project to serve as steward to his father's family name is his haste to produce "a son who will feel as he felt about the 'great past'" (*Nightwood*, 38). Toward this end, Felix seeks an American wife who he assumes, as a national of the tabula rasa United States, will easily become anything he wishes her to be (*ibid.*, 39). Felix reports this plan to Doctor Matthew O'Connor, the figure of central interest in the novel from and about whom we will hear more soon. It is significantly to this transsexual female character that Felix solemnly intones that "to pay homage to our past is the only gesture that includes the future," a temporal relation between past and future that Freud's theorization of sexuality complicates, as we will see (*ibid.*). I will argue that Doctor O'Connor consciously addresses and makes philosophical the catachreses of social identity and gender trouble that the rest of *Nightwood's* characters suffer unknowingly. It is she, O'Connor, who will explain that the past and future, night and day, male and female, are "related by their division" (*ibid.*, 80).

Felix's program for himself and his family, "his fabrications [that] seemed to be the framework of a forgotten but imposing plan; some condition of life of which he was the sole surviving retainer," finds a poor helpmate in his chosen American, the boyish diffident Robin Vote, who will quickly abandon husband and child for Nora Flood, the American circus promoter, and then eventually leave Nora for the American heiress Jenny Pretherbridge (*Nightwood*, 30). In contrast with Felix's practice of producing coherence by replicating mythic familial and social structures, a practice that we might call Eliotic in its faith in form to stabilize chaos, Robin inflicts the return of the psychic history of familial trauma that Freud describes. She effortlessly excites needs in her pursuers that she is constitutionally incapable of fulfilling; among these needs is Felix's need for a family and racial past. Barnes presents the danger of Robin's attraction as a result of her carrying forth of the common psychic past, a return that functions as an exact inverse of the ordered past that Felix desires. Her attraction, which is that of "the woman who presents herself to the spectator as a 'picture' forever arranged is, for the contemplative mind, the chiefest danger. Sometimes one meets a woman who is beast turning human" (*ibid.*, 37). She appears aesthetically ordered "forever arranged" but is somehow stuck as a remnant of the evolutionary process of "turning human." Robin offers contact with the vestigial beast in the human psyche. When she brings

this necessarily repressed force to the surface, however, her lover finds that the resultant pain comes from within himself or herself and that this psychic pain is connected to a well of collective repression:

Such a person's every movement will reduce to an image of a forgotten experience; a mirage of an eternal wedding cast on the racial memory; as insupportable a joy as would be the vision of an eland coming down an aisle of trees, chapleted with orange blossoms and bridal veil, a hoof raised in the economy of fear, stepping in trepidation of flesh that will become myth; as the unicorn is neither man nor beast deprived, but human hunger pressing its breast to its prey. Such a woman is the infected carrier of the past: before her the structure of our head and jaws ache—we feel that we could eat her, she who is eaten death returning, for only then do we put our face close to the blood on the lips of our forefathers. (*Nightwood*, 37–38)

Felix detects Robin's antique quality, the past that infects her and which she carries, but "being racially incapable of abandon" (*Nightwood*, 37–38) he misreads her out-of-time quality as fulfilling his desire for something venerable and culturally sanctified. To support this misreading he converts her "dangerous" allure, before which he "aches," into the safe loveliness of a museum piece, a still unravished bride of quietness: "he felt that he was looking upon a figurehead in a museum, which though static, no longer roosting on its cutwater, seemed yet to be going against the wind; as if this girl were the converging halves of broken fate, setting face, in sleep, toward itself in time, as an image and its reflection in a lake seem parted only by the hesitation in the hour" (*ibid.*, 38). The narrative anticipates, however, what the characters will soon discover: Robin's animality, here figured by the veiled eland bride chapleted in orange blossoms, an image whose attraction is painfully perfect, "insupportable."

In her chapter on *Nightwood*, "The Odor of Memory," in *Freud's Drive*, Teresa De Lauretis argues that when Djuna Barnes writes *Nightwood* her text is formed by "a discursive event—that epic poem of modernity that is *The Interpretation of Dreams*" (*Freud's Drive*, 118). It is Freud as Modernist wordsmith that De Lauretis consults in order to account for Barnes's rendering of Robin and her effects: for De Lauretis, Robin is simply the sustained repetition of the belated return of the

originary trauma of sexuality. In particular De Lauretis is interested in the narrative form that Freud takes from Sophocles in articulating the structure of sexuality, the “proleptic and analeptic” movement of the Oedipus myth, that “mode of belated understanding or retroactive attribution of sexual and traumatic meaning to earlier events—which Freud calls *Nachträglichkeit* . . . that characterizes the structure of fantasy and with it Freud’s new modernist understanding of sexuality” (ibid., 119). This understanding provides the terms to think sexuality beyond the imperative toward biological reproduction.

De Lauretis’s analysis of the belated narrative structure that psychoanalysis innovates, the return of the ancient in or *as* the modern, and the naming of “trauma” as the “newly ancient” injury, nearly matches the form of Eliot’s reading of Modernist myth, but not quite. The emergence of the ancient animality in the newness of a New Woman does not order the chaos of Robin’s power as Eliot claims the return of the mythic functions in Joyce’s art, insofar as his art is modern. Eliot’s critical analysis is reflected here in Felix’s satirized fidelity to the forms of the past, to comfort and order. It is to Doctor O’Connor whom Barnes gives the task of explaining the insufficiency of these forms. When confronted with Felix’s desperate inability to understand Robin’s effect, the doctor punctures both Felix’s and Eliot’s faith in the easy relationship between myth and the future. He explains that “‘destiny and history are untidy. We fear the memory of that disorder. Robin did not.’ ‘No,’ Felix said in a low voice. ‘She did not’” (*Nightwood*, 118).

Later, in a parallel explanation to Nora, the doctor reformulates her response, suggesting that once the past and the future are thrown into disorder the lover is left with the cyclical present of trauma returning: “and Robin? I know where your mind is! She, the eternal momentary—Robin who was always the second person singular” (ibid., 127). This interweaving of Eliot’s and Freud’s definitions of myth in the Modernist moment continues in Barnes’s depiction of Doctor O’Connor, and it is here where my reading and De Lauretis’s diverge. De Lauretis sees Robin as the repetition of the return of the originary trauma of sexuality, which Freud elucidates in *The Interpretation of Dreams*. I find Freud relevant to *Nightwood* because Barnes employs Freud’s theoretical figures to say something new about the relationship between genitals and sex identity. In rendering the Doctor, I argue, Barnes repurposes Freud’s theoretical figures to think physical sex beyond assigned sex, a reading that presses Emily Coleman’s oft-cited wonderstruck rhetorical question, “Can you read that and not see that something new has been said about the very

heart of sex?” *Nightwood* says “something new” about the relation between genitals and sexed identity as well as about sexuality.

Previous critical readings of *Nightwood* consider Doctor O’Connor’s transsexual body solely as a figure for something else. In her touchstone article, “Laughing at Leviticus: *Nightwood* as Circus Epic,” Jane Marcus characterizes the novel as a sphere in which “the symbolic phallus as law is absent . . . replaced by the wayward penis of outlaw and transvestite” (J. Marcus, 229). Marcus, like De Lauretis, considers Doctor O’Connor to be a figure of the psychoanalytic expert. For Marcus, however, this depiction is satirical:

[Doctor O’Connor] like Tiresias in Eliot’s “Waste Land,” suggests emasculation, not the ancient and powerful life-force of mythical transvestite figures. Barnes’s doctor-transvestite is only posing as a gynecologist, and he identifies with the maternal principle. He lampoons all of the male sex doctors whose own sexual identity was so troubled, from the mad Otto Weininger to Havelock Ellis (who was aroused only by women urinating) to the Freud of the Fleiss letters. (J. Marcus, 230)

Marcus marshals this treatment of Doctor O’Connor as “emasculated,” false, and primarily a vehicle to satirize male scientists who proclaim expertise on the subject of the feminine to support her claim that Barnes privileges “the female world of the night, magic, ritual” (J. Marcus, 230). In Marcus’s reading, O’Connor may desire access to this world, might fervently envy female bodies even, but is barred from this sisterhood.

In *Tiresian Poetics* Ed Madden develops Marcus’s argument regarding the “sisterhood of outsiders” that *Nightwood* collects but states his intention “to orient that ‘sisterhood’ around O’Connor’s effeminate body—sexologically feminized and performatively feminine—and his Tiresian voice, which advances a recovery of repressed and excluded histories” (Madden, 181). Concerned that this assertion might be taken too far, Madden is clear that he is describing only O’Connor’s gender and not his sex, hastening to state that Doctor O’Connor is merely “feminine” and worrying that reading O’Connor as female “is problematic: O’Connor is not a female and to read him as a voice of the feminine comes dangerously close to appropriating femininity in order to value the gay male” (ibid.). Madden’s critical anxiety is of critical importance: Madden rehearses the worry of many gay women and fem-



inists that has always accompanied trans life, a history that is outlined in detail in the “Introduction,” that trans women and effeminate gay men denigrate or appropriate female experience. This anxiety disallows the critical reflections that are the chief concern of this chapter, which takes as its challenge the task of accounting for the double motion that trans femininity accomplishes in Barnes’s oeuvre: producing a female essentialism that is located in bodily structures and experiences, but also broadening the kinds of bodies that can have these experiences.

Doctor O’Connor’s trans destabilization of the terms of essentialism extends to linguistic essentialism. In *Late Modernism: Politics, Fiction and the Arts between the World Wars*, Tyrus Miller names Doctor O’Connor as the interpreter of the discourse that Luce Irigaray names with the neologism “La Mysterique,” the discourse that accounts for the style and themes of the last chapter of *Nightwood*, “The Possessed.” In the final scene of the novel Nora has followed Robin into a church where they cavort with dogs; in this scene the women produce this mystical speech. Doctor O’Connor understands this language, Miller argues, because he is

adept at reading mystical discourse. . . . a language of the body, its excretions and discharges the medium of its writing. From the perspective of this writing, O’Connor is able to offer a “rhetorical” critique of the American’s relation to the body and the flesh. . . . O’Connor goes on to compare the sheets of a European’s bed, stained with the secretions and ejaculations of night, to the newspaper. If the newspaper is the record of the day, the filthy bed sheets are the record of the night, with its passions, its sufferings, its anonymity, and crime. O’Connor’s criticism of the “literal error” has as its correlate an implicit theory of reading, a hermeneutics of the night text written out of the body’s depths. He recalls the corporeal discourse of classical mystic writing, with its sympathetic wounds and stigmata, its ecstasies and its lassitudes, its sudden ebbs and flows of blood, mucus, and tears. (Miller, 160)

In Miller’s critical estimation, Doctor O’Connor can understand La Mysterique, but *he* cannot speak it. *He* can represent the experience of woman, but cannot be she. In contrast to this critical history, and in a certain resistance to it as well, my own reading of Doctor O’Connor

aims to treat Barnes's rendering of Doctor O'Connor in its historical discursive context, a context in which trans feminine people were vocal and visible and increasingly presented with the promise of bodily transformation. We are introduced to Doctor O'Connor holding court in a Viennese café as an "Irishman from the Barbary Coast (Pacific Street, San Francisco), whose interest in gynecology had driven him half around the world. He was taking the part of host . . . and was telling of himself, for he considered himself the most amusing predicament" (*Nightwood*, 15). This brief calling card, which portends the Doctor's more consequential appearances, is full of gay vernacular clues as to the nature of the Doctor's amusing predicament. San Francisco was notorious in the early twentieth century as a civic den of iniquity, as evidenced by a history of that city's underworld entitled *The Barbary Coast* that Barnes owned.<sup>14</sup> The Doctor's interest in gynecology connects the character with the medical aspects of femininity and womanhood and hints at the surgical creation of woman that is going on in Europe at this time. Barnes explicitly confirms Matthew O'Connor's femininity shortly when the narrator remarks that "the doctor . . . got his audience by the simple device of pronouncing at the top of his voice (at such moments as irritable and possessive as a maddened woman's) some of the more boggish and biting of the shorter early Saxon verbs" (*ibid.*). From the Doctor's origin on the Barbary Coast, to her pursuit of knowledge of gynecological surgical innovation, to her hysterical falsetto, Barnes saturates her depiction with references that locate Doctor O'Connor in the nexus of popular and medical discourses of transsexual femininity.

Later, we might recall this early description when we encounter Jenny, whose story is recounted in a chapter called "The Squatter." Jenny is the older American woman for whom Robin leaves Nora permanently. Nora accuses Jenny of being so incapable of genuine passion that she steals the most passionate love she knows, that of Nora for Robin. It is Jenny, the squatter, the trafficker in false emotions, who in Barnes's narrative is the parasitic, parodic, derivative woman, perhaps recalling most closely Wendell's claims to womanhood in *Ryder*. When Robin begins flirting with a young woman in Jenny's presence, the Doctor attempts commiseration: "Ah! he said. "Love, that terrible thing!" (*Nightwood*, 75). Jenny is embarrassed by the sympathy of a person so strange to her and so refuses it:

She began to beat the cushions with her doubled fist. "What could you know about it? Men never know anything about

it, why should they? But a woman should know—they are finer, more sacred; my love is sacred and my love is great!”

“Shut up,” Robin said, putting her hand on her knee. “Shut up, you don’t know what you are talking about.” . . . Then Jenny struck Robin, scratching and tearing in hysteria, striking, clutching, and crying. (*Nightwood*, 75–76)

Barnes punctures Jenny’s attempt to shame Doctor O’Connor when Jenny insists that normative gender roles affix permanently and uniformly to biological sex with one of the few lines of the novel spoken by Robin, who is in her own queer bodily predicament. She instructs Jenny to “shut up.” It is with this exchange marked by Jenny’s saccharine, false faith that so clearly ignores the situation that she’s in with Robin, Robin’s chastisement, and the eruption of Jenny’s jealousy and desire in an act of hysterical violence that “The Squatter” ends. Jenny’s violent “language of gestures,” to cite the O’Connor of *Ryder*, produces the one moment of sympathy toward “the squatter” in Barnes’s otherwise cruel textual rendering. This scene of gender regulating chastisement, attempted and disallowed, performs an invocation of the female Doctor O’Connor as poet-prophetess; her monologues occupy most of the following chapter.

#### WHAT IS THIS THING?

In this chapter, “Watchman, What of the Night?,” Nora goes to Doctor O’Connor to learn about her own “predicament,” her experience with Robin. This is the scene that was briefly mentioned in the opening section as the initial inspiration for my chapter. As Nora enters the Doctor’s domicile uninvited, Barnes provides a catalog of her domestic objects that echoes the catalog of the objects from the apartment that Nora bought for Robin when they first settled in Paris. Doctor O’Connor keeps

a pile of medical books, and volumes of a miscellaneous order, reached almost to the ceiling, water-stained and covered with dust. Just above them was a very small barred window, the only ventilation. On a maple dresser, certainly not of European make, lay a rusty pair of forceps, a broken scalpel, half a dozen odd instruments that she could not place, a catheter, some twenty perfume bottles, almost empty, pomades,

creams, rouges, powder boxes and puffs. From the half open chiffonier hung laces, ribands, stockings, ladies' underclothing and an abdominal brace, which gave the impression that the feminine finery had suffered venery. (*Nightwood*, 79)

The dusty piles of medical books in the squalid and stultifying apartment recall the Doctor's gynecological specialization. Arranged on her dresser is a menagerie of surgical objects (scalpel, forceps, and unidentifiable instruments) and cosmetic objects (creams, rouges, powder, and puffs). This pairing composes the transformational arsenal of ladies in the Doctor's predicament, tools that allow both medical and cosmetic paths to femininity. We also note the clothing of a lady, "laces, ribands, stockings, and ladies' underclothing" in addition to the abdominal brace, which can function as a makeshift corset. These feminine objects together have "suffered venery," the archaism suggesting the lesser sins. Among the sins that adhere to these objects are the illegal gynecological services, including illegal abortion and transsexual surgeries, that occurred for years before they were brought under medical regulation. These female cosmetics and underclothes also recall O'Connor's descriptions of public sex, and the evocation of venal female faces and garments suggests that some of that public sex might be for hire. Barnes's cinematic narrative pans up to Matthew in a flannel nightgown, "heavily rouged and his lashes painted" (*Nightwood*, 79). Nora has come expecting answers and is surprised by the questions that these two vignettes produce. The doctor registers her surprise and responds with good humor, "'You see that you can ask me anything,' thus laying aside both their embarrassment" (ibid., 80). This moment initiates Nora and Doctor O'Connor into a night of intimate talk. Nora confesses her desperation regarding Robin's departure (a subject to which we will return), and the Doctor listens and commiserates but also claims a deeper injury, a frustrated impossible desire for

children and knitting. God, I never asked for better than to boil some good man's potatoes and toss up a child for him every nine months by the calendar. Is it my fault that my only fireside is the outhouse? And that I can never hang my muffler, mittens, and Bannybrook umbrella on anything better than a bit of tin boarding as high as my eyes, having to be brave, no matter what, to keep the mascara from running away? (*Nightwood*, 90–91)

Tyrus Miller reads scenes such as this as producing “representation(s) of femininity [that] are hyperbolically stereotypical versions of maternity and domesticity . . . [and that] mark the utter performativity of gender” (Miller, 192). My reading of Doctor O’Connor diverges from Miller’s by panning out and considering the two women talking together as the more significant “representation of femininity” that this scene offers and by considering the recounting of each woman’s somatic pain as indicative of Barnes’s depiction of how sex and gender are felt and embodied.

In this chapter, Barnes depicts this commonality of feeling between the suffering female and the suffering trans female. Both women’s conditions skate between the physical and the mental in ways that signify beyond these particular characters who voice the experience. Each woman develops a meditation on her condition: that of the woman in love with a woman lothario and that of the transsexual woman living in a body that limits her. Doctor O’Connor’s genre of speech, long impassioned monologues recalling those of *Ryder*, mine this component of the woman’s condition in Barnesian style. She holds forth:

If I had it to do again . . .—I’d be the girl found lurking behind the army . . . am I not the girl to know of what I speak? We go to our Houses by our nature—and our nature, no matter how it is, we all have to stand—as for me, so God has made me, my house is the pissing port. . . . In the old days I was possibly a girl in Marseilles thumping the dock with a sailor, and perhaps it’s that memory that haunts me. The wise men say that remembrance of things past is all we have for a future, and am I to blame if I’ve turned up this time as I shouldn’t have been, when it was a high soprano that I wanted, and deep corn curls to my bum, with a womb as big as the king’s kettle, and a bosom as high as the bowsprit of a fishing schooner? . . . I haunt the pissoirs as naturally as Highland Mary her cows down by the Dee. (*Nightwood*, 90–91)

This passage recalls the desires confessed during the merry trip to the priest in *Ryder*. At this point the Doctor O’Connor of *Nightwood* recounts her visit to a church where she exposes her penis, which she refers to with the diminutive nickname Tiny O’Toole, and presents her body to God to receive *her* judgment. Doctor O’Connor reveals else-

where that she uses the female pronoun for God because “ritual itself constitutes an instruction. So we come back to the place from which I set out; pray to the good God; she will keep you. Personally I call her ‘she’ because of the way she made me; it somehow balances the mistake” (*Nightwood*, 150). Doctor O’Connor represents this event, this appeal to God, as a last effort to account for “the amusing predicament” in which she finds herself. This scene is the most complex and significant Barnesian rendering of trans feminine somatic experience. I quote at length from Doctor O’Connor’s beautiful recounting of her experience in the church:

“Kneeling in a dark corner, bending my head over and down, I took out Tiny O’Toole, because it was his turn, I had tried everything else. There was nothing for it this time but to make him face the mystery so it could see him clear as it saw me. So then I whispered, ‘What is this thing, Lord?’ And I began to cry; the tears went like rain goes down on the world, without touching the face of Heaven. . . . I was crying and striking my left hand against the *Prie-Dieu*, and all the while Tiny O’Toole was lying in a swoon. I said, ‘I have tried to seek and I only find.’ I said, ‘It is I, my Lord, who know there’s beauty in any permanent mistake like me. . . . *So tell me, what is permanent of me, me or him?* . . . And there I was holding Tiny, bending over and crying, asking the question until I forgot, and went on crying, and I put Tiny away then, like a ruined bird, and went out of the place and walked looking at the stars that were twinkling.” (*Nightwood*, 112)

Tyrus Miller reads this scene expressly against Eliot’s introductory remark that assures readers that the “peculiar” types of *Nightwood* represent not any particular realist rendering of perversity but rather provide the trope for the exploration of “universal misery and bondage” (Miller, 188). For Miller, the scene in the church “forces transsexual disjuncture between [O’Connor’s] gender identification and the sexed body, thus making sexual identity a fantasy of essentiality, belied by the ‘mistake’ of the physical body” (*ibid.*, 192). In Miller’s reading, this “transsexual disjuncture” is socially enforced and the seat of a specific transsexual (or perhaps more broadly queer) experience. For this reason, “the real misery in the scene is a misery of particularity: a misery situated in econ-

omies of the sexual order and the identities made available or denied to those who find themselves outside of socially prescribed roles and socially accepted constructs of desire” (ibid.). Miller cites this scene to dislodge the heterosexism of Eliot’s nervous erasure of the queer specificity of the pain in *Nightwood*, and this impulse is important and critically sound. However, Miller’s rush to dismiss the universal as a category of analysis in accounting for this scene and others like it in this novel erases Barnes’s negotiation and reworking of experiences that are universal: the experience of having and relating to one’s own body and the bodies of others. Crucially, alienation from the body is not a uniquely transsexual experience, nor is it universal among trans feminine people. In Barnes’s depiction, however, the woman with a penis becomes a figure for the experience of bodily alienation. Miller’s critique reinforces (repeats rather than addresses) the Barnesian instance of the trans feminine allegory.

Recognizing this figural operation allows us to see what Barnes is making of Freud. I contend that what Barnes produces here is a reworking of the experience of sex differentiation as described in Freud’s psychoanalytic work on the experience of “becoming a woman” in the essays “Femininity” (1911) and “Female Sexuality” (1931). Doctor O’Connor’s experience in the church recalls the universal developmental experience of recognizing the existence of sexual difference and negotiating the status of one’s own body in relation to this new concept. O’Connor also has the very experience that Freud’s psychoanalysis deems fundamentally impossible: the experience of desiring to be a woman. We might identify the desire we are addressing here more precisely as the desire to have a female body, countering Freud’s insistence that we “recognize [the] wish for a penis as being *par excellence* a feminine one” (“Femininity” 344, emphasis in original). The desire to attain or retain male genitals is universal for Freud and is only abandoned as an aspiration by female people after substantial mental turmoil. O’Connor’s experience in the church inverts this parable from the human psychic biography. In my reading then, there is nothing particularly transsexual about this scene; it is rather an index of female embodiment as a universally transsexual experience.

For Freud genitals are the material facts that the child interprets in order to develop a gender identity. In “Female Sexuality,” Freud elaborates his theory of the scene in which the female child first experiences genital deficiency: “When a little girl has sight of a male genital organ

and so discovers her own deficiency, she does not accept the unwelcome knowledge without hesitation and reluctance . . . she clings obstinately to the expectation of acquiring a similar organ sometime, and the desire for it survives long after the hope is extinguished” (“Female Sexuality,” 192). Observe the common features between this scene from the universal psychoanalytic story and Doctor O’Connor’s experience in the church. Like the little female child, Doctor O’Connor expresses horrified confusion and disidentification with her genitals: “So then I whispered, ‘What is this thing, Lord?’ And I began to cry; the tears went like rain goes down on the world, without touching the face of Heaven” (*Nightwood*, 112). Like the little female child in Freud’s telling, O’Connor “rebels against” the “unpleasant facts” of her genital status (Freud, “Female Sexuality,” 189). O’Connor rebels by naming the positive, beautiful effect of her predicament: “‘It is I, my Lord, who know there’s beauty in any permanent mistake like me. Haven’t I said so? But, I says, ‘I’m not able to stay permanent unless you help me, oh Book of Concealment! . . . So tell me, what is permanent of me, me or him?’” (*Nightwood*, 112). O’Connor recounts her attempt to reconcile a persistent sense of herself as female with the sight of the organ that troubles this sex identity, recalling Freud’s account of this experience of genital disidentification as the persistent, universal problem of sexed life. Eliot’s use of the concept “universal” in the introduction affirms the particular pervert as *only* the trope for the general. Barnes, conversely, exposes the universal nature of perversity that Freud observed in the clinical context and then theorized.

Belying all of this commonality, however, and lest we ally Barnes too cozily with Freud, we must remember that O’Connor is also expressing a desire that is uniquely impossible and literally unthinkable within the terms of Freudian psychoanalysis. O’Connor expresses an identification that in Freud does not exist. Freud arrives toward the end of his essay “Femininity” with the claim that “we are now obliged to recognize that the little girl is a little man. . . . It seems that with them all their masturbatory acts are carried out on this penis-equivalent, and that the truly feminine vagina is still undiscovered by both sexes” (“Femininity,” 146). Nowhere does Freud consider possible O’Connor’s frustrated desire for a “womb as big as a king’s kettle.” O’Connor desires the disappearance of her troublesome penis; she desires the castration that for female and male child alike is the ultimate horrifying threat.

This passage depicting O’Connor’s self-inquiry in the church ends with the familiar Barnesian contrast between the bodily, anarchic com-



ponent of human life, signified by the animal, “Doctor O’Connor’s ruined bird,” and the mental component, the equally vexed experience of “thinking.” This figure of the animal recalls Robin as we’ve seen her, as a “beast turning human.” Significantly, O’Connor’s soliloquy also recycles phrases from two previous scenes in the novel, and these rhetorical connections reinforce the relation between O’Connor and *Nightwood*’s sapphically lovelorn women. In the midst of her wanderings Robin also visits churches, and Barnes renders one such visit in a vocabulary that echoes this scene:

Leaning her childish face and full chin on the shelf of the *prie-dieu* her eyes fixed, she laughed, out of some hidden capacity, some lost subterranean humour; as it ceased, she leaned still further forward in a swoon, waking and yet heavy, like one in sleep. (*Nightwood*, 47)

We learn shortly after what Robin must already know; she is pregnant, and unhappily so. When she goes into labor, she starts drinking and “[is] delivered” (*Nightwood*, 48) in a drunken rage. Like Doctor O’Connor, whose soliloquy also had her kneeling at the *prie-dieu*, Robin makes her plea to God to solve the mystery of her bodily dispossession. Barnes connects Robin’s female body to the penis of Matthew O’Connor—both are in a swoon—and Robin’s unwanted pregnancy corresponds with O’Connor’s unwanted penis. Each woman suffers a somatic predicament. It is this somatic identification—from the early journalism to *Nightwood*—an identification that is connected to female genitalia, but that is primarily experienced as a dispossession of the body, a loss of control over the meanings attached and treatment afforded to bodily structures, that defines female experience. In “Femininity,” Freud remarks that “when you meet a human being, the first distinction you make is ‘male or female?’ and you are accustomed to make the distinction with unhesitating certainty” (“Femininity,” 141). Barnes’s novel suggests the similarity between the female experience of being recognized in the degraded term of the male/female binary and the trans female experience of being unable to be recognized as the degraded term in this binary, despite an experience of one’s body that indicates that one should be named “woman.” These are the original forms of bodily dispossession that produce the melancholy predicament that is the Barnesian rendering of the female relationship to her anatomy. Barnes’s depiction relies on the Freudian assumption that most females have this literal expe-

rience of genital disbelief only briefly and in childhood, and ever after only experience castration as a prismatic array of experiences that are metaphors for this original castration. The trans female figure sustains this literal experience of genital disbelief, and so lives in the sustained state of melancholy shock, as Doctor O'Connor's monologue demonstrates so poignantly. Other forms of bodily dispossession, those that we've already encountered, and the one to come—the deprivation that Nora suffers in relation to Robin—find sorority in the trans female's reliving of woman's original traumatic recognition. Barnes renders the social component of feminine dispossession and so suggests that when Freud concludes that the stability of the social requires woman's genitals to be read as catastrophic injuries, he reproduces—rather than just identifies—the connection between woman and lack. As we've seen in all of this scholarship, however, there is a resistance to noticing Barnes's rendering of the mirroring between the female and trans female experience of genital lack.<sup>15</sup>

Barnes's practice of weaving reflections between the female and trans female into *Nightwood's* textual fabric might suggest that the narrative kindly colludes in creating a simple feminist alliance between these two kinds of women. The textual operation of this alliance is as complex, however, as the previously examined instances of Barnesian "feminism" which depict women as reviled and maimed. When Nora arrives in Doctor O'Connor's apartment and views the menagerie of feminine finery that has suffered venery, the narrative voice muses that "there is a certain belligerence in a room in which a woman has never set foot; every object seems to be battling its own compression—and there is a metallic odour as of beaten iron in a smithy" (*Nightwood*, 79). We will soon learn what the narrative has already revealed that it "knows." Matthew consistently asserts that she is a woman and desires only to be treated as such. When the narrative smells the absence of woman in the history of Matthew's bedchamber, it subjects Matthew to embarrassment, this affect that has accompanied our reading of Barnes's depiction of women from the first. Here again Freud clarifies this issue when he writes that "shame, which is considered to be a feminine characteristic par excellence but is far more a matter of convention than might be supposed, has as its purpose, we believe, concealment of genital deficiency" ("Femininity," 160). Freud's naming of shame as the affect that accompanies the experience of the female recalls the moments that this chapter has surveyed: the epiglottal penetration of Barnes's forced feeding recalling the forced penetration of rape, the splaying out and the bruising on

the repulsive bodies and corpses, the puncturing of Evangeline Musset's hymen by surgical hands or instruments, the rapes of *Ryder*, the equally torturous and invasive childbirths of both *Ryder* and *Nightwood*, and finally Doctor O'Connor holding her apostrophic genitals in her hand. This is the catalog of Barnesian female bodies, and the narrative collusion in shaming female characters is the seat of feminist resistance even as it is the trace of anti-feminist representational violence.

Barnes's work consistently draws attention to the line between rhetorical and physical violence. At moments such as these, Barnes's texts operate in rhetorical complicity with the misogyny being depicted, furthering the shaming of women that is the seat of their resistance. In this way, these depictions interrupt any attempt to name a liberal feminist politics in Barnes's work: there are no "positive images of woman" here. This violent antagonism that figures within the scene of woman's encounter with woman (whether she be the voice of the narrative or the person of another character) will be our concern for the rest of this chapter. Barnes recounts a story about Dan Mahoney, the friend whose speeches she transcribed to place in the mouth of Doctor O'Connor in her novels. Mahoney visited her after the excitement of the success of *Nightwood* had worn off and expressed distress regarding the depiction of Doctor O'Connor in the novel. The two argued and as the argument became heated Mahoney asked Barnes why she didn't offer actual rather than just textual blows. Barnes replied, "You know I'm too ill to fight a man now." Mahoney replies, "'A man?'" he laughs bitterly, 'a man—me—it's really me in all this world I loathe—hate—detest—I wish I had—I've no guts!'" (Herring, 214).<sup>16</sup> As in the narrative comment that claims that "no woman" had ever entered the Doctor's apartment, so here in the biographical anecdote Barnes knowingly subjects the trans woman to a transmisogynist shame but—in the context of her writing—this very shaming binds O'Connor closer to the category of woman. Barnes's axiom "We don't rise to heights—we are eaten away to them," conveys the common degradation as the basis for exaltation and it is this antiliberal notion that founds Barnes's politics and the representational operation of her oeuvre (*Nightwood*, 125).

This peculiar complex of cruel degradation and exaltation is the context for the move to discussing Nora and Robin. Barnes's novel is replete with cruel depictions that render a tender effect, tenderness here denoting the kind of positive affect that in its beauty, lightly injures. Early in the novel, she recounts the story of an armless and legless woman who defenseless, is raped and then must scoot herself home on the board on

wheels that is her only agency (*Nightwood*, 30). Late in the novel, she tells the story of

the paralyzed man in Coney Island (take away a man's conformity and you take away his remedy) who had to lie on his back in a box, but the box was lined with velvet, his fingers jeweled with stones, and suspended over him where he could never take his eyes off, a sky blue mounted mirror, for he wanted to enjoy his own "difference." (*Nightwood*, 146)

Barnes repeatedly depicts those living in the shadows of social death. Doctor O'Connor, consummate wordsmith, is the character who Barnes depicts as the most fully socially dead and yet most capable of enjoying her difference, and with dazzling wordplay most possessed of the need to make beauty out of pain. Doctor O'Connor is the person who "never asked better than to see the two ends of my man no matter how I might be dwindling" (*Nightwood*, 101). She is the one who "know[s] what none of us know until we have died. [She was] dead in the beginning" (*ibid.*, 163). She is "damned, and carefully public!" (*ibid.*). She, "being condemned to the grave . . . decided to occupy it with the utmost abandon" (*ibid.*, 78). "Death is intimacy walking backwards," O'Connor tells us (*ibid.*, 128).

O'Connor is the lead of a cast of dead and dying social types that we've seen Barnes recast in roles to reenact scenes of our psychic history, and by reenacting them shed light on the forgotten trauma of our collective developmental history. Barnes recycles this temporal structure in an aside that points to the erotic and romantic boon of the "eaten past returning." O'Connor tells Nora that

"You never loved anyone before, and you'll never love anyone again, as you love Robin. . . . what is this love we have for the invert boy or girl? It was they who were spoken of in every romance that we ever read. The girl lost, what is she but the Prince found? The Prince on the white horse that we have always been seeking. And the pretty lad who is a girl, what but the prince-princess in point-lace—neither one and half the other, the painting on the fan! We love them for that reason. We were impaled in our childhood upon them as they rode through our primers, the sweetest lie of all, now come to be in boy or girl, for in the girl it is the prince, and in the

boy it is the girl that makes the prince a prince—and not a man.” (*Nightwood*, 137)

This passage’s connection of the common allure of the “pretty lad who is a girl” and the “girl-Prince” fully imbricates Doctor O’Connor’s own situation as a trans woman with the situation of the lesbian lovers, here along the meridian of “this love we have for the invert.”

The second instance of parallel between Doctor O’Connor and the women, here a parallel with Nora, provides an entry into the insufficiency of previous models of thinking about the relationship between these characters. Nora and Robin’s relationship occupies relatively few pages in the novel. They meet at the circus, “the fantastical scene of their encounter,” set up housekeeping, their “humors mingle,” and their relationship dissolves in the span of ten pages. Barnes moves quickly in her rendering from this window of domestic stability to the narrative’s real interest, the vertiginous insecurity of their relationship and eventual separation. For Nora

Robin’s absence, as the night drew on, became a physical removal, insupportable and irreparable. As an amputated hand cannot be disowned because it is experiencing a futurity, of which the victim is its forbear, so Robin was an amputation that Nora could not renounce. As the wrist longs, so her heart longed, and dressing she would go out into the night that she might be “beside herself,” skirting the café in which she could catch a glimpse of Robin. (*Nightwood*, 59)

The phrase “beside herself” recalls Nora’s first impression of the flannel nightgown-clad Doctor O’Connor in bed. She asks why “he” should wear a dress and concludes that “he” does so to “lay beside himself.” Nora’s desire and the loss of Robin mean a bodily dispossession, an amputation. In an uncharacteristically prosaic aphorism Nora uses another somatic metaphor to describe Robin’s effect: “suffering is the decay of the heart,” she says (*Nightwood*, 156). The loss she suffers originates in the somatic similarity between her body and Robin’s. Faced with male lovers, Nora is confident of the neat distinction between her self and the male other, but when she loses Robin, a female lover, she realizes that “she is myself. What am I to do?” (*ibid.*, 127). Barnes depicts the lesbian encounter as one that forces women to experience a loss of limits of the body. The bodily uncertainty that the encounter of female with

female provokes parallels the bodily uncertainty that Doctor O'Connor narrates in the church.<sup>17</sup>

Appropriately then, it is the Doctor who can identify and explain to Nora the disorienting effect of the body's decomposition: "You are," he said . . . "experiencing the inbreeding of pain. Most of us do not dare it. We wed a stranger and so 'solve' our problem. But when you inbreed with suffering . . . you are destroyed back to your structure" (ibid., 130) The Doctor claims that the love between the two women is an "inbreeding of pain" recalling the definition of the feminine that has been developed throughout this chapter: woman is she who suffers morphological genital lack. When woman meets woman, pain meets pain, and the Doctor suggests that this is a meeting that most "do not dare."

The relationship between Nora Flood and Robin Vote was famously modeled on the eight-year relationship between Djuna Barnes and Thelma Wood, a relationship that, like its fictional interpretation, was marked by Wood's infidelity and Barnes's resultant despair. Barnes's scrapbook contains a snapshot of Thelma Wood posing in the polka dot blouse and smart little hat that Barnes herself wore for her most famous author's portrait. Wood also wears the double-breasted jacket and heeled oxfords that we see on Barnes in later photographs. (See figure 2.) There is a companion photograph of Barnes with a riding crop in the same location taken on the same day. This is one of several pairs of snapshots in these scrapbooks that indicate that Thelma and Djuna took turns photographing each other in similar poses.

This photographic portrait dates from the period in which Barnes was beginning to write toward *Nightwood*. The vision of the flesh-and-blood Robin Vote, the already amputated limb of Djuna Barnes's body, masquerading as Barnes, is an intertext to *Nightwood's* representation of lesbian attachment as profoundly befuddling the distinction between the self and the beloved. Nora parses the vexing effects of this similarity in a transsexual metaphor:

"I stood on the centre of eroticism and death, death that makes the dead matter, as a lover we are beginning to forget swindles and wastes; for love and life are a bulk of which the body and heart can be drained, and I knew in that bed Robin should have put me down. In that bed we would have forgotten our lives in the extremity of memory, moulted our parts, as figures in the waxworks are moulted down to their story, so we would have broken down to our love." (*Nightwood*, 158)



Figure 2. Thelma Wood circa 1932 (University of Maryland, College Park)

Nora desires to have remained in bed “moult[ing] parts” in her sustained encounter with Robin. The tenderness and cruelty that Barnes characterizes as the effect of Robin Vote represents the rending of the narrative. Above or behind the level of characterization, the narrative itself is bifurcated, producing pleasure and pain in the same stroke, complicating still more the question of whether Nora Flood’s injury comes from without or from within the female structures of her own body, structures that she longs to shed. It is this rending that makes Eliot’s distinction between the general and the particular insufficient. The self is internally divided in Barnesian writing, and so no identity of a coherent “particular” is possible to provide a representation of the “general” experience. Women in particular are internally divided, and it is this division that constitutes them in their morphology. Doctor O’Connor understands this and knows herself to be the allegory for this reality. She, “Doctor Matthew Mighty-grain-of salt-Dante-O’Connor, will tell

you how the day and the night are related by their division” (*Nightwood*, 80).

In *The Apparitional Lesbian*, Terry Castle identifies *Nightwood* as simply a rewriting of Henry James’s *The Bostonians* (Castle, 167). In particular, she considers “Nora’s erotic suffering” to be representative of the confusion of the self with the beloved that is a common theme in the narratives of lesbian affective history and literary history. Castle connects James’s lesbian novel with Barnes’s lesbian novel in a way that neatly summarizes the movement of this chapter: from Barnes’s rendering of women’s suffering as a source of political collectivity in “How It Feels Forcibly Fed” to her tropological interest in women’s erotic suffering in *Nightwood*.<sup>18</sup> Castle writes:

Barnes’s imagery recalls James’s as well as Isaiah’s: Olive’s vision of the terrible “suffering of women” (the vision she mistakenly presumes Verena to share) comes to her “in the watches of the night,” and references to “watching” and “watchmen” pervade James’s novel. Later, when Nora tells O’Connor of finding a doll on the bed in the room of the woman Robin has been unfaithful to her with—a doll identical to the one Robin gave her—and then lapses into her own spooky sibylline reverie (“we give death to a child when we give it a doll—it’s effigy and the shroud; when a woman gives it to a woman, it is the life they cannot have, it is their child sacred and profane; so that when I saw that other doll—” [142]), we see Barnes, at her most sublime, turn a passing Jamesian sarcasm—Mrs. Farrinder’s contemptuous dismissal of Olive’s love for Verena as “a kind of elderly ridiculous doll-dressing” (157)—into an unnerving metaphysical set piece on lesbian desire. (Castle, 167)

But, as with all of the scholars whose work this chapter cites, Castle identifies the principal instance of feminine suffering in this text as Nora’s proleptic deprivation of Robin, the somnambulist whose closeness immediately produces her distance. Castle ignores the connection between these women and Doctor O’Connor, conceding only that O’Connor’s frustrated desire *figures* the desire of the lesbian couple that is Barnes’s main object of interest (Castle, 168).

Surprisingly, given Eliot’s critical collusion in—indeed, his founding of—this critical tradition of segregating the perverse from the general for



the purposes of maintaining the possibility of analogy, it's an intertext by Eliot to which we turn to teach us how to read the female somatic suffering of Doctor O'Connor in sorority with other experiences of female suffering in Barnes's oeuvre, and more broadly to read the relation between these two "New Women"—the lesbian Nora and the transsexual Matthew. It is a critical commonplace to name Doctor O'Connor as Tiresias, and in Barnes's unpublished drafts of a cycle of poems that she called "The Book of Dan" written for Dan Mahoney, Barnes makes this link explicit with notes that refer to Dan as Tiresias. They are Tiresias's eyes that "see" the action of Eliot's "The Waste Land." The blind seer is most present in a scene in which s/he stands adjacent as "The Little Typist," the prototypical New Woman, experiences modern eros.

Eliot's "Little Typist" enters the stage of her modern erotic encounter identified not by name, but simply with her diminutive vocational appellation, which signifies the modern drafting of women into mechanized modern employment. Eliot outfits this scene with idioms of the industrial age: engine-like labor and tins that mechanize former domestic arts. The Little Typist is shadowed by a sexually changeable handmaiden, who with her prophetic foreknowledge "awaits the expected guest" who will enact erotic "assault." At the propitious moment, the depiction of the sexual act is censored. Tiresias's philosophical aside draws like a curtain across the scene, and it is a message of sympathy and of common feeling that s/he brings. S/he, Tiresias, has "foresuffered all / Enacted on the same divan or bed," and this comment shields the body of the Little Typist from the reader's gaze in the indecorous moment of perhaps violent and definitely indifferent modern copulation. This tender somatic identification between Tiresias, who bares their history in the shape of "wrinkled breasts" and the Little Typist, who suffers the timeless experience of the female body, is ultimately the only propitious element of this scene, which is otherwise mired in vanity, indifference, folly, and patronizing gestures. Zeus gave Tiresias prophecy as a compensation for the castration inflicted by Hera. So as woman, Tiresias knows the future; the Little Typist is the future of woman. The Little Typist's departing comment, "Well now that's done and I'm glad it's over," is another instance of a mournful Modernist female voice that speaks from within the seemingly morphologically inevitable muteness of lyric femininity.

Barnes restages this paradigmatic Modernist scene of erotic despair and feminine identification between the mythic trans feminine and the "New Woman" who is femininity's future. In Doctor O'Connor's bed-

room, Barnes expands the stage props of venal female undergarments from Eliot's poem, "stockings, slippers, camisoles, and stays," to include "a rusty pair of forceps, and a broken scalpel, and half a dozen instruments that she could not place," tools for a more complicated—and risky in both the physical and social sense—donning of the feminine (*Nightwood*, 78). Doctor O'Connor, who suffers the sustained experience of female castration, philosophically remarks on the travails of lesbian eros. Barnes recasts the Little Typist as Nora, another suffering modern lover whose experience reveals that although individual assignments may end, the trauma of sexuality repeats and will never be "done . . . and over." Thinking Barnes's work in extension of Eliot's poem—and in a certain proleptic resistance to his critique—exposes the propitious interaction between female and trans female that Barnes experienced as a cis woman with a trans feminine friend and mined in her fictional forms. Theirs is not a relation between the particular "abnormal" trans female and the general human experience of "affective bondage" but a particularly Modernist negotiation of the bondage that history affixes to the feminine, a history that is naturalized through allegorical conversion of the vagina into an absence.

Another figure of trans femininity clarifies the matter still further. In "Transfiguration," a poem published in 1938, Barnes strings together lines that reverse the narrative sequence of Bible stories ending with the myth of Genesis. In Barnes's reversal of the story, "To Adam back the rib is plied / A woman weeps within his side," Barnes re-creates the trans figure that contains a weeping woman in the side of man; this fully reverses time and "feed[s] the last day / To the first." Barnes's recursive figure of time is perhaps the most accurate theoretical formulation for the relationship between the mythic past and the future in Eliot's poem and in Barnes's oeuvre. It is the figure of the newly ancient transsexual body—tugged between antiquity and the future—that Barnes uses to convey this temporal ordering and the impossible fantasy of the abolition of sexual difference, the original ruinous antagonism, that might be actualized in the future if only the myths of the past can be reordered. The complexity of Barnes's work, however, lies in the fact that "sexual difference" understood as located in differently shaped anatomy does not order the affective structures in her work, rife as it is with females in male bodies and lesbians who act (and are treated) like errant boys. Rather, Barnes demonstrates how the words "woman" and "man" understood in relation to the metaphors of "castrated" and "phallic" can

be detached from the anatomical structures around which these metaphors were constructed and applied to people irrespective of anatomy.

“What’s a woman?” asks Augusta, the abused daughter and victim of incestuous rape in Barnes’s last completed work, the play *The Antiphon* (88). “A cow,” answers her son. In *Ryder*, Wendell’s son Elisha poses the same question of his father, “Tell me, what is a woman?” (*Ryder*, 224). “Passion, of a kind,” is Wendell’s reply, and knowledge of “injustice” (*ibid.*). This too is the question that Doctor O’Connor poses in the scene of the church when she asks, “What is this thing?” presenting her body and experience for divine interpretation and pronouncement. We hear in Barnes’s questions echoes of Denise Riley’s seminal feminist question, “Am I that name?” a question that historicizes the category of woman. All previous critical accounts of Doctor O’Connor refuse the complexity of this question in Barnes’s oeuvre. These critical answers refuse the difference within the feminine, that difference which is Doctor O’Connor. O’Connor characterizes herself as “I who am the last woman left in this world, though I am the bearded lady” (*Nightwood*, 100). This comment communicates the character’s sense that she is in some way the limit or the end of woman. Elsewhere she explains, “Why is it that you want to talk to me? Because I’m the other woman that God forgot” (*Nightwood*, 143). What is it like to live in a female body? How do we allow or create bonds between women? These are the fundamental feminist questions that Barnes’s oeuvre explores with particular aesthetic deftness and conceptual weight in her multiple iterations of the trans feminine.

One of the few remaining paintings by Djuna Barnes is housed with her papers at the University of Maryland, College Park. It is dated 1938 and titled *The Ambisexual Art Dealer* (see figure 3). The painting is one of the few visual art pieces that Barnes produced that could be called beautiful. In contrast to the distended women’s bodies in her drawings in *The Book of Repulsive Women* and the satirical bawdy drawings in *Ladies Almanack* and *Ryder* that depict women dressed in comical regimentals on horseback, this portrait is stately and peaceful. It depicts its subject in a draping teal top and elegantly rendered high white collar daintily covering the neck. The gold background reflects the light of the subject’s copper hair, and the lines of the features of the face are fine and strong, with rouged lips and almost no eyebrows. The subject’s head is in partial profile, neither facing the viewer nor turning away but



Figure 3. Djuna Barnes, *The Ambisexual Art Dealer* (University of Maryland, College Park)

gazing purposefully at something outside the portrait's frame. Barnes's lovely portrait teases out the fine artistic possibility of the trans woman as she'd known her and forgets the misogynist shame to which she'd subjected her female characters, trans and cis alike. *The Ambisexual Art Dealer*, painted as Eliot's endorsement was making *Nightwood* an avant-garde sensation, is "the woman that God forgot," remembered.

## Ceased to Be Word and Became Flesh

### *Trans Feminine Life Writing and Genet's Vernacular Modernism*

Almost *unimaginably*, Schreber would seem to become during the duration of his “illness” a woman’s soul in a woman’s body. (emphasis mine)

—Kaja Silverman, “A Woman’s Soul Enclosed in a Man’s Body: Femininity in Male Homosexuality”

You know Lily Mae Jenkins? . . . He prisses around with a pink satin blouse and one arm akimbo. Now this Lily Mae fell in love with a man name Juney Jones. A man, mind you. And Lily Mae turned into a girl. He changed his nature and his sex and turned into a girl.

—Carson McCullers, *The Member of the Wedding*

Was trans feminine experience *imaginable* during the Modernist period? The depictions in Huxley, Joyce, and Barnes all tend toward an affirmation of Kaja Silverman’s suggestion that it was not. In each literary case, the shock of the revelation of the genitals of a trans feminine character relies on the reader’s presumed inability to imagine such bodies and lives. This chapter considers sources that document the rich diversity of trans feminine experience and social recognition of trans women in the period, belying both the literary investment in shock and the sexological focus on isolation, confusion, and despair. The chapter’s consideration begins with sexological case study narratives, letters, and memoirs supplemented by information revealed in the detailed record of an 1870 criminal trial. These vernacular sources reveal that violence surrounded trans feminine life in the form of police targeting and incarceration, domestic abuse by lovers, street harassment, sexual assault,

foreclosure from uncriminalized employment, and the criminalization of prostitution that was often the only work available to trans feminine people. These sources also reveal that late Victorian and early twentieth-century trans feminine lives were lived not in isolation, but in community. These writers were not defined by confusion regarding their bodies and identities, as their sexologist interpreters insist, but more often by a measure of certainty that is reflected by the great risks that they took to live as women.

In addition to this information about the lives of trans women in the period, returning to the accounts in the case studies reveals that trans women had a variety of understandings of their bodies that often did not conform to the sexological metaphor of entrapment and desire for change. Contrasting these understandings with the sexological model reveals that cis doctors applied their own a priori assumptions regarding genitals, sex, and identity to their interpretive task. Rather than expanding the imaginable to answer trans women's observations about their bodies, these doctors looked away from this very material that they cited as evidence. They affirmed Ulrich's model when they ascribed dissatisfaction and desire for bodily change to their subjects. They allow cisness to stand unchallenged because their diagnostic narrative universalized the desire to cross over from the undisturbed category of manhood to the undisturbed category of womanhood or vice versa. This chapter explores the historical reality of trans life and conceptual understandings of sex produced by trans women that the sovereignty of this medical model has erased from history.

This trans feminine writing finds its literary counterpart in Jean Genet's *Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs*, a novel that depicts a trans feminine character in a vernacular labor and social milieu rather than installing a figure of transsexuality to engage deep questions about history, desire, and embodiment as in the Modernist work of the previous chapters. The novel engages the fact, revealed in the life writing, that trans feminine embodiment was imagined independent of diagnostic authentication or medical intervention from Schreber's fin-de-siècle through the Modernist period. Genet's character Divine, like her real-life trans feminine counterparts, displaces cis understandings of genitals, sex, and sexuality. Genet places Divine in the world that sees her as a woman and subjects her to that category.

When Berenice, a black domestic worker, reports to her young charge Frankie in Carson McCullers's *The Member of the Wedding* (1946) that Lily Mae Jenkins "changed . . . nature and . . . sex and turned into a

girl,” she reflects the fact that trans women are recognized as women by their communities. Schreber’s status as “a woman in a woman’s body” was imaginable not only for trans women, but for many people during the period.<sup>1</sup> Lily Mae’s path to womanhood is perhaps little understood, but her female identity is a fact that requires no medical explanation. These sources reveal the daily life of trans feminine experience. The unimaginable quality of trans feminine existence was a component of the medicalization and criminalization of trans femininity, not a universal response.

Part of the work of this chapter is to explore the relation between a cultural field called “trans femininity” and people who *The New Woman* identifies as trans feminine. Both trans feminine life writing of the Modernist period and *Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs* testify to the lives of those who call themselves and each other Marys, Maryannes, and mollies in England; fairies, pansies, and sissies in the United States; and *tantes* and *molles* in France. Trans feminine cultural production is the historical mark of this thriving under violent conditions that are both material and representational. The life writing collected here attests to the sense that trans feminine people made of their own lives, the words that named their experiences, and the understanding of bodies that trans feminine people and spheres produced. Sexologists cited these case studies as data to ground the sexological diagnostic type called the extreme invert. These doctors present an image of a confused, lonely person who is befuddled by *his* body. Before Hirshchfeld, *his* sex and gender difference is a mode of expressing *his* desire for other men. Returning to the case studies as vernacular sources, as we will do next, tells many different stories.

#### CASE STUDY NARRATIVES AS LIFE WRITING

As the “Introduction” suggests, case study narratives reveal three global challenges to this sexological abstraction of the extreme invert. First, for their subjects it is not always (or even usually) sexual desire for cis men that grounds trans women’s sex identity. Rather, they reveal a range of relational and social components of the development of sexed identity for trans feminine people. Second, instead of metaphors of being trapped in the wrong body or expressions of yearning to change that body, subjects often narrate an understanding of their bodies as female. They often report that sensation animates the material structures of the body to ground their female sex. Rather than a desire to change their

sex, they aim to change their sex-specific documents in order to find work. They seek to change the conditions that subject them to sexual assault and public humiliation. Third, rather than isolation and confusion, many subjects narrate joyous social lives that are marked by social recognition as women. Perhaps the most fundamental challenge to the sexological abstraction, however, is the simple variety of these reports. There is no one understanding of how bodily structures relate to sex identity. There is no single narrative that defines trans feminine life. This narrative variety belies the demand of diagnostic abstraction.

KRAFFT-EBING'S CASE STUDIES: "THE CONSTANT FEELING OF BEING A WOMAN FROM TOP TO TOE"

Krafft-Ebing's presentation of Case 128 in *Psychopathia Sexualis* conforms to the sexological and criminological frame in which sexual desires and acts are of primary concern. The narrative first outlines the youthful development of the subject's sexual interest in men.<sup>2</sup> Following attempts to reorient their sexual interest toward women by visiting "houses of prostitution" with "[their] comrades," Subject 128 "[allows] [themselves] to be seduced" by a man (Krafft-Ebing, 196–97). These two begin a relationship in which, Subject 128 reports, "we lived as man and wife. X. played the man" (ibid., 197). Following the dissolution of that relationship, Subject 128 reports that after a period of loneliness they "made the acquaintance of a man, a 'sister,' who felt like me. For some time I was taken care of by him" (ibid.). In terms of general social interaction they say that "in the society of gentlemen I am silent and embarrassed while in the society of those like myself I am free, witty, and as fawning as a cat" (ibid., 198). Those of the latter group conform neatly with the trans feminine type that Carpenter disavowed. Subject 128 describes them as "effeminate, sensitive, easily moved and easily injured" (ibid.). Their experience suggests that sociality has a substantial role in forming and confirming gender identification. Identification with "sisters" and the distinction between "gentlemen" and "those like myself" are the parameters of this social expression of gender. This social component is erased from the sexological distillation which asserts that gender and sex are static qualities emanating from within individuals who confront the facts of genital morphology and either identify with those genitals (in the case of cis people) or rebel against them and desire bodily change.



Case 129 is the story of the Hungarian doctor with which *The New Woman* begins. This narrative reaffirms the role of collectivity and recognition in the lived experience of gender. Subject 129 goes beyond the facts of her life to outline a theory of sexed embodiment that is utterly erased from the sexological distillation. This account accesses the way in which sensation animates physiological structures and in particular, how sensations of permeability, fullness, and arousal attach to and produce sexed identity. Indeed, Subject 129 reveals that sexed sensations of the body and social experiences of the sex interact.

This narrative is longer than Subject 128's and gives a more precise sense of the feminine and gender nonconforming practices with which Subject 129 identifies. She writes that when circulating at a party she observes other trans feminine people and is drawn to them: "what seemed the prettiest sight was: two young men, beautifully dressed as white ladies, with masks on" (Krafft-Ebing, 201). Subject 129 narrates a relation between the social practices of "dressing as ladies" and her consideration of medical body alteration: "a young lady's form was more pleasing to me . . . I am sure that I should not have shrunk from the castration knife" (ibid., 202). Interest in female dress also foments bonds with cis girls, among these "a young lady, with whom I was boarding [who] proposed that I should mask as a lady and go out with her . . . I did not acquiesce, much as I should have liked to" (ibid.). This connection with women extends to adulthood when Subject 129 worked as a waiter and "the [waiter-girls] always treated me 'as if I wore petticoats'" (ibid., 203).

The sheer number of different experiences of sorority with other women and trans feminine people and the significance that Subject 129 ascribes to these experiences belie the focus on rejection and abjection that the sexological abstraction highlights.<sup>3</sup> These relationships underline the social component of the development and confirmation of sexed identity. Subject 129 knows that medical bodily alteration is possible, but it is not the condition or horizon of her female sex. This is one of many instances in the archive of trans feminine life writing in which trans women describe medical services as a tactic that might help them to live more comfortably, but not as the event that defines their womanhood.

The medical insistence on the biological family as the real unit of sociality that is the social form in which psychosocial health can be achieved doesn't recognize the kin bonds that these case studies identify as the most therapeutic and gender-confirming. Subject 129 experiences certain bonds organized by a shared womanhood and other bonds organized by a shared gender nonconformity. We've seen many examples

of the former. In the latter category Subject 129 includes her close bond with a trans masculine friend who was

my dearest associate . . . a lady suffering with neurasthenia, who, since her last confinement, feels like a man . . . She, by her example, helps me to endure my condition. She has a most perfect memory of the female feelings, and has often given me good advice. Were she a man and I a young girl I should seek to win her. (Krafft-Ebing, 211–12)

Reading this description among the descriptions of connections with women and feminine people clarifies the dual axes of gender identification that this trans feminine person expresses: both with women (trans and cis) and with people of trans experience (both feminine and masculine).

This account of solidarities, identifications, and affirmations recasts the instances of violence, isolation, confusion, and distress which sexological descriptions (and subsequent psychiatric diagnostic nosologies) make central to their influential definitions of inversion and eventually gender dysphoria. The case studies certainly report such harms. For instance, Subject 129 tells the story of “a youthful friend [who] felt like a girl from the very first, and had inclinations towards the male sex” and “his sister [who] had the opposite condition; and when the uterus demanded its right, and she saw herself as a loving woman in spite of her masculinity, she cut the matter short, and committed suicide by drowning” (Krafft-Ebing, 212). Placed within the context of the whole narrative, which describes bonds of support and careful accounting for the reality of the subject’s gender experience, this suicide reads as an index of the desperate measures that people are driven to by a society in which reproductive organs determine social role. The case studies contextualize the experience of distress, which may drive this particular trans masculine sibling to suicide but not their trans feminine sibling. This frame locates the cause of this violence in cissexist society and not in the individual psychic life of people who reject their assigned sex.

This relational component extends to somatic understanding that arises through sympathetic identification with feminized sensations of pain and discomfort. As a medical doctor Subject 129 has contact with cis women’s bodies, and this contact conditions her sex identity. She remarks that “obstetrics I learned with difficulty (I was ashamed for the exposed girls, and had a feeling of pity for them); and even now I

have to overcome a feeling of fright in obstetrical cases; indeed, it has happened that I thought I felt the transaction myself” (Krafft-Ebing, 204). Common feeling with women emerges at the overlap of the affective and the physical when Subject 129 reports that assisting her wife in childbirth “almost broke my heart; for I knew how to appreciate her pain” (ibid., 204). Later in the text, she reports that “every four weeks, at the time of the full moon, I have the menstrual sensation of a woman for five days, physically and mentally, only I do not bleed; but I have the feeling of a loss of fluid; a feeling that the genitals and abdomen are (internally) swollen” (ibid., 208). This ability to appreciate feminized affects (shame of bodily exposure) and physical sensations (childbirth pain and menstrual pain) forms another front of feminine sex identification through which she understands her body.<sup>4</sup> Describing her female proportions and characteristics, she writes that “the mammary region, though small, swells out perceptibly. The abdomen is feminine in form; the feet are placed like a woman’s and the calves . . . are feminine; and it is the same with arms and hands. I can wear ladies’ hose and gloves 73/2 to 73/4 in size. I also wear a corset without annoyance” (ibid., 206). Here sartorial practice and the physiological self-concept mingle as elements of female embodiment.

In addition to the social components of sex, Subject 129 outlines a theory of sexed embodiment that is erased from the sexological distillation. This account indicates that, for Subject 129, sensation animates physiological structures and in particular, sensations of permeability, fullness, and arousal produce female sexed identity. Indeed, for Subject 129, sexed sensations of the body and social experiences of the sex interact. Subject 129 provides a careful index of her understanding of her body parts. It is this account that produces a theory of genital structures themselves. For instance, she describes her first adolescent sexual experience during which she preferred “to lie beneath the girl and exchange my penis with her vagina. To her astonishment, the girl had to treat me as a girl, and did it willingly” (Krafft-Ebing, 203). Here the act of sex precipitates bodily self-understanding, again in a relational dynamic. Subject 129 suggests that this sexual encounter occasioned a sensed experience of the genitals that activated her female sex identity. The result of this activation is revealed in the passage that provides *The New Woman*’s first epigraph and which this chapter contextualizes not as an anomaly plucked from the archive to evidence a single instance of trans feminine self-definition, but as part of a substantial literature that defines sex in ways that attest to trans feminine experience. In it she

outlines with the greatest medical specificity her experiences of each of those structures of her body that are used to assign sex:

I feel the penis as clitoris; the urethra as urethra and vaginal orifice, which always feels a little wet, even when it is actually dry; the scrotum as *labia majora*; in short, I always feel the vulva. And all that that means one alone can know who feels or has felt so. But the skin all over my body feels feminine; it receives all impressions, whether of touch, of warmth, or whether unfriendly, as feminine and I have the sensations of a woman. (Krafft-Ebing, 207)

Without reference to official explanations, Subject 129 describes her body parts as she experiences them. This understanding of female embodiment is one example among a diverse group that this chapter collects. Subject 129 voices a proleptic resistance to the twentieth-century medical and popular commonplaces of transsexual definition that revived the mid-nineteenth-century metaphor of being “trapped in the wrong body” and hinged sex on surgical genital transformation. Part 1 has observed that early twentieth-century literature takes part in the cultural entrenchment of this definition through literary allegory, even as Bloom’s and Doctor O’Connor’s feminized bodies—animated by desire and subjected to pain—also recall Subject 129’s understanding of the relation between genitals and sex.

These “general feelings” of wetness and vaginal sensation represent the positive content of feminine sensation. Subject 129 affirms the activity and presence of female genital structures in opposition to an entrenched cultural tradition that defines female genital morphology as absence and female sexuality as passive.<sup>5</sup> This passage produces an affirmation of the vulva, labia majora, and vaginal orifice that does not resort to phallicizing or virilizing language in order to grant these structures and experiences meaning. We discover in this nineteenth-century account a trans feminist theory of embodiment, which brings these structures and the social categories with which they are associated into presence. Subject 129 insists that her body grounds her female identity, but this does not require her to conform to the cis understanding of what vulvas and vaginal orifices look like. She offers an understanding of genitals that requires the cis reader to transform her understanding of clitorises and vaginas. How different this feminist project is from that of Carpenter and other cis male feminists of the period, who imagine the relation between gay

male and cis female to be organized by a shared potential for rational civic participation and comradely companionate marriage.

As we have seen, Subject 129 narrates her female sex identity and experience of her genital structures as a development that occurs in relation to other women and gender nonconforming people, but this fact in no way precludes a personal and enduring sense of sex. It is on this point that the narrative ends. She reports that “during the last three years I have never lost for an instant the feeling of . . . *being* a woman from top to toe” (Krafft-Ebing, 212) and “the constant feeling of *having* female genitals” (ibid., 212, emphases mine). Subject 129 is not trapped in her body, nor is she *like* a woman, nor does she betray the behaviors or qualities of the “other sex.” She *is* a woman who *has* female genitals. Sexological reckoning with this fact would have meant a change in the function of sexology. Rather than the producers of diagnostics and the saviors of trapped women, metabolizing Case 129 as it is written, trusting these words, and using medical authority to authorize trans women’s narratives could have been a conduit to spread the good news that women have various kinds of genitals and can be trusted to declare and live their sex, with or without the medical services that doctors can offer.

Subject 129’s reflections are incompatible with the sexologist’s abstraction of the invert in both content and form. From Ulrichs to Freud, inversion is the metaphor that marshals femininity as an explanation for same-sex desire. But desire for men does not ground her feminine identification; rather, her sexual experiences with women reflect and affirm her womanhood, a fact that if recognized would have exploded Freud’s theoretical appropriation of the trans feminine. Cis women friends, lovers, and coworkers acknowledge and affirm her at every turn. For Krafft-Ebing and Ellis, femininity is the source of the invert’s deepest confusion and suffering. Subject 129’s certainty and clarity regarding her sex identity and her affirmation of life as a woman are incompatible with the sexological expectation that she suffer. Finally, and most crucially, her beautiful and serious reflections install her as the expert on the subject of her own experience of sex. Krafft-Ebing calls her “a notable example of compulsory feelings and hallucinations on the basis of a neurotic condition” and Hirschfeld (reading the case as published in Krafft-Ebing) identifies Subject 129’s claims to female embodiment as an “insane train of thought” (Hirschfeld, 197). But she requires no doctor to diagnose her or bureaucrat to issue her authentication papers. Krafft-Ebing’s collection became the chief reference for doctors who diagnosed trans women with extreme inversion and judges who evaluated

them for the crimes associated with sexual and gender nonconformity. The conceit that this text seeks the truth of trans women ennobles this instrumentalization of their words against them in the doctor's office and the judge's court.

Other genres of writing that documented trans feminine life in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries informed an understanding of the material basis for the social category of the trans woman. Materialist feminists define "woman" as the social category established through historical association with unwaged reproductive labor.<sup>6</sup> The social category of trans woman is established at the intersection of a historical association with unwaged reproductive labor (so not mutually exclusive with the category of woman) and a categorical association with sex work, a form of criminalized labor (so not reducible to the category of cis woman). Examination of the historical continuities of trans feminine life from the mid-nineteenth century (where this chapter's inquiry begins) to the period after 1970 (the focus of chapter 6) reveals this structure. These sources also inform an understanding of the relation between the social experience of trans womanhood and the experience of sex based on sensation that Subject 129 helps us to understand. This bridging of the social and bodily experience clarifies the totality of the operation of trans woman as an ontological and historical category. The inclusion of this experience in the understanding of sex further completes an understanding of the historical category of woman.

#### FANNY AND STELLA: TRANS SISTERHOOD, INSTRUMENTAL RAPE

A famous British legal case from 1870 vivifies this bridging in early trans feminine experience. An analysis of this case benefits from and further clarifies Foucault's account of sex as a particularly significant component of the modern "regimes of truth" (*Discipline and Punish*, 19). Here are the facts: in April 1870, Fanny Park and Stella Boulton were ambushed and arrested after a night of carousing at the Strand Theatre in London. The arresting officers (who had in fact been tailing them for months) charged them with buggery, conspiracy to commit buggery, and "[disguising] themselves as women . . . to frequent places of public resort, so disguised, and to thereby openly and scandalously outrage public decency and corrupt public morals" (McKenna, 35). Their trial became "one of the most sensational trials of the [nineteenth]

century” (Cocks, 124). Theirs was the most significant media sensation to address sex between male-assigned people until Oscar Wilde’s 1895 trial galvanized the emerging concept of the homosexual for men whose primary sexual interest was other men, the authorities that criminalized them, and the doctors who claimed to be in pursuit of their truth.

The transcripts of Fanny and Stella’s trial reveal the facts of their lives as people of trans feminine experience circulating in London’s West End. Although born to middle-class families, Boulton and Park’s trans femininity found expression as the theatrical double act Stella Clinton, benefitting from the license that vaudeville offered queer and trans people to dress and act in accord with their gender identity. They also participated in spheres of commercial sex and relationships of patronage with male sexual partners, including long-term marriages with men (M. Kaplan, 54–56). Most significant and long-lived, however, was their relationship to one another, which they described as a sisterhood. Their lives also included close relationships with cis women sex workers. A young Fanny entered into female sociality among these sex worker women who “would call her ‘Deary’ or ‘Margery’ or ‘Mary-Ann’ or ‘Miss Nancy’. . . . They did not judge her like the others. They would curse and cuss her in a friendly way, and then she would answer back with a haughty toss of her head” (McKenna, 72). The carceral historical sources reflect this intertwining of cis and trans woman. Arrests of trans feminine people in mid-Victorian London mostly occurred when among “the routine nightly quota” of sex workers, some turned out to be trans feminine people (*ibid.*, 106). The story of Fanny and Stella particularizes the larger history of cis and trans women’s shared vulnerability to arrest and police violence that George Chauncey documents.

The story of Fanny and Stella also reveals that this material basis for the trans feminine social category dovetails with the gendered bodily experience that Subject 129 described. In theirs and other trans women’s trials, the court solicited evidence from medical examinations. Park and Boulton underwent two lengthy physical exams during which doctors looked for physical evidence of anal penetration. In his history of the trial, Neil McKenna describes the exam in which

the penis, testicles and scrotum [were] lifted, pulled, squeezed and peered at; foreskin rolled back; and the meatus, the lips of the urethra, pinched and prised apart to see if there was any discharge. Then they would be asked to turn over and lie flat while their buttocks were carefully parted and scru-

tinized, before they were instructed to stand up and bend over the couch while their anuses were minutely examined. (McKenna, 206)

A doctor handled the patients' genitals, parts "the lips of the urethra," and the police used sexually transmitted infections as evidence: these actions all conformed with the treatment of cis female patients who had been accused of solicitation or prostitution. This treatment was politicized by feminists agitating against the Contagious Diseases Act of 1864, which allowed police to order the nonconsensual gynecological examination of any woman who was accused of prostitution (Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight*, 22). Gynecological exams constituted "instrumental rape" (qtd. in *ibid.*, 90) according to W. T. Stead, who campaigned for the repeal of the act, and the whole of the "medical exam revealed the steely scientific side of sexual torture . . . introduced to represent a ritualized degradation, an act of voyeurism and violation of female bodily integrity" (*ibid.*, 100).

Doctors extended the gynecological treatment of genitals to anal examination. When examining Fanny and Stella, the doctor used both "a large and powerful lens for the purpose of magnification" and "a speculum to examine the rectum" (McKenna, 206). They looked for a "funnel-shaped depression of the anal cleft," the "erasure of the *rugae*, the characteristic puckerings and ridges around the anus," and looseness and slackness (*ibid.*). These last qualities supposedly indicated "excessive and extreme dilation of the anus" that proved regular penetration (*ibid.*, 207). This scene indicates the imbrication of medical diagnosis and juridical evidentiary signs that both point to a relation between the vagina and the rectum. This operation of gender is reflected in the operation of vernacular trans femininity. Chauncey explains that so long as men took the "'masculine,' here meaning insertive, role in the sexual encounter—so long, that is, as they eschewed the style of the fairy and did not allow their bodies to be penetrated," they maintained male social identity. The categorical association of trans femininity with sex work reinforced this connection between penetration and womanhood by subjecting trans feminine people to methods of criminalization and examination on the prison exam table that cis women also endured.

Dr. James Thomas Paul, a surgeon employed by the Metropolitan Police, performed these examinations (McKenna, 42). He was trained by "the father of English forensic medicine," Alfred Swain Taylor, whose own interest—"verging on obsessional"—in sodomy stemmed from his



reading of a case from 1833 in which the body of a woman named Eliza Edwards was donated to a research hospital for dissection during which she was revealed to have a penis and testicles. The report on Edwards's postmortem examination noted that "the rugae or folds of skin which give the puckered appearance to the anal aperture had quite disappeared" and that it "resembled the labia of the female organs" (qtd. in *ibid.*, 47).<sup>7</sup> Paul offered a similar description in reference to Fanny and Stella's case. McKenna observes that the doctors' description of Fanny and Stella suggests that the fact that the "the anus resembled a female labia" indicated their guilt (*ibid.*, 207). It was a prior feminization of penetrated sexual subjects that legitimated such examinations in the eyes of the police and the courts. Doctors then reinforced and made explicit this feminization through the comparison of patients' rectums to labias and vaginas. This posited homology between rectum and vagina underwrote the techniques of physical examination and was then reproduced in the examination's conclusions.<sup>8</sup> This is the crux of the medico-legal logic that produced the expert trans feminine.

This carceral history demonstrates that non-cis understanding of genitals does not only come from the examination of trans feminine self-description. The behavior of the officials who arrested and examined Fanny and Stella expressed a violent corollary to trans feminine descriptions of penetrability. This treatment by police points to an enduring double bind of trans feminine experience that recalls Freud's proliferation of the figuration of the trans woman while denying their actual existence. While trans women were disproportionately vulnerable to feminizing violence, cis medical experts still claimed the role of gatekeepers who could grant or bar trans women access to the identity of woman. These particular forms of violence were thus absent from the articulations of violence against women that grounded Stead's and others' critique. This easy sorority between cis and trans sex workers was not politicized and their common experience was not centered in feminist writing and efforts during the period. This erasure of commonality opened up the fissure that allowed the installation of the trans woman as a figure for woman or sex.

#### MAGNUS HIRSCHFELD'S CASE STUDIES:

"AS A WOMAN I WAS TOTALLY WITHOUT PAPERS"

Magnus Hirschfeld ran his Institute for Sexual Science starting in 1919, and that institute provided a social and advocacy space for women like

Fanny and Stella. The work of the institute built on Hirschfeld's research as a sexologist. The subtitle of his *Transvestites: The Erotic Drive to Cross-Dress* (1910) reveals his participation in the sexological project of interpreting signs of gender for the sexual truths they might reveal. *Transvestites* also offers case study narratives from the early twentieth century that provide many details of working-class trans women's lives. These women highlight features of their lives that contrast with the "points of information," as Havelock Ellis put it, that sexological inquiry makes central to determining sex. Although these accounts also include information about family medical history and information about the success or failure that the subject has in integrating into familial structures, these narratives emphasize whether or not the subject's family accepted their gender nonconformity. Likewise, desire for women is as common in these narratives as desire for men. Third, the narratives include details about social relationships and labors that offer a rounded sense of the lives of the subjects and the way that their status as trans women affects the facets of these lives. Hirschfeld's inclusion of this information reflects the extent to which his inquiry, like Carpenter's, seeks an account of gay and trans life. This goal contrasts with previous sexologists' efforts to solicit information solely to distill a figure that can help doctors diagnose patients. This task finally allows Hirschfeld to detach desire from gender and consider gender identity as a separate sphere of experience. In *Transvestites* he identifies gender nonconformity as its own experience rather than an adjunct to or symptom of desire for people of the same sex, even as his subtitle retains the relation between the two.

These descriptions of trans feminine lives demonstrate the diversity of experiences that defy diagnostic specification. Subject One reveals that in her youth, she and her cis "girl playmates . . . showed each other [their] genitals" and despite the difference that they note between their bodies, these girls "treated [her] exactly as one of their own" (Hirschfeld, 21). This easy recognition of Subject One's female identity extends to adulthood sexual partnerships with women who accepted her and she "never had an inclination toward men" (*ibid.*, 27). This is also the experience of Subject Two, who attends dances in women's clothes with her female partner. The women marry and Subject Two's wife, as part of their commitment to one another, "promised me she would not be opposed to my individuality in marriage, but would rather promote it as much as possible" (*ibid.*). She "promotes" her partner's femininity by lending her "a woman's nightshirt, bedjacket, and earrings" (*ibid.*).

Such unions are part of lesbian history that Sharon Marcus documents among cis women in the nineteenth century.

Subject Three identifies social recognition of her female identity and not bodily change as her primary goal. “My greatest desire,” she writes, is “to be able to live untroubled and undistinguished as a woman” (Hirschfeld, 29). The reality of her female identity is confirmed in her daily life. She writes that “my wife daily confirms [her feminine tendencies] and indeed it is also clearly visible in our household, when I . . . relax in the kitchen and perform housekeeping” (ibid.). Reproductive labor is practiced and shared between female spouses—one cis and one trans—as a gender-confirming activity. Subject Three makes the clearest claim that, although she desires social recognition, she doesn’t require it to establish her sex. She states that “I have never looked for verification of the same condition in persons or in books; I never gave it a thought, because everything appeared in me by itself, even if deviating from the rule” (ibid., 30). Her particular expression of disinterest in “book” verification rejects medicalization or otherwise expert confirmation in the clearest terms.

Whereas Subject Three doesn’t require official “verification” from others, for Subject Four gender confirmation does come from an experience of hearing about trans feminine people. She overhears a story at a family party about a friend of her mother’s whose college student son “arrived home one day in women’s clothing and was so unrecognizable that for the longest time she and her husband had no idea they were talking to him” (Hirschfeld, 32). Subject Four is inspired by this story to express her own female identity. Here again is evidence of the way that women (both cis and trans) confirm each other’s female identity and capacitate each other’s expression of that identity. Recognition of these observations from the trans feminine archive reveals not the subjection of women to the prison of identity and to gendered labor expectations based on that identity. Rather, these observations reveal identification with the social category of woman and the performance of social practices that affirm this identification.

This expression of identity and affinity in these texts does not preclude or dull their analysis of the enforced binarization of gender. Subject Five offers a very clear analysis of the effects on trans women of the gendered division of two areas of society. The first is the gendering of paid sectors of employment, the fact that women did certain jobs and men others. The second is the use of gender as a category of identity in bureaucratic forms. These two areas are related, since proper identifi-

caution is necessary to get a job. The exclusion from papers and work produces Subject Five's sense that she is not present in the world:

It lay heavy on my mind that I was getting older and older and was getting nowhere. . . . As a woman I was totally without papers, and so, in order not to be totally erased from the ranks of the living, every three months I sent the rent to my landlady because there at my apartment I was officially registered. (Hirschfeld, 48)

Despite the difficulty, she “endeavoured to find every possibility to prolong my life as a woman” and took practical steps to allow that. She “went to a woman’s employment agency, paid my fee, and wanted the position of a female companion. Her questions about where I had been I answered truthfully, but I could produce no references” (Hirschfeld, 49). She points to the bureaucratic realities that form the actual contours of trans women’s lives. She “realized that there was no possibility of achieving an existence as a woman” because “on account of lacking a social security card” she could never attain employment (*ibid.*). She consults a friend who suggests transitioning back to male social identity and men’s work. The next day,

with great lament and sorrow, I had my beautiful brown hair dressed for the last time. . . . The next morning at my friend’s apartment the barber cut off my hair after I stopped resisting. Each cut hurt me. Then, for the first time in twenty months I again put on men’s clothing and felt very unhappy in them. (Hirschfeld, 51).

This narrative outlines in the simplest terms the relation between the bureaucratic use of sex as an identifying category, the sex segregation of labor spheres, trans women’s life chances, trans women’s identity, and trans women’s emotional well-being. This woman makes choices about how to wear her hair at the nexus of factors of aesthetic affinity, gender expression, and economic necessity organized by the socially enforced gendered division of wage work.

Letters exchanged between Hirschfeld and a trans woman compose Case Study 13, which contains a life narrative from the perspective of a woman in middle age. She offers resources for thinking about the con-

nection between the social category of trans woman, feminizing violence, and embodiment. Hirschfeld began the correspondence after reading her plea, in a German magazine, that mothers raise their girlish sons as girls so that they will be “more stable in their girlishness” and “will never want to become men” (Hirschfeld, 83). At the time that she and Hirschfeld trade letters, the woman is forty-seven years old and in her letters she describes her life. She was born in Tyrol (in present-day Austria) to parents who conceded to the “fuss” she made about putting on trousers and so allowed her to wear dresses (*ibid.*, 88). After her parents’ deaths she went to live with aunts and uncles who forced her to wear boy’s clothes. She fled to Switzerland in her early teens in “the clothes of a young woman and her certificate of domicile” because her family would not allow her to pursue a career as a teacher. In Switzerland she supported herself as a nanny and by doing housework and embroidery (*ibid.*, 88). While thus employed, her mistress discovered her trans status but “did not make a big fuss about it because she had never had such a good woman worker” (*ibid.*). This mistress also encouraged her trans feminine employee to go dancing and enjoy herself. These details reveal a trans feminine life that does not conform to the sexological diagnostic narrative.

At age sixteen, she experienced an attempted rape followed by her attacker spreading the news that she was a “hermaphrodite.” These experiences motivated her to move to France, where she found work as a domestic and “came together with women who lived with other women like married people, which in France is a rather widespread custom” (Hirschfeld, 88–89).<sup>9</sup> Her trans status is again revealed against her wishes when one of these young women examines her body in the night. In the morning, the cis woman comforts Subject 13 by reporting that she “need not be ashamed” because “there really were other girls like [her]” (*ibid.*, 89). As with Subject Four’s response to hearing about a trans feminine family friend, this moment documents the importance of trans women’s knowledge of other trans women. This refutes the sexological and popular emphasis on isolation. She became very attached to this girl who, to her dismay, married shortly after to a man who began to show sexual interest in the young trans woman. His interest was unwelcome, and this is another indication of trans women’s vulnerability to sexual shame and sexual precariousness. This experience motivated her to leave Europe for the United States.

From France she moved to New York and then Milwaukee, working as a maid and cook when possible and in men’s sectors when necessary.

Her migrations were motivated by similar sexual assaults and revelations of her genital status. In New York, she was assaulted by a male fellow embroiderer who then used the threat of calling the police and revealing her trans status to keep her “as a coquette” and coerce her into sex. In this experience, Case 13 reports, “[he] treated me totally as a woman,” revealing her intimate knowledge of the misogynist violence that shapes that social category, even as the threat to reveal her trans feminine status represents a transmisogyny that targets trans feminine people alone (Hirschfeld, 90). Finally she settled in San Francisco, where she ran a boarding house for showgirls, worked as a bookseller (specializing in “trashy literature and socialist writings”), and “took part in the worker’s movement” (*ibid.*, 91). Her domestic situation among the other women was stable, although neighbors suspected her of being a prostitute (*ibid.*). Case 13’s experience confirms the association that cis society made between trans women and sex work. Sex work was often an option available to trans women when other work was unavailable, trans status was used against women to coerce them into sexual relationships, and trans women were often assumed to be sex workers simply because they were trans. Subject 13 also demonstrates the structural role that sexual violence played in the lives of all women, who suffered ruined reputations when they were sexually assaulted.

These letters confirm elements of the case studies of bourgeois trans women collected by Krafft-Ebing twenty-five years earlier and also those of the criminalized trans feminine lives documented by Chauncey and in the history of the Boulton and Park trial. These letters *also* demonstrate the immersion of the trans woman writer in the feminized concerns, anxieties, socialities, and labors of cis working-class women in each city in which she lives. As was the case with Fanny and Stella’s arrest and examinations, the letter writer’s vulnerability to sexual assault and its ruinous social effects rest on the preexisting femininity that is then reinforced by these experiences.

As was the case with previous accounts, cis women affirm her. During this time Subject 13 reports that “the dancers . . . accepted me just as nature made me” (Hirschfeld, 91). In contrast, she feels distant from men: “I am not a friend to men. Conversations with women satisfy me more, and I am always envious of educated women, because I always look up to them . . . For that reason I always have been an activist for equal rights” (*ibid.*, 93). Hirschfeld’s text provides space for this narrative of trans femininity as an experience that grounds a relation to women and refuses connections with men, but such experiences never

made their way into the sexological abstraction or the expert models of trans women that came after.

Her correspondence with Hirschfeld goes further to predict and affirm a trans sociality that is possible if “total freedom of dress” could allow “the effeminate people [to] connect with female society, just as the man-woman will befriend the so-called stronger sex” (Hirschfeld, 85). Trans feminine and trans masculine people compose an ideal couple: “the woman-man will grow into the feminine and be attracted by the man-woman, because by nature both feel right for each other, he as a woman and she as a man” (ibid.). She writes that she “fell very much in love with a young woman of a manly type; however, she did not understand me and I could not fully accept her . . . she married another and is supposed to have never become happy” (ibid., 91). In 1904 she advertised in a marriage magazine identifying as an “effeminate man” in search of “a manly woman” (ibid., 92). Her ad states that she can “cook, sew, wash, [and] iron” and desires a partner to fulfill the opposite gendered tasks (ibid.). She never found a long-term partner of the type she wanted: a “manly woman” who would wear men’s clothes and affirm her role as the woman. Like Case 129, she confirms the appeal of partnerships among trans people, an appeal based on the capacity of trans partners to affirm trans sex identities.

Hirschfeld learned from these stories. Many of the institute’s priorities reflected the needs that the case studies articulate. Hirschfeld offered employment to trans women, agitated to overturn sodomy laws, and provided identity documents that allowed trans women to go out in public in clothes that reflected their sex identities with protection from police harassment.<sup>10</sup> The institute was a vital center of trans sociality that provided space to foster the kind of trans socialities that the subjects of the case studies reported finding valuable. Hirschfeld’s writing, however, stays in the sexological mode. In Hirschfeld’s analysis, cited already in chapter 1, that follows these case studies, he writes that

no matter how much transvestite men feel like women when dressed in women’s clothing . . . they remain aware that in reality it is not so. To be sure, some do imagine—and if so, then the wish is the originator of the thought—that their skin is softer, their forms rounder, and their movements more gracious than are usual for men, but they know full well, and often are depressed by the fact that they do not physically belong to the desired sex. (Hirschfeld, 182)

Hirschfeld insists that the wish to be a woman is primary to the sense that one is a woman. In his analysis “the wish is the originator of the thought” that one has a female body. This framing is not supported by many of the case studies that precede these observations, including those that this chapter has surveyed. Did Hirschfeld believe this, or was such a framing a necessary pretext for offering genital surgeries and other gender-confirming health care? Was a debility or illness necessary in order for a doctor to make a case that his profession should offer a cure? In either case, this move from the case study reports to Hirschfeld’s diagnostic conclusions is the historical locus of the folding in of trans women into medical logics that insist that they don’t mean what they say. Hirschfeld’s text stages the encounter between the vernacular and the expert trans feminine. Trans women report a variety of accounts of their sex and identity. Hirschfeld cites these accounts are boiling down to the desire to change sex. The expert model offers services and legibility. However, it also requires that women concede to the story that science tells about their experience.

JENNIE JUNE’S MEMOIRS:  
A FEMALE BRAIN IN A FEMALE BODY

*Autobiography of an Androgyne* (1918) and its sequel *The Female Impersonators* (1922) are essential texts in the canon of early twentieth-century trans feminine life writing because they narrate the experience of medicalization from the perspective of a trans woman and in the context of her life, bridging the expert and the vernacular. Their author, Jennie June, dedicates her second volume to the task of saving other trans people from suicide, a textual expression of solidarity that was newly available in the 1920s as “female impersonators” began to see themselves as a distinct class requiring collective care and representation. June grew up as a trans feminine child in upstate New York and found the downtown New York City world of the fairies that Chauncey describes in her early twenties. Graduate study at Columbia allowed her to commute between a male social identity uptown, in which she was able to work and study, and her trans feminine life downtown, where she joined the Cercle Hermaphroditos, a mutual support and social group for trans feminine people.<sup>11</sup> June’s memoir describes partnerships with men that she understood as marriages in which she was the wife. She also reports many instances of sexual assault and beat-



ings, sometimes combined with theft. The men who inflict this violence, alone and in groups, usually approach her as potential sex partners and then beat her, steal her money, and have sex with her while threatening further beatings. The routinized physical and sexual violence is comparable with the experiences of poor cis women, especially sex workers.<sup>12</sup> This distribution of violence forms feminized gender categories without distinguishing cis from trans.<sup>13</sup>

*Autobiography of an Androgyne* describes June's decision-making around the gender-confirming medical care that was newly available as a component of a medicalized trans narrative in the early twentieth century. Her description of her experience adds to the previous descriptions of bodily self-understanding recounted by the subjects of late nineteenth-century sexological narratives. As noted in the introduction, June explicitly rejects Havelock Ellis's explanation that same-sex attraction stems from the development of secondary sexual characteristics. For June, femininity feels essential and primary, stemming from the presence of "governing corpuscles of germs ordinarily found only in the protoplasm of females" (Werther, *Autobiography of an Androgyne*, 31). This organic basis means that "medico-legally it is wrong to make genitals the universal criterion for determination of sex. Medico-legally, sex should be determined by psychical constitutions rather than by the physical form" (ibid.). In this analysis, June echoes the political claims of Ulrichs and Carpenter but with gender self-determination as her primary political objective. Yet, unlike Ulrichs's, this claim doesn't rest on the heterosexualization of desire through the figure of the woman's soul trapped in a male body. Unlike Carpenter's, June's affirmation of sex doesn't lead to her naming any new aberrant type, as in Carpenter's disavowal of the "extreme invert."

June also resists the sexological assumption that gender difference is only a component of adult sexuality rather than an identity that develops in childhood. She laments that she was considered a boy by her parents and notes that she was "looked upon by all the children as more of a girl than a boy" between the ages of seven and twelve (*Autobiography of an Androgyne*, 38). She reports selecting the name of Jennie for herself at age four (*Female Impersonators*, 93). She documents the mutual recognition of trans feminine children, noting that she knew three other "girl-boys" within three blocks of her house. The poorest among them became a sex worker, or in her words, a "*fille de joie*" (*Autobiography of an Androgyne*, 38). She notes that women involved in sex work were the first adult women of trans experience that she met and explains that

she too “aspired” to be “a fallen woman” (ibid., 70). She calls boys and men “the opposite sex” (ibid., 168) and writing in her diary about life in the dorms during her freshman year of college, she states that

I am really a woman, and a very amorous one at that . . . Did society ever compel another woman, except those like me, to live, eat, sleep, frequent the same comfort-rooms and baths, lie sometimes in the same bed, with men, and sometimes listen to the unclean talk of men? I am driven wild by instinctive cravings more than any other human being ever was. (*Autobiography of an Androgyne*, 52)

After arriving at the university in 1891, “life in a great city soon made its impress on my constitutional femininity” and she finds the queer and trans social and commercial life of the Bowery (*Autobiography of an Androgyne*, 49). These experiences reflect the operation of the categories of male and female in a social milieu that doesn’t subscribe to a cis understanding of these terms.

Jennie June bridges the vernacular and medical understandings of trans femininity. In her time as a fairy in the Bowery she is fully inscribed in the vernacular trans femininity of street life. She also finds affirmation of her sex during visits to the New York Academy of Medicine where she read medical journals, and by reading the work of Ellis and Krafft-Ebing, in whose texts she learns about the extreme invert. She comes across two articles in a journal of anthropology describing “a class of abnormal human beings in India who are called ‘eunuchs by birth’ [whose] natures suited mine exactly” (*Autobiography of an Androgyne*, 65). She cites similar investigations of “‘squaw-men’ of American Indians and a Greek slave ‘devoted to unmentionable use’” (ibid., 66). She puts together these references into a trans feminine genealogy and recognizes herself as part of it. This identification abruptly shifts when she remembers her sister’s exclamation that June is not like “effeminate men,” a category from which she retreats in her youth (*The Female Impersonators*, 71). These social experiences call June into trans femininity with which she feels a deep identification, but the violence inherent in being positioned as such provokes her ambivalence and retreat. In her disavowal of “effeminates” she participates in the border wars around gender and sexuality that we are familiar with from the cis gay male tradition of Carpenter and Gide. In *The Female Impersonators*, June confirms her experience of the antagonism toward effeminates that

Carpenter voices. She observes that “the mildly androgynous” gay men “fear suspicion of their secret if they associated with ultra-androgynes” (ibid., 21). By adulthood, she considers herself to be firmly in the latter category.

In contexts where she is not engaging with cis people, June reveals perspectives from within the scene of trans feminine people. For instance, she describes her experience with “professional fairies”:

. . . introduced to me as Jersey Lily, Annie Laurie, and Grace Darling. Two others had adopted the names of living star actresses. The unreflecting and uneducated victims of innate androgynism, and having passed their lives exclusively in the slums of New York, they had always been perfectly satisfied with the lot Nature had ordained for them. (*Autobiography of an Androgyne*, 129)

This passage reflects June’s class bias against those trans feminine people who are “unreflecting and uneducated victims” of the slums, but in it she also connects that class status with their experience of being “perfectly satisfied” with trans life. In this rhetorical progression, June mobilizes the expert expectation that trans feminine people suffer with the vernacular reality that many trans women viewed their lives as satisfactory. This world of trans feminine thriving is more difficult to access in the sexological texts that form a large part of the archive of trans feminine narratives in the period. The genre of medical writing will always disproportionately contain the words of people who feel (or feel that others feel) that there is a wrong that must be righted, a malady that must be cured. Yet, as we’ve seen in this chapter’s close attention to the case studies, there is plenty to suggest that many trans women in the period, including those who shared the stories of their lives with sexological researchers, felt likewise “satisfied.”

Here as elsewhere, June confirms an unsatisfactory feature of trans feminine life: the daily surveillance by police and the reality of police harassment. She regrets that “Christendom has refused to acknowledge that God has created this type of human being, the woman with masculine genitals. It hunts them down, and drives them from one section of our great cities to another by repeated raids on their resorts” (*Autobiography of an Androgyne*, 129). This is a reality in the lives of poor cis women as well, who all lived under the suspicion of sex work. June reflects this commonality between cis and trans in her reference to “my

sister courtesans, both male and female . . . [who] had adopted their occupation as a gainful one, whereas I sought merely the satisfaction of strong instincts” (ibid., 106). Here again June repeats the sexological distinction between her noncriminal identity and the criminal activity that is associated with trans femininity. But her call out to her “sister courtesans” reveals that, from her perspective, no neat division is possible.

Jennie June’s careful description of embodiment, like Subject 129’s, resists a cis understanding of sex. She uses Latin words to demurely encode this discussion. She states:

Nature created me *puellam sine vagina*, and then drew me toward the sturdy sex as few of the gentle sex are drawn. In such a case, what is more natural than to use the next best foramen? Furthermore, instinct pointed out the makeshift. It came just as natural for me *utor ore* as for physical women to use what Nature has provided them. (*Autobiography of an Androgyne*, 81)

Here June states that she is a girl born into a body without a vagina. Penetration through “the next best foramen,” anal penetration, is part of her sexual and sex identity and her desire for this kind of penetration drew her to a “natural” understanding of her body’s parts. In a way, here June affirms an understanding of sex that is confirmed by the doctors and police officers who examined Fanny and Stella. In both instances, female embodiment is defined by penetrability, and all women face the threat that patriarchal social structures pose based on that definition. June presents a different understanding of the relation between bodily structures and sex identity than does Subject 129. June feels her rectum as the site of feminizing penetration, whereas Subject 129 feels her penis as a “vaginal orifice.” This chapter collects life writing that reflects the diversity of trans feminine experiences of embodiment, challenging sexology’s diagnostic logic. These accounts also present a supreme challenge to a cis understanding of sex and the heteropatriarchal logic that relies on the fixed meaning of genitals.<sup>14</sup>

June pursues medical body modification, and a careful reading of her relationship with this service illuminates the difference between her understanding and the sexological narrative. In childhood, June reports that she contemplated physical alteration of her body and “would meditate taking my father’s razor and castrating myself in order to bring my physical form more in accord with that female sex to which I in-

stinctively yearned to belong” (*Autobiography of an Androgyne*, 45). In adulthood, June does seek surgical castration, which was one among many body modifications that gender nonconforming people sought piecemeal outside of a diagnostic narrative of trans femininity in the early twentieth century, including hormones, mastectomy, hysterectomy, and orchiectomy (Meyerowitz, 17–18). She explains her choice as primarily motivated by a desire to curb her sexual appetite and describes the weight gain and fatigue that she experiences after castration. Far from identifying surgery as the utopian solution to an unclear sex, seventeen years after surgery she concludes that not much has changed and she does not recommend the procedure to others (*Autobiography of an Androgyne*, 161). Before castration, her body is equipped with the structures that allow for sexual and sexed expression as a woman. Her genital surgery is not the event that makes her female. The medical procedure is not the narrative climax of her story but rather is an ambivalent anticlimax.

Jennie June’s narrative also allows a more precise understanding of the relation between trans femininity and its material basis in relation to sex work. For much of *Autobiography of an Androgyne* she moves between a life uptown where she lives as an effeminate man and Ivy League student and a life downtown where she lives as a trans feminine fairy. In this single life composed of two different social gendered experiences, we can see that June is unclassed by her trans femininity. The relationships and violences she experiences downtown are the same as those experienced by poor women who do sex work. She fears “possible disfigurement by blows—or even murder—by one of the numerous prudes who detest extreme effeminacy in a male (supposed)” (*Female Impersonators*, 103). Her money also, however, allows her refuge uptown where she escapes some of the violence directed at trans feminine people and cis sex workers. She experiences violence which is similar to that experienced by cis prostitute women when she isn’t carrying money: beatings and sexual assault. When she is the paying party in a commercial sexual exchange she experiences the softer violence of extortion and bribery. This structure of the violence that she faces clarifies the relation between trans femininity, criminalized labor, and interpersonal violence. In the clearest terms, her experience reveals gender to be a question of identity and identification, but only as a function of a material structure that set the terms. Notions of “crossing” gender or changing sex are not really relevant here. Rather, trans femininity is its own state of being with defining social rules and concerns.

Jennie June's memoirs are the last significant published trans feminine narrative before the transformations of the late 1920s and early 1930s. These changes enabled the culmination of the medicalization of trans life by offering genital surgery and hormone treatment. June's words are the last in the Modernist period to present trans life as embedded in trans sociality. Her texts present the realities of policing, sexual violence, sex work, and sexual practices that are common features of the lives of her sister fairies. The next significant story, Lili Elbe's memoir of sex change, indexes the shift to narratives extracted from these trans feminine scenes.

In the early 1930s Magnus Hirschfeld and his institute began advertising their surgical sex change services. Among the earliest patients to undergo vaginal construction was Lili Elbe, a Danish painter (Meyero-witz, 20). Her experience attracted media attention and she published a fictionalized account of her life story in Dutch entitled *Fra Mand til Kvinde—Lili Elbes Bakendeler (From Man into Woman—Lili Elbe's Confessions)* with the help of an editor named Niels Hoyer in 1931.<sup>15</sup> Elbe's story is the first transsexual narrative that reports genital surgery as the climax of a narrative arc that begins with diagnosis and then gives a detailed account of life after such surgery. The popular circulation of Lili Elbe's book marks a transition wherein the now *incoherent* narratives that this chapter has previously read come to seem incomplete or anachronistic in contrast with the completed arch of Lili's story as the first example of a finished sex change narrative.

The press circulation of Lili's narrative was the first instance of the media sensationalization of trans life. She first gained popular attention after the publication of a "lurid article" by a "sensational journalist" (Hoyer, 225). The fact that Lili never read it indicates her discomfort with this sensationalism (*ibid.*). Her own telling of her story is a rich resource for how one particular trans woman's life is lived before, during, and after receiving gender-confirming health care. It demonstrates what questions about desire, kinship, friendship, employment, misogyny, and notoriety arise for women of trans experience as they weigh questions of trans feminine identity and health care options. The memoir places her within social relationships. Lili is supported by her wife Gerda through her process of coming to recognize her female identity and through her operations and public life in a female social gender. Rather than a self-understanding of a female soul trapped in a male body, Lili considers "Lili" and "Andreas" separate people that have a mutually respectful relationship. She moves from being Andreas to being Lili, but

remembers Andreas with fondness and is fascinated by the differences between them.

Her memoir recounts the challenges she faced when seeking gender-confirming health care. The first surgeon she approaches declines to operate based on his sense that genital surgery is a “beautifying operation,” reflecting an understanding of trans health care as merely cosmetic that complicates many trans people’s access to the present day.<sup>16</sup> The second doctor confined his examination to her “gut,” indicating that he did not understand the kind of health care she was looking for, and the third doctor “declared Andreas to be “perfectly crazy” (Hoyer, 23). The incorporation of trans health care into psychiatric models in the late twentieth century reflects the institutionalization of this last doctor’s diagnosis.<sup>17</sup> Another doctor allegorizes Lili, calling her a “bridge,” and in this metaphor discovers “the remarkable thing about [her] fate” (ibid., 246). He explains that her importance is the

unique thing that slumbers within [her], namely, the emotional bond between the two sexes. This presentiment in your blood, which now pulsates through a woman’s heart as it formerly pulsated through the heart of a man, rises now and again through the mists of ambiguity into a penetrating insight. (Hoyer, 246)

In these lines we see that the trans feminine allegory which installs trans women as a figure for changes in heterosexual sexuality and cis genders has now circled out of fiction to be applied to actual trans women. The allegory depends on one fundamental claim: that Lili was “formerly a man” and that it was surgical sex change and medical authorization that made her a woman. Without this framing the allegory collapses.

After Lili’s medical procedures, she reports doctors’ self-aggrandizing narrative of completion. One of her regular physicians remarks that: “When I saw you first, I thought you were a pitiful, degenerate, unfortunate creature, but now . . . you are a healthy and vigorous woman” (Hoyer, 245). This observation confirms the doctor’s sense of his own role as savior. The doctor’s comments express the faith kept by medical authorities from Ulrichs on that trans feminine life can illuminate cis understandings of sex. This model is then repeated in Modernist novels and queer theories.

The memoir also provides an account of straight and cis people’s responses to the circulation of the story of surgical sex change. She notes

a difference in response based on sex. From women “she received many proofs of sympathy . . . Women whom she did not know in the least sent her letters full of comprehension and enthusiasm” (Hoyer, 243). In contrast, “all the male friends of Andreas avoided Lili” because, the narrative explains, her attractiveness posed a challenge to their sexual identity (ibid.). Elbe’s story helps the reader to understand the complexities of attaining gender-confirming medical care, the social structures that support trans women, and the threat that trans feminine self-assertion poses to the sexual identities of cis men.

These are not the elements of Elbe’s story that Tim Armstrong finds significant. He concludes his chapter on *Man into Woman* by applying Butler’s term “literalizing fantasy” to position the text in relation to Modernist aesthetics. He cites Butler’s claim, engaged at length in the next chapter, that transsexual desire is defined by “imaginary participation in bodily parts” (qtd. in Armstrong, 183). Armstrong elaborates to argue that “in the actual production of the transsexual body, the opposite is true: organs are made to conform to self-perception” (ibid.). Armstrong goes on to suggest that Lili’s narrative “presupposes a knowledge of the ‘right’ configuration” (ibid.) of gender. To support his parsing, Armstrong cites Butler’s analysis that “the assignment of ‘sex,’ before even gender, is the reality-effect of a violent process that is concealed by their naming (language)” (ibid.). For Armstrong, “the transsexual exposes that process at its most material” (ibid.). The bodies of trans women are, in this account, the emblem of capitulation to the universally violent subjection to the logic that genitals are the sole criteria for determining sex. For Armstrong, this exemplarity is the *meaning* of the first transsexual narrative. He goes so far as to state that

Lili is a man’s woman. . . . By constructing Lili as a woman, by introducing her moving account to the public as a pioneering case of a “happy” intervention in pursuit of the “truth” of gender, modernist medicine produces . . . a woman for whom destiny is anatomy. This is the literalizing fantasy of Modernism at the level of the organ. (Armstrong, 183)

When Armstrong *applies* Queer Theory to the story of Lili Elbe in order to discover that story’s resonance with Modernist aesthetics, he is in fact glimpsing an origin of Queer Theory’s critical apparatus and producing a critical tautology. Tracing this inheritance is the focus of chapter 5. Armstrong interprets Elbe’s life and body as a figure for the



social process through which cis people are forced to concede to their assigned gender. Her story is simply a means to understanding this social process. The most damning (proleptic) retort to this allegorization of trans life comes from Elbe. She states of her female identity: “What it therefore meant I could not discover. It simply *was so*” (Hoyer, 98). Elbe’s assertion invites critics to abandon the project of decoding what trans femininity *means* for cis people’s understanding of their own sex and to focus instead on what trans feminine experience *is* and *has been*. This chapter has attempted to accept this invitation. It has considered the pressures that have surrounded trans women’s medical decisions. It has investigated the affinities through which trans women’s sex identity has been expressed. It has looked at the role that work, violence, and basic needs have played in trans women’s understanding and expression of their sex identities.

Even if there seems to be more fodder for this inquiry in the form of trans feminine life writing available from the period than one would have thought, a brief citation in Neil McKenna’s account of Fanny and Stella’s trial provides an occasion to consider trans feminine stories that exist as brief notes in the historical record rather than full accounts or preserved pieces of life writing. McKenna cites an article published in *The Times* on September 21, 1850, that tells the story of a man who performed a citizen’s arrest on a young woman who approached him to offer sexual services. He was surprised to learn when she lifted her veil that she was “a person of colour” and had a “growth of beard” (McKenna, 105). She “gave her name as Eliza Scott” to police and during her trial “told the extraordinary story of her life” (*ibid.*, 105). She reported that

she had been sold by her aunt for a slave, escaped and, after many adventures fetched up in the West Indies where she “got her living by washing, ironing and cleaning, and attending people who are ill, more particularly those afflicted with rheumatism,” whom she cured with the application of Indian herbs. (McKenna, 106)

This brief outline of Eliza Scott’s life story hints at the many stories of trans womanhood that were not included in the sexological case studies and published accounts of the period.

Another such brief account begins in 1876, when Frances Thompson was among a group of five African American freedwomen who testified before a U.S. congressional committee about the rapes that white men

had committed against them during a period of race riots in Memphis immediately following emancipation ten years before (H. Rosen, 235). After appearing before Congress, Thompson was arrested in Memphis on the charge of “cross-dressing” and her trans status became a newspaper sensation that was cited as evidence that all of the black women who had testified were lying about widespread sexual assault by white men during the riots (ibid., 235–36). The *Memphis Daily Appeal* posited that Frances Thompson had a false identity that proved by extension that “persecutions of the black race in the south” were “pretended outrages” and that all of the “blood-and-thunder stories are manufactured” (qtd. in H. Rosen, 237).

Thompson responded to the charge, leveled both by the courts and the media, that she lived her life under a false identity by stating, simply, that she “was always regarded as a woman” (qtd. in H. Rosen, 238). Newspaper reports confirmed that in Memphis Thompson had always been “supposed to be a woman” (ibid., 238). Thompson lived with another woman, Lucy Smith, who at least one newspaper described as her romantic partner, although the historian Hannah Rosen argues that the evidence cited to support this—that the two women shared a bed—is not adequate to proving a sexual relationship because people of the same sex often shared beds in the period (ibid., 353n51). The two women supported their household by “taking in sewing, washing and ironing,” like many other women of their class (ibid., 69).

Frances Thompson’s story clarifies the position of trans women in relation to cis women in her community during the period. Thompson was among the generation of black women who were born into slavery and in early adulthood navigated the transition to working and living as workers in a wage economy. She was among the many women in Memphis and across the South who were raped by white men as part of a campaign of racial and gendered terror after emancipation. She, like other black women, was subsequently subjected to the presumption that black women were generally sexually available to white men. The media confronted Thompson and the others who testified with the prevalent racist fantasy that black women were too depraved to be capable of refusing sex (ibid., 82). Her status as a black trans woman, however, added to these difficulties the risk of arrest for cross-dressing, public misgendering in the press, and a sentence of labor on a Memphis chain gang. During her time on the chain gang she was “forced to wear men’s clothes,” and her jailer would “[exhibit her] to the curious eye of the public” and treat her “very grossly” (qtd. in H. Rosen, 237). In short, as a black woman of

trans experience, Frances Thompson had the support of a black community that recognized her as a woman. Her experiences overlapped significantly with the black cis women with whom she was comfortable and familiar enough to testify alongside before the committee. She was also vulnerable to violences that were specific to her as a black trans woman.

Eliza Scott and Frances Thompson are just two of the women whose trans experience enters the historical record through arrest and misgendering.<sup>18</sup> The experiences gathered here demonstrate the place of trans women in histories of enslavement and emancipation, immigration, feminized labor sectors, domestic labors, feminine healing practices, and lesbian socialities. The haphazard entry of their trans feminine experience into the historical record obliges us to continue to search for such trans feminine sources and not to assume the cis status of historical actors. Cis working-class women's narratives from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are rare, and trans women's are rarer still. It is this scarcity that makes the presence of trans women in the work of the cis male artist Jean Genet more precious as documents of trans feminine life in their period than they might otherwise be.

The trans feminine life writing surveyed here prepares us to read *Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs*. Jean Genet, imprisoned, lustily scrawled the novel on scraps of paper that were then trashed by prison guards only to be rewritten from memory.<sup>19</sup> *The New Woman* has argued that the trans feminine operated as a Modernist ur-sign for the disordering of gender and sex in the early twentieth century. This semiotics relates intimately to the operation of the sign "woman" in literary and in social history. The title of this chapter, "ceased to be word and became flesh," comes from a passage in the novel that demonstrates Genet's reformulation of this conceptual relation of the trans feminine to the general operation of sex, a reformulation that emerges from his experience of what he calls the "materialization of the penal colony." In this passage a warden leads Genet's imprisoned autobiographical narrator down a prison hall of doors bearing signs and Genet abstracts a theory of the relation between words and bodies from this experience:

As I passed each door, I would read a label indicating the category of the occupant. The first labels read "Solitary confinement"; the next "Transportation"; others: "Hard labour." Here I received a shock. The penal colony materialized before my eyes. Ceased to be word and became flesh. (Genet, 177-78)

This description partially resonates with what Foucault calls in *Discipline and Punish* “brandings,” the process by which prison forms inmates into recidivists and delinquents (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 199). Genet is particularly interested in the way in which words literally shape “flesh” by isolating, moving, and working prisoners’ bodies. I read this scene as Genet’s direct engagement with Kafka’s story “In the Penal Colony” (1914), in which a maniacal officer in the title penal colony describes his devotion to an execution apparatus called a Harrow that inscribes the name of the crime on the victim until the point pierces the body of the prisoner and he falls to his death in a pit. A character called simply “the explorer” witnesses its operation and asks regarding the prisoner, “Does he know his sentence?” (Kafka, 197). The officer replies: “No . . . there would be no point in telling him. He’ll learn it on his body” (ibid.). Kafka here allegorizes what Genet attends to in the literal sense: punishments shape the flesh of the punished.

It is with the carceral iteration of a broader social experience of living under the weight of words in mind that Genet presents Divine, *Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs*’s trans feminine heroine. The novel renders her experience of having a body and being called by different accusatory names: queen, *maricon*, fag, invert, bitch, woman. Genet’s novel engages the relation between words and “sex”—a field that is in part linguistic, in part chemical, in part biological. In Genet’s rendering “woman” is, at once, Divine’s sentence, her crime, and therefore, in accordance with Genet’s ethics, the source of her criminal divinity. Her depiction therefore can’t be read through applications of Queer Theory to Modernism that seek to move past woman as an analytic and political category.

In all of the literary work that this project considers, the writer displays the trans characters’ body at a point in the narrative development that interrupts the reader’s previous experience of that character. Recall the evocation of Greenow’s “anatomy too horrible,” the display of Bloom’s vulva into which the doctor plunges his hands, Doctor O’Connor’s keening over her “ruined bird,” and the description of Tiresias’s wrinkled breasts. In each case, the genital and sexed structures of the body erupt into the scene of the literary work, jarring the reader into recognition of the essential truth of the characters’ tortured experience. The novelist or poet reveals the trans womanhood of the character, and it is around the fulcrum of this revelation that the narrative teeters. Theoretical texts replicate this relation to sex by turning to trans life in search of exemplarity. Genet, in contrast, reflects the relation between social identity and embodied sensation, an understanding that trans

feminine life writing reveals. Identity doesn't spring from a single word, say "woman." Rather, sex springs from the many ways that association with that word (both avowed and inflicted) shapes the everyday, the collectivities and antagonisms that that association produces, and the way it feels to live within those collectivities and antagonisms. Genet refutes Armstrong's analytic approach to Lili Elbe, not because Divine's story doesn't include surgery or hormones, but because Genet's depiction grows out of the reality of the lives of women who might consider the wisdom and desirability of surgery and hormones as part of their decisions about their lives. These decisions are informed by questions of material need, safety, and access that Genet lays out for the reader.

#### SHE'S THE LIMIT

*Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs* tells the story of the arrival of the queen Divine on the queer and trans street scene of Montmartre, her partnership with the pimp Darling Daintyfoot, the arrival of a street boy called Our Lady of the Flowers into their lives, and Our Lady's trial for murder. The novel moves back and forth in time with the death of Divine as the returned-to narrative horizon. This queer classic attends to the space of overlap between gay male, trans female, and cis female life, both materially and semiotically. Genet stages a fantasy in this world and placed among other queer and trans characters, the trans feminine figure loses her scandalous anomalousness and her status as an allegorical figure for cis characters to conceptually orbit around. Rather, Genet's characteristically autobiographical narrator expresses the similarity between himself and the queen heroine, breaking the tether that binds the trans feminine to the othering associations that are the seat of her allegorical potential in previous Modernist works and the Queer Theory to come.

The chapters of part 1 of *The New Woman* have revealed the sexological origin and literary appropriation of the early twentieth-century tethering of the trans feminine to diagnostic abstraction. *Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs* demonstrates a Modernist text embedded in another genealogy of trans feminine representation, one that knows and affirms the networks of sociality, care, resistance, and survival (as well as commerce, addiction, violence, and death) that queer and trans people (and trans women in particular) have built, joyed and suffered in, and defended since before the period of this book's focus. This genealogy knows genitals to be plastic material objects that (always and for all of

us) are subject to gendered meanings that arise from sensations, often produced in relation to other bodies. This is the observation of Subject 129 expressed on the level of the social world of Divine and her sister queens. It is the world of Fanny and Stella, Jennie June, and the many trans feminine people that this chapter has surveyed. Genet's participation in this scene teaches him that two queens might feel differently about their bodies and might define sex differently, just as two people of cis experience might. This exposure to trans feminine diversity disrupts the conceptual singularity and fixity through which the trans feminine allegory operates and ensures that his depiction of trans femininity will operate differently.

In Huxley we detect the elements of a trans narrative that borrows from the sexological narrative and lends to the medical and popular currents that coalesce in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*' definition of "gender dysphoria" in the late twentieth century.<sup>20</sup> The origin of this narrative, as is reflected in Huxley, is the locating of inversion in problems surrounding gender deviancy in childhood. In contrast, we meet the adult Divine as "she," as a queen, and it is only later that we learn of Louis Culafroy, the name that Divine was once called (Genet, 73). The truth of Divine is her life in Paris. Her history of rural "boyhood" is distant and not likely to contain the truth of her adult life because "Culafroy became Divine," just as Andreas became Lili Elbe (Hoyer, 294). Genet further reverses the terms of the sexological narrative that so often plays on themes of confusion, stealth, and deception. Divine's life is supremely public and she is forthright about her gender and profession: she is a queen and trades sex for money. It is Divine's mother Ernestine who obscures the facts of Divine's life when she concocts a story of suicide to explain the disappearance of her "son." Like the sexologist's unreliable construction of the trans feminine figure, "Ernestine is perfectly aware how ridiculously literary her act is . . . she has to submit to cheap literature [to make] her even more touching in her own eyes and ours" (Genet, 76). Integration into the family and therefore straight society is the supposed desire that shapes the prescriptions for success in sexological and literary engagements with trans femininity. Divine's escape from family and straight society defines her desire and success. Freud insists that a child becomes a woman under duress; Divine elects womanhood.

We recall the isolation and inscrutability that Dick Greenow feels from his youthful shame at being discovered playing with a dollhouse, to his response to the coded evocation of "coarse" homosexuality, to his

adult despair that no one could understand him. This sense that gender nonconformity is a life sentence for lonely confusion is made sovereign in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM)* for “gender identity disorder,” which requires proof of “clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational or other important areas of functioning” (American Psychological Association, 581). The trans feminine narratives that this chapter has surveyed evidence that the violence of gender surveillance and regulation is a feature of life for gender nonconforming people, in keeping with Huxley and the *DSM*’s depictions. Genet renders this experience of distress as well, but we can learn from the contrast between his rendering and Huxley’s. When she first arrives in Paris, aged twenty, Divine goes to a café in the early hours of the morning and “the whole café thought that the smile of (for the colonel: the invert; for the shopkeepers: the fairy; for the banker and the waiters: the fag; for the gigolos: ‘that one’ . . .) was despicable” (Genet, 82). In this scene Genet lays out the multiple taxonomic terms (both expert and vernacular) by which Divine is derisively called. Each term has its own connotation; presented together they give a sense of a grid of terms by which Divine is attacked at this moment. Elsewhere “*maricona*” (ibid., 123) and “bitch” (ibid., 230) are the words used to refer to Divine, who, like Doctor O’Connor, calls herself a woman. These terms are related to femininity and to homosexuality. They point to the conceptual relation between the former and the latter term. Divine’s femininity exposes her to these terms, a material reality that figures nothing beyond itself in Genet’s account. But, in response to this subjection to a grid of degrading terms, on the level of Genet’s language, of lovely description, Divine smiles. Meeting the violence of the café patrons: “She smiled all around. . . . Divine did not press the point. From a tiny black satin purse she took a few coins, which she laid noiselessly on the marble table” (ibid., 82). Here Genet gives Divine the appellation “full of grace,” and her grace runs against the degradation that the scene inflicts (ibid.).

Later in the novel and later in Divine’s Paris life, Genet repeats this representation of the way in which the fat of resistance marbles the meat of ridicule. In this later scene, Divine actively resists harassment by affirming her association with women. A group of male “hoodlums” bother Divine as she’s leaning on a tree in the boulevard:

“Here’s what I might say,” she thought, “to make them think I’m not upset.” And holding out her hands to the children, with the nails up, she smiles and says, “I’m going to start a

fashion. . . . You see, it's pretty. The we-women and the they-women will have lace drawn on their nails. . . . The three hoodlums felt foolish, and one of them, speaking for the others as well said: "Jesus, she's the limit." They left. (Genet, 211)

Here Divine throws the word "woman" at the feet of the males who inflict feminizing violence. Divine dons the mantle that, from Carpenter to Greenow, gay men have disavowed. If Carpenter worried about the "distinctly effeminate type," here Divine exalts in and makes resistant use of the very feminine qualities that define this type (Carpenter, *The Intermediate Sex*, 30). Divine flaunts the tinselly queenliness by displaying her painted nails, her invented whimsy. It is through this gesture of answering transmisogynist harassment with queenly feminine audacity that Divine imagines her connection with other "we-women" and "they-women," which I read as indicating women of trans and cis experience respectively. In this passage queens are a "we," recalling the sisterhoods of the case studies.

Genet knows that the violent imposition of gender norms and responses to this violence are not the only features of a queen's experience. Queer and trans life and sociality are not the negative space produced by transphobic and homophobic oppression. Rather, these lives and socialities produce their own positive content, and Genet depicts this content and the logics that these scenes produce and operate under. One such quality is the language that the scene innovates to name its reality. The reader learns that

the queens on high had their own special language. Slang . . . was the male tongue. [It was] a secondary sexual attribute. . . . like the colored plumage of male birds . . . Everyone could understand it, but the only ones who could speak it were the men who at birth received as a gift the gesture, the carriage of the hips, legs, and arms, the eyes, the chest, with which one can speak it. (Genet, 100)

Genet's pen loves the hauteur of the queens. Here he notes the equally stylized and manicured manner of the men whose speech decorates them as they strut like roosters. Language is embodied in this account, diffused through the limbs, chest, and carriage. Slang is "a secondary sexual attribute" that determines who is "she" and who is "he." These gendered qualities order the erotic and social world of the streets and



garrets of Divine's queendom. When Divine wants to attract Our Lady, who desires masculine men: "she tried for male gestures . . . so unskillfully [that they became] a sort of embittered swish" (Genet, 143). Attempts at speaking the language of masculinity fail, revealing Divine's femininity to be essential to her.

Dressing is another social practice of gender, and its particular importance to trans feminine sociality and understanding was demonstrated by Subject 129's repeated return to the subject. Genet outlines Divine's dress in minute and painterly detail. The first night that she arrives in Paris she wore a

champagne silk short-sleeved blouse, a pair of blue trousers stolen from a sailor, and leather sandals. . . . When the tea was brought, she drank it . . . in tiny little sips (a pigeon), putting down and lifting her cup with her pinkie in the air. Here is a portrait of her: her hair is brown and curly; with the curls spilling over her eyes and down her cheeks . . . Her forehead is somewhat round and smooth. Her eyes sing, despite their despair, and their melody moves from her eyes to her teeth, to which she gives life, and from her teeth to all her movements, to her slightest acts, and this charm, which emerges from her eyes, unfurls in wave upon wave, down to her carefree feet. Her body is fine as amber. (Genet, 82)

Genet depicts trans feminine life and sociality in terms that are local to these scenes. The practices of language, naming, and dressing in the novel reflect Genet's involvement with trans feminine life. Through this literary practice, trans femininity is released from its obligation to represent a symbolic threat to masculinity and heterosexuality. Genet depicts the actual, material experiences of gender enforcement and Divine's resistance to this enforcement. We see queens harassed on the street, but the beautiful description of their retorts bites back. Genet notices the exact color of the silk of her blouse, the arrangement of her curls, the fineness of her amber body. Champagne, amber, brown: this is the palette of her. These details, cultivated by the queens of Genet's acquaintance and observed and transcribed by Genet, vivify the subtle significance of marks of gender in costume and grooming that express sex and gender identities.

Genet's novel demonstrates that this social sphere reflects a theory of sexual difference that emerges from the experiences of gender non-

conforming people. Genet introduces literary operations that reflect this understanding because his novel has abandoned the installation of the trans feminine as a stock character and figural wellspring. As we've seen throughout this book, the transsexual's rejection of her genitals and the desire for their alteration is a central component of the medical understanding of transsexuality that grounded previous literary engagements. Medical and literary texts laid bare the bodies of their subjects as evidence of the necessity to change them. In sexological narratives we find descriptions and measurements of parts of the body, especially those associated with sex assignment. In Huxley's final figure in *Greenow*, for instance, Pearl wishes to hide her genital organs and Dick struggles to reveal these organs as evidence of his true sex.<sup>21</sup> Genet's text departs from this tradition to reflect embodied sexual difference that does not conform to cis logic. The novel explains the sex difference between Divine and her masculine lover, Gorgui: "Divine thinks about that tongue of his which is so strong while hers is so soft. Everything about Divine is soft. . . . Divine is she-who-is-soft. . . . whose tool is supple. With Gorgui, all is hard" (Genet, 190). As was the case in Subject 129's account, Genet reveals an understanding of genitals as bearers of sexed sensation and sex as a product of social meaning. As is the case with Jennie June's account of embodiment, this operation relates to the signs "man" and "woman," but the factors that yoke a person to one or the other of these terms have to do with social role and with the ways in which sensation provokes desire for the penetrative or receptive uses of body parts in sex. Here softness and hardness are the ontological indicators of the sex of these bodies. *Molle* (soft) is a French vernacular term for a trans feminine person.

In Genet's text the social and sensate components of embodiment are ordered by (and in turn reinforce) gender roles. The most iconic instance of gender difference is between "she who is soft," Divine, and her domineering male partner and pimp, Darling Daintyfoot. The essence of Darling is that "he rams it in. So hard and calmly that anuses and vaginas slip onto his member like rings on a finger" (Genet, 116). This queer milieu knows that all bodies are penetrable and therefore vulnerable to social feminization, but it also knows that those who live under the mark of the feminine bear the social implications of that fact. Divine's queer and trans milieu doesn't divide acts of penetration into "heterosexual" and "homosexual," nor does it distance itself from Carpenter's "vulgar" act. Rather, Genet reflects the reality that the scene understands power as male and penetrative and lack of power as fe-

male and penetrated. Fanny and Stella endure the violent effects of this understanding at the hands of the police and their doctor colleagues. This is a theory of sex that resembles the description of the sensation of vaginal receptivity that Subject 129 reports, but, of course, in that case this understanding does not link the feminine with powerlessness.

This passage reflects the reality of gender that Genet knows because he witnesses this understanding that orders the sexual and social sphere in which he travels. He experiences this understanding on his own body during sexual encounters in which men treat him in ways that are not very different than the way Darling treats Divine. In this experience penetration is gendering. It is in this reality that Genet finds the interest of trans and queer experience, not in its potential to figure something outside of itself. It is here that he finds the potential for political metaphor. Darling “has the penetrating force of the battalions of blond warriors who on June 14, 1940 buggered us soberly” (Genet, 116). In a Fanonian mode, for Genet, phallic sexuality explains the hypermasculinity of war, invasion, and occupation. Genet’s interest in the metaphorical possibility of male sexuality repays some of the loan extracted from female sexuality and female nudity in the sexological tradition and in the literary texts that proceed in a sexological tradition that require the display of feminized bodies as the seat of scientific or aesthetic truth.<sup>22</sup>

This trans understanding of sexual difference does not occasion the dismantling of the categories of man and woman. Rather, Genet outlines the material basis for the persistence of heterosexism in this social milieu. The sexual division of labor and arrangement of violence is the material base that grounds these relationships. The relationship of Divine and Darling is formed around their roles as sex worker and pimp. Her boyfriend is also her boss in this commercial arrangement. The political economy of Divine and Darling’s life is organized around both Divine’s criminalized sex work and her domestic labor. This dual labor that reproduces Divine and Darling as woman and man is reflected in their daily schedule: “they eat breakfast in the afternoon. During the day they sleep and listen to the radio. Toward evening, they primp and go out. At night, as is the practice, Divine hustles on the Place Blanche and Darling goes to the movies” (Genet, 89). The sexual division of labor orders the domestic sphere as well: “Divine loves her man. She bakes pies for him and butters his roast” (ibid., 95).

Genet’s depiction of Divine’s labors both confirms and recasts the housekeeping that Hirschfeld’s Subject Three finds to be gender-confirming. As in the case study, in *Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs*, domestic

work confirms womanhood. In this case, however, Divine does women's work for her boyfriend under the condition of abuse and the threat of abandonment. From this material basis springs a set of gendered abusive behaviors. Darling hits Divine "right and left, with the merciless speed of misfortune, two slaps to shut her up, shrank her like a greyhound" (Genet, 122). Despite this violence, Divine is bound to Darling and she understands her desire in the idiom of "a poor old woman who wonders: 'Will he love me?'" (ibid., 158). Darling refers to Divine with misogynist epithets; after "Darling tried to pick a quarrel with Divine so he could leave her. He found nothing to quarrel about. That made him furious with her. He called her a bitch and left" (ibid., 98). The insults and interpersonal violence that Divine endures recall the treatment that Jennie June reports at the hands of her partners. However, Genet's novel depicts that violence as a sustained gender relation between intimate partners, in which the woman partner's labor is necessary to her male partner but still unvalued. This lack of value bleeds into her own lack of value in her relation to the man. It is she, Divine, who wonders if she will be left by her valued male partner.

This gendered structure of violence and desire also characterizes the relation of queen to the police, and her vulnerability to police violence is another point of commonality between Divine's life in Montmartre and the chapter's trans feminine life writing. Divine is subject to repeated arrest, and she manages even that experience with audacity and panache. In one example she is picked up "on the boulevard" where "policemen have stopped Divine, who is tipsy. She is singing the *Veni Creator* in a shrill voice. . . . they take Divine to the station" (Genet, 111). Her experience in jail reflects the role of sexuality in the experience of imprisonment for trans feminine people. She is both vulnerable to sexual violence and uses her sexual appeal to navigate arrest and incarceration. Upon arrest "she rubs against [the police officers], and they each get a hard-on, squeeze her more tightly, and stumble on purpose in order to tangle their thighs with hers" (ibid., 111). This passage speaks to the particular sexual violence that is a feature of life for both those cis women whose lives are criminalized and for all trans women whose existence as trans women is criminalized.

Divine doesn't suffer alone. Rather, trans women, "the little queens, both young and old," gather to witness her arrest. They "see Divine going off, borne away to the music of the grave nuptial hymn, the *Veni Creator*" and "cry out" with drama and gay in-jokes that express both the seriousness of police violence and the fun that they make of this

common experience: “‘They’re going to put her in irons!’ ‘Like a sailor!’ ‘Like a convict!’ ‘Like a woman in childbirth!’ . . . Divine being led away by the arm, and her sisters bewailing her” (Genet, 112). These women are also there to greet Divine upon her release. When she is

again at her post on the boulevard. Her blue eyelid is swollen: “My God, Beauties, I almost passed out. The policemen held me up. They were all standing around me fanning me with their checked handkerchiefs. They were the Holy Women wiping my face. My Divine Face.” (Genet, 112)

Genet depicts masculine violence as the organizing structure of gender both on the level of interpersonal relationships and on the level of gendered and sexualized structures of state power. This is one way that the text denaturalizes male sex on the level of gendered social structures.

Another crucial aesthetic innovation of Genet’s text performs a mirror denaturalizing of sex on the level of intimate, interpersonal relationships to bodies and gender. In this second innovation, Genet converts the violent patriarch’s penis into an object of aesthetic pleasure. Genet exposes the desire for masculinity that sexology heterosexualized through the metaphor of inversion and that early gay rights writing recast as spiritual rather than bodily. Genet’s feminist scandal is that he aestheticizes, enjoys, and (through writing) dominates the bodies and characteristics that define cis manhood. These bodies are distinguished by their association with a symbolic of the penis, but it is phallic social identity that actually codes them as masculine. Darling is “the Eternal . . . in the form of a pimp” whose passing “makes [the street queens] prattle [cease]” (Genet, 69). Darling Daintyfoot is powerful in the Montmartre scene, but he is also an object that is desired by both cis men and women of trans experience. Genet aestheticizes and abstracts this patriarch’s body into anonymous beauty, into the shape of his genitals which Divine possesses and uses: “Darling’s penis is in itself all of Darling: the object of [Divine’s] pure luxury” (ibid., 116). This is a literary operation that undoes Freud’s critical metaphor of castration. Genet detaches the fixed meaning of phallicism from the penis, while simultaneously insisting on the social reality of phallicism. Genet’s literary treatment insists that men can be objects of female desire and deftly demonstrates that this sexual dynamic, the desire that figures the penis as an object of aestheticized sexual desire, doesn’t reorder the social categories of man and woman. The social power that is represented by phallicism, the social

violence that is organized in this way, endures. This depiction fully denaturalizes the link between penis and phallic power that Freud's metaphor and its many cultural appropriations reproduces.

In its particulars this attitude toward penises seems far from the case study subjects' accounts that dislodge cis understandings of genitals. But Divine's relation to Darling's genitals amounts to the same thing. Genitals are meaningful to the extent that they are invested with meaning. Female identity can reside in a variety of attitudes that individual women have to their genitals. Desire for men can be located in a desirous relation to that man's genitals. In neither case does assigned sex establish the meaning of genitals.

From Huxley to Joyce, the scandal of trans feminine figurality is rooted in the assumption that trans feminine genitals are objects with fixed meaning and that the reader will receive a moment of clarifying shock when the novelist bares them. In his treatment of Darling's penis, Genet relocates the representational burden onto cis men's genitals. In this way, Genet abolishes the very assumption that there is something specific about trans women that ties them to a representative function. Genet's immodest aestheticizing of Darling's penis, like the figural engagement with male phallicism that explains war and other violences, further free the trans woman from her particular figural status.

To clarify this point, contrast this description of Darling's beauty with the physical descriptions of Divine we have encountered. In this novel, trans feminine beauty is particular, audacious, and noble. Its exploration is personal and specific. Divine's beauty is the filigree of her personhood. The beauty of Genet's language comes from her and is alone adequate to evoke her. Her physical beauty, however, is an analogue to her other graces. Take, for example, "Divine's kindness . . . she is scrupulously kind. One day in a police wagon, on the way back from court . . . she asks an old man 'How many?' He answers: 'They slapped me with three years. What about you?' She's down for only two, but answers: 'Three years'" (Genet, 115). For Genet, this daily kindness showed by the criminalized toward the criminalized constitutes all of politics, ethics, and divinity.

In contrast, Darling is a gruff and graceless blank who bears a beautiful and useful genital object. It is his proximity to Divine, his involvement with her, that makes him worthy of particular notice. Divine is the artist and Darling the muse. Like Genet, she converts her male lover into an object, his penis into a synecdoche. His penis is invested with phallic significance because of his social manhood. In the death "of the tangible

him there remains . . . only the plaster cast that Divine herself made of his cock” (Genet, 70). This is Darling’s death mask. Genet’s literary description of Divine’s creation is the ultimate indicator of the mingling of Genet and Divine, writer and character, cis gay man and queen. It is a fundamental repudiation of cis gay male attempts to taxonomize the trans feminine in order to disavow any relation between cis gay men and trans women.

In her joyous desire Divine violates the female imperative to suffer and the trans imperative to become an explanatory cypher. She does suffer hunger, cold, physical abuse, emotional maltreatment, arrest, incarceration, threats of abandonment, economic exploitation by a sexist pimp, and the daily dangers of being a woman who does criminalized sex work. Within the violent contours of her life, Divine’s body is for her own pleasure and she takes pleasure where she can get it. Her trans experience is a fact of her life and, like her trans feminine sisters of the life writing, she doesn’t solicit explanations nor does she apologize. Her queenliness is itself a daily triumph of being. Genet pens her blasphemous hagiography, and the fundamental quality that it documents is her riotous, resistant pleasure in being alive. As Divine dies,

she did what she thought fitting: she made gestures. Her whole body was then seized with a frenzy to remain behind. She made some gestures of frightful despair, other gestures of hesitation, of timid attempts to find the right way, to cling to earth and not rise to heaven. . . . In space she kept devising new and barbaric forms for herself, for she sensed intuitively that immobility makes it easy for God to get you in a good wrestling hold and carry you off. So she danced. While walking. Everywhere. Her body was always manifesting itself. Manifesting a thousand bodies. (Genet, 307)

Everything that is lovely about Divine is not displayed but rather expressed. The feminine remainder roosts in pigeon sips, rises with her pinky, walks with a mincing step that is revealed as dancing. Divine, the self-proclaimed “Lady of High Pansiness,” manifests her body (Genet, 305). She devises new forms of movement and through motion her body is many bodies. From her smile on entering Montmartre to this last rage against death, Divine manifests feminine resistance in response to the ontological situation in which she finds herself. Her experience is defined by the material relations of sexual difference, but trans feminine

experience reveals that sexual difference does not operate according to cis logic. All bodies are penetrable and genitals gain sexed meaning through their bearers' experiences of desire and violence. Incarceration, domestic work, and sex work are gendering experiences. Trans feminine narratives reveal this relation between bodies and identities.

"[Divine] wants to die with dignity," Genet observes in one of his many returns to this framing narrative event (Genet, 110). Near the middle of the novel, Divine is holding court at a bar with Darling and other queens. Her characteristic "coronet of false pearls" falls from her head and the bar-goers shout with "malicious joy" that "Divine is uncrowned! . . . She's the great Fallen One!" (ibid., 203). As they swarm to snatch the pearls from the ground, Divine laughs, plucks her bridge from her mouth, places it on her head, and with "her heart in her throat, but victorious" she cries, "Dammit all, Ladies, I'll be queen anyhow!" (ibid., 204). "Nobility is glamorous," Genet tells us on this occasion (ibid.). This victorious self-affirmation and riotous sociality recall the trans women that this chapter has surveyed. When Divine laughs, she laughs with this lineage of trans women at any medical or literary endeavor to contain the overabundant trans feminine or to put her to conceptual work.

The trans feminine allegory that reappears in the texts of Queer Theory relies on two assumptions about trans feminine people. First, the operation of the allegory requires that trans women are assumed to be categorically different from cis women. It depends upon trans woman being held apart from the category of woman in order that she can then be installed as a figure for woman. The life writing presented in this chapter proves that trans women were not categorically distinct from cis women; rather, their experiences overlapped. Second, the operation of the allegory requires that all trans women are the same. In particular, the allegory rests on the assumption of a single understanding of embodiment that defines trans womanhood. This understanding is based on the idea that trans women have male bodies that might be subject to sex change. This life writing likewise demonstrates that rather than a consistent definition of female embodiment, trans women provide a variety of models for describing their experiences and bodies. Divine's experience is shaped by her categorical relation to women, both cis and trans. She doesn't experience her body as male or her sex as subject to change. Rather, her depiction, like those of the trans feminine life writing, requires the reader to dispense with cis definitions of sex. These renderings disrupt the assumptions that ground the theoretical iteration of the trans feminine allegory, as well as the assumptions that ground



the medical and popular engagement with trans women throughout the twentieth century and beyond.

Magnus Hirschfeld's Institute for Sexual Science was destroyed by the Nazis in 1933. The pyre featured in the famous photographs of Nazi book burning was fueled by the texts of the institute's library (Meyerowitz, 20–21). Doubtless among the burned books and papers were thousands of documents of trans feminine life from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that were lost to history in a day. The Nazi targeting of sexological research and the broader social disorder produced by World War II disrupted the international community of sexologists that existed in Europe before the war. The center of sex change after the war was the United States. There was, in fact, a direct transmission from the former to the latter. Harry Benjamin, the American expert on sex change, learned from Magnus Hirschfeld and personally hosted him on his visit to the United States in 1930 (Meyerowitz, 46–50). Despite the transmission of technical and sexological knowledge, the postwar period saw a retreat from Hirschfeld's queer and trans service model and the return of the previous sexological model that defines trans people as sick and doctors as saviors. University research centers at Johns Hopkins and UCLA provided services but also did research on trans patients.

This period also saw the consolidation of a singular life story of the transsexual woman in popular consciousness. This story was popularized through the wide circulation of two “first” trans stories: Christine Jorgensen's in the United States beginning in 1952 and Roberta Cowell's in the United Kingdom in 1954. These stories offered many isolated trans women their first indication that other people of trans experience existed. Jorgensen's and Cowell's narratives attested to many of the conditions of trans feminine life revealed in the writing that this chapter reads. These works also, however, established a set of narrative conventions that, because these stories were the only ones available, created a set of expectations that all trans women are held to throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century.

Jorgensen's story was “the most written-about topic in the media” during the year 1952 (Stryker, *Transgender History*, 47). She debuted her version in a five-part article entitled “The Story of My Life” in *American Weekly* in March 1953. This series (and the subsequent memoir and film) told the story of a working-class youth who always felt like a girl. She managed to get estrogen from a pharmacist without a prescription and sought and received genital surgery in Denmark (Jorgensen vii).

Upon her return to the United States, Jorgensen found herself a celebrity. The newspaper stories scrutinized her clothing, voice, body, and the medical details of her story. What followed was a tense dynamic between a press hungry for sensation and Jorgensen, who sought to maintain her dignity. Newspaper reporters made insinuations about her sexual life, her inauthentic womanhood, and made jokes at her expense. Jorgensen responded by insisting that she was a normal middle-class woman. Jorgensen poignantly expressed the effect of this press attention: “Unlike other women . . . I had to be a super-female. I couldn’t have one single masculine trait” (qtd. in Meyerowitz, 79).

Newspapers in England first showed interest in Roberta Cowell’s story in the wake of the press attention paid to Jorgensen. Fearing the seemingly inevitable exposure, Cowell sold her memoir for serialized publication in the *Picture Post* in 1954 for (a badly needed) 20, 000 pounds (Kennedy, 103–4). Cowell’s story contrasted with Jorgensen’s in some ways. She had been married and a parent, and rather than a history of effeminacy, she reported a past as a normatively gendered man who had an abrupt shift to female identity. Cowell reports that she had always had a uterus and the trauma that she endured during World War II had caused the uterus to begin producing estrogen. For this reason, she did not consider her surgery to be a sex change but rather as the medical response to an intersex condition (Kennedy, 130–32). In her 1954 memoir, Cowell also states frankly that she could not be female without surgical intervention. She says that “she has no desire to become a freak” (Cowell, 107).

Both women’s stories are examples of trans feminine life writing, but their publication marks the beginning of a very different kind of trans feminine narrative. Both women were World War II veterans whose “male” identities were centered as the start of their stories. Both memoirs emphasized that their authors were not gay men and rigorously distanced them from gay and trans feminine sociality. Both presented themselves as trapped women who, after attaining female social identity, were chaste. Both emphasized their conservative values, particularly their conservative sexual mores. Both emphasized familial narratives. These works share some of the narrative conventions of Lili Elbe’s *Man into Woman*. Jorgensen and Cowell center doctors who star in the salvation narrative that makes them women. These texts contribute to the social amnesia that posits trans femininity as new. The stories these memoirs tell are in line with Armstrong’s notion that Elbe’s story is an example of “Modernist medicine.”

These two women's stories established a set of narrative conventions that defined the popular understanding of trans women in the late twentieth century. This popular understanding reinforced a medical narrative that defined trans women by their pursuit of genital surgery. Their narratives brought to the mainstream public all the hopes and fears that sexologists, Freud, and the literary Modernists brought to their engagement with trans femininity in the early twentieth century. Lili Elbe, Christine Jorgensen, and Roberta Cowell's stories enter the historical record already in the allegorical form that sexology innovated and Freud suggested had figural meaning. The questions that guide their entry into public life and the frame in which their stories are allowed to be told emphasize that their "changes" represent technological innovation and the growing tolerance of society for difference. In other words, these women's most personal identities and the most intimate details of their bodies and desires are solicited to be evaluated for what they supposedly reveal about changing times in the post-World War II moment.

The media engagement with Jorgensen and Cowell established stories like theirs as the emblem of complete and correct trans femininity. This was a trans feminine respectability narrative that disavowed association with anal sex, prostitution, or the trans feminine social scenes. This produced a fissure between the aspirational street queen and the trans woman who is a miracle of science in the transmisogynist framing. This made Fanny and Stella, Jennie June, and Frances Thompson inscrutable on a much broader scale than the more limited popular circulation of Lili Elbe's story had. The lives of trans women who lived outside of medicalization became narratives of historical imprisonment, unfulfilled wishes, and incomplete experience. The 2000 British documentary *Changing Sex* begins with the observation that before 1930

people who felt they were trapped in the wrong bodies had only one escape, to cross dress. All that changed seventy years ago when it became possible to change sex. A man could be turned into a woman and a woman could become a man. This is the story of the transsexual. It's one of confusion . . . misdiagnosis . . . of scandal . . . of success but most of all it's a story of courage.

This framing sums up the popular understanding of the history of trans experience.<sup>23</sup> The story begins in 1930 when Magnus Hirschfeld, "the father of transgenderism," provided the first genital surgery and the

story develops from there.<sup>24</sup> This common understanding insists that womanhood is defined by a vagina and incentivizes the disappearance of the stories of women with penises that this chapter reads. This centering of Jorgensen and Cowell's stories and the neglect of material in the archive of nineteenth and early twentieth-century trans feminine life writing considered previously in this chapter laid the groundwork for the revival of the trans feminine allegory in the late twentieth century.

Part 2 of *The New Woman*, "Materialist Trans Feminism against Queer Theory," takes two passes through the intellectual engagement with the trans feminine from the 1970s to the early twenty-first century. First, chapter 5 outlines Queer Theory's revival of the Modernist allegory of trans femininity from the intellectual foundation of the field in the 1970s. Second, chapter 6 outlines the intellectual tradition that *The New Woman* calls Materialist Trans Feminism. This genealogy of thought grows out of trans feminine experiences that remained largely consistent throughout the long twentieth century. These texts politicize sex work, policing, transmisogyny, and other sources of trans women's precarity. They vigorously refute the generalizing of cis understandings of sex and offer a feminist theory of female embodiment that does not assume cis experience. They affirm the many kinds of experiences that collectively define trans women's experience. They look past the centered stories of individual trans women and reflect the experience of trans collectivities. These texts also remark on the shallow history of trans feminine stories that were available to the writers of these very texts as they grew into their own trans feminine identities. This book attempts to contribute to the revelation of the depth of trans feminine life from the late nineteenth century to the early twenty-first century. This chapter has sought to evidence that trans women's lives have not been on a path from entrapment and isolation to medical perfecting and visibility. Rather, trans feminine people and socialities have been erased. The words that trans women have written have been repurposed to valorize experts. The understanding of bodies that trans feminine socialities produce has not been generalized in medicine, popular representation, or theoretical writing. It has been the aim of part 1 to demonstrate the history of that process from its origin in the mid-nineteenth century to its popular dissemination after World War II. It will be the aim of part 2 to demonstrate the effects of this process on late twentieth-century theory and highlight the emergence of Materialist Trans Feminism as not only a way forward, but as a calling back to the marginalized trans feminine thought that this chapter has considered.

PART II

# Materialist Trans Feminism against Queer Theory



## A Triumphant Plural

### *Post-Structuralism, Queer Theory, and the Trans Feminine*

In nineteenth-century texts there is a stereotypical portrait of the homosexual or invert: not only his mannerisms, his bearing, the way he gets dolled up, his coquetry, but also his facial expressions, his anatomy, the feminine morphology of his whole body . . . the repulsive aura that surrounds [this image] has come down through the centuries.

—Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*

[The] impersonation of women [by the actress Divine] implicitly suggests that gender is a kind of persistent impersonation that passes as the real. Her/his performance destabilizes the very distinctions between the natural and the artificial, depth and surface, inner and outer through which discourses about genders almost always operate.

—Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*

What it therefore meant I could not discover. It simply *was* so.

—Lili Elbe, *Man into Woman*

Foucault's "stereotypical portrait" of a repulsive feminine body that makes coquettish gestures recalls the most famous passage of his more famous first volume of *The History of Sexuality*. In this famous passage Foucault observes that nineteenth-century sexual science attributed to the homosexual "species" an "internal androgyny, a hermaphroditism of the soul" (*History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, 43). In both passages, Foucault concedes to the sexological framing of trans femininity as an indicator of desire for men in order to critique the medical natural-

izing of sexuality inherent to this framing. His tone recalls Carpenter's disavowal of the "mincing lisping effeminate."<sup>1</sup> What may seem like incidental evocations of trans femininity in fact reflect Foucault's theoretical re-entrenchment of the sexological attitude that trans femininity is an indicator of male homosexuality. In other words, Foucault fails to distinguish between "the invert" and "the homosexual," a distinction that became very meaningful by the 1890s. The historical material of chapter 4 demonstrates the process through which trans femininity emerges as a cultural field that is related to both cis femininity and male homosexuality but is distinct from both as well. Foucault's inattention to the historical redrawing of these distinctions is an internal limit to his historical foundation for theorizing the emergence of sexuality in the late nineteenth century.

In order to derive a theory of this historical emergence, we must leave the confessional to consult histories of sex work, working-class women, and colonial attitudes regarding non-heteronormative sexuality. Sexuality is not organized by the singular chill of the medical and sociological incorporation of the sodomite into the homosexual, who is then dogged by the "stereotype" of a supposed "internal androgyny." Rather, the material realities of the fin-de-siècle fairy: the reality of sexual assault, gendered division of labor, and the bureaucratization of sex and gender define the conditions of the specific emergence of trans womanhood. This approach reflects that trans femininity is an experience that, in Lili Elbe's words, simply "was so" requiring no medical explanation nor providing any explanation for male homosexuality or any other social category.

Following chapter 4's attention to Genet, we need look no further than Judith Butler's reading of the actor Divine to observe the effect of Foucault's elision of trans femininity on the field of Queer Theory. Beginning in the 1970s, the actor Divine took the stage name of Genet's iconic Modernist heroine as he played trans feminine roles and became a star of John Waters's Dreamlanders company.<sup>2</sup> In the passage of *Gender Trouble* (1990) cited among this chapter's epigraphs, Butler states that Divine's performance "implicitly suggests" the "destabilization of sex."<sup>3</sup> The trans feminine writing of chapter 4 amply demonstrates that trans femininity, historically, has not destabilized the categories of man and woman. What happens if we read Divine not as an effect on the cis understanding of sex, but in relation to a history of trans feminine representation? We recognize that the actor Divine cobbled together every quality that from Carpenter to Foucault gay male intellectuals have



run. She violated the narrative conventions of aspirational womanhood and medical perfectability through which the sensational media allowed Lili Elbe, Christine Jorgensen, and Roberta Cowell representation and the responsibility of representing all trans women. Her aesthetic of excess, her exaggerated makeup, her disinterest in being demure: Divine was Gide's nightmare of feminine artificiality. She is the feminine remainder and cannot be folded into heterosexuality. She is the epitome of the "tacky queen" who, by donning the name of Genet's heroine, affirms her association with sex work. Like her Modernist namesake, she refuses to be perfected medically or otherwise because she is already Divine. Here as elsewhere in *Gender Trouble*, Butler fixes the trans feminine as a critical figure for the general construction of sex and gender, rather than a category with its own history and theoretical insights. Inattention to trans femininity as a genealogy of experience allows this critical installation.

This chapter argues that this installation of trans femininity as a figure for the breakdown of sex dates back to a theoretical impasse in texts of the 1970s that served as the epistemological foundations of the academic field of Queer Theory. This amounts to a revival of the Modernist figure and does not reflect the fundamental challenge to the transparency of the meaning of genitals and the supremacy of doctors and bureaucrats as the arbiters of sex that the trans feminine life writing of chapter 4 outlines. This challenge has been transmitted through trans feminine cultural forms for more than a hundred years despite every effort (rhetorical, medical, bureaucratic, juridical, and criminological) to deny trans feminine existence. The theoretical distillation of trans woman as a figure erases this history and its actual theoretical import.

The first significant example of this foundational impasse is Roland Barthes's *S/Z* (1970). Barthes reads the trans feminine castrato La Zambinella as an ontological threat to manhood and the end of sexual difference, but ignores Balzac's meditation on the category of woman that includes the possibility of non-cis experience. In his introduction to her memoirs, published in 1980, Foucault claims that Herculine Barbin's childhood license for flexible gender and adult subjection to bureaucratic gender enforcement reflects the passage into the age of sexual truth that has formed the understanding of bodies and sex acts since the late nineteenth century. To make this claim, Foucault must ignore Barbin's avowals of girlhood and sorority with other girls and women. This chapter argues that Barthes and Foucault unknowingly read their nineteenth-century texts through the Modernist allegory of trans femininity. These thinkers take for granted the notion that trans women are

uniquely suited to be figures that clarify the theoretical and historical operation of sex. This assumption indicates the centrality of the allegory into the 1970s.<sup>4</sup>

For texts of Queer Theory beginning in 1990, in the Post-Structuralist critical lineage, trans woman *is* internal difference and therefore she cannot have any identity; in her internal plurality she cannot *differ from* her trans sister without interrupting her positioning as a stable ground for theory. Like Freud and the literary Modernists, queer theorists avoid the historical specificity of the trans feminine by positioning her as a critical figure. She is available to represent “the horror of castration” or “historical change” because theorists and novelists convert her into an explanatory figure for the operation of sex in general. This conversion obviates the need to engage with trans femininity as a field of experience with its own history and theoretical provocations.

This chapter ends by proposing historical touchstones that clarify the historical emergence of trans femininity when theorized in the methodological tradition of Foucault. As we have seen in previous chapters, histories of sex work, sexology, and working-class life in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries reveal the conditions in which trans femininity became a distinct social category during the period. When we introduce histories of colonial projects in that same moment, the theoretical stakes become clear. This argument draws from postcolonial histories to demonstrate that the heterosexualization of society was an important facet of the project of bringing European-style centralized state formations to colonized places. This heterosexualization was achieved in many places through the criminalizing and cultural disappearing of erotic arrangements in which male-assigned people had sexual and romantic relationships with each other. This process established that sex is the basis of sexual pairing and genitals are the basis of sex. This was an internal and an external colonization, through which the denizens of the urban trans and queer milieu were criminalized as barbarians and the supposed barbarians of the East were shamed for their gender-deviant depravity. This is the story of the colonial disavowal of sexual mores that violate European standards of heteronormativity and the elite disavowal of the working-class reality that male-assigned trans feminine people operated socially as women. The position of trans femininity at the center of these developments explains the peculiar investment in trans femininity as a cipher for historical changes in the understanding of sex in the Modernist moment, Barthes and Foucault’s 1970s, and the Queer Theory of the 1990s.

## BARTHES AND FOUCAULT ALCHEMIZE THE TRANS HEROINE

We begin with texts by Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault that reveal the presence of the trans allegory as a conceptual spur at the very moment of transition from Structuralist to Post-Structuralist theories of sex.<sup>5</sup> Each thinker looks back from the 1970s toward the nineteenth century and focuses his attention on a trans feminine figure, one a fictional character and the other a historical figure who authored a memoir. In his essay *S/Z*, Roland Barthes considers Balzac's novella *Sarrasine*, the story of the title French sculptor's hapless pursuit of the Italian castrato Zambinella, whom Sarrasine reads as a woman. Barthes finds at the heart of this text the void left by its heroine's absent organ, and the troubling reverberations that this castration sounds. Michel Foucault introduces the newly discovered memoirs of Herculine Barbin, a nineteenth-century French intersex woman, which he reads as a document of a life lived without the constraint of sex identity, until the state insists that Barbin is male. For Barthes, following Freud, the trans feminine Zambinella represents the psychic straitjacket of castration. For Foucault, Herculine represents the freedom of sexuality without sexual difference. The opposed critical functions that these interlocutors attach to nineteenth-century trans feminine figures are examples of, as Rita Felski puts it, "diverging views of the transgendered subject as a figure of either apocalypse or redemption" in the theoretical work of the late twentieth century (Felski, 139).

These critical texts emerge at moments of realignment in the thought of each philosopher. *S/Z* marks Barthes's first sustained elaboration of the role of double entendre and multiple meaning, operations that illuminate the play within the structures of language. As Judith Butler notes, Foucault's discovery of Herculine Barbin in 1974 corresponds with his refocus from operations of disciplinary institutional power in *Discipline and Punish* to modalities of proliferating discursive power that finds only its terminal form in the institution, which he outlines in *History of Sexuality: Volume One* (Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 95). For both the semiotician-philosopher and the historian-philosopher, an encounter with the trans feminine provides an ideal conceptual vehicle, a kind of catalyst, for a critical practice that exposes the internal difference of signification. For Barthes, Zambinella's bodily enigma breaks open the fixed meaning of the literary text. For Foucault, Barbin's bodily ambivalence exposes the ensnaring meaning-making apparatus of genital sexual difference that drops on humanity like a guillotine during the very years of Barbin's life.

Barbara Johnson writes that “if human beings were not divided into two biological sexes, there would probably be no need for literature,” affirming the tenet of deconstructive literary analysis and philosophy that cites sexual difference as the base unit of difference. In her reading, Barthes misreads Balzac when the philosopher aligns himself with the novella’s protagonist and not its author. While *Sarrasine* might be obliterated by the revelation of castration, as Barthes argues, it is *Sarrasine*’s initial credulity toward the unity of the feminine and the subsequent revelation of the actual internal difference of the feminine that is Balzac’s literary achievement (Johnson, 111). In this moment Johnson identifies in Balzac a proto-Modernist variation of the allegory of trans femininity that I identify in this project. Johnson then repeats this allegory by reducing Balzac’s heroine to her castration, to “the literalization of the ‘difference within’ which prevents any subject from coinciding with itself” (ibid., 10). It is my contention that both Barthes’s and Johnson’s critical accounts neglect the richest element of Balzac’s work: his deft rendering of *La Zambinella*’s difficult predicament as a castrato who passes for a time as a woman, an experience that parallels trans feminine experience.

Published in 1830, *Sarrasine* opens with an unnamed narrator rousing himself from a daydream to survey the elegant party guests assembled in the mansion of the De Lanty family of the Faubourg Saint-Honore district of Paris. The family is of mysterious national origin, and its jewel is the beautiful sixteen-year-old Marianina, who contrasts with a mysterious and sickly relative who perambulates her. The narrator is occupied with his task of engaging the attention of a young woman party-goer who is intrigued and disquieted by this ghostly relative whose sex is in question. The narrator capitalizes on the young woman’s curiosity by promising to explain the history of the mysterious figure if she will allow him to visit her the following evening. The young woman relents and the narrator visits her house to tell the story that will comprise the rest of the text.

This story within the novella is that of the young, homely, and destitute French sculptor *Sarrasine* who travels to Rome to study the city’s ruins and masterpieces and finds there a transcendent muse, the opera’s soprano prima donna *La Zambinella*. From the moment she takes to the stage of the Argentine Theatre *Sarrasine* resolves to “possess her,” returning to the theater night after night to stare at the object of his obsession (Balzac, 40). Eventually, his nightly presence and singular focus become conspicuous and he is approached by an old woman who

invites him to a soiree that La Zambinella will attend. Amid the debauched atmosphere of the gathering and the potentially mean-spirited looks of encouragement bestowed upon the besotted sculptor by his fellow guests, Sarrasine finds Zambinella reserved and charmingly naive and timid: a feminine ideal. He chases her out of the dining room and into an adjacent boudoir, where she threatens him with a knife and exhorts him to cease his pursuit. He refuses and is persuaded by another partygoer to attend a party at an ambassador's home where Zambinella will perform. He arrives to find her dressed as a man and, horrified, he is informed that she is not a "she" but "[the] kind of creature [that] perform the roles of women in the Papal State," a castrato (*ibid.*, 40). When confronted, Zambinella does not deny that she is a castrato and reveals that her flirtation had been a joke played for the amusement of her friends. First incredulous, then heartbroken, then enraged, Sarrasine plots to abduct Zambinella. Having done so, he vacillates about whether to kill her when into his studio burst three men who kill Sarrasine on the behalf of Cardinal Cicognara, Zambinella's protector. Thus ends the narrator's tale, and Balzac's story pans out to focus on the narrator and his inquisitive paramour. It is she, the curious beloved, who points out that the story leaves unresolved its central question: he or she? The narrator replies that Zambinella alone knows the answer to this question and comforts his female companion, who has been left melancholy by the story, by pointing out that to the credit of civilization, "they don't make wretched creatures like that anymore" (*ibid.*, 46). The narrative ends with this image of a heterosexual couple composed of a woman whose curiosity and pity is piqued by the story of a castrato and a man who assures her that social evolution which arches toward a more compassionate humanity will never allow such lives to be lived again.

Barthes, in his semiotic exegesis on Balzac's text, requires more than 250 pages to produce an adequate account of each *lexia*, or fragment, of the novella through the interpretive frame of five codes: the hermeneutic, the semic, the symbolic, the proairetic, and the cultural. The hermeneutic code traces the operation of enigma in the text; the semic considers individual parcels of meaning or *semes* that point metonymically to concepts; the symbolic denotes moments of multivalence and entry into axes of certain key symbolic states or acts; the proairetic identifies particular terms of action that construct sequences throughout the text; and the cultural code refers to a science or body of knowledge (Barthes, *S/Z*, 20). Barthes considers the *topos* of the text to be the "stereoscopic place where the five codes . . . intersect" (*ibid.*, 21).

The following section will focus on the interaction between two specific instances of these codes: the hermeneutics of “the snare” in which Zambinella catches Sarrasine and the symbolic operation of castration. I will argue that through Barthes’s reading of Zambinella in these terms, she comes to represent a redoubling of the feminine function. Barthes’s fidelity to psychoanalysis sets him up to see Zambinella as a lack, an enigma, a snare, and a hole in language. This frame obstructs his vision of Balzac’s text and forecloses its most significant operation: Balzac’s *Sarrasine* fractures sexual difference from without through the creation of the taxonomy of feminine types and from within through the narrative’s deft exploration of the complexity of Zambinella’s experience. It is just there, however, in the very specificity of Zambinella’s sex, where Balzac’s novella stages woman’s return: through the bond established among feminized people by their common inclusion in a taxonomic of feminine types and by Balzac’s satirical rendering of Sarrasine’s adjudication of that taxonomy. Balzac understands the sorority among those who are *treated like women*; this is the ignored interest of his text.

Barthes begins *S/Z* by articulating a desire to create a survey of “a writerly” text; a literary object or critical mode which affirms the plurality of the text. The writerly text exposes critique as not the selection of one or another interpretation, or even the reconciliation of several acceptable interpretations, but rather the affirmation of the infinite meanings contained within the text. He writes:

Let us first posit the image of a triumphant plural, unimpoverished by any constraint of representation (of imitation). In this ideal text, the networks are many and interact, without any one of them being able to surpass the rest; this text is a galaxy of signifiers, not a structure of signified . . . the systems of meaning can take over this absolutely plural text, but their number is never closed, based as it is on the infinity in language. (Barthes, *S/Z*, 6)

Here Barthes’s critical excitement is palpable; in this passage he is breaking through the Structuralist mental cords that bind interpretation to only ever find the same old stories retold. In place of the old “constraint” and “imitation” he finds “networks,” “galaxies,” codes on the march. Here Barthes finds, finally, a critique that can begin to honor the “infinity of language” (Barthes, *S/Z*, 33). “Why does Sarrasine find Zambinella so seductive?” asks Barthes shortly thereafter (*ibid.*, 33). In

response to the above characterization of his critical project, we must first ask this question of Barthes. Barthes locates Sarrasine's credulity to the ploy of Zambinella's feminine appearance, her snare, in the sculptor's desire to create; he wishes to mold an ideal feminine type out of the material at hand. But what does Barthes wish to make of Zambinella? Barthes finds Zambinella to be the supremely writerly center of a text that is supremely readerly (closed and literal). She is the ideal object for the elaboration of his theory of critique because she vacillates in the space between the untruth of her appearance and the sovereign truth of her genital lack. He argues that Balzac sustains this openness through the use of a hermeneutic enigma, a technique that continually solicits the desire for a solution to the problem of Zambinella's sex through the deferral of that solution. For Barthes the question is "who is or rather what (sex) is La Zambinella?" (*ibid.*, 106). Barthes suggests that Balzac defers the answer to this question through a narrative coyness, a literary holding-back, that masks Zambinella's deficient sex with her enchanting false femininity, for "it (is) the castrato's nature to enchant, like a supernatural medium" (*ibid.*, 46). Barthes is enchanted by the critical possibilities that castration suggests, possibilities that subsequent theorists attach to the trans feminine.

Zambinella's enchanting deception begins as she enters the scene of the story. The narrator and his paramour observe Marianina's elderly uncle who disquiets that young woman but also excites her interest. When the young lady's attention is attracted to a painting of Adonis who is "such a perfect being . . . too beautiful for a man" (Balzac, 17), the narrator informs her that the painting was based on a sculpture of a woman, and suggests that this art object's history bears upon the mystery of the mysterious old De Lanty relative. We learn later that the sculpture was Sarrasine's rendering of Zambinella, who is in fact this same elder De Lanty. The young woman's interest in the old man, further stoked by her attraction to this painting of a sculpture of a woman, bears force. She asks impetuously, "who is it? . . . 'I want to know'" (*ibid.*, 17). From the outset, the question of Zambinella is a question of a forestalled desire to know, as Barthes argues.

The answer to this question, the question of Zambinella's identity, which has looped back through her incarnation as a statue and then a painting, to encounter her present incarnation as a mysterious spectral old man, is deferred again through the story within the story, the story which the narrator claims will reveal the mystery. In Barthes's reading, the narrator's story is, in fact, the story of Sarrasine's knowledge deferred

not so much by deception but by his own understanding of sex and the sexual relation. Zambinella's concealment of her sex is a caprice which is made ironic because Sarrasine reads her repeated retreat that prevents the revelation of her genital status as a supremely feminine demureness and as, in Barthes's terms, the "coquetry which proves the Woman" (Barthes, *S/Z*, 141). In Balzac's novella Woman's ability to absent herself, to withhold and to retreat, is, according to Barthes, her essential characteristic. As Sarrasine's knowledge is deferred, the reader's view is further deferred through the story that the narrator tells his inquisitive mistress and thus through the story's duped protagonist Sarrasine and finally through his eyes to his ever-retreating object, Zambinella.

The question of the uncertainty of the source of deception, of who is being ensnared by whom, is paramount to Barthes's critique. Consider his reading of the scene in which Sarrasine first achieves communication with Zambinella while she is performing on stage. Barthes cites from the novella and then interprets:

*He left his box . . . after having given a signal to Zambinella, who timidly lowered heavy eyelids, like a woman pleased to be understood at last. . . . Here is a snare, since La Zambinella is not a woman; but by whom is the snare set, for whom is it intended? By Sarrasine for himself (if the utterance is indirect in style, reproducing Sarrasine's thought)? By the discourse for the reader (plausible, since the like gives a modality to La Zambinella's putative membership in the female species)? (Barthes, *S/Z*, 134)*

Here Barthes suggests that the narrative dupes doubly, putting both the protagonist and the reader off the scent. The text plays with the very concepts of communication and understanding as Zambinella uses subtle and noncommittal signs to lead lover and reader astray. Zambinella's caprice is enabled by Sarrasine's self-delusion; he assumes her look suggests acquiescence. But she is playacting, so the reader remains unsure whether it is Zambinella or the narrative that is deceiving us. For Barthes, it is when the narrator calls her a woman that the text unequivocally colludes in "a snare (the discourse need only have said 'artist' to avoid lying); truthful at the outset, the sentence ends in a lie" (Barthes, *S/Z*, 111). This masquerade produces a collaboration between the capricious Zambinella and the complicit text; the snare is set by Zambinella's "entire costume [which is] a trick played on Sarrasine,"



and her compromised body that Sarrasine willfully will not see (*ibid.*, 55). Cutting through all the confusion regarding the source of the deception, for Barthes the subject of the deception is clear: Zambinella appears to be, but is not, a woman.

Zambinella's deception, in Barthes's reading, is not only a tactic deployed in the game that she plays with her friends using Sarrasine as her pawn and plaything. This frivolous plot is only a cover for a more consequential effect of her game. She also uses her femininity to mask a metaphysical lack which springs from her physical lack; not only a castrated man, she is a castrated woman, castrated of the organs, bodily forms, and capacities that nature might offer in compensation for the absence of the phallus. Not only not man, she is also not a woman. She is not. The concealment of her deficiency in the game of deception is not only a lark but also the brief fulfillment of "the dream of normality," which Barthes contends a genuine sex would offer (Barthes, 38). Barthes anchors this reading in lines from Balzac that focus on bodily lack:

*Her bosom, the treasures of which were concealed in an excess of coquetry, by a covering of lace, was dazzlingly white.* In order to analyze . . . La Zambinella conceals her bosom (the text's only allusion to an anatomical, and no longer cultural, femininity); along with her bosom, La Zambinella also conceals from Sarrasine the very reason for the concealment: what must be concealed is the fact that there is nothing: the perversity of deficiency lies in the fact that it is concealed by padding out (the vulgar falsehood of the artificial), but by the very thing which is usually used to conceal the full bosom (lace): deficiency borrows from fullness not its appearance but its deception. (Barthes, *S/Z*, 143)

Here Barthes outlines the contours of Zambinella's bodily terrain, which is an anatomical deficiency masked by the vulgar artificial false presence of cultural femininity. But it is precisely the mark of femininity, lace and padding, that masks a deficiency. The corporeal reality is the reality that is made meaningful in the symbolic: for Barthes, Zambinella is "the blank of castration" (Barthes, *S/Z*, 38). But if woman is defined by her castration, as Freud insists, how do we read Barthes's insistence that castration forecloses Zambinella from womanhood in this text?

Zambinella's deficiency is transferable because when "Sarrasine passionately kisses a castrato (or a boy in drag); the castration is transposed

onto Sarrasine's own body and we ourselves, second readers, receive the shock" and in our eyes Zambinella castrates Sarrasine (Barthes, *S/Z*, 165). Here Barthes explicitly uses a trans feminine term, "drag," to name Zambinella. Zambinella's bodily deficiency, her femininity, is also her seductive lure, which opens up the symbolic operation of gender as a function of phallic possession or phallic dispossession for Barthes. Her foreclosure from the human stems from an insufficiency which is femininity redoubled by the revelation of an insufficiency of femininity: "in La Zambinella there had been . . . a teleological essence from which the castrato had been excluded, and this essence was femininity itself" (*ibid.*, 38). Her feminine caprice activates her de-virilized organ's threat which is the threat that this organ could be absented. Her deception allows her to give castration to Sarrasine as a love token in return for his kiss. For Barthes, Zambinella is a "blind and mobile flaw in the system [of sex]" because she is without sex, she is beyond life and thus, when she transfers her deathlike essence, she slays her suitor (*ibid.*, 36). The title *S/Z* reflects this line of argumentation that explains the transfer of castration from Zambinella to Sarrasine:

Customary French onomastics would lead us to expect Sarrasine: on its way to the subject's patronymic, the Z has encountered some pitfall. Z is the letter of mutilation . . . Z is the first letter of La Zambinella, the initial of castration, so that this orthographical error committed in the middle of his name, in the center of his body, Sarrasine receives the Zambinellan Z in its true sense—the wound of deficiency. (Barthes, *S/Z*, 107)

Zambinella castrates Sarrasine through the cultivation of her enigma: her use of a costume of lack (femininity) to mask a fact of lack (castration). Barthes reads this cutting into the French orthography of Balzac's juxtaposition of the letters *S/Z*.

As an alternative consider this: Zambinella and the friends with whom she initially conspires to seduce Sarrasine are Italian speakers given voice in a French-language text. The play between the Italian subject pronoun "lui" which is always gendered masculine and the French indirect object pronoun "lui" which can be masculine or feminine is the play of this system which is the Italian operatic company's little trick on the French sculptor. Sarrasine's constant nervous project to establish the constancy

and supremacy of himself as a man functions in this novella only as the foil of cartoonish, fragile, nervously maintained egoic coherence around which the fascinating story of La Zambinella's incoherence winds and through which she weaves. His fascinations and revulsions are the structures around which the story grows, which the story pierces and chokes to death with its provocations and scandals. Zambinella is an ontological scandal, but this incoherence does not stem from her anomalous sex and it does not position her outside of sex. Rather, Balzac stages the operation of desire as the disordered play between structure (here the sculptor's hackneyed romantic script) and excess (his response to Zambinella's particularity). Sarrasine's desire emerges between the concept "woman" and the overwhelming intensification that his body experiences before Zambinella. It is through this staging that we must read the exposure of the most significant relation in Balzac's text: the relation *Z/z*, the relation of Zambinella to woman.

In *A Lover's Discourse* Barthes cites Western philosophy's foundational theory of erotic love, already cited in chapter 2 of this volume (60). In the *Symposium*, Plato teaches that male and female were joined together in one body before human pride angered the gods, motivating them to rend the human apart, creating woman and man. The creation of sexual difference occurs in reaction to an overstrong ego; yearning for the other and thus dependence on the other is the eternal penance for this sin. Sarrasine yearned for Zambinella. This yearning was lived, in accordance with a script of eros, as a struggle. When this yearning is frustrated by the revelation of the perceived sameness between lover and beloved, Barthes reads Sarrasine's mourning as the end of man through castration: this particular castration and the general potential for castration that the specific instance makes thinkable. The reading that follows suggests a different operation of symbolic injury in Balzac's text, which defines desire as always injurious. Sarrasine himself suggests idioms for erotic injury when, before he can imagine Zambinella's genital status, he declares himself "mad for her" (Balzac, 31) and that "passion [for her] devastated him" (ibid., 26). Desire, for Balzac, is an injury that works on the fixity of the self, as elsewhere Barthes would encourage us to observe. Zambinella is feminine internal difference, as Barbara Johnson suggests, but no more than any cis woman. She is not, as Johnson has it, in a relation of allegorical distinction from woman. Rather, hers is a variant of female experience and Balzac leads us toward this fact, even as Barthes and Johnson lead us away.

Barthes sees Sarrasine's blindness in regard to Zambinella's body, which he manifests in his sculpting of that body, as a violent dissection of the female into

partial objects: leg, breast, shoulder, neck, hands. Fragmented Woman is the object offered to Sarrasine's love. Divided, anatomized, she is merely a kind of dictionary of fetish objects. This sundered, dissected body . . . is reassembled by the artist (and this is the meaning of his vocation) into a whole body, the body of love descended from the heaven of art. (Barthes, *S/Z*, 112)

This artistic dismembering gains interest, in Barthes's reading, precisely through its ironic aptness as a representation of Zambinella who is herself dismembered both physically and in symbolic terms. Therefore Barthes suggests that her body and bodies like hers function symbolically as misogynist fantasies of woman; she is the catalog of fetish objects that woman, if she wishes to remain intact, cannot be. Thus Barthes's critique rescues the natural female body from the artificial feminized body.<sup>6</sup>

Feminist readers of Balzac after *S/Z* revise Barthes in many ways, but retain the reading of Balzac that places Zambinella outside of woman and considers castration the conceptual center of the novella. Johnson recasts the question of castration to distinguish the protagonist from the author and to note the internal difference of the text. Considering Barthes's account, she writes that "to regard castration as the ultimate narrative revelation and as the unequivocal cause of Sarrasine's tragedy, as Barthes repeatedly does, is to read the story more or less from Sarrasine's point of view" (Johnson, 9). Johnson argues that Balzac is exploring the castrating effects of Sarrasine's discovery of the internal difference of gender. The text "explicitly thematizes the opposition between unity and fragmentation, between the idealized signified" that Sarrasine believes in before Zambinella's genital status is revealed and "the discontinuous empty play of signifiers," which is the quality of gender that the revelation forces Sarrasine to recognize (*ibid.*, 10). For Johnson, this revelation of the fiction of gender fixity reaffirms Barthes's claims regarding the utter incoherence and fundamental falseness of La Zambinella because

[she] seems to embody the very essence of "woman" as a signifier . . . while emptied of any ultimate signified . . . What

Sarrasine dies of, then is precisely a failure to reread . . . What he devours so eagerly in *La Zambinella* is actually located within himself: a collection of sculpturesque clichés about feminine beauty and his own narcissism. In thinking that he knows where difference is located—between the sexes—he is blind to a difference that cannot be between, but only within. In Balzac’s story, castration thus stands for the literalization of the “difference within” which prevents any subject from coinciding with itself. (Johnson, 10)

This critical move reflects the Post-Structuralist commitment to the trans feminine allegory and anticipates Queer Theory’s revival of it. Johnson’s conceptual frame fixes the castrato as difference itself. As Naomi Schor parses it, the castrato is “a synecdoche for femininity, since . . . the feminine is always defined as difference from the masculine norm” (Schor, 330). In Johnson’s reading, the castrato comes to occupy that feminine and female position which, through her own reading, cis woman has just vacated. The trans feminine castrato becomes the negative space that makes the cis woman meaningful. The very structure of critical metaphor produces a cis female coherence through the assertion of a trans feminine fragmented artificiality. What if we read *Sarrasine* from *Zambinella*’s perspective? This is the reading, I argue, that Balzac leads us toward.

*Sarrasine* insists that *Zambinella* is the en fleshed ideal of “woman,” an aesthetic perfection, the features of which are never specified or given shape in the text. She displays simply “those exquisite proportions of the female being that are so passionately desired, combined together in a really living and subtle way . . . It was more than a woman, it was a masterpiece!” (Balzac, 25). Balzac’s vague rendering of feminine aesthetic perfection is given meaning by the text’s outlining of the sirens and Sapphos that violate this feminine ideal. But within this ideal, where *Sarrasine* feels most sure of his erotic script, Balzac’s feminine rebels when the partygoers develop a taxonomy of the antisocial to describe the aged *Zambinella*; she is “a vampire, a ghoul, an artificial man, a type of Faust or Robin Hood, [she] shared something . . . with all of these anthropomorphic natures” (ibid., 8). She is “Death and Life, an imaginary arabesque, half a hideous chimera and also divinely feminine” (ibid., 15). She is a “creature for which there is no name in human language, a form without substance, a being without life” (ibid., 13). Upon first seeing *Zambinella*, *Sarrasine* immediately receives her form as a female ideal.

Consider the movement from this moment to their final encounter. This concluding moment echoes the reader's first image of the aged Zambinella (an apparent "old man"). When Sarrasine learns Zambinella's gender history, he worries that he will never be able to view a woman (represent her in marble) with innocent adoration again because

"I shall constantly think of that imaginary woman, when I see a real woman." He indicated the statue with a gesture of desperation. "I shall always have in my memory a divine harpy, who will come and stick her claws in all my masculine feelings, and who will stamp all other women with the mark of imperfection. You monster, who can give life to nothing, you have emptied the world of all its women." (Balzac, 43)

The harpy is the feminine version of the monstrous nothings that are used to describe the aged Zambinella; Sarrasine's name-calling inserts her into the taxonomy of monstrous feminine types at the very moment when she is supposedly expelled from the feminine. When Zambinella's scandalous bodily history is revealed, the threat held at bay through the term "coquette," Sarrasine's playful moniker for Zambinella, is activated. Balzac stages the revelation that Zambinella is distinct from the ideal that Sarrasine has created, and thus fractures the category by exposing a scandalous difference within the concept. Here Balzac suggests a fundamental constitutive sorority between Zambinella and the other women. If ideal woman in *Sarrasine* is carved in relief, gaining coherence by the cutting away of what she is not, and Sarrasine sculpts Zambinella out of this mold of the ideal of woman who is not, if both are thus cut up, then woman and Zambinella, woman as Zambinella, are knotted together in an operation of discursive power that creates them to be mutually constitutive. This joint origin creates the condition of their shared resistance. In the moment when Sarrasine first experiences Zambinella as not-woman, he immediately inserts her into the taxonomy of woman that he has already established; she is transmogrified into a harpy. Thus the supremacy of the artist Sarrasine is frustrated, and this frustration comments metacritically on Balzac's unwillingness to fix the meaning of the trans feminine in the text. His confrontation with the openness of Zambinella finds no home in a neat signification. Barthes reads this tendency as a taboo on the word "castrato"; the text is castrated of its organizing signifier. Rather, I argue that Balzac stages

the openness of trans femininity tempered by a gender taxonomy that outlines what woman is not. This is the trap that Zambinella—and indeed all women—are in: an opening of sexual difference that does not obliterate it. Barthes reincorporates the trans figure as a function for binary gender, as a locus for Sarrasine’s panic or desire, by reducing her to an effect on masculinity rather than, as she so clearly is in Balzac’s text, a feminine presence.

Zambinella is the occasion for this story; without her there would be no *Sarrasine* and Sarrasine would not be remembered. Her allegorical significance, that which can be generalized and has meaning beyond the character or the text, is not the somatic status of the character, is not the “fact” of castration or its revelation, but rather the conflicts that arise as a result of both Sarrasine’s and the narrator’s paramour’s attempts to access the truth of Zambinella. Having decided from the beginning that the castrato operates as a figure of castration, Barthes reads around her in Balzac’s novella and so misses much.

What other readings are possible if we do not assume the figurality of the trans feminine as an effect on masculinity and heterosexuality? What does a reading of Zambinella as a character rather than an effect on other characters reveal? First, we notice Zambinella’s speech acts are truncated and cut; she connotes that which she cannot denote. When confronted with Sarrasine’s passion, she cannot explain why she can’t accept an offer of romantic love; she prefaces her refusal of his attentions with this request: “Remember, my lord, that I will not have deceived you” (Balzac, 32). This imperative future anterior vivifies Zambinella’s situation. She implants in the future Sarrasine the capacity to recognize the truth of the intensification of feeling that they are both experiencing. She anticipates the moment when this intensification will be retroactively delegitimized by the revelation of her genital status and projects her speech into that future in which she will be silenced. This is the linguistic temporality of her trans experience. It finds its mirror in the temporality of Herculine Barbin’s text, which looks back from a silenced space in which she has been forced into a male social role.

Barthes selects *La Zambinella* because he is searching for the most literal object—nothing is more real than castration—and because she is also that most banal of objects: a sex symbol. Realness and banality make *La Zambinella* “readerly,” but, she is also “writerly.” As an absolute enigma she is an open field on which the reader can assign his or her own meaning. Barthes’s reading of Zambinella’s characterization

portends the positioning of trans figures in Queer Theory: trans is forwarded as the most literal and real experience of sex that is also the most “literary.” She is positioned as the most literal indication that sex is unstable and the most open field for the theorist to assign meaning.

Both Barthes and Johnson rush to the end of *Sarrasine* to find the critical interest of the novella. This is the moment of the revelation of Zambinella’s genital status, and both philosophers are eager to find the sovereign truth of the story in the revelation of castration. But Zambinella is calling to them from the previous pages, asking whether they will still love her if she isn’t a woman. This is the orienting moment for my reading of Zambinella’s imperative future anterior: “Remember that I will not have deceived you,” she says. Reading the story before the revelation of her genital status, reading the reality of Zambinella in an imperative future anterior, the temporality of trans in this novella, Zambinella demands that we remember that she has not deceived us. The story is about Zambinella who survives. The framing device makes the trace of La Zambinella in art and in flesh the occasion for remembering *Sarrasine* at all. He is only significant as part of this “solution,” this “explanation” of the mystery of La Zambinella, the old man. The question is left open: it is only La Zambinella who knows the answer to the central question of the narrative: “man or woman,” even as she teaches much about woman. In the close of the frame the young paramour asks if she too will not be known. This is a recognition of the commonality of experience of two people who have been positioned as women. This recalls the sorority of the trans feminine life writing. *Z/z* is not a relation between figures but a relation between feminized characters.

I have suggested that La Zambinella replaces woman as the mute marker of difference in Johnson’s reading of *Sarrasine*. What happens when the figure speaks? This is a supremely Johnsonian question that the text asks here. La Zambinella speaks in fiction from a position within a genealogy of trans female experience. Zambinella circulates in the chiasmus of theories of sexual difference. Here she is eternal woman, there she is the dissolution of the distinction between woman and man. Like Jennie June, she suffers violence both as a feminized person and as someone who disrupts cis categories. Like Jennie June, we understand Zambinella in relation to the identity of woman. Her womanhood is assumed and therefore embodied (her coyness) but then, in the space of a moment is converted into something that retains its relation to woman, but also becomes absolute difference from woman (a harpy) and in this conversion poses an absolute challenge to man and masculinity.



“TELL ME THE TRUTH. ARE YOU A WOMAN?”

Sarrasine levels this question at Zambinella. Its asking marks the end of his amorous pursuit of Zambinella as his amorousness becomes aggression. In his “Introduction” to the memoirs of *Herculine Barbin*, Michel Foucault asks, “do we truly need a true sex?” (Foucault, “Introduction” vii). Are we truly women or men? Or to tailor the question to Balzac’s text, why does Sarrasine expect that there is a truth that Zambinella could be expected to tell? Foucault answers the question of the facticity and verifiability of sex through his reading of the memoirs of *Herculine Barbin*. While his account of the theoretical implication of the trans subject at first seems wholly opposed to the meaning that Barthes assigned Zambinella—utopian instead of dystopian—it is in fact subtended by a similar valorization of the trans feminine as a figure for the openness of meaning that occludes the meditation on sexual difference that the texts demand.

Barbin was born in 1838 and raised as a girl in convent schools in rural France, where she began the passionate sexual partnerships with other girls that she carried on throughout her life. During her adolescence, she began to notice differences between her own body and those of her female peers. She grew coarse body and facial hair, she didn’t menstruate, her body remained thin and her features “hard” (Barbin and Foucault, 26). She took her concerns about these physical differences to priests who referred her to doctors, who in turn sent her to magistrates. At the age of twenty-two, therefore, she was legally reclassified as a man and sent off to Paris and a new vocation as a railway porter. At twenty-five, lonely and desperate in a new identity that did not fit, she died by suicide. She wrote her memoirs shortly before she killed herself.

Foucault’s interest in *Barbin* is historical and his investigation points to the historicity of the category of woman. During the years of *Barbin*’s life (1838–1863), Foucault documents a shift in medical and legal attitudes toward patients and citizens with mixed genitalia. Medieval and Renaissance responses to infants identified as hermaphrodites, understood as a person of mixed sex, allowed the father or godfather to make the initial choice regarding the sex in which the infant would be socially recognized. Then, upon reaching adulthood, the person was allowed to choose a sex identity, which was then the legal, economic, and social category in which the person would proceed in adult life. The biological, juridical, and administrative regulations that rose in tandem with

modern nation-states corresponded with a shift in attitude toward children identified at birth as hermaphrodites. Foucault writes in his introduction to the memoirs that, in this era

the doctor was no longer concerned with recognizing the presence of the two sexes juxtaposed or intermingled, or with knowing which of the two prevailed over the other but rather with deciphering the true sex that was hidden beneath ambiguous appearances. He had, as it were, to strip the body of its anatomical deceptions and discover the one true sex behind organs that might have put on the forms of the opposite sex. (Foucault, “Introduction” vii)

In this analysis, an acceptance of mixed and individual sexed identity is replaced by the belief that an empirical true sex could be uncovered with the aid of medical science. In Foucault’s analysis then, “true sex” is a modern invention that doctors and bureaucrats produced in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to valorize their own positions of expertise, catching the figure of indeterminate sex in discourse in the process.

This mania for truth, which composed part of the order of things, which is Foucault’s primary object of critique, propelled the hermaphrodite out of a realm of sexed freedom into the stricture erected by the invention of the concept of sexed truth. This development, as elsewhere in the history that Foucault examines, “implied the disappearance of free choice. It was no longer up to the individual to decide which sex he wished to belong to, juridically or socially. Rather, it was up to the expert to say which nature had chosen for him and to which society must consequently ask him to adhere” (Foucault, “Introduction” ix). For Foucault, this incursion on freedom perpetrated by the expert with the epistemological tool of “sexed truth” both enacted in the name of society and entrusted to society to enforce, had a significant afterlife in the twentieth century. In particular for Foucault, “it is at the junction of these two ideas—that we must not deceive ourselves concerning our sex, and that our sex harbors what is most true in ourselves—that psychoanalysis has rooted its cultural vigor” (*ibid.*, xi). It is retrospectively through the lens of this influential history and articulation in the theoretical and clinical supremacy of psychoanalysis that Foucault considers Barbin’s youthful experience as a prolepsis of resistance against the twentieth-century obsession with biological sex. It is she who, without the obligation to be any particular sex, can experience the pleasures

of polymorphous (although Foucault avoids this psychoanalytic term) sexuality:

One has the impression . . . that everything took place in a world of feelings—enthusiasm, pleasure, sorrow, warmth, sweetness, bitterness—where the identity of the partners and above all the enigmatic character around whom everything is centered had no importance. (Foucault, “Introduction” xiii)

As in Barthes’s reading of Balzac, Foucault’s critical excitement marks this passage. If *Sarrasine* allows Barthes to push beyond the seemingly intractable relation between linguistic structure and correct interpretation, here Foucault has lighted on his equivalent object. If genital sex seems to be the likewise intractable material fact that no theory of sexuality can deny, Foucault enlists Barbin as a subject whose body requires that sexuality be thought beyond genital sex, and therefore allows, indeed compels, Foucault to do so.

Herculine Barbin’s relationship to her body develops through both identification and disidentification with her female peers. She experiences a vacillation within the categories of female and feminine. This experience is far from an experience of “not having” a sex as Foucault characterizes it (Foucault, “Introduction” xiii). Early in the text she repeatedly refers to herself as a girl, a lady’s maid (Barbin and Foucault, 16), a woman (*ibid.*, 20), a daughter, a mother (*ibid.*, 47), and a girlfriend (*ibid.*, 44). Significantly for this chapter’s inquiry, she articulates her experience of being a girl among girls and she marks her social place as constituted and enacted in relation to and before girls and women (*ibid.*, 21, 26). Her proximity to other girls, which provides so much pleasure, also provokes shame as her body develops differently: “I would have preferred to be able to hide myself from the sight of my kind companions, not because I wanted to shun them—I liked them too much for that—but because I was instinctively ashamed of the enormous distance that separated me from them, physically speaking” (*ibid.*, 26). This shame indicates that this play of her difference from and similarity to other feminine people, which brought moments of pleasure, does not result in the utopianism that Foucault finds in Herculine Barbin; the latter point has been made by Judith Butler, as well (*Gender Trouble*, 31–32). The experiences of embarrassment and confusion that mark her life as a girl among girls are mild when compared with the pain of being classified as a man, and she marks her shift from girlhood

to manhood in this way: “the phase of my existence as a girl . . . were the fine days of a life that was henceforth doomed to abandonment, to cold isolation” (Barbin and Foucault, 87). Herculine thoroughly disassociates herself from a male identity, and her suicide is proof of her inability to live as a man. The particular force of her rejection of the identity “man,” a rejection that she articulates in strong terms, is absent from Foucault’s critique and from Butler’s as well; in both readings it is Barbin’s place outside of gender that explains her suicide.

Herculine recounts her youthful encounter with a literary trans feminine role model. Twice in her memoirs, in fact, Barbin first obliquely and then more directly connects her experience to that of a character in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* and the reader is led to assume that she is reading, in particular, the poet’s discussion of Hermaphroditus:

From time to time I caught myself reading to a very late hour of the night. It was my recreation, my relaxation. . . . I confess that I was extraordinarily shaken when I read Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. *Those who know them can imagine how I felt*. As the sequel of my story will clearly show, this discovery had a special bearing on my case. (Barbin and Foucault, 18, emphasis added)

Who can imagine how Herculine felt at this moment of self-recognition produced by glimpsing the reflection of her own experience represented in a late classical text? This is the simple, yet central question that must be asked of Barthes and Foucault. Each theorist rushes to name the general effect of his trans feminine subject, but sees very little of the particular affect that she receives from her body, relationships, and desires. Barthes deems her the harbinger of a general panic, the seme for a catastrophe, which proves the triumphant plurality of the literary system. Foucault deems her the trace of a lost promise of a general freedom. How curious that at the exact moment in the history of thought in which these two philosophers midwife the general recognition of difference within texts and identities, their theories should reduce the trans feminine in such apparent resistance to the texts in which they encounter her. When Herculine attempts to reconcile her confusing bodily experience with the demands for truth made by prurient doctors and worried priests, she wonders if the truth of sexed experience “[goes] beyond all imaginary conceptions . . . Haven’t the *Metamorphoses* of Ovid gone further?” (Barbin and Foucault, 87). A significant theoretical

question emerges from Barbin's memoir that clarifies a feminist theory that does not assume cisness. How do we theorize identifications based on a relation to the sign of woman that springs not from genital similarity but from a social experience formed around an assumption of genital precariousness? How will the castrated—cis and trans—march together in theory?<sup>7</sup>

Barthes, Johnson, and Foucault—and as we will see in the following section, Queer Theorists as well—pursue the trans feminine in search of something exemplary about her body, something that places her outside of sex and gender, something that is coterminous with *who* she is. She can then help *us* to understand the operation of *our* sex and gender, a reinscription of the neutrality of cisness right where it might be denaturalized. Herculine Barbin's memoir demonstrates that, rather than being an index of heterosexuality's internal instability or the agent provocateur that exposes the fragility of normative gender, trans feminine life has a genealogy of its own that is not approachable with analytic tools that center cissexuality.

Although my critique contradicts all the conclusions of Jay Prosser's *Second Skins: The Body Narratives of Transsexuality*, his parsing of the problem of the use of transsexual experience in the constitution of Queer Theory is worth citing as we move toward a consideration of that field's formation. He writes:

In what are now considered its foundational texts, queer studies can be seen to have been crucially dependent on the figure of transgender. . . . Seized on as a definitively queer force that “troubled” the identity categories of gender, sex, and sexuality—or rather revealed them to be always already fictional and precarious. (Prosser, *Second Skins*, 22)

Prosser's concern over Queer Theory's “dependence” on the “figure of transgender” and the positioning of transgender as a “trope” reveals our common proposition that the transsexual protagonist of the transsexual allegory serves Queer Theory as a meta-sign for not just the social construction of sex but for the very structures of meaning. This is to say: the transsexual feminine, in queer theoretical articulation, has an especially strong bond to the operation of trope and allegory; she is an internal crisis of signification that figures figuration even as her supposed conceptual fixity is the secure ground of the figure. As Carole-Anne Tyler puts it, “transsexualism literalizes the loss patriarchy tropes as woman”

(qtd. in Prosser, *Second Skins*, 14). Tyler writes in the mode of Queer Theory that trans woman is the trope that literalizes. She is the writerly object that can only be read one way. The next section traces this allegorical assumption in Butler and Edelman.

QUEER THEORY'S MODERNIST INHERITANCE:  
JUDITH BUTLER AND THE CATEGORY OF "WOMAN"

Herculine Barbin, and Foucault's reading of her memoirs, provide the first occasion for Judith Butler's figural installation of trans femininity, a theoretical method that she reproduces in two subsequent monographs that focus on sex and gender. In this first instance, Butler connects Foucault's introduction to Barbin's memoirs and the *History of Sexuality: Volume One*; in both works, Butler observes, Foucault reverses the commonly accepted notion of the relation between sex identity and sexual desire and activity. Sexuality does not spring from an individual's observation of their sex and their belief that s/he must couple with someone of the opposite sex; rather,

the category of sex, prior to any categorization of sexual difference, is . . . constructed through a historically specific mode of sexuality. The tactical production of the discrete and binary categorization of sex conceals the strategic aims of that very apparatus of production by postulating "sex" as "a cause" of sexual experience, behavior, and desire. (Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 31)

Foucault's analysis, in Butler's reading, reveals that the very biological notion of sex emerges in order to be the naturalizing referent through which we categorize a person's sexuality as either normative or deviant. In Butler's critical frame, Herculine's body and desire confound this system of regulation; an uncertain sex leads to uncertainty in the adjudication of "correct" sexuality. For Foucault and then for Butler, this relation between this body and the law represents a rich occasion for the theorization of this process of regulation and the laying out of the way in which the regulation and regularization of bodies into one or the other sex provides the conceptual foundation for the naturalization of heterosexuality.

Butler then asserts that Barbin's body, on the level of its morphology, applies pressure to linguistic categorization along the binary lines of sex and this pressure holds Barbin outside of any singular sexed identity. For Butler, Herculine is "the sexual impossibility of an identity" because "the linguistic conventions that produce intelligible gendered selves find their limits in Herculine precisely because she/he occasions a convergence and disorganization of the rules that govern sex/gender/desire" (*Gender Trouble*, 31).

As I observed in my discussion of Foucault's reading of the memoirs, Barbin does locate herself in "linguistic conventions" of kinship, gender, and sex. How then are we to understand the space between Barbin's use of gendered terms to describe herself and her relations to others and this assertion that her body places her outside of linguistic conventions and in an oppositional position to sex identity? Butler claims that beyond linguistic disordering, Herculine's body exhibits a "sexual heterogeneity . . . [that] implies a critique of the metaphysics of substance" (*Gender Trouble*, 32). It is this question of what retooling of the "metaphysics of substance" is required in order to account for Herculine Barbin that we must investigate.

In order to understand this argument, we must back up and consider the argumentation that led Butler to the reading of Barbin's memoirs. Earlier in the section "Subjects of Sex/Gender/Desire," Butler outlines the goals of *Gender Trouble*; chief among these is an interrogation of the category "woman." Woman in the introductory moves is in fact *the* instance of "identity." She suggests that any claim that "woman" is an internally coherent category produces an outside in which political subjects who don't fit the criteria for inclusion in this political category find themselves in opposition to "woman." These "domains of exclusion reveal the coercive and regulatory consequences of that construction, even when the construction has been elaborated for emancipatory purposes" (*Gender Trouble*, 8). Butler considers the category of "woman" and the political negotiations around it as a necessarily destabilizing operation of "feminism" that provides an opportunity for women to voice resistance to the political formation, and thus trouble the unity of "woman." Implicit in Butler's description is the argument that claims made under the mantle of feminism and in the name of woman cleave more closely to ontological claims than do other political operations, since other terms of political unity do not imply chromosomal or morphological credentials. So it is the limits of the easy political operation of "woman"

as a subject of feminism that Butler troubles by pointing to domains of exclusion that these operations produce.

Butler then marshals the figure of the trans feminine, in the form of Herculine Barbin, to exemplify these “domains of exclusion.” She extracts from that relation of theory to example the conclusion that trans exposes the link between binary categories of gender and the heterosexualization and normalization of sexuality. Butler asks, “to what extent does the category of women achieve stability and coherence only in the context of the heterosexual matrix?” (*Gender Trouble*, 9). In answer to her own question, she proposes that “the presumption of a binary gender system implicitly retains the belief in a mimetic relation of gender to sex whereby gender mirrors sex or is otherwise restricted by it” (ibid., 10). Her examples in this book and the next—from Barbin to the lesbian phallus—indicate that both trans feminine and trans masculine gender experiences and representations work to denaturalize female sex and prove that “gender is not to culture as sex is to nature; gender is also the discursive/cultural means by which ‘sexed nature’ or a ‘natural sex’ is produced and established as ‘prediscursive,’ prior to culture, a politically neutral surface on which culture acts” (ibid., 11). The exemplarity of trans bodies and embodied experience proves this theory.

Butler finds another resource for thinking about the relation of gender to sex in Simone de Beauvoir’s familiar feminist claim that “one is not born a woman but rather becomes one,” a feminist refusal of the a priori assumption that all people *are* naturally and fully identifiable by a sex with which they themselves identify and that they possess fully and unambiguously. Butler repurposes de Beauvoir’s formulation further to suggest an analogue between the general process of becoming woman and the trans iteration of this process. Butler observes that nothing in de Beauvoir’s theoretical frame

guarantees that the “one” who becomes a woman is necessarily female. If “the body is a situation,” as she claims, there is no recourse to a body that has not always been interpreted by cultural meanings; hence, sex could not qualify as a prediscursive anatomical facticity. Indeed, sex, by definition, will be shown to have been gender all along. (*Gender Trouble*, 12)

Butler’s reading pushes de Beauvoir’s claim to what we might call its logical conclusion. If attaining sex is a cultural process and there is no



way to think about a “facticity” that precedes this cultural inscription, the trans woman’s assent to womanhood proves this point. Significantly, however, in this passage Butler maintains a distinction between being “female” and becoming a “woman.” But, how are we to understand this distinction? Her critique has already clearly shown that there is no notion of sex that is independent of the social terms of gender. So what is the “female” that may or may not be the foundation for “woman” in this passage? If, as Butler contends, “‘the body’ is itself a construction, as are the myriad ‘bodies’ that constitute the domain of gendered subjects. Bodies cannot be said to have a signifiable existence prior to the mark of their gender,” then what is “the female” and why is the distinction between “female” and “woman” preserved (*Gender Trouble*, 13)?

Butler’s assertion that trans experience challenges the metaphysics of substance is most forcefully argued here where she asks: “to what extent does the body *come into being* in and through the mark(s) of gender?” (*Gender Trouble*, 13). It is toward the critical end of answering this question that Butler uses Herculine Barbin as an example for the kind of bodily material and experience that proves the principle of sexed non-identity. It is in this critical frame that Barbin’s description of her body and experience disappears and her identifications and relation to womanhood can pass without remark.

Butler finds resources for this queer theory of the construction of gender in the most revolutionary theoretical contributions of Simone de Beauvoir, Luce Irigaray, and Monique Wittig, the three most influential French feminist intellectuals of the mid-twentieth century. Whereas Butler understands her critical departure from these thinkers as a corrective that introduces the history of feminist critique to the challenge of the queer, revisiting the material Butler cites reveals its relevance for a trans feminist analytic that is not in opposition to woman. The very silence of these and other feminist thinkers on the subject of trans and, therefore, the absence of the fixing of trans as an allegory for sex generally, ironically provides resources to the critic who is attentive to the operation of trans femininity, understood as a variant of female experience.

Consider the material that Butler cites. Butler parses Irigaray’s philosophical positioning of woman as antithetical to being itself, as in fact “not one” sex: “Irigaray would maintain . . . that the feminine ‘sex’ is a point of linguistic *absence*, the impossibility of a grammatically denoted substance, and hence, the point of view that exposes that substance as an abiding and foundational illusion of a masculinist discourse” (*Gender Trouble*, 15). Butler’s reading of this material suggests that Irigaray’s

theorization names woman as wholly unsaid within phallogentric language. In contrast, de Beauvoir considers woman a lack or an Other to man and “implicitly poses the question: Through what act of negation and disavowal does the masculine pose as a disembodied universality and the feminine get constructed as a disavowed corporeality?” (ibid., 17). Wittig agrees with Irigaray that the female sex is produced in tandem with heterosexuality, but pushes beyond this point to advocate an abolition of the category of woman. In a footnote Butler points out that this elevation of Wittig’s thought extends to the materiality of sex: “[Wittig] argued that Irigaray’s valorization of the anatomical specificity is itself an uncritical replication of a reproductive discourse that marks and carves up the female body into artificial ‘parts’ like ‘vagina,’ ‘clitoris,’ and ‘vulva.’ At a lecture at Vassar College, Wittig was asked whether she had a vagina, and she replied that she did not” (ibid., 201n54).

These negotiations of the correct philosophical attitude to have toward the category of woman apply equally well to trans woman. Questions of unspeakability, unrepresentability, “disavowed corporeality,” and Wittig’s refusal of the invasive demand for information about her genital status rhyme closely with the trans histories and theories that we will encounter in the next chapter. The culmination of Butler’s reading-together of de Beauvoir, Irigaray, and Wittig is the brief citation of Herculine Barbin and Butler’s reading of Foucault’s account of Barbin. Butler rejects the utopian quality of Foucault’s claim that Barbin exists happily outside of sex but retains Foucault’s claim that Barbin’s genitals as a mark of “sexual heterogeneity . . . impl[y] a critique of the metaphysics of substance as it informs the identitarian categories of sex” (*Gender Trouble*, 32). From her work in *Gender Trouble* on, trans provides a critical vehicle for Butler’s critique of the normative category of woman, instantiating an absolute opposition between woman and trans.

Butler connects her interest in the breakdown of the category of woman very directly to the intellectual history of “the poststructuralist break” that severed thought from Structuralism’s faith in the incontrovertible relation between signifier and signified, father and child, and man and woman. Butler writes that the

poststructuralist break with Saussure and with identitarian structures of exchange found in Lévi-Strauss refutes the claims of totality and universality and the presumption of binary structural oppositions that implicitly . . . quell the

insistent ambiguity and openness of linguistic and cultural signification. As a result, the discrepancy between signifier and signified becomes the operative and limitless *différance* of language, rendering all referentiality into a potentially limitless displacement. (*Gender Trouble*, 51)

Here we remember the giddy moments in Barthes and Foucault's texts where the trans feminine provides the figure for the "discrepancy" at the heart of signification. Remember back still further to Freud's trans feminine figures that explain the psychic process through which the development of sex identity determines one's place in the social order. This movement in Butler's thought demonstrates the queer theoretical inheritance of gender as a privileged instance of this "break," "refut[ation]," "discrepancy" inherent in "linguistic and cultural signification," that both psychoanalytic theory and Post-Structuralist philosophy posit. Sex as "a literalizing fantasy" that explains bodily experiences of pleasure by differentiating these pleasures and locating them in "the penis, the vagina, and the breasts" is, in Butler's work, the most significant instance of the break between objects and the words that culture assigns them (*Gender Trouble*, 90). Being a sex, then, requires the belief in the power of words to account for sensation, desires, and relations that name the body.

We must recall Butler's development of this argument regarding the credulity toward the truth-making operation of signs that ground the experience of being a sex and "becoming a gender" when we arrive at *Gender Trouble's* brief direct engagement with transsexuality. As in the case of Butler's discussion of Herculine Barbin, the transsexual represents the conclusive instance of the imaginary relation between sexed identity and body parts:

Transsexuals often claim a radical discontinuity between sexual pleasure and bodily parts. Very often what is wanted in terms of pleasure requires an imaginary participation in body parts, either appendages or orifices, that one might not actually possess, or, similarly, pleasure may require imagining an exaggerated or diminished set of parts. (*Gender Trouble*, 90)

The absorption of the singularly defined transsexual of the sexological diagnostic is clear. Butler raises this figure as an example for the general

operation of sex, but in the operation of the example, the theory breaks down. If gender really does script sex, if pronouns and proper names and other gendering linguistic structures really do determine the experience of bodies, then it cannot be said that there are body parts “that [a person of trans experience] might not actually possess.” If morphology, on the level of sensation, springs from one’s relation to a set of words, then sex is something “real” that springs from the linguistic relation to one’s genitals and other sexed characteristics. Butler hastens to point out that “transsexual identity” (*Gender Trouble*, 90) is only an example of the “imaginary” operation of sex as “the phantasmatic nature of desire reveals the body not as its ground or cause, not as its occasion and its Object. The strategy of desire is in part the transfiguration of the desiring body itself” (ibid.). But significantly, Butler preserves the relation of transsexual example to general principle that Freud innovated. The effects of this maintenance of the distinction between example and general operation of sex, and the nomination of philosophy and theory as the keepers of this distinction, become clear in subsequent theoretical investigations of trans life and its implications for the understanding of sex and gender.

We should keep these two points that I’ve developed in this section in mind—that Butler installs an absolute division between woman and trans, and that Butler maintains trans genital morphology as exemplary—when in 1993, in *Bodies That Matter*, Butler returns to the question of the materiality of sex, or rather tries to approach this question only to find herself unable “to fix bodies as objects of thought” (*Bodies That Matter* ix). The very attempt to approach the physical material of sex provokes a return to the relation between sex and subjection. Butler reaffirms that

there is no subject prior to its constructions, and neither is the subject determined by those constructions; it is always the nexus, the non-space of cultural collision, in which the demand to resignify or repeat the very terms which constitute the “we” cannot be summarily refused, but neither can they be followed in strict obedience. (*Bodies That Matter*, 124)

In an effort to address this “collision” between the act of repeating or refusing cultural norms, Butler approaches the scene of the drag ball and the lives and testimonials of the queer and trans people who participate in this scene.

In the section “Ambivalent Drag,” Butler identifies Jennie Livingston’s 1990 film *Paris Is Burning* as an exemplary text for addressing the operation of transgender culture and transsexual identification. It is in the reading of this film that the effects of Butler’s theoretical account of trans first become clear. This reading allows Butler to respond to a common misreading of her account of performativity in *Gender Trouble*, a misreading that takes Butler to be arguing for a proliferation of drag performance and other queer cultural practices as means of subverting norms of gender and sexuality. Rather than pure subversion, Butler finds a far more complex operation at work in drag performance. Butler sees the drag circuit as one of the “occasional spaces” that accommodate queers in a culture that is bent on their destruction (*Bodies That Matter*, 124–25). In these spaces the “killing ideals of gender and race, are mimed, reworked, resignified” (ibid.). But in addition to this “defiance and affirmation, the creation of kinship and of glory in that film, there is also the kind of reiteration of norms which cannot be called subversive” (ibid., 125). These norms “lead to the death of Venus Xtravaganza,” a young woman of trans experience who is strangled in a hotel room during the period in which Livingston is shooting the documentary. Butler identifies Xtravaganza as “a Latina/preoperative transsexual, cross-dresser, prostitute, and member of the ‘House of Xtravaganza’” and suggests that in order to understand the meaning of her life and death we must consider “the set of interpellating calls [to which] Venus [responds], and how [this] reiteration of the law [is] to be read in the manner of her response?” (ibid.). Butler omits “woman” from the list of identity terms, even though this is the word that Venus uses to describe herself, her experience, and her hopes for the future. A careful analysis of Butler’s theoretical use of Venus reveals that the exclusion of “woman” from this list is necessary to the integrity of her argument:

Venus, and *Paris Is Burning* more generally, calls into question whether parodying the dominant norms is enough to displace them; indeed, whether the denaturalization of gender cannot be the very vehicle for the reconstitution of hegemonic norms. . . . I want to underscore that there is no necessary relation between drag and subversion, and that drag may well be used in the service of both the denaturalization and reidealization of hyperbolic heterosexual gender norms. (*Bodies That Matter*, 125)

Butler's critique of previous critical claims that drag subverts gender norms was certainly necessary, but can we locate that "reconstitution of norms" elsewhere? At what point in the film is Venus engaged in hyperbole or parody? In keeping with the norm of the critical history of approaching trans women, Butler's account opposes trans to "woman"; as a result, she can't see how this sign is still making meaning after the severing of the word from the bodily structures that are used to assign sex. Secondly, Butler maintains the distinction between the transgender example and the general operation of sex and gender. For Butler, trans life makes plain that "identification is always an ambivalent process" because it requires "identifying with a set of norms that are and are not realizable, and whose power and status precede the identifications . . . This 'being a man' and this 'being a woman' are internally unstable affairs" (*Bodies That Matter*, 127).

*The New Woman* has argued that identifying as woman is itself an act that transgresses psychoanalytic and philosophical ideas about what it is to be human. The injunction against identifying as a woman is violated in *Paris Is Burning* but, because there is no theoretical way to think this identification, Butler's reading misrecognizes the desire to be a woman as a parodic operation: "when it is men in drag as women, what we have is the destabilization of gender itself, a destabilization that is denaturalizing and that calls into question the claims of normativity and originality by which gender and sexual oppression sometimes operate" (*Bodies That Matter*, 128). Crucially for her argument, Butler names the operation of drag as a question of "men in drag as women," a parsing of identity that is not prominent in the self-description of the drag queen subjects of the film, most of whom identify as women and/or have lived as women. *Bodies That Matter* misses another significant point, however, and it is one that I will revisit shortly as I move toward trans feminist theories: misogyny and woman-hatred survive the "destabilization of gender" that the drag scene enacts. The questions that Butler asks about the drag scene reflect an interest in heterosexual norms and the extent to which queer culture produces their "appropriation and then a subversion [or] both at once [or] remains caught in an irresolvable tension, and sometimes a fatally unsubversive appropriation takes place" (*ibid.*, 128). This persistent framing of drag ball culture as something that operates on pure figures of sex, gender, and race forecloses other questions. What does being a drag queen mean to drag queens? What does being a trans woman mean to trans women? Butler doesn't ask these questions because they don't have singular answers that clarify theoretical questions.

The theoretical implications of the focus on heterosexuality are most apparent in Butler's discussion of "realness." This is the standard of evaluation for many of the categories of drag performance and competition; "realness" is an index of how perfectly the performer or contestant inhabits the categories of "woman" or "man" in the estimation of the ball audience and judges. Butler parses realness as "the result of the embodiment of norms, a reiteration of norms, an impersonation of a racial and class norm, a norm which is at once a figure, a figure of a body, which is no particular body, but a morphological ideal that remains the standard which regulated the performance, but which no performance fully approximates" (*Bodies That Matter*, 129). Butler argues that the drag scene's commitment to "realness" reveals its capitulation to the valorization of whiteness and gender normativity. This capitulation ensures that, in her estimation, "women of color and lesbians are not only everywhere excluded from this scene, but constitute a site of identification that is consistently refused and abjected in the collective phantasmatic pursuit of a transubstantiation into various forms of drag, transsexualism, and uncritical miming of the hegemonic" (*ibid.*, 131). Realness then, in Butler's reading, closes off the scene of the drag ball to lesbians and women, but what reading of the film *Paris Is Burning* finds no women there?

Consider one of the film's subjects, ballgoer Dorian Corey's definition of "realness" in contrast to Butler's definition cited above. Corey explains that "when [trans women are] undetectable, when they can walk out of that ballroom into the sunlight and on to the subway and get home and still have all their clothes and no blood running off their bodies those are the femme realness queens and usually it's a category for young queens." Here Corey focuses on the role that realness plays in the life of trans women beyond the ball, connecting the practices of these competitions with the trans lives of which they are a part. This comment certainly does not contradict Butler's contention that realness is defined with reference to norms, but Corey attends to the way that realness functions for trans women as part of their daily material experience rather than focusing on how this concept works for or against heterosexual gender norms.

The discrepancy between Butler and Corey's analysis of realness is grounded in Butler's sense that the trans women who speak to their experience of sex and gender articulate these experiences as yearnings: yearning to be white, yearning to be rich, and most importantly, yearning to be "like" women. For Butler, this yearning is grounded in a

fantasy [that] involves becoming in part like women and, for some of the children, becoming like black women, falsely constitutes black women as a site of privilege; they can catch a man and be protected by him, an impossible idealization which of course works to deny the situation of the great numbers of poor black women who are single mothers without the support of men. In this sense, the “identification” is composed of a denial, an envy, which is the envy of a phantasm of black women, an idealization that produces a denial. (*Bodies That Matter*, 131–32)

Butler’s claim that trans women in the drag scene and outside of it idealize and identify with “a phantasm of black women” is not supported by the ways in which other trans women in the film discuss their life prospects and their experience with womanhood. In previous work I’ve discussed Pepper LaBeija’s trans feminist analysis of the discussions around their decision to pursue hormonal and surgical sex change. In that discussion, I cite LaBeija’s explanation of their experience taking hormones in their youth and not to pursue genital surgery. In explaining their own choices and experiences, LaBeija describes the motivations and experiences of trans women who chose surgical sex reassignment. They note that many of the

kids that I know they got the sex change because they felt that “oh I’ve been treated so bad as a drag queen, if I get a pussy (excuse the expression) I’ll be treated fabulous.” But women get treated bad, ya know, they get beat. They get robbed. They get dogged. So having the vagina, that doesn’t mean that you’re going to have a fabulous life. It might in fact be worse. (Livingston et al.)

LaBeija’s comments reflect the recognition within the trans scene of the dangers and abuses that living full-time as a woman opens up for trans women. LaBeija’s estimation that it is only “sometimes . . . actually worse” implies that in her experience of watching a generation of trans feminine people wrestle with decisions around transitioning and identification, it is usually better to be read as a cis woman.

Another moment in the film challenges Butler’s analysis that the ballgoers have an unrealistic fantasy of life as a woman of color in a more direct way. In her one-on-one interview with Livingston, Venus Xtrav-



aganza explains that “I don’t think there’s anything mannish about me except for what I have between me down there, which is my own personal thing” (Livingston et al.). In this statement Xtravaganza claims the right to name her identity and the right to control access to her body, pushing back against the impertinent cis assumption that the intimate details of trans feminine bodies are available for examination, diagnosis, and judgement. Xtravaganza does not *desire to be* a woman, although she might desire medical procedures that would make her relation to her body and to the world more comfortable. She *is* a woman, a woman of color, and a woman of trans experience. Butler highlights Venus’s desires for economic security and the kinds of surgical transformations that both require money and can lead to greater financial security as a capitulation to racist norms, and she connects the aspirational quality of these desires to Venus’s sex. Venus speaks from the perspective of someone whose life is routinely threatened because her race, class, and gender make sex work the best option to fund her life, even though the criminalization of sex work and the transmisogyny of her sex work clients conspire to regularly threaten her life. This is, as her drag mother Angie Xtravaganza remarks as she reflects on Venus’s death, “part of life . . . part of being a transsexual in New York City and surviving” (ibid.). Butler’s reading repeats the sexological and psychoanalytic method that gathers the words of trans feminine people and produces a figure that effaces the vital, lived, and located social experiences and bodily self-understandings expressed in these reports and then also cites these narratives as confirmation of theoretical conclusions. *Bodies That Matter* takes the life narrative provided by Pepper La Beija, Dorian Corey, Angie Xtravaganza, and Venus Xtravaganza and translates their words into a pure figure.

In 2004 Butler published *Undoing Gender*, a text that returns a third time to discussion of transgender and transsexual embodiment. In an introductory move Butler identifies a “New Gender Politics” that amends the traditional feminist political commitment to “woman” that Butler has addressed throughout her work, to avow a commitment to a more plural set of analytics and concerns. Butler writes that “gender *now* also means gender identity, a particularly salient issue in the politics and theory of transgenderism and transsexuality” (*Undoing Gender*, 6, emphasis added). The chapters of *The New Woman*, from the introduction forward, all show that trans representation before “now”—before Queer Theory—articulated itself in a way that neither refused identity nor located identity in heterosexual or cis ways of interpreting bodies.

The presentism of the intellectual foundation of Queer Theory, a presentism that (ironically) is the maintenance of the century-old Modernist assertion of the scandalous newness of queer and trans existence, cannot see this history of trans reckoning with the politics of gender categories. Recognition of this history can resolve many of the tensions between a feminism that takes woman as its touchstone and politics that emerge from trans experience. Butler articulates the tensions around identity categories, focusing particularly on the

tension that arises between queer theory and both intersex and transsexual activism [that] centers on the question of sex assignment and the desirability of identity categories. If queer theory is understood . . . to oppose all identity claims, including stable sex assignment, then the tension seems strong indeed. But I would suggest that more important than any presupposition about the plasticity of identity . . . is queer theory's [opposition] to the unwanted legislation of identity. (*Undoing Gender*, 7)

This focus on the “legislation of identity” is certainly crucial, and a wealth of writing by thinkers engaged with trans political formation addresses it.<sup>8</sup>

Butler's lack of attention to trans history is repeated in chapter 3 of *Undoing Gender*, “Doing Justice to Someone: Sex Reassignment and Allegories of Transsexuality,” which examines the case of David Reimer, who rose into the media spotlight after publishing a memoir that recounted his experience of gender and sex. Reimer was born in 1965 with a penis and other attributes that led to his unambiguous assignment of a male sex. His genitals were damaged during surgery shortly after birth. At the urging of doctors, his parents decided that David should begin a course of hormone therapy and have genital surgery. Following surgery and starting hormones, they began to raise their child as a girl. His parents made this choice largely at the urging of Doctor John Money, director of the Money Institute, a psychologist whose clinical work sought to substantiate his theory that sex identity was entirely socially constructed and that how children are treated produces their sense of themselves as girls or boys. David Reimer came to reject his reassigned female sex during his teens and sought further surgical and endocrinological intervention to enable his life as a man. His memoir, written in his thirties, generated an appearance on *Oprah* and other me-

dia interest. He died by suicide in 2004, four years after the publication of this memoir.

Butler's interest in the life of David Reimer lies in her contention that his life teaches us something about the way in which categories of sex underwrite the category of the human, recalling previous theories of trans that focused on the way in which trans teaches something about the category of sex. Butler writes: "when we ask, what are the conditions of intelligibility by which the human emerges . . . by which some subject becomes the subject of human love, we are asking about conditions of intelligibility composed of norms, or practice, that have become presuppositional, without which we cannot think the human at all" (*Undoing Gender*, 57). Here Butler clearly claims that human life and love outside of the norms of gender are subject to misrecognition and erasure. But who, in this theoretical parsing, is capable of offering recognition? The love among the people involved in the drag scene that *Paris Is Burning* documents indicates that they recognize each other.

Butler recounts the story of David and the ways in which John Money's institute was eager to use the story "as an example of its own theoretical beliefs" (*Undoing Gender*, 62). John Money's faith in his ability to script the "example" that David Reimer's life would provide, his presumption that it is his role as a doctor to position his patient as an example, is in some crucial ways rehearsed in Butler's philosophical analysis as well. Butler confirms the idea that the "David/Brenda case is an allegory, or has the force of allegory [as] the site where debates on intersexuality (David is not an intersexual) and transsexuality (David is not a transsexual) converge" (*ibid.*, 64). But it is precisely this eagerness to assign an allegorical significance to trans experience that misdirects Butler's critical perspective. Is it not more responsible critically and politically to say, simply, that David's case is not an allegory and that this way or that way of narrating his life does not explain anything beyond exposing the hubris and transphobia of certain medical researchers and clinicians and the fields of which they are a part?

Butler parses this case as illuminating a distinction between exemplarity and allegory:

David has learned about phallic construction from transsexual contexts, wants a phallus, has it made, and so allegorizes a certain transsexual transformation without precisely exemplifying it. He is, in his view, a man born a man, castrated by the medical establishment, feminized by the psychiatric

world, and then enabled to return to who he is. But in order to return to who he is, he requires—and wants and gets—a subjection to hormones and surgery. He allegorizes transsexuality in order to achieve a sense of naturalness. And this transformation is applauded by the endocrinologists on the case since they understand his appearance now to be in accord with an inner truth. (*Undoing Gender*, 65)

In this, now twice iterated, commitment to the allegorical operation of transsexuality Butler herself identifies the tropological imperative placed on David Reimer by the medical establishment: “the Money Institute enlists transsexuals to allegorize Brenda’s full transformation into a woman, the endocrinologists propose to appropriate transsexual surgery in order to build the phallus that will make David more legible as a man” (*Undoing Gender*, 66). Butler aims to counter this history in her own theoretical account of the life of this person; she states that “part of my task here is to do justice, not only to my topic, but to the person I am sketching for you, the person around whom so much has been said, the person whose self-description and whose decisions have become the basis for so much gender theorizing” (*ibid.*, 68). However, Butler contends that a central component of the task of “doing justice” to this individual life is to recognize the way in which David Reimer’s life is ruled by norms that precede and in some ways determine him. Therefore her task is not only to affirm David’s experience, “to take him at his word, and to call him by his chosen name,” but also to point out that these words emerge from a cultural field structured by gender normativity (*ibid.*, 69). Here, as previously in Butler’s engagement with transgender, the interest of the theoretical inquiry is in the operation of the terms of sex and gender and the potential of trans life to lay bare these operations.

This theoretical interest leads Butler to consider Reimer’s description of his experience during the period of his life when he was assigned female sex and was addressed as a girl named Brenda. Butler asks:

[what] Brenda sees as Brenda looks at himself, feels as he feels himself, and please excuse my mixing pronouns here . . . When Brenda looks in the mirror and sees something nameless, freakish, something between the norms, is *she* not at that moment in question as a human, is she not the spectre of the freak against . . . through which the norm installs itself? (*Undoing Gender*, 69)

This speculation about the particulars of David Reimer's juvenile sex identity, a speculation based on the words of his memoir, provide the fodder for Butler's theorization of the limits of the human. In this presupposition that trans life offers such theoretical exemplarity, Butler inherits the critical habit of establishing the stability of the trans figure as a referent for theoretical accounts of the instability of sex and gender. In Butler's theory, as in Foucault's, this implementation of trans as an "in between" or "non-identity" ignores the committal sex identification voiced by this person of trans experience. This assumption of "non-identity" allows Butler to use the assigned gender and given name of David Reimer, words and identities that he spent his life escaping.

#### EDELMAN'S UNEVEN DISAVOWAL

Despite their significant critical differences, differences made plain by Edelman's strong critique of Butler in *No Future*, his text develops a theoretical account of queerness and sociality that bears resemblance to aspects of the Butlerian tradition. Just as Butler has recourse to allegory in her late writings on sex and gender, so Edelman grounds his reading of queerness in his parsing of the figural as the political mode in which queer critique should operate. There is no theorization of the trans woman in *No Future*; indeed, there is no theorization of woman in *No Future*. It is the work of this section to demonstrate that "woman" and "trans woman" constitute the structuring absence of Edelman's critique, and to point to ways in which the rejection of identity, present already in the work of Foucault and Butler, allows this elision.

Edelman does allude to two films that thematize feminine transsexual identification;<sup>9</sup> first, he calls Jonathan Demme's *Philadelphia* the director's "filmic act of contrition for the homophobia some attributed to *Silence of the Lambs*" (Edelman, 18). In Edelman's reading, then, the absolute abjection of the transsexual serial killer in *The Silence of the Lambs* requires an apology in the form of the depiction of an upright, sympathetic, HIV-positive lawyer in the latter film. Second, in a brief aside during his discussion of Hitchcock's *The Birds*, Edelman notes in his characteristically thrilling gymnastic language the connection between the heroine of that film and

a second blonde Marion, the heroine of *Psycho*, whose "highway to happiness" abruptly dead-ends on her taking

for the simple-minded innocence of a Child . . . the wounded-sparrow twitchiness she encounters in Norman Bates. More hawk than sparrow, but birdlike himself, Norman puts the lie to the avian analysis he offers while chatting with Marion: “I think only birds look well stuffed because, well, because they’re kind of passive to begin with.” But *The Birds*, like *Psycho*, portrays the revenge . . . of those conceptualized as “passive” by depicting the activist militancy that attends their coming out. (Edelman, 131)

Here, as in the discussion of *The Silence of the Lambs*, Edelman moves without comment over the opportunity to address the depiction of a trans woman to arrive at his object of interest: the homosexual man at odds with heterosexuality. In both *The Birds* and *Psycho*, moreover, the taint of heterosexuality in the scene is a naive blonde woman. This refusal of the female as an object of queer interest and the definition of queer as the mutual enjoyment of two masculinities is at the heart of Edelman’s theory.

A central tenet of *No Future* is that the queer is defined by its antagonism toward the figure of the child as a figure for all political futures, indeed for the operation of the political as such. This future adheres in

the image of the Child [that] invariably shapes the logic within which the political itself must be thought. That logic compels us, to the extent that we would register as politically responsible, to submit to the framing of the political debate . . . as defined by the terms of what this book describes as reproductive futurism: terms that impose an ideological limit on political discourse as such, preserving in the process the absolute privilege of heteronormativity by rendering unthinkable, by casting outside the political domain, the possibility of a queer resistance to this organizing principle of communal relations. (Edelman, 2)

For Edelman, “queerness, by contrast, figures outside and beyond its political symptoms, the place of the social order’s death drive” (Edelman, 3). But far from bemoaning the way in which the queer is figured as pure threat, in Edelman’s estimation, “queerness attains its ethical value precisely insofar as it accedes to that place, accepting its figural

status as resistance to the viability of the social while insisting on the inextricability of such resistance from every social structure” (ibid.).

This tethering of queerness to figurality and fixing of queerness in opposition to the future “viability of the social” is the seat of the opposition between queerness and identity. Edelman stridently states that Queer Theory’s triumph is its saying no to identity. For him, “the appropriately perverse refusal that characterizes queer theory [is a refusal] of every substantialization of identity, which is always oppositionally defined, and, by extension, of history as linear narrative . . . in which meaning succeeds in revealing itself—as itself—through time” (Edelman, 4). It is the queer rejection of identity that makes the queer such a politically unpalatable subject because “politics, construed as oppositional or not, never rests on essential identities. It centers, instead, on the figurality that is always essential to identity, and thus on the figural relations in which social identities are always inscribed” (ibid., 17). It is this political operation of queer that forms the critical possibility of Queer Theory as it “constitute[s] the site where the radical threat posed by irony, which heteronormative culture displaces onto the figure of the queer, is uncannily returned by queers who no longer disown but assume their figural identity as embodiments of the figuralization and hence the disfiguration, of identity itself” (ibid., 24).

Here as elsewhere in queer theorizing, this “identity” is woman whose disappearance allows a purportedly gender-neutral man to break from heterosexuality. There is no equivalent refusal of the masculine; indeed, researching this book has revealed many instances in which suggesting that gay men have anything to do with femininity has induced a panic that we can trace back to Edward Carpenter.<sup>10</sup> We might recall my discussion of the Freudian origin of the panic attendant to the realization of woman’s existence when Edelman moves to a consideration of his refashioning of Lacanian terminology in the form of “Sinthomosexuality,” which is

the template of a given subject’s distinctive access to jouissance . . . the sinthome, in its refusal of meaning, procures the determining relation to enjoyment by which the subject finds itself driven beyond the logic of fantasy and desire. It operates . . . as the knot that holds the subject together [that] binds the subject to its constitutive libidinal career, and assures that no subject, try as it may can never ever “get over”

itself—“get over,” that is, the fixation of the drive that determines its *jouissance*. (Edelman, 35–36)

While bracketing the critique of psychoanalytic models of sexual difference, a discussion that I’ve elaborated in chapter 1, here I simply want to draw attention to the maleness of *sinthomosexuality*, “the site where the fantasy of futurism confronts the insistence of a *jouissance* that rends it precisely by *rendering* it in relation to that drive” (Edelman, 17). In a footnote Edelman clarifies this gender question: “Some readers may reasonably be tempted to ask if the *sinthomosexual* must always be male. As my insistent refusal of identity politics should be taken to suggest, the *sinthomosexual* has no privileged relation to any sex or sexuality—or even, indeed, to any species” (ibid., 165). The maleness of the *sinthomosexual* is explained, for Edelman, by

a gender bias that continues to view women as “naturally” bound more closely to sociality, reproduction, and domesticating emotion. Even in representations of women who fail to embrace these “natural” attributes and thus find themselves assimilated to the sort of fatality that the *sinthomosexual* embodies, such refusals are themselves most often “explained” by reference to the intense fixation of their emotional attachments. (Edelman, 166)

Here Edelman claims forthrightly that the rejection of identity allows the unique focus on male subjects because “the introduction of taxonomic distinctions at the outset dissipate the force of my larger argument against reproductive futurism” (Edelman, 166). The implication of this androcentrism is revealed in recent public lectures, in which Edelman has provided a reading of Pedro Almodovar’s film *Bad Education* as the basis for his book project of the same name. This film recounts the complicated story of the protagonist Enrique, a film director, and his reintroduction to his boyhood love Ignacio. This reintroduction occurs when “Ignacio” (who actually turns out to be Ignacio’s brother Juan) pitches him a film about a transsexual, Zahara, whose experience of love for a classmate and abuse by a priest closely resembles the boys’ experience in grade school. In the story, it is ultimately revealed that Ignacio is the basis for the transsexual character and that she has died. Edelman reads the transsexual character as a pure figure for the grotesque and for the death of the male child that the audience adored (Edelman, UC-Irvine,



April 19, 2010). Just as Barthes saw Zambinella as the end of man, so Edelman reads the trans female character as the end of the boy.

The fundamental task of this section has not been to disagree with Butler's account of the way in which sex is binarized as a ground for the operation of heterosexuality and normative gender. Nor has it been to simply note Edelman's inattention to women and feminine people. Rather, I hoped to outline the points of contact between a theory that raises the trans woman to exemplarity and so erases woman and a theory that reads around the trans woman. In each case queerness emerges where woman has been disavowed. This relation mirrors the relation we've already seen between Barthes and Foucault: each installs the trans feminine as a figure; one suggests that she transcends sex and attacks heterosexuality, and the other suggests that she is an absolute negation and therefore exists only as an effect. I argue that we must look elsewhere and think differently in order to avoid repeating the habit of raising the trans feminine as an allegory that was established at the very moment when our contemporary definitions of sex were being scientifically and theoretically codified. Indeed, this book has argued throughout that this fixing of the trans feminine is essentially embedded in the conceptual foundations of psychoanalytic accounts of how a subject *becomes a woman*.

Writing in the wake of Queer Theory's rise, Bidy Martin observed "a tendency among . . . theorists and activists to construct queerness as a vanguard position that announces its newness and advance over and against apparently superseded and now anachronistic feminism with its emphasis on gender" (B. Martin, 104). Again, in the early 1990s, as in the early 1900s, the trans figure comes to emblemize the "outside of sex" and now in the 1990s *freedom* from the strictures of sex as well. Martin understands this tendency to contrast the vanguard queer present with the anachronistic feminist past as founded on a particular historical account of the contrast between the 1970s and the 1990s, between lesbian-feminism and queer thought and politics. This book has named the Modernist trans feminine allegory as a way of fixing the trans feminine body as a conceptual tool to order the vicissitudes of sex in the twentieth century. Martin observes, in queer studies articulations, the reversal of this valuation and the installation of woman as the disappointingly and embarrassingly stable ontology. Martin sees her concern as part of the evolution of queer thought. She, however, worries that

celebrations of queerness rely on their own projections of fixity, constraint, or subjection onto a fixed ground, often

onto feminism or the female body, in relation to which queer sexualities become figural, performative, playful, and fun. In the process, the female body appears to become its own trap, and the operations of misogyny disappear. (B. Martin, 104)

This misogynist operation in Queer Theory in the early 1990s requires a “visible difference represented by cross-gender identification to represent the mobility and differentiation that ‘the feminine’ or ‘the femme’ supposedly cannot” (B. Martin, 105). Martin’s analysis clarifies the position of the trans feminine as well: the celebration of “cross-gender” experience in contrast with the “swamp” of the female identity suggests that these experiences could not coexist. Rather than the disappearance that Queer Theory performs on cis woman, trans woman is brought to the fore, and as in the Modernist literary appropriation, converted into a figure for a general reordering of sex.

#### FEMININITY, EFFEMINACY, AND BECOMING MODERN

What else happened to the categories of sex and sexuality in the decades after 1870? This is the fundamental theoretical question that *The New Woman* asks with the benefit of Foucault’s method but with a recognition of the limits of the historical foundation of his theory. Queer Theory’s figural treatment of the trans feminine reflects an effect of the singular canonization of Foucault’s history of the emergence of the male homosexual as the consummate modern sexual species. Other histories provide the foundation for a theorization of the emergence of the trans feminine as a distinct cultural field and experience. Part 1 of *The New Woman* provides some of that material. The history of trans feminine sociality that chapter 4 begins to tell, and there is surely much more to recover, is the foundation of such a theory. This history clarifies the role that policing and incarceration, gendered labor spheres, social mores that govern women’s daily lives, and sexual violence play in shaping trans women’s experiences. They attest to the actual lived experience of trans femininity that is not categorically distinct from the experience of cis women, nor is the former reducible to the latter.

Another history must be introduced in order to understand the transformation in these experiences during this book’s period of focus. This context explains the intensity of focus on trans femininity that this book documents. This is the historical development that made genitals the

ground for sex identity. This process happened in tandem in internal and external colonial dynamics whereby the gritty neighborhoods of the metropolises and the sexual mores of colonies were jointly subjected to the imposition of the rational modern understanding that genitals determine sex and sexual role. It was through these processes that sex became cis.

The social category of trans femininity is inflected with association with the prostitute and the colonial effeminate, and so understanding these categories is necessary to understanding the trans feminine in the metropolises of the West. In the period when sex was made cis, feminist social discourses identified companionate heterosexuality and Carpenter's rational masculinity as the sole avenues through which cis women were encouraged to imagine freedom. Prostitution and gender-deviant queerness were positioned as impediments to this freedom. This is the context for the evocation of effeminacy as a kind of unacceptable femininity that is distinct from cis women. This reordering gave rise to the denigration of characteristics that are effeminate, and this was the birth of transmisogyny. Historicizing trans femininity reveals that in the late nineteenth century trans feminine people become the representative violation of the modern dictate that assigned sex determines social gender role. Trans femininity was only allowed to enter popular or medical consciousness in a narrative of medical salvation through sex change. The trans femininity that refused this narrative retained its relation to degeneracy, and among normatively gendered homosexuals trans femininity was disavowed as an anachronistic aberration. Foucault's inattention to these reorderings of woman and misogyny that correlated with the historical distinction between the male homosexual and the trans feminine invert enabled the theories that fix trans femininity outside of time.

Chauncey roughly periodizes this expert distinction between gender-deviant inversion and gender-normative homosexuality (and the corollary vernacular shift whereby trans women were distinguished from gay men and cis women) as it was expressed in the commercial sex sector of New York. At the turn of the century, sex work was done by cis women and fairies. Both feminized groups sold sex to men who "identified themselves as normal," that is, heterosexual (Chauncey, 67).<sup>11</sup> "By the 1910s and 1920s" Chauncey writes, "it was increasingly common for both gay- and straight-identified men to sell sexual services to gay-identified men" (*ibid.*). This shift went beyond spheres of commercial sex, as fairies also lived as the wives of "normal" husbands in the earlier

period. This way of ordering kinship became less possible with the shifts of the 1910s and 1920s toward a model of homosexuality. This is a succinct summary of the timeline in which trans feminine people and gay men were beginning to be considered as separate categories. This was the moment that Hirschfeld precipitated with his publication of *The Transvestites* in 1910.

Chapter 1 of *The New Woman* outlined writings by Edward Carpenter, Andre Gide, John Symonds, and Marc-Andre Raffalovich that grounded a politics which affirmed masculine gay men in resistance to the diagnostic model of inversion with its centering of gender nonconformity.<sup>12</sup> The circulation of these perspectives correlated historically with the shift that Chauncey describes from the view of street scenes. What we're witnessing here is the shift in both vernacular and expert models away from the conflation of sexual and gender non-normativity to their proclaimed distinction. For trans women this shift meant two things. First, it meant the insistence that they were categorically different from cis women, as opposed to a fairy model that did not insist on this distinction. Second, it meant that they were categorically different from gay men. This distinction was first widely honored in the first two decades of the twentieth century. This was the shift that provided the context for the stories of sex change that surfaced in the 1930s.

This was not a simple or total shift. Among bourgeois populations, the distinction between gender-normative homosexuals and the socially unintelligible gender difference of extreme inverts had already started to be made in the nineteenth century. This occurred while street fairies still lived in an easy relation to the category of woman in street scenes that did not distinguish them from cis sex workers. On the other hand, of course, throughout the long twentieth century, heterosexual trans women partnered with heterosexual men just as fairies did in 1900. This is a long history from at least the mid-nineteenth century to the present that, in many ways, medicalization interrupts. The point is that the introduction of the concept of "sex change" suggested a benchmark that made the previous categories of female identity socially inscrutable.

The shift in the late 1920s and early 1930s also set up a fissure within trans femininity. It was the beginning of the opening up of the distinction between the trans woman and the street fairy. This was a categorical distinction largely formed around factors of class and access. It took substantial economic resources and a lot of luck to find your way to Magnus Hirschfeld's institute. There were trans feminine people in every city and town, but it was Lili Elbe's story of sex change that

came to define the horizon of trans feminine life. The expert model of trans femininity shifted to offer sex change as this horizon. All trans women became beholden to the idea that they could be verified through diagnosis and completed through surgical intervention. The narrative of medical perfectibility granted the trans woman (a very conditional) legitimacy while the street fairy retained her relation to cis prostitutes. In broad strokes, this is a historical shift in understanding. We begin the twentieth century with a working-class reality in which fairies were subjected to the same conditions as cis women and lived female social identities. In the first decades of the century, trans femininity began to be understood through a bourgeois model of diagnosis and cure in which womanhood was an aspirational state that doctors could provide. Again, both categories of experience exist to this day, but the period from the late 1920s to the 1930s saw the emergence of sex change as the horizon that all trans women were thought to pursue in their hopes, if not in fact.

This shift brings us back to the primacy of the disavowal of pederasty and the perversions of “the East” in the work of Carpenter and others, outlined in chapter 1. The history of the imposition of binary sex categories in places that, prior to falling under colonial logics of modernization, did not ascribe to heterosexual norms in spheres of desire and love helps clarify the operation of this Euro-American historical development of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Afsaneh Najmabadi’s history of sexuality and gender in the Qajar period of Iranian history (1794–1925) demonstrates that the heterosexualization of love bonds required the erasure of the beardless male (*amrad* or *ghilman*) as a socially sanctioned object of male desire during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. She uncovers “a well-known practice of adult men keeping younger men as their companions, sometimes referred to as *adam’dari* (keeping a male). The older man was sometimes referred to as ‘the cover’ (*milhaf*) of the younger one” (Najmabadi, 24). These practices and relationships were public and publicized, providing inspiration for paintings, popular poems, and stories. The pairings were considered wholly compatible with heterosexual marriages, which were regarded as reproductive contracts and not affective forms. This erasure of the beardless beloved occurred as an Iranian response to falling under the gaze of Europeans who associated *amrads* with the trans feminine inhabitants of London and Paris (*ibid.*, 4). Moving toward the fin-de-siècle, “same-sex practices came to mark Iran as backward; heteronormalization of eros and sex became a condition of ‘achieving

modernity,' a project that called for heterosocialization of public space and a reconfiguration of family life" (ibid.). Najmabadi interprets this transformation as reflective of a change in the ideas about sex. Modernizing discourse considers "a society in which men and women mix at all levels as less gender stratified" but in fact "that very notion of mixing assumes a binary of two kinds . . . In that sense, modern heterosocialization became, paradoxically, productive of gender as a binary" (ibid.). This binarization of all people into either male or female was the mechanism through which love and desire were heterosexualized in Qajar Iran.

Najmabadi presents the *amrad/ghilman* as a term of "sexual difference" that is irreconcilable with heteronormalization. By "sexual difference" she means difference based on sexual practice or sexual role. The *amrad/ghilman* also must be thought, in Najmabadi's account, in relation to sexual difference in the morphological sense: as possessed of bodies that functioned in a way that female bodies functioned. Najmabadi is very precise here; she marks a historical transformation in the way in which different desires were mapped onto the bodies of different sexual types and the association of *amrad/ghilman* with women

To the extent that woman and mukhannas both defined non-manhood, they are certainly affiliated categories. Yet the reduction of that neighborly affiliation to one of similitude is largely a modern phenomenon. The ubiquitous designation of the beardless amrad *or* mukhannas as effeminate in our time reveals the depth of heteronormalization and the reduction of all gender and sexual categories to two: male and female, man and woman. (Najmabadi, 16)

The modern conversion of the *amrad/ghilman* into a figure that is "like a woman" reimagines this sexual difference as a morphological difference. What had been a question of how desires and "passions" animate the body, orienting desire either to the anterior or posterior, became a question of acting like a woman and occupying a female sexual function. The shift was narrated in one patriotic poem as training the desire of the nation's sons toward the "cunt," the origin of all the sons and daughters of "mother Iran," and away from the "anus," for which there was no nationalist symbolic equivalent.<sup>13</sup> In this new modern operation these two holes are imagined as equivalent but unequal sexual objects. This is a morphological distinction that in fact produced the conflation of the categories *amrad/ghilman* and woman (Najmabadi, 149). This

marked the “feminization” of the male beloved in modernist discourse, a feminization that was the morphological reimagining of male and female bodies.<sup>14</sup>

Whereas the active male partner (*amradum*) dissolved without a trace into heterosexual arrangements, the *amrads* retained their identity as the modernizing discourse deemed them backward and modernizers began a campaign to disappear them from public view. It was women’s right to reciprocal monogamy that underwrote this social campaign to disappear the *amrad*. Najmabadi explains the public perception in the period that women were “[demanding] that men give up their relations with *amrads* if they expected their wives to be companionate spouses” (Najmabadi, 25). Modernizing discourse interpreted *ghilmans* as usurpers of women’s right to the body and attention of their husbands in the new era of companionate heterosexuality.<sup>15</sup>

A substantial literature evidences that the colonial association of the colonized with effeminacy also ordered gender in the South Asian colonial context.<sup>16</sup> The contrast between “the manly Englishman” and “the effeminate Indian” was a substantial rhetorical component of colonial policy in late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century colonial India.<sup>17</sup> Like in Iran, there was an easy transposition from individual onto national gendered characters. Mrinalini Sinha observes that “British colonialism in India . . . gave rise to the dominant British explanations of contemporary Indian society in terms of decline or effeminacy” during the late nineteenth century (Sinha, 19).<sup>18</sup> In South Asia, a context of formal state colonial domination, this ideology found its mode of expression in antisodomy laws, as a large body of postcolonial work has examined.<sup>19</sup> Reading this work through Najmabadi’s observations helps us to recast this insistence on abolishing sodomy as the heteronormalization of sex as well as the persecution of those with same-sex desires. In other words, antisodomy law says not just that sex between men is sick, but also that *only* female-assigned bodies will be penetrated.

It was through these means that social structures in both the metropole and the colonies shifted to disappear people whose social expressions of gender and sexuality were incompatible with the modern dictate that genitals determined social role. At the end of this process, sex change became the sole means to attain a sex other than the one that you were assigned at birth. This is the disappearance that made the new woman new. She is available for rediscovery because these processes have excised her from history. As a fairy she is anachronistic in the modern world. As a transsexual woman she was an emblem of modern medical possibility.

In actual trans feminine life, the same women were dealing with their relation to these two categories and their defining narratives. This operation of power is confirmed by Queer Theory's insistence that trans women cross or change sex. In the conflation of trans women with sex change, sex became cis. In order for sex to become cis, the penetrability of all bodies must be denied. This is why trans femininity was infused with such a heavy representational burden in the Modernist period and throughout the long twentieth century.

The final chapter of *The New Woman* traces an intellectual tradition that reflects trans feminine knowledge. In contrast to Queer Theory's interpretation of individual trans people, Materialist Trans Feminism emerges from the collective life of trans sociality and knowledge production. Materialist Trans Feminism emerges from the history of socialities that take for granted the plural relations between genitals and sexed identities and feel no responsibility to majoritarian socialities that understand sex in a cis and heterosexual way. This is the queer and trans history of relations that are organized by the sign "woman" or in relation to the sign "woman," composed of people who often undergo risk to ease a relation between their bodies and that word. But this history does not reveal a series of easy or transparent relations to the word or the experience of being a woman. Rather, this history grounds a more vital and capacious trans feminist politics that does not assume cisness or that trans people are not also women.



## Materialist Trans Feminism against Queer Theory

The September 1973 issue of *Moonshadow*, the journal of the Miami-based trans feminist organization Transsexual Action Organization (TAO), included a short first-person narrative about the experience of a trans woman in a men's prison (see figure 4). In this piece, the author describes the prison as a "hellhole" of screaming inmates and guards. This frightening atmosphere is the backdrop for her experience of being sold for sex to other inmates in exchange for cigarettes. She writes about being incarcerated from the perspective of a person who "[has] breasts but [is told she is] a man." In addition to the discomforts and fears that all incarcerated people face, she writes that trans women endure this increased vulnerability to sexual and physical violence by other inmates and guards, as well as the constant violence of being misgendered. She also reports that new forms of organizing are offering hope to trans women in prison. She writes that "a [transsexual] went through the block yesterday and she told me there are a lot of [transsexual] and [transvestite] groups now" that are "really together and doing things . . . maybe they will help us." She contrasts the genuine hope that this autonomous trans women's organizing represents with the false hope offered by the most famous narrative of trans women's experience: "it's just not like they explained it in the Christine Jorgensen Story at all, they left so much out."

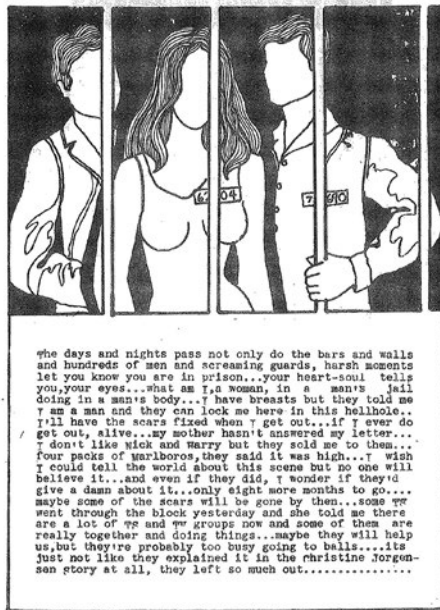


Figure 4. Article from September 1973 issue of the periodical *Moonshadow*

*The New Woman* has aimed to outline the distinction between the figural depiction that literature and theory distill from the expert model of trans femininity and the perspectives that vernacular trans feminine writing provides. Two fundamental theoretical points have returned in these chapters. First, many trans feminine people experience a relation between their sex and their bodies that violates both the cis understanding of sex and the diagnostic narrative of trans femininity. There is a long historical archive that demonstrates examples of female identity that do not hinge on assigned sex or the possibility of sex change. Second, the social category of trans woman has a material basis in both domestic labor and sex work. The devaluation of domestic work and the criminalization of sex work are the mutually conditioning material bases for the violence that trans women face.

This chapter traces the politicizing of these facts in writing and political work by trans women in the United States since the 1970s. This book calls this tradition of thought and political activity Materialist Trans Fem-

inism. This body of work includes political writing, periodicals, memoirs, and academic writing. The words of the speaker in the *Moonshadow* piece are an example. These words resonate with realities of trans women's experiences going back to Fanny and Stella. Like those women, the speaker experiences criminalization for being a trans woman. Also like Fanny and Stella, mutual care with other trans women is a source of hope. *Moonshadow* is one historical document of this political network of care that began to produce political analyses in the 1970s. The body in prison, the experience of having breasts, worrying about the likely event of sexual exploitation and assault: these are features of this trans woman's embodiment that Materialist Trans Feminism theorizes.

These features do not lend themselves to the explanatory or allegorical function assigned to trans women in works of literature and theory. In other words, although the *Moonshadow* speaker's experience is a corollary to the experiences of violence and resistance that the life writing documents in the Modernist period, texts of Queer Theory do not center such facts when the field assesses the *meaning* of trans women. As a political document that addresses the conditions of trans women's lives, the *Moonshadow* piece frees trans women of the imperative to illuminate cis people's experience or to represent some pre-political truth about her trans feminine body and mind. These writers don't respond to the expert's question that the press leveled at Christine Jorgensen and Roberta Cowell: "Are you a real woman and how do we know?" Rather, these trans feminists think and act from the conditions that the reality of trans women establish in the trans social, labor, and political spheres. Materialist Trans Feminist texts attend to both a common set of concerns that affect all trans feminine people and the internal diversity of that category. In other words, these writings identify the material conditions that bind trans women into a social category while also accounting for the diversity of trans feminine experience along the lines of race, class, immigration status, coloniality, and sexuality.

This chapter addresses the genealogy of such trans feminist texts that theorize and politicize trans feminine embodiment and trans feminist modes of organizing mutual care. Materialist Trans Feminism produces accounts of women's embodiment that do not assume cis experience. These accounts access the relation between trans feminine experience and criminalization, racialization, experiences of work, and other social factors. These texts also account for the joy of trans feminine life and sociality. Rather than Queer Theory's retreat from woman as an analytic and political category, Materialist Trans Feminism decenters cis experi-

ence to more accurately theorize the political category of woman. The chapter concludes by placing this intellectual and political production in conversation with texts by Leo Bersani and Denise Riley in order to demonstrate that trans feminist perspectives open up new possibilities in feminist and queer texts that do not address trans women directly. The chapter's frame reflects the double work of Materialist Trans Feminism. It is both an independent genealogy of thought and an analytic perspective that exposes new insights in canonical works of queer and feminist theory.

TRANS FEMININE SOCIALITY IN  
THE MID-TWENTIETH CENTURY: SURVIVAL  
PRACTICES AND CONCEPTS OF SEX AND GENDER

This intellectual and political work beginning in the early 1970s grew out of the conditions of trans feminine communal experience in the long twentieth century. Following the circulation of Jorgensen and Cowell's stories, individual trans women began to seek each other out while the trans feminine sociality of street scenes that this book has traced back to the 1860s continued. Social networks organized by and for trans women constituted what Susan Stryker calls "Midcentury Transgender Social Networks" (*Transgender History*, 41). Prominent examples of this kind of organizing includes the work of Virginia Prince, who started a support group and journal called *Transvestia* for trans women in 1952 in Los Angeles. Her friend Louise Lawrence started a "correspondence network with transgender people around the world" from her home base in San Francisco (*ibid.*, 44). She placed ads in magazines asking for trans women to contact her and in this way established her network. In the late 1960s trans women were on the front lines of several uprisings around the United States that portended a new direction in queer and trans self-organization. An anti-police riot at Compton's Cafeteria in San Francisco in 1966 was followed by a similar police riot at The Black Cat in Los Angeles in 1967. The events in Greenwich Village in June 1969 known as the Stonewall Uprising entered history as the catalyst for the politicizing of gay and trans life that occurred in the following years. Trans women of color were prominent among those who made that most consequential uprising.

The 1970s initiated a distinct period in which previous activities that supported trans feminine survival under the harshest conditions of era-

sure and criminalization were politicized in the radical movement that called itself Trans Liberation. This movement avowed a deep relation to Black Power, Women's Liberation, Third World Liberation, the anti-Vietnam War movement, and anti-capitalist struggle. The significant strain of this movement that analyzes misogyny as it affects trans feminine people is part of the longer genealogy of Materialist Trans Feminism that this chapter traces. This tradition of thought and struggle combines the practices of care that trans women had long offered one another with the spark and political perspective available in the wake of the moments of queer and trans uprising in the late 1960s. As we will see, Trans Liberationists centered political questions that stemmed from experiences with police abuse, incarceration, cross-dressing laws, sexual assault, intimate partner violence, denigration by both gay counterculture and straight society, and the right to express gender identity. These violent experiences take place against a landscape of limited access to survival necessities such as housing, jobs and economic resources, and health care. These features of life were common even for bourgeois and white women of trans experience, but were much more common for black women, non-black women of color, immigrant, and poor women.<sup>1</sup>

Many of the harshest conditions that women of trans experience faced resulted from their association with criminalized sex work. Chapter 4 reveals the historical fact that trans feminine life has often *only* been possible through sex work and visibility only occurred in relation to this work. Herein lies the material basis of trans femininity: a cis woman *might* be a sex worker and both proletarian and bourgeois standards for female respectability have long been defined in contrast to the figure of the sex worker, but trans femininity has been positioned by police and cultural producers in a *categorical* relation to sex work since the late nineteenth century. This is a feminist theoretical conclusion that trans feminine lives reveal and trans women politicize. Susan Stryker's documentary *Screaming Queen* contains archival footage from the late 1960s in which a white trans woman from a bourgeois background describes the assumption that she is a sex worker and the relation between trans feminine life and sex work. Frustratedly she reports that

most of the ts were prostitutes because . . . there was no way to get jobs then. As for me and other girls, the police were very bad. You could get picked up at any minute. I went to the grocery store, got picked up for "female impersonation." I never felt that I was impersonating a female. I

am female. . . . A common queen. I can't get away from that label.<sup>2</sup>

This woman's analysis testifies that the association of trans women and sex work that defined Fanny and Stella's lives in the 1860s extended through the mid-twentieth century. She also clarifies the relation between the criminalization of sex work and the criminalization of cross-dressing that the medicalization of trans femininity in fact bolsters by creating criteria to establish who qualifies as a woman and who does not.

The practices of communal survival and resistance that defined Trans Liberation in the late 1960s and early 1970s took shape around the existing conditions of trans women's lives. Close attention to trans feminine history reveals that this operation of power that established the precariousness of trans women's everyday lives was not a top-down total imposition of cis society's power. Rather, as Genet helps us to understand, the sovereign power of the police as representatives of the state existed in relation to the micropowers at work within queer and trans scenes. In the ethnography *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America*, Esther Newton gathers the testimonies of drag queens working and living in the drag scenes of Chicago and Kansas City in the early 1960s.<sup>3</sup> Much of Newton's book is concerned with documenting the fine distinctions that order this pre-Gay Liberation social and labor sphere. The distinction between a stage queen, street queen, street fairy, and hormone queen creates a social taxonomy that orders the relations among the queens (Newton, 21–40). As the queen's income level and prestige decrease, her femininity becomes more public, pronounced, and essential to the life of the queen. Newton observes that whereas the most glamorous and successful stage queens parade in female finery in clubs, their ability to shed that costume when they go offstage—to retain a claim to manhood—secures them the highest social prestige among their queen peers.<sup>4</sup> In contrast, the contingently employed street queens and the most intransigently female “hormone queens”<sup>5</sup> occupy the most degraded positions.

This hierarchy of social value that is constituted by and reinscribes a relation between femininity and degradation is expressed in the attribution of female genitals to trans feminine street performers. Newton documents this when she “[asks] a street performer what drag queens do when they are out of work, he [says], ‘they get their butts out on the

street my dear and sell their little twats for whatever they can get for them” (Newton, 10). This assertion that street performers have “twats” is in evidence again in regard to “transy drag,” which the scene defines as the wearing of women’s clothes for reasons other than performance (ibid., 51). Newton recounts an incident in which “a street-oriented boy was changing costume backstage. This revealed that he had on a pair of women’s underpants. . . . The other performers began to tease him about his ‘pussy’ underpants. He laughed it off, saying, ‘You old queens are just jealous of my transy panties.’ However, I noticed that he did not wear them again” (ibid.).

This ascription of “twats” and “pussies” to the most denigrated and feminine members of the drag scene reveals that, for trans women as for cis, a morphological distinction between penetrator and penetrated determines sex. The account of Subject 129 records an affirmation of this understanding of sex, and the rough gynecological methods that police use to examine Fanny and Stella demonstrates its misogynist infliction. Divine’s depiction indicates this organization of sex as both an operation of patriarchal power and the site of feminine resistance. This history informs a revision of Butler’s account of the theoretical implications of trans feminine life and embodiment. Newton reveals that the queens who wear female clothes for reasons other than stage performance, who do “transy drag” in the vernacular, are deemed “wrong because [their lives violate] the glamour standard, which is synonymous with professionalism, that is, the right context and motivation for impersonation (performance, making legitimate money) as opposed to the wrong context and motivation (private life, private compulsion to *be* rather than *imitate* a woman)” (Newton, 51). “Performativity” of femininity or womanhood is a concept that is central to Butler’s theory of gender and the basis for the exemplarity of trans experience. “Performativity” means differently when considered in a genealogy of trans feminine experience, which reveals a clear and acknowledged distinction between those who *act like* women in certain contexts and those who, as the scene parses it, wish to *be* women and who are therefore treated as women. The misogyny directed at transy queens is formed by a generally negative attitude toward cis women who, Newton comments elsewhere, the queens denigrate for being ugly and unglamorous (ibid., 57). Newton’s ethnography reveals that misogyny tethers the cis female and trans female experience. This misogyny is formed and enforced by an ascription of female genitals to anyone who is known to be penetrated

or inhabit a female social role. The diversity of social positions within this scene is precisely the kind of specificity that is essential and meaningful in the lives of drag scenes, but is erased in any attempt to flatten the trans woman into a single theoretical figure.

This history unlocks something crucial about the formation and reformulation of both cis womanhood and trans womanhood in the twentieth century. Chapter 3 argued that Djuna Barnes's oeuvre produces a feminist critique of the denigration that marks the experience of womanhood by depicting that denigration, even participating in it, but pushing it to explicit extremes that stage and expose this denigration as violence in the most garish terms. This method of critique is incompatible with liberal feminist arguments, stemming from Carpenter's moment, that aim to establish women's equality with men. This tradition addresses the female denigration that survives the liberal winning of the wage for bourgeois women, companionate marriage, and the vote. Camp and drag performance often fall into this tradition of feminist critical art that reacts to denigration through cultivation and staging of denigration, through the appropriation, on the part of the oppressed, of the terms and techniques of oppression.<sup>6</sup> As Newton's history makes clear, within this scene, feminine denigration adheres more completely to some queens than to others, demonstrating that misogyny orders this scene, even as its rules complicate the transparency of genitals as the basis of sex. This scene and its constitutive definitions of sex as a relation to female degradation and vulnerability clash with the claims to both gay and women's liberation in ways crucial to the explication of trans life, gay life, and women's life after 1969, as we will see in the following section. Newton's ethnography documents continuities of trans life from Fanny and Stella's 1870s to the 1970s.

#### TRANS LIBERATION / TRANS FEMINISM: MODELS OF AUTONOMY AND MODES OF SURVIVAL

In her melancholic preface to the 1978 edition of *Mother Camp*, Newton reflects on the time that she spent collecting the material for her ethnography some fifteen years earlier. Her reflections center around her sense that gay pride discourse and the kinds of sociality that it proscribes are not compatible with the sociality of drag scenes and the queens that inhabit them. In fact, the late 1960s and early 1970s saw the development of an autonomous and wide-reaching political move-



ment of Trans Liberation that politicized many of the facts of trans life that Newton observed. The June 1969 Stonewall Riots that catalyzed the rage of sexual and gender rebels under the banner of Gay Liberation drew people who had been working in women's liberation and the antiwar movements, people who had been involved with civil rights and third world radical projects, young college students who had little political experience, homophile activists who ranged from assimilationists to Communist Party members, people who lived on the street, and people who had fled the suburbs.

In the first years of the 1970s, the collectivity produced by the euphoria of uprising was riven by divisions based on gender, race, and political analysis. Feminist women frustrated by the male-centrism of Gay Liberation politics and the lesbo-phobia of feminist work formed lesbian feminist organizations. Gay people of color formed third world caucuses within Gay Liberation groups or chose to join autonomous third world projects. In this environment of refining autonomous practices, trans political groups coalesced, often emerging from within transmissogynist gay liberationist groups to form autonomous groups. Attention to these projects decenters moments of rupture (riots, for instance) by pointing to the sustained practices and bonds that activated in moments like Stonewall that become historical touchstones.

Trans Feminist projects are organized practices of mutual care and survival that form around the needs of trans feminine people. These are projects of self-defense against interpersonal violence enacted by police, prison guards, male sex work clients, and intimate partners. Trans Feminist anti-carceral politics resist policing and arrest and provide means to survive prison. Politics of bodily autonomy promote safe access to gender-confirming hormones and other health-related resources for wellness. Projects organized social reproduction to provide housing, food, and community. The Trans Liberation political network in the United States and internationally shared their work and experiences via newspapers and newsletters. A 1973 list published in *Moonshadow* provides a digest of such projects. (See figure 5.) These projects took shape in centers associated with radical organizing in the period like the Bay Area and Greenwich Village. But there were also Trans Liberation groups in Lansing, Illinois; Jacksonville, Florida; Baton Rouge, Louisiana; and Milwaukee, Wisconsin, among many other places.

The September 1970 issue of the *Trans Liberation Newsletter* published a list (cited in *Transgender History*, 97) of movement demands that indicates the priorities of the people involved in these projects.

# ORGANIZATIONS

Some of these organizations primarily serve the transvestite, but all relate to transsexuals as well. Services range from social activities, personal referrals, instruction, publications, protest actions, housing, employment, counseling, information, social events, telephone help-lines, etc. Most groups charge fees or dues, some are on a donation-only basis, some are free. \*x\* means the group issues a publication.

1. Empathy Club, Box 12466, Seattle, Washington, 98111. x
2. Erickson Educational Foundation, 4047 Hundred Oaks Avenue, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 70808. x
3. Foundation for Personality Expression, Box 36901, Los Angeles, California, 90036. x
4. Manicure, 485-38th Street, Oakland, California, 94705.
5. National Organization of Gender Identity Dysphoria, Project Rush, 708 South Magnolia Boulevard, Los Angeles, California, 90057. x
6. Queens Liberation Front, Box 1271, New York, New York, 10009. x
7. Salmacis Society, Box 2441, Menlo Park, California, 94025. x
8. Gimi Valley Group, 1725 Pandora Street, Gimi Valley, California, 93605.
9. Street Transvestites Action Revolutionaries, Greenwich Village, New York.
10. Transsexual Action Organization, Box 1708, Miami Beach, Florida, 33138. x
11. TAO Jacksonville, 230 North 4th Avenue, Jacksonville, Florida.
12. TAO Los Angeles - c/o the Transsexual Guidance Clinic.
13. TAO Orlando, 4211 Lake Lawn Avenue, Orlando, Florida, 32808.
14. TAO Philadelphia, 2178 Walnut Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 19103.
15. TAO San Francisco - c/o Transsexual Counseling Service.
16. TAO Staffordshire, 51 Gorlishaw House, Pleck-Walsall, WS2 9JE, Staffordshire, England.
17. Transsexual Counseling Service, 121 Leavenworth Street, San Francisco, California, 94102.
18. Transsexual Guidance Clinic, 6922 Hollywood Boulevard, Suite 211, Los Angeles, California, 90028.
19. Transvestites Independent Chapter, Box 45, Lansing, Illinois, 60438. x
20. TVIC, Box 2026, Camosa Park, California, 91306.
21. TVIC, 1104 Broadway, Albany, New York, 12204. x
22. Transvestite Information Service, Box 278, Spencer, North Carolina, 28159. x
23. TWS, 11870 Heidelberg Lane, #15, Whitmore Lake, Michigan, 48189.
24. Transvestites-Transsexuals, Gay Community Services Center, 1614 Wilshire Boulevard, Los Angeles, California, 90017.

The TAO would appreciate information on groups not listed.

**SALMACIS** **EMPATHY CLUB**  
**TVIC** **TH3S** **tao**

**Transsexual Counseling Service**

Figure 5. List of trans liberation political organizations (Moonshadow, September 1973)

#### WE DEMAND

1. Abolition of all cross-dressing laws and restrictions of adornment.
2. An end to exploitation and discrimination within the gay world.
3. An end to exploitation practices of doctors and physicians in the fields of transvestism and transsexuality.<sup>7</sup>
4. Free hormone treatment and transsexual surgery upon demand.
5. Transsexual assistance centers should be created in all cities with populations of one million inhabitants, under the . . . direction of postoperative transsexuals.
6. Full rights on all levels of society and full voice in the struggle for liberation of all oppressed peoples.

7. Immediate release of all persons in mental hospitals or prison for transvestism or transsexualism.
8. Transvestites who exist as members of the opposite anatomical gender should be able to obtain identification as members of the opposite gender. Transsexuals should be able to obtain such identification commensurate to their new gender with no difficulty, and not be required to carry special identification as transsexuals.

This list combines demands for decriminalization through changing laws with a broad vision for asserting the power of trans women in the movement and in areas of life that are particular sites of violence for trans women. The list leads with a strong statement against the criminalization of trans life, particularly through the “abolition of cross-dressing laws.” It then moves to a call to end the transmisogyny within the gay community, reflecting the continuation in radical milieus of the anti-trans woman dynamics that Newton observed in the pre-Gay Liberation drag scenes. Demands 3 and 4 address access to gender-confirming health care in the form of both surgery and hormones and note that the withholding of these services creates a situation in which exploitative doctors can take advantage of trans women’s health care needs. Health care also means resisting the psychiatric pathologizing of trans women’s lives, and the link between being “locked” in mental health hospitals and prisons reflects the relation between health care advocacy and anti-carceral politics in the lives of trans women. The list demands trans assistance centers staffed by trans women, a structure that imagines an organizational model for the informal networks of care that supported young trans women and gay people when they “came out” into queer and trans scenes.<sup>8</sup> The insistence on trans women as staff reflects the centrality of trans women’s autonomy, a feature that runs through the trans feminist material that this chapter collects. Finally the list reflects the importance of accurate identification in enabling many areas of life. This demand calls back to the moment when Hirschfeld’s Subject Five cut her hair and started wearing pants because the lack of social security papers prevented her from finding employment.<sup>9</sup> A communiqué published alongside these demands attributes “the oppression against transvestites and transsexuals of either sex [to] sexist values” and voices solidarity with Women’s Liberation.<sup>10</sup> Throughout, this chapter notes this relation between trans women’s political projects and Women’s Liberation. The needs that form these demands structure the Trans Liber-

ation projects of the movement. The next section examines significant examples of these projects.

RIOTERS/MOTHERS: SYLVIA RIVERA,  
MARSHA P. JOHNSON, AND STAR HOUSE

Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson had been involved in the Gay Liberation scene in New York when they founded Street Transvestites for Gay Power in 1970, following their participation in a student sit-in at New York University's Weinstein Hall that protested the administration's resistance to a gay dance occurring on campus in which student activists favored breaking up the action after the arrival of the New York Police Department. The reticence of student activists to defy the police underlined for the street revolutionaries the necessity of organizing separately. As they wrote in a statement, "you people run if you want to, but we're tired of running. We intend to fight" (qtd. in Cohen, 118). From that experience came Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries and STAR House. Rivera remembered that their goal was to offer housing to

street homeless people and anybody that needed help at that time . . . Marsha and I had always sneaked people into our hotel rooms. Marsha and I decided to get a building. [We] just decided it was time to help each other and help our other kids. We fed people and clothed people. We kept the building going. We went out and hustled the streets. We paid the rent. We didn't want the kids out in the streets hustling. They would go out and rip off food. There was always food in the house and everyone had fun. It lasted for two or three years. (qtd. in Feinberg, 107–8)

As Rivera's description of the project indicates, she and Johnson were themselves trans feminine young people who experienced homelessness and relied on sex work for survival. They created an organizational model for sharing the responsibilities to meet the basic survival needs of the collective. These autonomous political practices worked with what they had to build on the everyday help trans feminine youth offered one another.

This kind of political work was marginalized by the mostly white and middle-class people who were centered in movement spaces. Sylvia

Rivera had to fight her way onto the stage in order to deliver her infamous 1973 address to the crowd at Christopher Street Gay Liberation. In this address she succinctly outlined the work that she, Marsha P. Johnson, and others did from STAR House. Here she reveals that in addition to the direct services that STAR House offered to the young people who lived, ate, and entered community in that space, the house also served as an organizing base for keeping track of people who had been incarcerated. Rivera began:

I've been trying to get up her all day. For your gay brother and your gay sisters in jail! That write me every mother-fuckin' week and ask for your help and you all don't do a goddamn thing for them. . . . They've been beaten up and raped and they spend much of their money in jail to get their silicones and try to get their sex change. The women have tried to fight for their sex changes, or to become women of the women's liberation. . . . They write STAR because we're trying to do something for them. I have been to jail. I have been beaten and raped many times by men! Heterosexual men that do not belong in the homosexual shelter. . . . If you all want to know about the people who are in jail and do not forget Bambi L'Amour, Andora Marks, Kenny Messner and the other gay people in jail, come and see the people at STAR on 12th Street. . . . [We] are trying to do something for ALL OF US and not men and women that belong to a white middle class white club! (qtd. in Cohen, 158–59)

Rivera's speech makes clear how central criminalization and incarceration were to STAR's political priorities. Rivera and Johnson experienced incarceration and so they knew that gender nonconformity made a person more likely to be targeted by the police and caught in incarceration. They and other feminine people were also subjected to beatings and sexual assault as a routinized feature of incarceration. Rivera also points to the overlap of this gender violence in prison and in homeless shelters. She says the names of gay "brothers and sisters" who are currently incarcerated, declares her intention to center their needs in her political work, and insists that the larger movement not forget them. Rivera and Johnson's analysis and STAR's work reflect the intersection of these structures and address the immediate needs of trans people, including those in prison.

Among the people who actively tried to prevent Sylvia Rivera from speaking were lesbian feminists who themselves had to overcome the objections of cis male organizers to deliver a feminist political message.<sup>11</sup> Despite the obstruction of these feminists, STAR's work shared political strategies and objectives with a range of women's political projects during the period. First, housing was a central front of feminized political organizing in the 1970s. Rent strikes, tenants' rights organizing, and public housing organizing had pushed back against deadbeat landlords and discriminatory housing policies since the early twentieth century, and these movements were populated by poor white ethnic women and women of color.<sup>12</sup> STAR House was part of this history of struggle. STAR politicized care work and motherhood, another central front of 1970s feminist struggles. STAR didn't define motherhood and family in terms of biological relationships or state-sanctioned marriage. Sylvia Rivera described the people who lived at STAR House, who were often peers, as "[her] kids" just as gay and trans people in the movement called each other brothers and sisters (qtd. in Feinberg, 108). STAR resisted the practice of incarcerating trans people and politicized the conditions of incarceration.<sup>13</sup> Feminist projects in the period organized around women's prisons and the fact of rape in prison.<sup>14</sup> The group viewed sex work both as a survival tactic for trans women and as a site of the criminalization of trans women.<sup>15</sup> STAR addressed rape and domestic violence as community issues, as did many cis feminists.<sup>16</sup> STAR valued and affirmed women's rights to bodily self-determination and the autonomous control of health care. From silicone, to hormones, to abortion, to sterilization resistance, feminists and Trans Liberationists understood the political dimension of women's control of their own bodies.<sup>17</sup> STAR affirmed the relation among, in Rivera's words, "half-sisters" in struggle, as she called herself and other trans feminine people (Cohen, 119). This simple claim, that women should listen to and support each other, was a central feminist political priority of the period. In a 1995 *New York Times* article Rivera remarked that "Marsha plugged in the light for me," as she described the older girl looking out for her when she arrived on the scene of commercial sex on 42nd Street at the age of eleven. Their relationship is an example of a trans feminist practice that dates back to Fanny and Stella.

After the Tactical Patrol Force of the New York Police Department broke up the first night of Stonewall rioting, Sylvia was so inspired and amped up that she roamed the streets till dawn "setting garbage cans on fire" (Duberman, 202). The following night Johnson joined Rivera and the queer and trans people that came from all over New York after

hearing about the previous night's events. Marsha "climbed a lamppost to drop a bag with something heavy in it on a [police] squad car parked below . . . shattering the windshield" (ibid., 204). Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera's words and practices reflect the lessons of struggle, both moments of insurrection and projects of sustained care work. They were front and center in the streets during the Stonewall Rebellion. They were also there to house, feed, and emotionally support each other and other queer and trans youth in the wake of this moment of uprising. Their example demonstrates that valorizing moments of revolt like Stonewall can obscure the feminized tactics that reproduce struggle<sup>18</sup> and the radical perspectives that those who made that struggle held. Their example demonstrates that rioter and mother are not opposed categories.

POLITICS OF THE NON-MAN: CEI BELL,  
TOMMI MECCA, AND RADICAL QUEENS

Tommi Avicolti Mecca and Cei Bell formed another autonomous Trans Liberation group in Philadelphia in 1972 called Radical Queens. The first issue of their journal *The Radical Queen: The Magazine of the Non-Man* provides a short history of the organization, which began as a "small consciousness raising group" within the Philadelphia Gay Activists' Alliance (*The Radical Queen*, issue 1, 4) and set out to produce a "radical feminist, gender-free revolution" (Bell, 122). The group took the most emblematic political form of Women's Liberation, the consciousness-raising group, and formed when Cei and Tommi were lying around with their butch boyfriends and decided there was a power dynamic to these relationships that they had to work through together as femmes. In her remembrance of the importance of her friendship with Mecca, co-founder Cei Bell recalls the centrality of the friendship of Rivera and Johnson to the operation of STAR. She writes that "if Tommi and I had been pretty queens . . . who fit in, Radical Queens probably would never have happened. Pretty queens didn't spend Saturday nights writing manifestos" (ibid., 116). The friends' experiences as outsider queens who felt devalued in their relationships with masculine men underwrote their analysis of gender as "the caste system by which male-dominated society designates women and effeminates as inferior." Their consciousness-raising practice and publication combined the perspectives of lesbians, trans masculine people, and trans feminine queens, a coalition of all those who "machismo men loathe and fear" and who will band together to "storm their streets" (*The Radical Queen*, issue 1, 11).

The first Radical Queens manifesto voices resistance to “straight-identified machismo gays” who had ostracized them as “tacky queens,” motivating queens to “[band] together as a union of radical queens” for “the right to be ourselves . . . including wearing makeup, doing drag, and other femme-identified activity that any queen decides expresses him or herself” (*The Radical Queen*, issue 1, 1). This simple affirmation of the social practices that define femininity was not voiced in feminist spaces composed of women and lesbians who were trying to escape the heteronormativity that entrapped and enforced “femme-identified activity” in their 1950s childhoods. This affirmation came from trans feminists and also, significantly, the manifesto makes space for femme-identified people who use either pronoun.

Radical Queens introduced an anti-imperialist analysis arguing that, for straight male society, “life is a battle to be fought in Vietnam . . . against the communist” and that even within the resistant formations movement men “still reduced the women in the movement to secretaries and typists,” voicing a critique that was foundational to Women’s Liberation’s formation (*The Radical Queen*, issue 1, 9). These observations led Radical Queens to develop a political position as “non-men,” allowing them to resist both “counter-revolutionary” masculinity and “the passivity, non-aggression and fragility” that their “sisters in the Women’s Movement see as oppressive” (ibid., 10). Members of Radical Queens discuss the violence that they had both inflicted and suffered including taunting, physical abuse, and sexual assault. Speaking from those experiences, the queens affirm that “sisters and sissies have broken the shackles” (*The Radical Queen*, issue 2, 4).

Cei Bell evidences the commonness of the experience of sexual assault among trans feminine people by both lovers and strangers. In fact, she missed the announcement of the formation of Radical Queens because she was drugged and raped by her partner. Tommi had also experienced being raped by a lover. They agree that “in none of these situations was calling the police a reasonable possibility” (Bell, 122). This element of their critique exposes the gender violence of sexual assault in gay and non-cis pairings and like STAR affirms the necessity of anti-carceral responses, including queens’ mutual care.

*The Radical Queen* issue 5 reprints “As to the Matter of Dress” from the *Uranian Mirror*, a small gay newspaper out of Berkeley, California. This piece connects the policing of gender within the Gay Liberation movement to policing by the state: “Queen-stomping comes guised in many styles—no less the enemy than the uniformed policeman. We’ve



become accustomed to attacks on our community culture from straight radicals and homosexual manliness activists under such masks as ‘revolutionary discipline’ and the butch defense that our blatancy threatened the p.r. image of the movement” (*The Radical Queen*, issue 5, 15). It also addresses the male appropriation of feminist language in the movement: “The latest and most cleverly camouflaged strategy of this same anti-Gay offensive rips off from our sisters and sissies the anti-macho ideology, while being in fact the effort [to] deny our feelings the oppression and joy from which that feminist consciousness arises” (ibid., 15). This analysis is crucial: cis gay and antiwar movement men enforced a masculinist “discipline” that (among other qualities) equated femininity with mainstream values and appropriated feminist language to repack-age their allergy to femininity as a feminist position. Many Women’s Liberationists were also stuck in the contradiction that this statement calls out.

Radical Queens integrated political positions that were central to Radical Feminism: they affirmed man-hating and they affirmed women and femininity as political categories. Unlike other Radical Feminists, Radical Queens decentered cis women. They speak of “the destructive venom of masculinity [that] is everywhere” (*The Radical Queen*, issue 1, 8) and speak from the perspective of those who were coerced into masculinity that “manhood [means] the acquisition of property (car, house, woman)” (ibid., 8). For this reason, Radical Queens state that “they see justification for manhaters everywhere” (ibid., 7). This was a basis for solidarity between women and queens, transvestites, and other trans feminine people. Radical Queens affirmed trans feminine autonomous practices within the Gay Liberation and Women’s Liberation milieus, affirmed links with Women’s Liberation, and engaged in consciousness-raising and mutual support among trans feminine people. Like STAR, Radical Queens politicized gender policing by both the state and machismo gays. The group affirmed femininity in a way that centered trans feminine people and combated their movement detractors, male and female, gay and straight.

#### THE TRANS LESBIAN FEMINISM OF BETH ELLIOT

Trans women also participated in the Women’s Liberation movement and contributed to lesbian feminism. A prominent example is Beth Elliot, a folksinger who was a vice-president in the Daughters of Bilitis (DOB)

and participated in the organizing of the West Coast Lesbian Conference (WCLC) in Los Angeles in 1973. Her participation in the DOB ended in 1972 when some of the women in the organization forced her out for being trans. After Elliot worked to get the Los Angeles conference off the ground, the radical feminist Robin Morgan rewrote her keynote address to feature a viciously transmisogynist attack on Elliot's participation in the conference, and a group called the Gutter Dykes from San Francisco spearheaded the taunting of Elliot. Morgan accused Elliot of divisiveness and the metaphorical "rape" of women's space. These incidents form part of a strain of radical feminist writing that to this day targets trans women.

Beth Elliot's vicious maltreatment by transmisogynists has been the focus of the historical attention paid to her. It is equally important to remember that she participated in lesbian organizing and that she found something politically significant in these projects. Elliot's place within radical feminist practices is affirmed by the fact that many of her sisters in the DOB resigned in protest following her ouster, including the entire collective of *Sisters*, the San Francisco DOB's newspaper. After Elliot's ouster from the DOB, the Los Angeles-based newspaper *The Lesbian Tide* printed both a statement by the DOB dissenters and the *Tide*'s collective response. The San Francisco DOB dissenters write, "It is wrong to say that a lesbian woman in a male body is 'passing as a lesbian woman.' You don't 'pass' for something you ARE . . . Any transsexual who considers her/himself to be a woman will be eligible for membership and participation in S.F. DOB" (Editorial Collective, 21). The *Tide* editorial collective offers their analysis of trans women's political situation as one of exemplary radical self-determination: "Our common oppression is based on society's instance that we perform certain roles: wife, husband, mother, father, masculine, feminine ect . . . We cry out 'You cannot define us. WE DEFINE OURSELVES!" (ibid., 29). The collective goes on to "advise our transsexual sisters that, if they are not welcome in the liberal city of San Francisco, they are most welcome in the city of Los Angeles" (ibid.).

Closer examination of the 1973 conference also offers insight into further trans feminist solidarities that emerged at that very event. When the organizers of the Los Angeles conference responded to Morgan and others' transmisogynist request to kick Elliot out, two-thirds of the lesbians in attendance elected that Elliot should stay (McLean, 36). When Elliot was harassed while onstage, the organizer and editor of *The Lesbian Tide*, Jeanne Cordova, "walked onto the stage and grabbed the

microphone and asked: ‘What is the problem here?’ . . . Elliot is, Cordova said again and again ‘a feminist and a sister’” (Clendinen and Nagourney, 116). Barbara McLean’s article “Diary of a Mad Organizer” published in the May-June 1973 issue of *The Lesbian Tide* was a report back on the conference, and the article contains more information relevant to the self-assertion of trans women in lesbian feminist organizing. McLean reports that while the Gutter Dykes were berating Beth Elliot, a blind woman fought her way onto the stage: “She is furious . . . pounds on the podium, insists on speaking” (McLean, 38). She identifies to the audience as a trans woman and is “so emotional, trembling so bad she can hardly stand up, clutching the mike she cried out these women are crucifying Beth and all transsexuals. ‘Why do they torment her? You are more oppressive than our oppressors’” (ibid.). She then sits down defiantly in front of the stage and continues shouting over the din of the crowd. This glorious action defeats the Gutter Dykes and they relinquish the microphone (ibid.). Both Beth Elliot and this woman’s presence at the conference reveals that they were called by the politics of lesbian feminism. The unnamed blind trans woman’s insurgent act of resistance demonstrates the lengths that trans women went to in order to assert their solidarity with each other when trans misogyny arose in that milieu. It is, however, Robin Morgan’s keynote address, published first in *The Lesbian Tide* and then in her own book *Going Too Far*, that is unfortunately most remembered by history.

In an interview titled “Rapping with a Street Transvestite Revolutionary,” Marsha P. Johnson reports her reception among the New York DOB:

Once in a while, I get an invitation to Daughters of Bilitis, and when I go there, they’re always warm. All the gay sisters come over and say, “Hello, we’re glad to see you,” and they start long conversations. But not the gay brothers. They’re not too friendly at all toward transvestites. . . . [because] a lot of gay brothers don’t like women! . . . And when they see a transvestite coming, she reminds them of a woman automatically, and they don’t want to get too close or too friendly with her. (Jay and Young, 114–15)

Here Johnson deftly theorizes transmisogyny and the way it connects all feminine and feminized people involved in Gay Liberation. Beth Elliot’s experience working for years in lesbian separatist projects indicates that

the receptivity that Marsha Johnson reports was not limited to New York. Beth Elliot demonstrates that lesbian separatism was attractive to some trans women, just as her ouster demonstrates the destructive strain of transmisogyny that ran through lesbian separatist circles. In her 2011 memoir, Beth Elliot reflects back on her experience with separatist feminism. She writes that although many queer and trans people, including some trans women, had encouraged her to tell her story as a means of discrediting the movement entirely, she was unwilling to do so. Despite the fact that she was “the archetypal victim of radical lesbians,” she felt the need to “communicate . . . that this community was [her] home, that [she] had helped nurture and unbind it with all [her] heart, and that it still mattered to [her]” (Elliot, 25). The cruel transmisogynist violence that Beth Elliot and other trans women endured from some lesbian feminists has had devastating effects for solidarities among cis and trans women in the last quarter of the twentieth century and the first quarter of the twenty-first. Elliot’s and others’ devotion to feminist political action, however, participates in the genealogy of a feminism that continues to root out its own internal political contradictions, including transmisogyny.

ANGELA DOUGLAS, *MOONSHADOW*,  
AND TRANS WOMEN’S AUTONOMY

A communiqué from the Transvestite-Transsexual Action Organization (TACO) in Los Angeles, printed in the California-based gay newspaper *Gay Sunshine* in January 1971, requested funds for the legal defense of Angela Douglas, a trans woman who had been arrested in Miami for cross-dressing. TACO and its allies hoped that Douglas’s case could spur the overturn of the many cross-dressing laws that kept low-income trans women in a revolving door of incarceration. TACO noted that Angela Douglas was being cared for by “local gay sisters” in Miami (Transsexual Action Organization, “Communiqué”). Rather than seeking to join autonomous lesbian feminist organizations, Angela Douglas organized around the political autonomy of trans women.

TACO became the Transsexual Action Organization (TAO) in Los Angeles in 1970. TAO’s newspaper and political activity took off when Douglas and the organization moved to Miami in 1972. This autonomous group restricted its membership to (in its terms) “post-op” trans women and trans women on hormones. They explained this choice as motivated by the desire to bar male heterosexual transvestites. This pol-

icy is an important one to consider as we think about autonomies and exclusions during the period. There were definitely health-care access issues as well as basic self-determination questions that would lead a contemporary reader to reject any policing of participants in a trans political project based on their choices concerning body modification. But context reframes the policy when we remember that this was a time when gay men were dressing in ways that had historically been for drag queens only. Marsha P. Johnson recalls that there was an affirmation of gay men who took on some trans feminine cultural signifiers and practices while retaining male social identity: “[In the] Gay Activist Alliance . . . The only transvestites they were very friendly with were the ones that looked freaky in drag . . . with no tits, no nothing. Well, I can’t help but have tits, they’re mine. And those men weren’t too friendly at all” (Jay and Young, 114). Douglas clearly thought that a medical credential was required to guard the trans women’s autonomy of her project.

TAO focused in particular on resisting “police and public abuse of transsexuals and other gays” (qtd. in Meyerowitz, 239). The group also criticized the “emphasis the mainstream media placed on the ‘medical aspects’ of transsexuality” (ibid.). The organization’s publication *Moonshadow* circulated news of trans women’s activism around the country and internationally. It publicized arrests and non-police violence directed at trans women. Articles encouraged trans feminine people to organize themselves. The group publicized news about trans health care and offered tips for accessing this health care. TAO articulated a trans feminist political vision that was wholly autonomous from both Gay Liberation and Women’s Liberation while also working out what solidarities among these movements might look like. For instance, TAO announced the formation of a solidarity committee for cis lesbians in the September 1973 issue of *Moonshadow*. Subsequent issues publicized the activities of the Lesbian Unit that was formed for cis women who wanted to work with TAO. The publication also warned trans women against working with cis women in other organizations who might co-opt their struggle and energy. Solidarity in autonomy was the ultimate position of the group. *Moonshadow* approached the questions of inclusion as a question of the inclusion of cis women in projects organized by and for trans women.

TAO and *Moonshadow* defined autonomous collective practices for trans women in an environment in which there was a lot of gender experimentation on the part of cis gay men that could sometimes erase trans women and their specific experiences. They coordinated jail support and publicized transmisogynist police harassment. They created and circulated trans feminine culture and sociality. They called on Women’s

Liberation to address internal transmisogyny. They circulated information about health care to empower trans women when they interfaced with care providers. These activities were consistent with the activities of their sister organizations in New York and Philadelphia. Each group had a slightly different relation to these questions and the tactics that they used to engage the needs of their trans women members.

#### TRANS FEMINISM AFTER TRANS LIBERATION

A 1976 article in the *Journal of Homosexuality* proves that lesbian feminist identification survived the purges of the early 1970s. “Lesbian/Feminist Orientation among Male-to-Female Transsexuals” pushes back against the popular image of trans women as hyper-heterosexual and conservative, suggesting that lesbianism and feminist political orientation are as common among trans women as among cis. This argument is evidenced by autobiographical sketches of “the transsexual coauthors of this paper” who “are woman-identified women (lesbians) who (as feminists) reject the traditional male-created norms of what women (and men) should be” (Feinbloom et al. 60). Like the Trans Liberationists of the previously examined projects, the article points out the features of experience common to cis and trans women. The form of the article, trans women narrating and theorizing their own lives, pushes back against a (by 1976) hundred-year-old model of appropriating trans women’s words to craft medical diagnostics that bolster the gatekeeping authority of the cis medical establishment. The authors suggest that “the transsexual / lesbian / feminist individual must be explored in her own terms, not only as an object of biosocial forces but as a *subject* who endlessly participates in a process of choice and change” (ibid., 61).

One coauthor rejects the diagnostic assertion that she is “trapped in the wrong body” and the suffering that the medical model uses to define transsexuality. Instead she affirms that a feminist “social environment reinforced my self-concept,” leading to “little internal stress” and ensuring “freedom of self-expression” (Feinbloom et al. 62). She discusses the process through which she gains feminist consciousness and marks this process with her ability to say, “I am a woman” because this allowed “a growing awareness and integration, into my life, of feminist thinking” (ibid., 64). This women-identification was itself a feminist practice—the right to be women was a central concern of 1970s feminist projects and Trans Feminism clarifies this concern. This article doubtless rep-

resents the experience of many trans women who are not positioned to author journal articles but who felt an affinity with feminist goals and forwarded them.

TRANS FEMINIST WORK SINCE THE 1970S

A xeroxed flyer that is filed in the folder labeled “transsexuals” in the cabinets of the Lesbian Herstory Archive in Brooklyn invites people to the January 19, 1983, meeting of the “Gay Women’s Free Spirit” discussion group in Greenwich Village that will feature “A VERY SPECIAL DISCUSSION with RIKI ANNE WILSON A Lesbian Transsexual and Radical Feminist.” (See figure 6.) This is almost certainly a misprint and

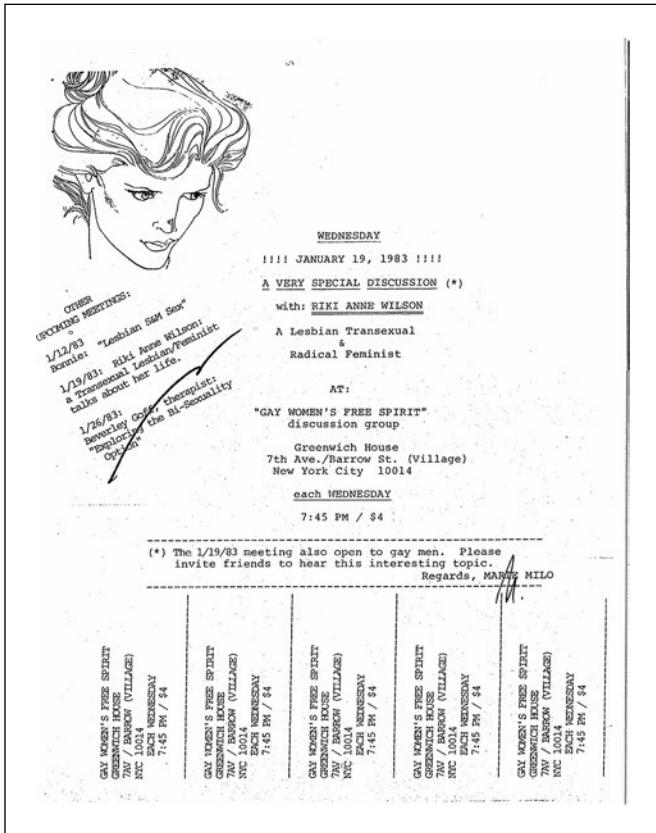


Figure 6. Flyer promoting Riki Wilchins’s talk at “Gay Women’s Free Spirit” discussion group

actually a reference to the influential trans feminist writer Riki Anne Wilchins, who was a founding member of the direct action group called the Transsexual Menace. This group staged vigils outside of courthouses that were hearing cases involving violence against transgender people (Stryker, *Transgender History*, 141) and organized displays of transgender collective presence by gathering in places such as New York City subway cars wearing the group's iconic shirts that feature the words "Transsexual Menace" in a font that is dripping blood (Goldberg). These collective direct actions continued the struggles of the Trans Liberationists of the 1970s.

Sandy Stone's influential article "The Empire Strikes Back: A Post-transsexual Manifesto" (1987) is in line with Butler that transsexual experience is bound by "realness," or in Stone's terms by the imperative "to pass," which she defines as the ability "to live successfully in the gender of choice, to be accepted as a 'natural' member of that gender" (Stone, 231). Stone also inserts transsexuality into a Post-Structuralist theoretical narrative: "A transsexual who passes is obeying the Derridean imperative: 'Genres are not to be mixed. I will not mix genres'" (ibid., 231). There is a significant difference, however, between Stone's approach to theoretical questions and the way the queer theorists considered in chapter 5 have approached them. Her understanding is grounded in transsexual experience. She writes, "I could not ask a transsexual for anything more inconceivable than to forgo passing, to be consciously 'read,' to read oneself aloud and . . . to begin to write oneself into the discourses by which one has been written—in effect, then, to become . . . posttranssexual" (ibid., 232). Her audience is "the brothers and sisters who may read . . . this" and she "[asks] all of us to use the strength which brought us through the effort of restructuring identity, and which has also helped us to live in silence and denial, for a re-visioning of our lives" (ibid., 232). Stone foregrounds collective life and theorizes trans life to, for, and in relation to trans people.

Emi Koyama produced important contributions to the canon of trans feminist writing starting in 2000. Her contribution is particularly significant because Koyama offers a trans feminist politics that opens into many other political questions. In 2000 she published a "Transfeminist Manifesto," in which she defines trans feminism as "a movement by and for trans women who view their liberation to be intrinsically linked to the liberation of all women." Her subsequent writing introduces questions of ability and disability to trans feminist thought. She centered



questions of survivors of sexual abuse. She outlined a sex worker politics that spoke to the particular issues that affect trans youth who engage in survival sex. She also contributes to the tradition of anticolonial and anti-carceral trans feminist thought. Koyama was also an important voice in the movement to resist the “Womyn-born-womyn” policy at the Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival.<sup>19</sup>

In *Whipping Girl: A Transsexual Woman on Sexism and the Scapegoating of Femininity* (2008), Julia Serano grounds her analytic in a genealogy of trans female experience. In resistance to queer analytics that oppose transsexuality to female experience, Serano demonstrates that misogynist sentiments and female identities articulate in the life of many trans women. She writes that “most of the anti-trans sentiment that I have had to deal with as a transsexual woman is probably better described as misogyny” (Serano, 3). She explains this critical distinction by pointing out that “we identify, live, and are treated by the world as women” and so “traditional sexism shapes popular assumptions about transsexual women and why so many people in our society feel threatened by the existence of ‘men who choose to become women’” (ibid., 4). This focus on the way in which women’s history and experiences of misogyny shape trans women’s lives sets the terms for Serano’s trans theory that follows.

In her “Trans Woman Manifesto” Serano outlines and explains a political theory of transmisogyny, a contribution that clarifies the operations and representations that are the concern of *The New Woman*. First she defines “cissexism” as “the belief that transsexuals’ identified genders are inferior to, or less authentic than, those of *cissexuals* (i.e., people who are not transsexual and who have only ever experienced their subconscious and physical sexes as being aligned)” (Serano, 12). This discussion of cis privilege illuminates the way in which transphobic and misogynist discourses prop each other up in the production of the phobic response to trans women:

When a trans person is ridiculed or dismissed not merely for failing to live up to gender norms, but for their expressions of femaleness or femininity, they become the victims of a specific form of discrimination: trans-misogyny. When the majority of jokes made at the expense of trans people center on “men wearing dresses,” or “men who want their penises cut off,” that is not transphobia—it is transmisogyny. (Serano, 14–15)

In *Whipping Girl* Serano addresses some of the same trans feminine cultural practices that Butler addressed before her. When addressing drag, Serano simply observes that “some trans people gravitate toward drag because it provides them with a rare opportunity to express aspects of their subconscious sex in a socially sanctioned setting” (Serano, 28). Here she focuses on the way in which drag works for trans people and this focus reorients her conclusion. Echoing Venus Xtravaganza, Serano understands her sex as “about [a] personal relationship . . . with my own body” (ibid., 85). Serano reframes the concerns of Queer Theory to address her trans feminine experience of sex. She grounds this new theory in the vocabularies in which trans and cis queer people often discuss sex identities and advocates a retooling of theoretical vocabularies for discussing sex. She writes that “the first step we must take toward dismantling cissexual privilege” is to do away with the terms “‘genetic’ or ‘biological’ males and females” that indicate that cis sex identities are more real than trans sex identities (ibid., 172–73). Here Serano’s critique of the biological credentials for sex recalls the discussion of “realness” in *Bodies That Matter*, but with a critical difference. Serano identifies the conceptual and semantic tools that produce the terms under which we all live sex. This critical operation relocates the agent of realness away from the trans people who are most victimized and onto the operation of transphobia and cissexism.

Crucially, this theory does not require the ascription of sexed non-identity to trans people. In fact, Serano is very precise in her account of the way in which academic formulations perform this ascription. She identifies a “phenomenon—which [she calls] *ungendering*—where gender-variant people are used as a device to bring conventional notions about maleness and femaleness into question” despite their sometimes committal female or male identities (Serano, 196). This practice of “ungendering” departs from its scholarly origins to influence popular representations of trans people. Serano’s analysis engages the political category of woman in a trans feminist tradition that stretches back to Case 129.

#### CONTEMPORARY TRANS FEMININE MEMOIR: JANET MOCK’S STORYTELLING

Janet Mock’s 2014 memoir presents an experience that contrasts with Serano’s in many ways, but many of their analyses are compatible.

*Redefining Realness: My Path to Womanhood, Identity, Love & So Much More* took Mock's black-Hawaiian trans woman's story and self-definition to the *New York Times* bestseller list. Mock is a journalist who came to national attention with a 2011 story in *Marie Claire* magazine that discusses her trans experience.<sup>20</sup> The memoir narrates many life experiences of both violence and affirmation that are common for trans girls. She describes her understanding of her body, her relationships, and her experiences as a woman who is usually read as a black cis woman. In contrast to the memoirs of Lili Elbe, Christine Jorgensen, and Roberta Cowell, Mock's story is the story of a trans woman among other trans women. She was also able to gain social recognition as a fairly young adolescent, a circumstance that is rare but that also allowed her a trans girlhood that was less fettered or obstructed by cis people than is usually the case.

The story of Mock's childhood contains moments of both struggle and triumph. Her mother struggled with addiction, relationships with abusive men, and difficulty finding consistent housing and sources of financial support for her children. Her father moved from Hawaii to Oakland, where Janet and her siblings lived with him for a time, before he was overwhelmed by caring for them and sent them back to Mock's mother. She also reports deep moments of support from her parents, particularly her mother, and from her brother Chad. She also had access to an extended black family that influenced her sense of herself as a powerful woman. She reports that her female identity was her "first conviction" (Mock, 55). This identity found expression in friendships with cis girls and also in sexual experimentation with boys in childhood. She describes her experience of sexual abuse by an older stepbrother. She writes that this abuse continued in part because her abuser recognized her feminine identity and his recognition made her fear that he would expose her secret female identity. This story provides an important political analysis of the fact that trans identity is used to coerce trans youth. She also clarifies that, as a young girl, she did not have access to the words and concepts "like *trans*, *transgender*, or *transsexual*" that would have "offered [her] clarity about [her] gender identity" (ibid., 80).

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, as she grew up she gained the terms and connections to name her experience. Early in her high school years school officials prevented Janet from dressing in gender-confirming clothing at school (Mock, 180) but with her "mother's vocal advocacy" she arranged with school officials so that she was able to wear clothes that expressed her gender, use she/her pronouns, and use her chosen name by

the time she entered high school (*ibid.*, 181). In high school she became close friends with another trans girl, the brazen Wendi who remains a close friend, and the two attended a monthly support group called “Chrysalis” that was run by a trans woman named April. The group brought in trans women who worked as “lawyers, store managers, teachers, and community outreach workers” to serve as role models for their young trans sisters. Chrysalis also offered a trans women-positive social space for girls like Janet and Wendi (*ibid.*, 183). Janet also excelled academically. She was an honor student, a class representative, and won a prestigious scholarship to fund her undergraduate study at the University of Hawaii.

In late adolescence Mock found her way to a community of trans women, many of whom did sex work. The memoir deftly unpacks the place that spheres of commercial sex occupy in many trans feminine lives. She reports her youthful sense that all trans women do sex work, an important testimony to the way that the criminalization of trans feminine life produces conditions in which trans girls see this work as their only option (Mock, 175). Her description of her and her sisters’ experiences doing this work attests to the danger of beating, arrest, and sexual assault that she and her trans sisters faced. She also reveals that sex work scenes provide spheres of vital sociality for trans women. It was on the streets that were the venue for sex work that trans women found both the material and emotional support that they required. For them, this work was “survival sex” (*ibid.*, 171). This relation between the material necessity of doing sex work and the kinship with other women that it offers goes back to Fanny and Stella.

Mock recounts her experience as an older adolescent coming out into the scene of Honolulu’s Merchant Street. This neighborhood has been a red-light district since the 1960s and has been a particular “attraction for seamen and soldiers, tourists and admirers, looking for a woman with something extra,” one of the vernacular terms that the scene uses for trans women (Mock, 169). Mock reports many instances of harassment by cis men whose comments combine desire and violence. She also conveys that for young women of trans experience, many of whom were black and Hawaiian, Merchant Street was a “sanctuary” (*ibid.*, 170). This was the place where “every Friday and Saturday night, swarms of girls dressed in their evening best congregated on a street named after commercial dealing and trade. . . . It was my chance to meet all the legends I had heard about from Wendi” (*ibid.*). This was a sphere of tender mutual support. Mock reports that “it was understood in our

sisterhood that I was making something of my life, that I was reaching heights that most girls and women like us were unable to grasp, and that my time on Merchant's would be short-lived" (ibid., 209).

Among the Merchant legends and the young admirers who were Mock's peers, Mock was able to obtain hormones. This was one of many instances of sharing knowledge about ways to pursue gender-confirming bodily changes outside of a medical model. The young women are all interested in each other's strategies. When Mock arrives on Merchant Street, the other women evaluate her breasts: "'Girl, you already got your chi-chis done?' Shayna asked. 'They're hormone breasts,' Wendi said. . . . 'I like see,' Shayna said, reaching her hand into my bra. There were no personal boundaries when it came to the women on Merchant's" (Mock, 169). This kind of attention to bodily transformation didn't only refer to hormonal and surgical change. The women of Merchant Street were also interested in trans feminine strategies like "[padding] hips" (ibid.).

These examinations of breasts and hips open up conversation about another kind of transformation that all the women on Merchant Street know is an option, in theory if not in fact: genital surgery. This operation, which was the central event of previous trans women's narratives—Lili Elbe, Christine Jorgensen, and Roberta Cowell—that had been widely circulated, is one of many kinds of bodily transformation that the women discuss on Merchant Street. Mock first learns about the practicalities of attaining bottom surgery from Shayna, who

used to come to town from Kaneohe to hang out until she got serious about getting "her change." She was nineteen when she began saving, and by twenty-one she had her own car, apartment, vagina, breasts, and hips filled with medical-grade silicone from a doctor in Tijuana who pumped most of the girls. . . . I admired her work ethic, her determination to execute a plan. (Mock, 170)

Although Janet Mock does desire and eventually attains genital surgery, she insists that, for women of trans experience, genital surgery doesn't have the singular centrality in defining womanhood that it does for cis people who are often selecting which trans women's stories to tell. Mock writes that "transition was different for everyone but one thing was constant: It wasn't about becoming some better version of yourself or a knockoff of some unattainable woman: it was about revealing who you'd always been" (Mock, 170). She adds that most women that

she knew had “zero desire to have ‘the surgery’” (ibid., 171) and that, in fact, having a penis was an asset in the commercial sex sector of Merchant Street (ibid., 207). Exposure to the reality that most trans women didn’t choose to pursue genital surgery informed Mock’s perspective that “genitals [don’t] dictate . . . womanhood” and that, in fact, “there [are] many paths to womanhood” (ibid., 188). Although her own “path and . . . internal sense of womanhood included a vagina . . . that does not negate anyone else’s experience” (ibid.). This recognition of the diversity among trans women’s options and choices regarding gender-confirming health care reflects the long tradition of trans women who voice various accounts of their female embodiment, which this book traces back to the mid-nineteenth century.

Janet Mock comes to view herself and other trans women who do sex work in order to get the things they need as “surviving outlaws” (Mock, 171). For Mock, sex work is one way that trans women assert control over their bodies. Theirs are

bodies that [are] radical in their mere existence in this misogynistic, transphobic, elitist world—because their bodies, their wits, their collective legacy of survival, [are] tools to care for themselves when their families, our government, and our medical establishment turned their backs. (Mock, 171)

She doesn’t look away from the difficulties of this kind of work. She enters into it as someone “who wasn’t comfortable enough with her body to truly gain any kind of pleasure from it” (Mock, 177), largely because of the transmisogynist punishment that encouraged her to question the “realness” of her sex and encourages her to consider cis women “the ‘real’ thing” (ibid., 173). In this context, and given her financial need, she “rented pieces of herself: mouth, ass, hands, breasts, penis” (ibid., 177). These analyses don’t apologize for trans women’s involvement in sex work or attack sex work while neglecting the economic and political structures that make this kind of work dangerous. Rather, Mock declares sex work as the best option in a field of bad options. Her words recall the organizational strategies of STAR and other 1970s Trans Liberationists. The women of Merchant Street capacitate their trans sisters just as Fanny and Stella did in 1870 and Marsha and Sylvia did in 1970.

Mock provides a clarifying articulation of the relation between economic precariousness and sex work. As a college freshman, after working low-wage service jobs alongside some much higher-paying criminalized

sex work, Mock decided to engage in sex work full time in order to make the money necessary to travel to Thailand where one of her trans sisters had paid \$10,000 for genital surgery. Mock addresses the stigmatizing of this kind of calculation. She writes that “many people believe trans women choose to engage in the sex trade rather than get a *real* job. That belief is misguided because sex work *is* work, and it’s often the *only* work available to marginalized women” (Mock, 200).

As did many of her trans woman foremothers, Mock connects this attitude toward this work with its criminalization and the resulting incidence and conditions of trans women’s incarceration. Like TAO and other 1970s trans feminist organizations, Mock remarks on the frequency with which trans women are arrested for prostitution, which is “a non-violent offense committed by consensual adults” that leads to trans women being “placed in a cell with men because prisons are segregated by genitals” (Mock, 206). As has been a consistent feature of trans women’s lives, placing trans women in men’s prisons makes them “vulnerable to sexual assault, contracting HIV, and being without hormones and trans-inclusive health care during her incarceration” (ibid.). Mock characterizes this as a “cruel and unusual punishment” (ibid.).

Mock directly takes on the way that cis narratives and interests drive the framing of those trans women’s stories that are widely circulated by popular media. These stories “describe the journey of transsexual people as a passage . . . from male to female” (Mock, 227). These stories center on “undergoing hormone therapy and genital reconstruction surgery” which are “the titillating details that cis people love to hear” (ibid.). The centering and valorizing of these details perpetuates an understanding of womanhood that makes “women with penises . . . feel that their bodies are less valuable, shameful, and should be kept secret” (ibid., 206). For trans women this often means partnering with straight cis men who both desire trans women and feel that they need to hide this desire. This combination leads to dangerous conditions for trans women who are taught to believe that “the only way she can share intimate space with a man is through secret hookups,” leading them to “engage in risky sexual behaviors that make her more vulnerable to criminalization, disease, and violence, she will be led to coddle a man who takes out his frustrations about his sexuality on her with his fists” (ibid., 207).

When Mock does tell the story of her genital surgery, she includes details of the experience that demonstrate that it is an experience of going to the doctor to have surgery. She is sitting atop a “paper-covered exam table” in a “thin pink medical dress” while a nurse takes her blood

pressure and pulse and listens to her “lungs with a stethoscope,” just as most people have done at one time or another in their lives (Mock, 229). Mock emphasizes the quotidian aspects of her medical experience in resistance to a history of media representations that mystify this moment as a symbolic shift that makes a person into a new person. Her presentation is also significant because it places her trip to Thailand and the health care that she accesses there in the arch of her life story and in the context of stories of trans women who don’t seek genital surgery. Trans sorority extends to her experience with surgery. While she is recovering in Thailand, she meets an Australian woman named Genie who was undergoing surgery at the same time. They provide support to each other and extend the network of kinship that Mock first found in Chrysalis and on Merchant Street (ibid., 235).

Mock observes that there is too little history available to put these experiences in perspective. Despite “the media’s insatiable appetite for transsexual women’s bodies” (Mock, 255), as a young girl “society . . . didn’t offer [her] a single image of a girl” like herself (ibid., 253). What she was left with were popular images that “[dismissed] and [dehumanized]” trans women (ibid., 255). Mock specifically identifies the media focus on Christine Jorgensen as the first popular “‘sex change’ darling” as both a source of “vital . . . cultural change” and as a centering that obscures stories like hers. The media “rarely report on the barriers that make it nearly impossible for trans women, specifically those of color and those from low-income communities, to lead thriving lives” and choose to center on “tried-and-true transition stories tailored to the cis gaze” (ibid.). Mock’s memoir is particularly significant because it pushes back against the long history of cis control over trans feminine stories. Even in the *Marie Claire* piece that enabled her subsequent work on behalf of trans women, a cis reporter repackaged her story as a story of “sex change.” Mock was not comfortable with this framing of her story. It is these pressures that make trans women choose between invisibility and the “hostile” experience of “forced disclosure” (ibid., 247). This is the choice between cultural invisibility and public misrecognition under terms that force trans women to “internalize the shame, misconceptions, stigma, and trauma attached to being a different kind of woman” (ibid.). Mock’s memoir contributes to a trans feminine archive that offers another way: the way of vital and precise self-definition that consults trans women for the words that define trans women’s experience.

Janet Mock concludes her book’s acknowledgments with thanks to “my sisters, my siblings, my elders, my foremothers Sylvia Rivera,



Marsha P. Johnson, and Miss Major Griffin-Gracy” (Mock, 261).<sup>21</sup> Mock’s mention of trans women elders in her acknowledgments evidences contemporary trans women’s inheritance of the work of trans women who became politically active in the late 1960s and early 1970s. This sisterhood between contemporary trans women and the projects of Trans Liberation is an established and recognized inheritance. This book seeks to extend these networks of care back to the nineteenth century to the very installation of the disjuncture between trans feminine life and trans feminine meaning. When the contemporary doctor, talk show host, or magazine writer grills an individual trans woman to try to investigate her meaning, they hide the reality of the world that trans women have made. Trans women and trans feminine people, sisters and siblings, have made their own space. They have made their own concepts and offer understandings of sex that free all people from cis constraints. It is for cis society to either accept or continue to reject that gift.

#### MATERIALIST TRANS FEMINISM AND A MINOR QUEER THEORY

In her classic text of Radical Feminism, *The Dialectic of Sex*, Shulamith Firestone expressed the relationship of feminism to Marxism. She suggests that it is “dangerous to squeeze feminism into an orthodox Marxist framework” based on “incidental insights of Marx and Engels about sex” (Firestone, 7). Rather, we must recognize that feminism “[enlarges] historical materialism to *include* the strictly Marxian” content that only a focus on the political category of woman can reveal (ibid., ). We can adapt Firestone’s account of male Marxism to caution ourselves against attempts to squeeze trans women into a feminist analysis that assumes cis experience. One way to achieve this is by outlining the substantial archive of trans women’s writing as chapters 4 and 6 have aimed to do. Another way to decenter cisness is to allow the many trans feminist provocations presented in this book to tease trans feminist potential out of feminist and queer writing that did not aim to consciously address trans femininity and yet, in fact, does. In Firestone’s terms, trans feminism “enlarges” feminist thought to include the “strictly” feminist by bringing feminism closer to a complete picture of the political category of woman. Trans feminism is a necessary component of a complete analysis of both misogyny and of women’s assertion of political power in the face of patriarchal social structures.

IS THE RECTUM A VAGINA?: LEO BERSANI'S  
TRANS FEMININE THEORY OF EMBODIMENT

I will now turn to consider texts published in the years before the seminal texts of Queer Theory and which form a minor queer theory. These texts allow us to think trans and woman beyond the inheritance of the critical allegory that forms the backbone of canonized queer theories of sex and gender. I suggest that Leo Bersani offers a theory of sexed ontology and Materialist Feminists offer a historical materialist methodological approach to sex that, conjoined, adds to the tradition of Materialist Trans Feminism. Bersani accounts for the central place of the construction of woman and her relation to the homosexual in the construction of the modern subjectivity.

Bersani's influential essay "Is the Rectum a Grave?" (1987) sounded a clarion call to gay people who were in the process of responding to and surviving the AIDS crisis. Bersani urges his peers to reject the conservative responses to the epidemic that reproduced the pathologization of gay male sexual sociality by arguing that gay men could be responsible. Bersani suggests that rather than contradicting the assertions and insinuations made by clergy, journalists, politicians, and medical experts that gay male promiscuity was responsible for the AIDS epidemic and arguing that any response to the epidemic must center on the eradication of the social structures that supported this promiscuity, gay people should embrace the relation between gay male sexual practice and death.

Bersani's analysis addresses Butler's question about the relation between queer genders and their effect on normative understandings of heterosexuality but focuses specifically on the connection between men and masculinity. Discussing gay male style in the 1980s, Bersani casts doubt on Jeffrey Weeks's claim that the gay adoption of macho style was an affront to heterosexual masculinity. He rejects the notion that this style, as Weeks claims, "gnaws at the roots of a male heterosexual identity" (qtd. in Bersani, 13). While Weeks considers gay masculinity a threat to the self-sameness of heterosexual masculinity, Bersani locates the subversive potential of gay male sexuality in its relation to women. He identifies "the very real potential for subversive confusion in the joining of female sexuality . . . [because] the signifiers of machismo [are] dissipated once the heterosexual recognizes in the gay-macho style a yearning toward machismo, a yearning that, very conveniently for the heterosexual, makes of the leather queen's forbidding armor and warlike manners a perversion rather than a subversion of real maleness"

(*ibid.*). Bersani's account of the relation between the queer iteration and the heterosexual iteration of masculine self-styling does not accord with Butler's analysis of gender performativity. Whereas for Butler, drag stylings of female realness affirm the normative and heterosexist definition of womanhood, for Bersani the gay male uptake of hypermasculine stylings perverts the normative. By extension, Bersani produces a divergent account of identity as well. For him, "it is not because of the parodistic distance that [gay men] take from that identity, but rather because, from within their nearly mad identification with it, they never cease to feel the appeal of its being violated" (*ibid.*, 15).

This violation of masculinity that is at the heart of desiring masculinity, in Bersani's critique, is given a particular critical edge in the moment in which he's writing, as "the public discourse about homosexuals since the AIDS crisis began has a startling resemblance . . . to the representation of female prostitutes in the nineteenth century as contaminated vessels, conveying 'female' venereal diseases to 'innocent' men" (Bersani, 18). Clearly, in Bersani's analysis this equivalency is formed by and reinscribes an ontology: the relation between the homosexual and the woman is predicated on the way in which the bodies of both function sexually. AIDS phobic logic connects old fears that prostitutes "publicize (indeed sell) the inherent aptitude of women for uninterrupted sex" with newly vigorous attacks on male homosexuals and particularly the "form of sexual behavior being targeted [is] the criminal, fatal, and irresistibly repeated act. This is of course anal sex," which homophobic discourse conflates with vaginal sex (*ibid.*). The physical ability to engage in sexual activity over a period of long duration is transformed in this fantastic conflation into a hysterical insatiability that beckons contamination. Bersani traces this ontological theory of contagion, a theory that suggests the morphology and functioning of the sexualized hole invites infection, to the responses to syphilis in the nineteenth century that—as with AIDS in the 1980s,

"legitimate" a fantasy of female sexuality as intrinsically diseased . . . promiscuity in this fantasy, far from merely increasing the risk of infection, is the sign of infection. Women and gay men spread their legs with an unquenchable appetite for destruction. This is an image with extraordinary power . . . the infinitely more seductive and intolerable image of a grown man, legs high in the air, unable to refuse the suicidal ecstasy of being a woman. (Bersani, 18)

Bersani links gay male and female responses to the pathologization of our “passivity.”

Although Bersani forwards the connection between gay men and women, the hero of this “powerlessness,” the model degraded sexual subject, is the gay man. Bersani explains this value and valor with reference to a metaphor that is of great interest to the analysis of this chapter. Bersani writes:

But what if we said . . . not that it is wrong to think of so-called passive sex as “demeaning,” but rather that the value of sexuality itself is to demean the seriousness of efforts to redeem it? “AIDS,” Watney writes, “offers a new sign for the symbolic machinery of repression, making the rectum a grave.” But if the rectum is the grave in which the masculine ideal . . . of proud subjectivity is buried, then it should be celebrated for its very potential for death. Tragically, AIDS has literalized that potential as the certainty of biological death, and has therefore reinforced the heterosexual association of anal sex with a self-annihilation originally and primarily identified with the fantasmatic mystery of an insatiable, unstoppable female sexuality. It may, finally, be in the gay man’s rectum that he demolishes his own perhaps otherwise uncontrollable identification with a murderous judgment against him. (Bersani, 30)

Bersani contends that the rectum of the gay man is subversive to the extent that it *is* a vagina and that—by extension—the homosexual is a radical positionality insofar as it accrues meaning through its conceptual and semiotic—and sometimes experiential—association with woman. Case 129, Genet’s *Divine*, and Janet Mock all confirm that trans women have long theorized this non-cis understanding of genitals. This is the challenge to “the metaphysics of sex” that is historically specific. In a footnote Bersani writes that a “major facet” of the degradation inflicted on gay men in the age of HIV is the association of the rectum and the vagina: these are the “privileged loci of infection” (Bersani, 18). Bersani writes at a moment of homophobic revival, as the AIDS epidemic revealed the intransigency of the association of the gay man with women and the characterization of both as diseased. In the final section of this chapter, I will suggest that this modern subjectivity is synonymous with the invention of companionate heterosexuality as the vehicle for the

“liberation” of woman, the pathologization of “the homosexual,” and the making figural of the trans woman. But before moving to this last section, we will consider Denise Riley’s materialist history of woman that sounds important echoes of Bersani’s theory. It is the conflation—in both homophobic and homo-liberationist discourse—of the rectum and the vagina that grounds the challenge to the “metaphysics of sex” that queer and trans history demonstrates, queer politics must embrace, and queer theory has until now only circled around.

ARE WE THAT NAME? MATERIALIST FEMINISM  
AND THE CATEGORY OF WOMAN

Denise Riley’s Socialist Feminist historiography of woman produces a theory just as Bersani’s theory reveals a significant component of the history of sex. In *Am I That Name?* Riley traces the career of the category of woman in European history, a tracing that requires “both a concentration on and a refusal of the identity of ‘women’” (*Am I That Name?*, 1). Her historical practice “[moves] to the ground of historical construction including the history of feminism itself [to] suggest that not only ‘woman’ but also ‘women’ is troublesome—and that this extension of our suspicions is in the interest of feminism” (*ibid.*). Riley’s history, like Bersani’s theory, tills the same ground as Queer Theory, but uncovers something quite different than the canonized texts in the field. Riley signals her particular rejection of androcentric philosophies, and perhaps particularly a Post-Structuralist strain of androcentrism, when she “refuses to break with feminism by naming it . . . a *neutral deconstruction*” (*ibid.*, 3, emphasis added). She is equally unwilling, however, to “identify feminism with the camp of the lovers of ‘real women’” (*ibid.*). It is the space between these positions that Riley investigates, and helps to produce.

As in the case of de Beauvoir, Irigaray, and Wittig, Riley’s commitment to the category of woman offers significant resources for thinking the history of the category of trans woman. This utility is present in her first presentation of her project; Riley posits a modality of gender that is episodic and unpredictable. The experience of being gendered woman is not characterized by a consistent denial or a uniform maltreatment because “unmet needs and sufferings . . . spring from the ways in which women are positioned, often harshly or stupidly, as ‘women.’ This positioning occurs both in language, forms of description, and what gets

carried out” (*Am I That Name?*, 3). Riley distinguishes between some pre-social identity of women and the experience that is activated by the social positioning of people “as ‘women.’” This account of woman’s subjection is a more diffuse, complex, and specific version of Althusser’s scene of interpellation in which the subject’s response to the address of the representative of the state produces her as a subject of the state apparatus. Riley’s theoretical bifurcation of the experience of being a woman into a component that is, in her account, ill-defined and vexed but also wholly personal, and a component that is public and is activated by being “positioned” as a woman, recalls vividly Julia Serano’s account of the same bifurcated experience. For Riley, as for Serano, being a woman is, in part, a matter of self-knowledge, a self-knowledge about which there is very little to be said, and a question of being seen as or treated as a woman, an experience that is indissociable from the operation of “harsh and stupid” misogyny.

This theoretical starting point avoids the rigid conceptual threads of the canonized strains of radical feminism that defined “woman” narrowly, producing the brutal effects that we considered in the discussion of Beth Elliot, Sylvia Rivera, Sandy Stone, and, no doubt, thousands of other women of trans experience who suffered the insufferable presumption of cis women who tasked themselves with telling other women that they are not real. Riley equally, however, escapes the limits of queer theories of gender because “no one needs to believe in the solidity of ‘women,’” but this lack of credulity also cannot mean a critical or political allergy to the word “woman” (*Am I That Name?*, 5). This refusal to refuse “woman” is conceptually but also politically significant and need not be “confined to the giddy detachment of the academy . . . where politics do not tread” (*ibid.*). Riley promises us that

there are alternatives to those schools of thought which in saying that “woman” is fictional are silent about “women,” and those which, from an opposite perspective, proclaim that the reality of women is yet to come, but that this time, it’s we, women, who will define her. Instead of veering between deconstruction and transcendence, we could try another train of speculations: that “women” is indeed an unstable category, that this instability has a historical foundation, and that feminism is the site of the systematic fighting-out of that instability which need not worry us. (*Am I That Name?*, 5)

Riley's insistence on the "historical foundation" of the instability of woman is of paramount importance. Like Foucault, Riley is deeply suspicious of the regulatory operation of the category of sex. Like Butler, Riley is attuned to the instability of the category of woman. But unlike both Foucault and Butler, Riley feels bound as a philosopher to account for the history that can only be traced by employing the category of woman. Nowhere is this difference more obvious than in a passage in which Riley acknowledges that there is another way to go about the querying of identity that she is performing. She writes:

It's not that our identity is to be dissipated into airy indeterminacy, extinction; instead it is to be referred to the more substantial realms of discursive historical formation. Certainly the indeterminacy of sexual positionings can be demonstrated in other ways, most obviously perhaps by comparative anthropology with its berdache, androgynous, and unsettling shamanistic figures. (*Am I That Name?*, 5)

Here Riley recognizes that the elevation of certain figures that defy binary gender categories might be made into examples to achieve a theory of "sexual positionings." Riley's historical materialism and the historicizing of the category of woman allow a more concrete analytic of sex and sexual difference. Riley's theory rejects the Modernism that marks the work of those canonized primarily as queer theories. She outlines the "differing temporalities of 'women'" that "substitute the possibility of being 'at times a woman' for eternal difference on the one hand, or undifferentiation on the other. This escapes that unappetizing choice between 'real women' who are always solidly in the designation, regardless, or post-women, no-longer-women, who have seen it all, are tired of it, and prefer evanescence" (*Am I That Name?*, 7). Riley's focus contrasts with Butler's in a formal sense; whereas Butler maintains an analogical relation between trans woman and woman, Riley, in contrast, approaches the category "woman" as a pure concept. From the history of woman, she distills a theory of woman as an experience that "if traced out carefully, must admit the degree to which the effects of lived gender are at least sometimes unpredictable, and fleeting" (*ibid.*).

This attention to the history of woman offers a politics. Riley suggests that her parsing of "the peculiar temporalities of 'women'" produces a politics that is opposed to an eternal unity of female experience

through history,” and in resistance to other political claims that have been anchored in female experience, she does not make “a claim . . . in the hope of an Edenic future; to suggest that the polarity of the engaged and struggling couple, men and women, isn’t timeless, is not a gesture toward reconciliation, as if once the two were less mercilessly distinguished, and may be so again if we could stop insisting on divisive difference, and only love each other calmly enough” (*Am I That Name?*, 7). Rather, she advocates a more labile politics that takes advantage of the changeability of the category:

What does it mean to say that the modern collectivity of women was established in the midst of other formations? Feminism’s impulse is often, not surprisingly, to make a celebratory identification with a rush of Women onto the historical stage. But such “emergences” have particular passages into life; they are the tips of an iceberg. The more engaging question for feminism is then what lies beneath. To decipher any collision which tosses up some novelty, you must know the nature of various pasts that have led up to it, and allow these their full density of otherness. (*Am I That Name?*, 8)

This political focus on the “emergences” of woman and the necessity of tracing these emergences in order to account for the “density of otherness” offers much to a trans feminist analytic. The innovations in technology and the semiotic life of queer sociality are two of the areas that propel woman’s reemergence. In her theorization of these historical truths, Riley affirms as a historical materialist what Johnson, Irigaray, Wittig, and de Beauvoir have each proposed in philosophy:

The old Aristotelian conceptions had posited imperfection within herself as the mark of woman . . . Women themselves were the result of a generative event which was never completed; necessary though they were for the survival of the human species, individually each was by definition imperfect; and imperfect in the etymological sense too, of not fully carried through. This theory of woman as a misbegotten male, as if interrupted in a trajectory, could imply that woman was at once a kind of systematic exception and not necessarily of the same species as man. (*Am I That Name?*, 24)



Riley's reflection on the history of woman overlays in beautiful and important ways onto the history and theoretical extractions from Case 129 to Janet Mock who each resist the claim that trans women are imperfect in their bodies, misbegotten, and of another species.

Denise Riley also provides a way to think about transmisogynist feminism. The fixing of the category of woman and the virulent defense of the bounds of that category were set up in the genealogical roots of liberal feminism where equality installed binary difference. Riley cites John Stuart Mill who, in *The Womanly Vote*, writes that "we talk of political revolutions, but we do not sufficiently attend to the fact that there has taken place around us a silent domestic revolution; women and men are, for the first time in history, really each other's companions" (qtd. in *Am I That Name?*, 84). For Riley this assertion of equality and complementarity opened "the abyss between 'women' and 'human'. . . . There was no way in which some synthesising feminism could have arched over this; the ambiguity of 'women' could not be resolved. On the contrary, what the feminist demand for the vote did was to lay it bare" (ibid., 95). This account explains the need to distinguish between women and men as an origin point of liberal feminism's false claim that a symbolic equality based on the complementarity between man and woman in a heterosexual union can ground female emancipation.

The female body is the last touchstone of "the female" that Denise Riley historicizes for her readers and it is from this attention to historicity that she extracts her theoretical moorings. She proposes an uncertain relation between the body and sexed identity, a structural contradiction inherent in what she calls "bodily being." Rather than a uniform and consistent experience, one can "be hit by the intrusions of bodily being" (*Am I That Name?*, 97). She offers the example of what would seem to be the most cis experience, "the start of menstruation," but suggests that this kind of bodily experience is not the actual experience that determines sex because "only at some secondary stage of reflection induced by something else, would your thought about your body's abrupt interruption become, 'Now, maddeningly, I'm pushed into this female gender'" (ibid.). She goes on to say that the politically neutral and not necessarily gendering experience of the surprise onset of menstruation is related to "a classic example of another kind of precipitation into a sexed self-consciousness" that likewise is not an agential identification (ibid.). In this instance

you walk down a street wrapped in your own speculations; or you speed up, hell-bent on getting to the shops before they close: a car slows down, a shout comments on your expression, your movement; or there's a derisively hissed remark . . . You have indeed been seen "as a woman," and violently reminded that your passage alone can spark off such random sexual attraction-cum-contempt, that you can be a spectacle when the last thing on your mind is your own embodiedness. (*Am I That Name?*, 97)

In Riley's analysis a person is called into female embodiment by an experience that one understands to be feminizing. This analysis dispenses with a progressivist modernism that identifies sex change as the ur-sign for the future of sex and forwards in its stead a theory of the temporality of sex. She observes that "even the apparently simplest, most innocent ways in which one becomes temporarily a woman *are not* darting returns to a category in a natural and harmless state, but are something else: adoptions of, or precipitations into, a designated there in advance, a characterization of 'woman'" (*Am I That Name?*, 97).

Riley's words hew very closely here to Butler's, but this temporal metaphor of "darting returns" doesn't require the trans exemplarity that Butler employs and applies equally well to cis and trans women's experiences. Likewise, Riley's attention to structure differs from those we've encountered previously. Riley suggests that beyond the seemingly intransigent binary structure that fixes woman in a timeless symbolic place

"women" as a collective noun has suffered its changes . . . If we look at these historical temporalities of "women" in the same light as the individual temporalities, then once again no originary, neutral and inert "woman" lies there like a base behind the superstructural vacillations. . . . [Feminism] has no choice but to work with or against different versions of the same wavering collectivity. (*Am I That Name?*, 98)

This temporal analysis not only allows for historical variability, but also opens up the question of woman to address differential racializations, colonial dynamics, and class-based variability in the definition of women.

Riley outlines the ways in which medical and political focuses on woman, in addressing cervical cancer for instance, or getting woman-

friendly legislation passed, need to employ the category. She does not reject these instances in which the forwarding of “woman” is necessary but rather she points out the need to

emphasize that inherent shakiness of the designation “women” which exists prior to both its revolutionary and conservative deployments, and which is reflected in the spasmodic and striking coincidences of leftist and rightist propositions about the family or female nature. The cautionary point of this emphasis is far from being anti-feminist. On the contrary, it is to pin down this instability as the lot of feminism, which resolves certain perplexities in the history of feminism and its vacillations, but also points to its potentially inexhaustible flexibility in pursuing its aims. This would include a capacity for a lively and indeed revivifying irony about this “women” . . . A political movement possessed of reflexivity and an ironic spirit would be formidable indeed. (*Am I That Name?*, 98).

Reflexivity and irony of spirit are among the hallmarks of radical queer and trans politics, imbued as that formation has always been by a camp spirit and the *joie de vie* of the police riots that started the movement, riots that prominently featured trans women and gender nonconforming youth. “To be named as a woman can be the precondition for some kinds of solidarity,” she writes (*Am I That Name?*, 99). Politicized queens and trans women attest to the validity of this aphorism.

In contrast to this formulation, several contemporary feminisms also set themselves against what they believe to be a damaging indifference to the powerful distinct realities of the body in recent queer thought. Here Elizabeth Grosz sets out her understanding of the Irigarayan conception that

all bodies must be male or female, and the particularities, specificities and difference of each need to be recognized and represented in specific terms. The social and patriarchal disavowal of the specificity of women’s bodies is a function, not only of discriminatory social practices, but, more insidiously, of the phallogentrism invested in régimes of knowledge—science, philosophy, the arts—which function only because and with the effect of the submersion of women under male

categories, values and norms. (qtd. in Riley, *Am I That Name?*, 101)

Riley responds to Grosz's presentation of the female body as the inarguable material ground for female solidarity and common experience by suggesting ways in which bodies with female sex assignment vary. She writes, "perhaps [the woman's body] must always be transmuted into bodies in the plural, which are not only marked and marred by famine or gluttony, destitution or plenty, hazard or planning, but are also shaped and created by them. 'The body' is not, for all its corporeality, an originating point nor yet a terminus; it is a result or an effect" (*Am I That Name?*, 102). In addition to this fracturing of the unitary "female body" into its variant types, Riley outlines the idea that bodies are only *sometimes* and to different degrees treated as sexed: "it's more of a question of tracing the (always anatomically gendered) body as it is differently established and interpreted as sexed within different periods" (*ibid.*, 103). Trans experience is a significant part of this periodization of women's experience and of its political effect: "while it's impossible to thoroughly be a woman, it's also impossible never to be one. On such shifting sands feminism must stand and sway. . . . No one is saved, and no one is totally lost" (*ibid.*, 114). There is a true place where feminist and queer theories of sexual difference intersect and produce each other rather than warring into the "airy indeterminacy" of false conciliation. Remarkably, this intersection comes at the conceptual place that has most stuck in the craw of each theoretical school. The trans feminine is the figure that provoked such scandal for many radical feminists and the experience that had to be "ungendered" and imagined as unlivable in order to substantiate queer claims. Materialist Trans Feminism is the tradition that thinks the theoretically overburdened and yet previously unthought trans feminine both historically and theoretically.

Attention to this theoretical tradition allows an understanding of the centrality of the trans feminine to the Modernist period. It is at that historical moment that the artists that this book considers strive to account for a subjection—that is feminine—that persists beyond the liberal promise of woman's escape via the vote, via employment and economic power, and via divorce from the strictures that had been assumed to be the seats of women's oppression. It is at that moment, in the early twentieth century, that sex change—the ability to surgically and hormonally produce a body that is socially recognized as female—works doubly as the figure for the flexibility of misogyny and its intransigence,

a utopian and dystopian overlay that produces a conceptually complex and internally divided figure: the Modernist trans feminine. Sex change supposedly *means* that bodies can come to occupy or escape from a material female existence, but trans feminine experience actually reveals most starkly that all bodies are ruled by a relation to the feminine mark of lack and degradation. Riley and Bersani's historicized theories reveal the tenacity of the association of the feminine with degradation, a tenacity that is the enduring and adaptable power of misogyny. We must follow Riley's exhortations to "question woman" but with the definition of "anatomical gender" that Bersani theorizes. His definition reflects the fact that the sexual subjection forged on the symbolics of female genitals can circulate and contaminate the symbolic supremacy of any body that can be penetrated, which is to say, all bodies.

Materialist Trans Feminist thought and practice in the long twentieth century is a crucial site for working out these questions that pertain to the political category of woman. This is a category that has always included trans feminine people, a fact that *The New Woman* has traced back to the 1860s. Trans women's writing reflects these women's experiences. This work offers the tools to theorize those experiences, not because trans women mean some single thing about the sex of cis people but because they say many things about sex that cis people don't. Trans feminism undoes the utopian marriage of man and woman that liberal feminism routinely proposes as a political goal. It reinstalls women and the feminine as vital categories for feminist theory and political activity with none of the universalizing (and thus cis sexist, racist, and bourgeois) baggage that made us turn away from those categories to begin with.



# Notes

## INTRODUCTION

1. The assigned name of the author was Earl Lind and the work was published under the pseudonym Ralph Werther. Within the memoir narrative the author identifies by her street fairy name Jennie June, and I use that name throughout *The New Woman*.

2. Subject 129 mailed her case study narrative to Krafft-Ebing along with a letter in which she expressed gratitude to her fellow physician for the work that he was doing to circulate accounts of women like her. She also reports the pain and anguish born of “the weight of the imperative to be a woman,” and the hope that “if [she] fulfills [her] duties as physician, citizen, father and husband” she might “deserve to count [herself] among human beings who do not deserve to be despised” (Krafft-Ebing, 213). Contrasting the letter with the case study narrative reveals the actual historical process whereby bourgeois trans women cut off from the trans feminine sociality of urban poor communities found comfort in doctors who were interested in them but were also folded into the logics of medicalization.

3. Reading Ulrichs’s formulation in the context of his argument in *The Riddle of Man-Manly Love* reveals that it is the foundational instance of this reinsertion. Through the figure of “a woman trapped in a man’s body,” Ulrichs folds men who have sex with men into heterosexuality. He crafts this phrase as a way to distinguish between criminal acts and the essentially heterosexual identity of men who have sex with men. Ulrichs recasts love between men not as the crime committed by the sodomite but as the pitiable plight of the invert. As we’ll see in chapter 1, as the century progressed, gay men began to affirm their identities as men, relocating the claim to normalcy in gender conformity and disavowing trans femininity as the true mark of the perverse.

4. *The New Woman* periodizes the medicalization of trans feminine life in broad terms from the late 1860s when Ulrichs first circulated his influential phrase to 1930 when Magnus Hirschfeld first publicized sex change services. This medicalization was the foundation of the approaches of the researchers and doctors who institutionalized trans health care on a wider scale in the post-war period. See Meyerowitz chapters 4 and 5. The crucial qualities of medicalization are the metaphor of entrapment and the promise of sex change.

5. As the Tiresias myth in its many iterations indicates, interest in the implications of genital variability for heterosexuality preceded the Modernist period. The historically specific factor that accounted for the allegory of trans femininity was the medicalization of trans life that produced an authenticating narrative of diagnosis and surgical and endocrinological cure. This process was coterminous with the allegorization of trans life into an always figural state. The Modernist trans feminine emerged both from this longer tradition of cultural interest in genital variability and from the historically specific age of medicalization.

6. The nineteenth and twentieth centuries saw a variety of socially sanctioned forms in which male-assigned people could appear as women, and it is important to understand the points of contact and protocols of distinction between these accepted forms and trans feminine life. These accepted forms can be classified into three groups. First, vaudeville entertainers who were men and who cross-dressed as women were billed as family entertainment. The most famous and successful of these was Julian Eltinge, whose reputation for theatrical virtuosity was predicated on his public image as a manly man off stage. So while it is impossible to know if Eltinge had queer or trans identity, his public persona required that he protect himself from association with queer and trans life. Second, certain performers did have trans and queer identity and vaudeville offered a venue for the expression and circulation of these identities (Faderman and Timmins, 18–19; Senelick, 94). Third, elite all-male cultural spaces from Ivy League colleges to the U.S. military have staged drag performances that cited trans feminine cultural forms. The most famous representative is the Hasty Pudding Club at Harvard, which boasts Supreme Court justices and presidents among its past members (Garber, 60). These were prominent features of cis culture, both working-class and elite. Whereas previous scholarship collapses these cultural forms into a single object of study such as “cross-dressing” or “female impersonation” (see Garber; Tyler; Gilbert and Gubar), *The New Woman* views performances that assumed the cis and straight identity of performers as appropriations of trans feminine cultural signifiers. In this sense, rather than being coextensive with trans feminine life, *The New Woman* argues that this appropriation was part of the cultural field that sought to contain the threat of trans femininity by curating its signifiers in cis terms. That this field also offered space to trans feminine people and for the development of trans feminine culture is without doubt. We can therefore view these cultural forms through the lens of a tension between trans feminine vernacular culture and the forms of culture that repackaged it for cis consumption.

7. In “Sissy Man Blues,” a song that was recorded by several bluesmen, the male speaker regrets that the “good gal . . . [he did] wrong” is gone, and pleads that if the “Lord . . . can’t send [him] no woman” that he will “please send [him]



some sissy man.” This sissy man is a compensatory object of desire who is voiceless within the song’s narrative. His devaluation in relation to cis women indicates an enduring component of violence against trans feminine people, whose authenticity as women is challenged while the intense misogynist tones of their punishment remain, as we’ll see in chapters 4 and 6. This song also, however, accounts for the sissy man as an available positionality in working-class communities in contrast to bourgeois culture’s pathologizing of trans femininity as an anti-social condition. See Gill, 43–45; and Chauncey, 250–51. In “Sissy Blues” Ma Rainey’s speaker bemoans that her man “got a sissy, his name is Miss Kate / He shook that thing like jelly on a plate . . . Now all the people ask me why I’m alone / A sissy shook that thing and took my man from me.”

8. See Faderman and Timmins, 30–31 and Abrams, 37–50 for reporting from Los Angeles; chapter 1 of Chauncey for New York; and chapter 1 of Houlbrook 1 for London. For a geographically broader and less detailed account of female impersonation in the period, see Bullough and Bullough, 232–45. For a wonderful account of sissy men and other trans feminine and queer gender expression in blues, vaudeville, and gay club culture in Chicago and other cities, see de la Croix, 97–160.

9. This was a cultural field that people could associate themselves with for a time and then move out of, perhaps because of volition, but definitely under the real threat of social obliteration and premature death that trans feminine life posed, as we will see in chapter 4. This book does not claim that every person who participated in trans feminine cultural practices viewed herself as a woman. The historical sources demonstrate, however, that many did. For some trans feminine people, womanhood was essential and expressed consistently throughout life at all costs. For others, trans feminine expression was a phase of life that was moved through and then left behind, in terms of social role if not in their self-perception. For descriptions of the cultural signifiers that defined and expressed trans femininity, see Houlbrook, 149–58; and Chauncey, chapter 2.

10. Hemingway’s posthumously published *Garden of Eden* (1986) features a heterosexual couple in which the female-assigned partner is trans masculine, a fact that becomes increasingly apparent throughout the novel. They experiment with cutting their hair in a boy’s style and attempting to get as tan as possible, choices that the narrative presents as masculinizing gender-confirming body modifications. Although this is Hemingway’s most direct and sustained engagement with trans experience, it is of less interest to the inquiry of *The New Woman* than the repeated references to the wartime genital injury that results in the impotence of the protagonist Jake Barnes in *The Sun Also Rises* (1926). See my discussion of genital injuries suffered by World War I soldiers in my “Introduction.” The reader recalls Barnes’s injury when the novel depicts “steers [that] run around like old maids” and Barnes’s boorish friend Mike Campbell uses “steer” as an epithet to impugn the masculinity of Robert Cohn (E. Hemingway, 146). Jake Barnes also becomes very angry when effeminate men dance “big hippily” with the women in his party and worries that he will be considered a “faggot” because of his friendly love for Bill (*ibid.*, 28, 121). The heroine of the novel, Brett Ashley, is a New Woman and this relation between the genital metaphor of the castrated steer and the masculine confidence of the

New Woman is precisely the relation that *The New Woman* reads. See Wendy Martin for an account of Ashley as a New Woman who takes on a masculine hairstyle and habits of dress. The absence of an actual trans feminine person from the text disqualifies it from chapter-length attention.

*Islands in the Stream* (1970), Hemingway's other posthumously published novel with which he struggled in the last years of his life, uses "half-cunt" as an emasculating term of derision. The manuscript of the novel at Harvard's Kennedy Library includes Hemingway's exploration of "androgynous" sexual acts that detach the roles of man and woman from assigned sex. See Burwell, 167–69 for more on the unpublished portions of that novel. The little-known fact that Hemingway's third child Gloria (who published a memoir about her father under her given name of Gregory) was a trans woman and that Hemingway struggled with his child's trans femininity throughout the period that he wrote *Garden of Eden* and *Islands in the Stream* (and particularly the latter, which includes a character based on Gloria Hemingway, Ernest Hemingway's trans child) provides the necessary context for reading these engagements with sex change and genital metaphor. For Gloria Hemingway's gender identity, see Gumbel; and Valerie Hemingway, 293–94.

11. The most common question I get when describing this book is "What about Woolf's *Orlando*?" Woolf's novel is indeed the story of a man who turns into a woman, but Woolf's aesthetic and conceptual engagement is with what Jack Halberstam calls "female masculinity" and feminist questions around the disenfranchisement of cis women and the possible alleviation of that condition through the pursuit of women's rights. This fact makes *Orlando* a clarifying counterexample to what *The New Woman* identifies as Modernist trans femininity, which is not a highly conceptual notion that a cis man might become a cis woman, but rather an engagement with the Modernist grappling with the fact that trans feminine people in their embodied narrative exist and a working out of the possible implications of this fact for the cis understanding of sex. Other Modernists engage with trans masculinity in related though diverse ways. Most famously, Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* depicts the invert Stephen Gordon, whose suffering is in fact far closer tonally to the Modernist trans feminine than is *Orlando*'s story. There are in fact interesting things to say about the Modernist negotiation of the points of contact among the trans masculine condition of being compelled to live as a woman, cis women's condition of being compelled to live as a woman, and the trans feminine experience of being compelled to live as a man in the period. Tracing these relationships requires recognizing the difference between trans masculine and trans feminine history and engaging both rather than flattening trans experience into an ahistorical theoretical figure. In Guillaume Apollinaire's play *Les Mamelles de Tirésias*, a feminist woman turns into a man, satirizing the political aspirations of women, but with far less cutting edge than, for instance, Huxley's depiction of a weakling man with a woman inside him in *Farcical History of Richard Greenow*, as chapter 1 will reveal.

12. See Washington.

13. See Grand.

14. Genital wounds were newly common for combatants in World War I because of the use of land mines. The incidence of these wounds had a direct

material effect on innovations in genital surgery that then had applications for genital surgery offered to trans women. See Meyerowitz, chapter 1.

15. The cultural signifiers of trans femininity enable aesthetic examinations of desire, social identity, and bodies in the historical period when scientific discovery, feminism, homosexuality, and material factors produced these shifts that people considered tantamount to a societal “sex change.” As Irving Kaufman sang in his 1926 “Masculine Women! Feminine Men!”: “Girls were girls, and boys were boys / when I was a tot. / Now we don’t know who is who or / even what’s what! / Knickers and trousers, / baggy and wide—? Nobody knows who’s walking inside! / Those masculine women and feminine men.” Kaufman’s perception that topsy-turvy gender-bending had displaced the simple man/woman binary of the recent past in fact reflects a modern projection of fixity onto the late nineteenth century that repeated throughout the twentieth century as each new generation expressed shock about new gender nonconformity by contrasting it with a past that never actually was when gender roles were fixed and unchallenged.

16. Genet is unique even in French literary history. Balzac, Maupassant, and Proust were all interested in the feminine gender expression of male-assigned people. But Decadent dandyism is distinct from the trans femininity that is of interest to *The New Woman*. Whereas this dandyism in both the British and French traditions strained out of a historical era when aristocratic refinement was the supreme masculinity, the trans femininity cited in the literature of *The New Woman* is of the age that increasingly centered bourgeois workaday masculinity as an ideal. This is the historical context in which the trans femininity of the sexologist’s office and the street attained a neat binary distinction from this cis masculine ideal. Secondly, the specific trans femininity that the Modernists engaged arose in relation to the possibility of medical changes to the body that were perceived as enabling “sex change.”

17. Scholarly work contributes to positing trans femininity as a “phenomenon,” implying both the internal continuity of trans experiences and their newness. Harry Benjamin called the book that would become the postwar medical touchstone for trans health care *The Transsexual Phenomenon* (1966). The English literature scholar Bernice Hausman concludes the preface to her widely cited theoretical investigation of sex change entitled *Changing Sex* (1995) by admitting that she is “critical of the phenomenon of transsexualism” (Hausman xi). Richard Ekins and Dave King’s sociological study called *The Transgender Phenomenon* (2006) claims to document the first British research into “‘transvestism’ and ‘transsexuality’” (xx).

18. Katy Steinmetz, “The Transgender Tipping Point,” *Time*, June 9, 2014; Buzz Bissinger, “Call Me Caitlyn,” *Vanity Fair*, June 30, 2015.

19. The mid-1960s saw the consolidation of the term “transsexual” as a diagnostic category (Lothstein xi). The “uniform standards of care for the hormonal and surgical sex reassignment of [trans] patients” became available in 1979 “when care guidelines were prepared and disseminated” and then “standard descriptive criteria for the psychiatric diagnosis of transsexualism were first made available in 1980 with the publication of the American Psychiatric Association’s *DSM III*” (Lothstein, xi). From 1980 to 2013 the *Diagnostic and*

*Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM) used the diagnosis of “gender identity disorder” (GID). The GID diagnostic for “boys and men” took the shape of a life story through which the “boy [with] a marked preoccupation with traditionally feminine activities” became the “adult . . . preoccupied with their wish to live as a member of the other sex” (American Psychological Association, 576–77). To obtain a GID diagnosis (and thus access to hormones and/or surgery) a patient was required to report such a life narrative expressed in terms of rejection of “traditional” maleness, disgust for “his” penis, and “clinically significant distress or impairment” (American Psychological Association, 581). In May 2013 the American Psychological Association released the fifth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM V), which introduced “gender dysphoria” as a new diagnostic class that allowed for more diversity in gender identifications.

20. Armstrong introduces this through brief attention to the theme of castration in Wilde’s *Salome* and even suggests that Wilde undergoes his own “transsexual” transformation when he “comes back” through the voice of a female medium after his death (Armstrong, 159). Armstrong then uses Wilde as a hook by noting that, before her sex change in the early 1930s, Lili Elbe stayed in a Parisian apartment that Wilde had once rented. Armstrong’s true interest is in the autobiography, “a text which stands in 1931, on the frontier of medical attempts to reconfigure gender” (*ibid.*, 160).

## CHAPTER I

1. Harry Oosterhuis usefully parses the larger historical process as the move from the nineteenth-century grouping together, “under the rubric of sexual indeterminacy . . . various biological and psychological fusions of manliness and femininity” to the twentieth-century project of gradually reclassifying “as radically separate phenomena, such [conditions] as homosexuality, hermaphroditism, androgyny, transvestism, and transsexuality” (Oosterhuis, 67).

2. Krafft-Ebing uses a variety of terms that all contribute to the aggregate figure of trans femininity that the reader gleans from his text. These terms include “antipathic sexual instinct,” “psychical hermaphroditism,” and “inversion of the sexual instinct.” Krafft-Ebing also posits an essential link between sexual role and gender. So his use of the “passive pederast” also contributes to his presentation of trans femininity. *Psychopathia Sexualis* also names the most extreme degree of sexual inversion as involving a measure of physical hermaphroditism (Krafft-Ebing, 258).

3. This broad dissemination of inverted patients’ narratives caused concern among doctors. The logic that identified the life story as the locus of the scientifically verifiable truth of inversion led to suspicion that inverts fabricated narratives based on stories they had read. Havelock Ellis defends against this suspicion by observing that “the published histories are so extremely varied and numerous . . . that they . . . only serve as models in the sense that they indicate the points of information which are desired” (Ellis, 90). Ellis’s defense is telling: sexologists solicit certain “points of information” and this is the mechanism that orders the chaotic, changeable, and relational operations of gender and sex-

uality, converting the messiness and particularity of these experiences into the transferable abstraction of the diagnostic. By extension, this process gathers the holders of a range of experiences of desire and gender into the bounded distilled category of “the invert.” Michael Levenson identifies Krafft-Ebing’s sexological case studies as a “presentation of character as case, developed through a series of micronarratives built upon a few revelatory events”; this sexological form had, Levenson argues, a significant influence on the development of Modernist literary character (Levenson, 79).

4. Ellis also developed the figure of “the Eonist,” who is a man who through overstrong identification with a female object of desire expresses his own internal femininity to a pathological degree. This is just one of many subcategories of male femininity that isn’t central to the specific figure of the trans feminine that the Modernists engaged.

5. Article titles such as “Arbitrary Transformation of Male Mammals into Animals with Pronounced Female Sex Characteristics and Feminine Psyche” do not indicate the species of Steinach’s patients and indicate rightly that Steinach viewed his work on animals as part of a larger project to understand the central role of hormones in the production of sex and gendered behavior in human animals (Meyerowitz, 16).

6. Surgical and endocrinological innovations that were used to effect sex changes (such as mastectomy, castration, and hormonal therapies) were available in the United States and in Europe and were used to treat non-transsexual identified patients with genital or hormonal irregularities. Joanne Meyerowitz attributes the move to harnessing this medical knowledge to facilitate sex change in Germany to “a vocal campaign for sexual emancipation [that sought] to remove the legal and medical obstacles to sexual and gender variance” (Meyerowitz, 21). Because doctors were identified as the authorities on queer and trans life, this early politicization of gender-confirming health care formed around the logic of affliction and cure rather than gender self-determination. The optimism that grounded these politics attached to doctors’ ability to “make women” out of people who by this logic were not women previously.

7. It will be the work of chapter 4 to contrast this analytic parsing with the words of the case studies themselves.

8. See Engels.

9. Here we uncover the historical basis for the repeated contrast between a laudable “androgyny” and a discomfiting “effeminacy,” a frame that repeated in the twentieth century. It formed the a priori that led Modernist feminist scholars to applaud Woolf’s Orlando and Barnes’s Nora but decry Doctor O’Connor. It is the historical basis for the lesbian feminist affirmation of cis women’s bucking of compulsory femininity, but a long-standing discomfort with trans women’s bucking of compulsory masculinity.

10. See Terry; Sommerville; Burdett; and Faderman. These scholars have pointed out that the pseudoscientific typological diagnosis of the “morbidity” versus “health” of groups of people exposes the eugenicist underpinnings of sexology. Carpenter’s description of the “weak” and “frivolous” effeminate type further reveals the misogynist basis of eugenics’ hatred of weakness and positing of women as uterine vessels to revitalize or contaminate the racial stock.

11. My reading of Carpenter’s disavowal of trans femininity contrasts with Leela Gandhi’s assessment of the potential of Carpenter’s bridging of homosexual and anti-imperial (among other) politics. See chapter 3 of Gandhi.

12. Eve Sedgwick notes that “Whitman’s influence on the crystallization, in the later nineteenth century, of what was to prove a durable and broadly based Anglo-American definition of male homosexuality, was profound and decisive” (Sedgwick, 203).

13. See chapter 5 for more historical context concerning charges of effeminacy and colonial dynamics.

14. Carpenter’s promotion of gender equality in “the civilized world” in *The Intermediate Sex* contrasts with his critiques of the mechanization of modern life and the cultivation of competition that he equates with civilization in *Civilization: Its Causes and Cure*. See Rowbotham, chapter 8 for a complete account of Carpenter’s anti-civilizational argument.

15. Ellis drew a link between homosexuality and prostitution through their shared origin in genetic disposition. Explaining the prevalence of lesbianism among sex workers, he writes that “in a very large number of cases, the prostitute shows in slight or more marked degree many signs of neurotic heredity, of physical and mental ‘degeneration,’ so that it is possible to look upon prostitutes as a special human variety” (Ellis, 102).

16. Chapter 5 will argue that Foucault’s inattention to these reformulations of gender that accompanied the emergence of the homosexual in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries enabled the revival of the trans feminine allegory as an ahistorical theoretical figure in the field of Queer Theory in the late twentieth century.

17. See Gilman, 3–5.

18. For more on Freud’s metaphor of inversion, see Craft, 37–39.

19. See Prosser, “Transsexuals and Transexologists” 23–43; and Salamon, chapter 1.

20. Added to the 1920 revision of *Three Essays*: [Sandor] Ferenczi “insists that a sharp distinction should at least be made between two types: ‘subject homo-erotics,’ who feel and behave like women, and ‘object homo-erotics’ who are completely masculine and who have merely exchanged a female for a male object” (Freud, *Three Essays on the History of Sexuality*, 13).

21. Mark S. Micale parses this historical transformation: “Eighteenth-century Britons conceptualized manliness largely in moral, rather than physical, terms; they regarded wisdom, virtue, rectitude, sympathy, and responsiveness as key “manly attributes.” In contrast to Victorian proscriptions on public male emotionality, the cultivation of true feeling, especially when aroused by religious, ethical, or aesthetic circumstances, was construed as a masculine quality. An excess of partying, gaming, and womanizing, on the other hand, as well as overindulgence in the new material luxuries of the day, might be viewed as unmanly” (Micale, 38).

22. In his navigation from the general principle of bisexuality to the specific case of adult inversion, Freud admits that “it was tempting to extend this hypothesis to the mental sphere and to explain inversion in all its varieties as the expression of a psychical hermaphroditism” (*Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, 7–8).

23. Huxley considered Freud to be a monomaniac (Murray, 205).

24. Chapter 3 discusses Djuna Barnes's feminist critique of force-feeding as a paradigmatic method of punishment for suffragists on hunger strike in her article "How It Feels to Be Forcibly Fed."

## CHAPTER 2

On this chapter's subtitle: In *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*, Elizabeth Grosz writes that "at best a transsexual can live out his fantasy of femininity—a fantasy that in itself is usually disappointed . . . [she] may look like but can never feel like . . . a woman" (Grosz, 208). Throughout this chapter I cite *Ulysses* by episode and line, separated by a period.

1. Joseph Valente, in his introduction to the anthology *Quare Joyce*, points out that "Joyce came to adulthood during what one might call the apex of classical sexology, the statistical midpoint of the staggered careers of Krafft-Ebing, Symonds, Ellis, Carpenter, and Freud . . . Joyce read all of these figures, and exposure was doubtless sufficient in itself both to generate and to evince an abiding intellectual interest in the typologies of sexual difference/dissidence" (Valente, 13).

2. For an exploration of the analytic of androgyny in Joyce, see Black, 72–73.

3. See Driscoll for a full account of the schools of feminist Joyce criticism.

4. Consider the following citation from Liza Picard's *Victorian London*: "The Association for Promoting Cleanliness Among the Poor opened a bath-house and laundry in Smithfield, in 1844, where you could bathe and do your washing, for a penny . . . The idea gradually spread. Endell Street baths were opened in 1846, where the Oasis Health Centre is now, in High Holborn. The first municipally owned ones, in the parish of St. Martin-in-the-Fields, began in 1849. In 1853 baths and washhouses opened in Marshall Street, Westminster, where they were badly needed, and Davies Street, a pocket of slum property in the middle of otherwise plutocratic Mayfair" (Picard, 49).

5. See Joyce, *Letters*, 156–57.

6. The most famous of these female Hamlets was the American lesbian actress Charlotte Cushman, whose cross-dressing was not limited to the stage. See S. Marcus, *Between Women*, chapter 5.

7. Bloom's identification of the sopranos who sing for old popes as "eunuchs" is one of his little inaccuracies. A eunuch is a male-assigned person who is castrated after puberty and whose voice therefore has already deepened. Also, his assumption that castrati were asexual doesn't square with historical accounts of these singers as notorious lotharios. See Heriot, 36–39.

8. The reader can listen to an example of one of the few recordings of "the last castrato," Alessandro Moreschi (d. 1922) at <http://www.last.fm/music/Alessandro+Moreschi>.

9. In *Ulysses Annotated* Don Gifford informs us that this is in fact the statement that Jesus makes at the last supper when explaining the rite of communion (Gifford, 100).

10. One recalls the curious, wonderstruck sigh with which Joyce ends this episode at the end of "Circe" when Bloom contemplates the mysterious changeling, his son Rudy, the progeny of his parenthood: "Bloom: (wonderstruck, calls

inaudibly) Rudy!/ Rudy: (gazes, unseeing, into Bloom's eyes and goes on reading, kissing, smiling. He has a delicate mauve face. . . . A white lambkin peeps out of his waistcoat pocket) (*Ulysses*, 13.4961–66).

11. See Bishop, "A Metaphysics of Coitus in 'Nausicaa.'"

12. See Bishop, 187–89 for a demonstration of the way in which Gerty's blush corresponds to Bloom's tumescence. My interest is in the way Gerty's bodily intensification accesses the latent erotics of those concepts that are said to discourage displays of desire: the virginity of Mary and ladylike standards of deportment. See S. Marcus, *Between Women*, chapters 1 and 3 for an investigation of the erotics of Victorian female friendship and women's print culture for a parallel discussion of feminine cultural forms that are sites for the expression of desire.

13. Her capacities in this arena are alluded to once, although significantly; it is her own mother and not children that she mothers in this passage, and the mothering that she bestows is comprised of the policing of her mother's unladylike behavior: "Gerty just like a second mother in the house, a ministering angel too with a little heart worth its weight in gold. And when her mother had those raging splitting headaches who was it rubbed the menthol cone on her forehead but Gerty though she didn't like her mother taking pinches of snuff and that was the only single thing they ever had words about, taking snuff" (*Ulysses*, 13.325–29).

14. See Margot Norris's reading of "The Dead" entitled "Stifled Back Answers: The Gender Politics of Art in Joyce's 'The Dead'" for a related argument about Joycean staging of feminist critique from within the operation of female idealization. See Margaret Barrow's "Teetotal Feminists: Temperance Leadership and the Campaign for Women's Suffrage," in *A Suffrage Reader: Charting Directions in British Suffrage History* for an outline of the intersection between temperance and feminist political discourse and action in Britain.

15. Fleiss believed that men had cycles like women, and Freud appeared to accept this idea (J. Marcus, 24).

16. For an interesting historical and literary analysis of the English anti-Semitic myth of Jewish male menstruation, see Katz, 440–62.

17. See Norris's "Disenchanting Enchantment" for an elaboration of the vital point that brothels served as venues of feminist action in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Norris, 231).

18. Joseph Allan Boone in *Libidinal Currents* provides a representative example of this kind of reading: "In terms of plot, the episode's affirmation of Bloom's sexual fluidity is qualified by its valorization of the phallic arena that provides the overarching context for this release of the repressed. Because Nighttown's primary reason for existing is to foster and satisfy male fantasies, it in effect forms an extended men's club where men meet, compete and bond in sundry Oedipal games" (Boone, 157).

19. See Deleuze, 1–35.

20. Chapter 2 examines suffragette force-feeding in greater detail and the conclusion examines the Contagious Diseases Act of 1864, which allowed for nonconsensual medical exams of women accused of prostitution.

21. See Lyon, chapters 2 and 3.



22. For a discussion of “kairosis” in Eliot and the linking of the transgender with the general hold that the concept of “propitious time” had on Modernist forms and movements, see my discussion of “The Waste Land” in chapter 3.

23. See Unkeless’s “The Conventional Molly Bloom” for a representative example of this line of argument. In it she claims that “it is Joyce’s language that makes Molly so alive, but the traits with which he endows her stem from conventional notions of the way a woman acts and thinks” (Unkeless, 150).

24. This state of absolute division between the ego and the object dissolves, significantly, in “only one state—admittedly an unusual state, but not one that can be stigmatized as pathological—in which it does not do this. At the height of being in love the boundary between the ego and the object threatens to melt away. Against all the evidence of his senses, a man who is in love declares that ‘I’ and ‘you’ are one, and is prepared to behave as if it were fact” (Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, 13).

### CHAPTER 3

1. Djuna Barnes’s oeuvre identifies bodily dispossession as the defining quality of feminization. This bodily dispossession takes many forms throughout her work: force-feeding, girlhood silencing, sexual assault, unwanted pregnancy and childbirth, and the narrative exposure of female and feminized bodies to the view of other characters and, thus, the reader. An affect that combines suffering and embarrassment is the mark of this feminization. Barnes’s later work, and most beautifully *Nightwood*, explore phallicism and penetrability as the qualities that determine who is feminized and who escapes feminization. These states retain a deep connection to the categories of man and woman, but not to types of genitals. This thematic determines Barnes’s form in her later works. Muteness is the symptom of this bodily dispossession, but in Barnes this muteness corresponds with torrential vocalization that never names the injury that is itself productive of muteness, but is nonetheless a response to this muteness. O’Connor experiences not a total muteness, but a lack of words to name the source of the injury.

2. See Kofman for a reading of Freud’s parsing of female sexuality as an enigma.

3. This article was one of several that she wrote on the subject of suffrage. In *Women of the Left Bank: Paris 1900–1940*, Shari Benstock notes that these articles represent Barnes’s seemingly inconsistent (or perhaps just highly nuanced) position on the subject of feminism and suffrage. Benstock characterizes “On Being Forcibly Fed” as tantamount to a “feminist manifesto” (Benstock, 238). Whereas Barnes’s other pieces exploring suffragist topics, such as her article on the Suffrage Aviation meet of 1913, are “mocking and condescending” (ibid.), Benstock argues that Barnes was sympathetic and supportive of feminist political aims that foregrounded the individual autonomy of women, but was quick to disparage feminist events or arguments that she found absurd or organized around a sentimental vision of women’s suffering (ibid.).

4. Freud names masochism as a feminine condition. “There is one particularly constant relationship between femininity and instinctual life, which we

do not want to over-look. The suppression of women's aggressiveness which is prescribed for them constitutionally and imposed on them socially favours the development of powerful masochistic impulses, which succeed, as we know, in binding erotically destructive trends which have been diverted inwards. Thus masochism, as people say, is truly feminine. But if, as happens so often, you meet with masochism in men, what is left to you but to say that these men exhibit plain feminine traits?" (Freud, "Femininity," 144).

5. We might also think of *Ladies Almanack* as Barnes's generic skewering of eighteenth-century women's conduct books. See Jones, chapter 1.

6. This celebrated resistance is not attributed to all "women born with a difference," as lesbians are identified in *Ladies Almanack*. For instance, Lady Bulk-and-Balk and Tilly Twill-in-Blood, stand-ins for Radclyffe Hall and Una Troubridge, hurry to make of one female partner "a Wife and the other a Bride" and worry about the lack of moral parameters and statist underwriting for their relationship and those like it. They ask, "What has England done to legalize these Passions?" (Barnes, *Ladies Almanack*, 19).

7. In an unpublished letter to Dan Mahoney, the real-life Doctor O'Connor, dated November 14, 1958, Barnes asks with her characteristic and devastating combination of acerbity and mournful pathos, "is Natalie (Barney) still about—and all of us as old as God. Looking back in this day is a very precarious position—what a world we have of it now—already computing carfare to Mars and you still are Herperus the evening star!" (University of Maryland Archive).

8. A note on pronouns: in this section, I have previously referred to Matthew O'Connor with male pronouns. I shift to "she" and "her" as the narrative reveals that Matthew self-identifies as female.

9. O'Connor even hints that Father Lucas is gay, or trans feminine, calling him "a Moll of God" (Barnes, *Ryder*, 137). See Trumbach for a history of the "Molly Houses."

10. See Sontag's "Notes on Camp," 45.

11. There is a critical tendency to find in Wendell Ryder himself an effeminacy that parallels the effeminacy of Matthew O'Connor. See Kannenstine, 48. This critical perspective is founded on several instances of Wendell's assertion of feminine qualities. For example, Wendell claims "a changing countenance. . . . At one moment I am a young and tender girl, with close-held legs, and light bones becoming used to the still, sweet pain that is a girl's flesh, metaphorically speaking, of course. Sometimes I am a whore in ruffled petticoat, and getting thrippence for my pains" (Barnes, *Ryder*, 164). Wendell's version of this kind of speech, which apes (poorly) the speech of Doctor O'Connor and playfully claims that he himself is the object of the very fleshly pain that he inflicts on women in this novel, is different in kind. I distinguish this satirical derivative appropriation of the female subject position from the speech of Doctor O'Connor, whose suffering places her within the Barnesian bounds of femininity and femaleness.

12. The third partition of Robert Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, Barnes's favorite book, outlines the charge that love is too queer a concern to be treated philosophically or to provide the plot for epic (Burton, 3). Burton writes that "to speak of love-symptoms, too phantastical, and for alone for a wanton

poet, a feeling young lovesick gallant, *an effeminate courtier*, or some such idle person” (ibid., emphasis mine).

13. For an historical analysis of how rhetorics of virility adhered to women, see Spackman, chapter 2.

14. The book is archived in her collected papers at the University of Maryland, College Park.

15. Kenneth Burke provides one of the few instances in which the connection between Matthew and Nora is recognized, and here it is an aside. In “Versions, Con—, Per—, and In—” he notes that “the last syllable of [O’Connor] is also to be found in Nora” (K. Burke, 246).

16. In his biography of Barnes, Phillip Herring suggests that Mahoney’s pride concerning their depiction in *Nightwood* turned to anger after a friend started circulating copies of the novel in the Left Bank with the “unflattering” passages marked (Herring, 214). Mahoney reports the incident to Barnes in an unpublished letter that Herring doesn’t cite directly and the content of which is relevant to the inquiry of this chapter. Mahoney writes: “Don’t forget you promised me an American first edition. I deserve it anyway, as a funny old-maid I know, who is mad at me has bought about twenty of them and sent them to all our mutuel [*sic*] friends—hers and mine, I mean; because she thinks it is a terrible lay-out. I should worry. The reason she is mad at me is because one day when she was stretched out in my garden I called her a mallosc [*sic*] because she was so lazy. I was thinking of a play I saw with Grace George years ago, in which she is a big fat beauty who wouldn’t get off her arse if the house was on fire. Anyway this one, who is very self-conscious about her virginal state thought it had some reference to the hermaphroditic state of certain moluscs (*sic*)—just because she owned a snail once in one of those aquarium things which produced a family all of a sudden all alone. No amount of explaining would convince her I meant nothing of the sort” (unpublished letter dated August, 13). Mahoney also performed the only abortion that Barnes is known to have undergone, in 1933 (Herring, 99).

17. For an account of this encounter that cites Freud’s account of lesbian narcissism, see Taylor.

18. Barnes would have bristled at this connection, no doubt. Her grandmother Zadel Barnes was a friend of Henry James when she lived in London before Barnes was born, and Djuna Barnes didn’t care for James’s writing. Significantly in the context of this chapter, she is quoted as calling him a “homosexual old woman” (Herring, 88).

#### CHAPTER 4

1. An early version of *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* also included a character called Lily Mae Jenkins who McCullers’s narrator describes as “a waifish abandoned Negro homosexual” (qtd. in Dews, 288). This material was cut from the published version of the novel.

2. I use the gender-neutral plural pronouns “they,” “their,” and “them” to refer to this person whose sex and gender identity is unclear in their case study narrative. See the note on usage at the beginning of this book.

3. See chapter 1 for an account of this sexological diagnostic abstraction.
4. Note the similarity between this sympathy for women and that expressed by Joyce's Bloom in the "Nausicaa" episode. See chapter 2 of *The New Woman*.
5. See Irigaray.
6. See James, 13–32 and 92–101.
7. Krafft-Ebing uses Taylor's report to offer Eliza Edwards's story as Case 150 in *Psychopathia Sexualis*. He notes that she was twenty-four when she died, had been an actress, wore her hair long with a middle part "in the manner of females," had a "feminine face," plucked her facial hair, and "fixed [her genitals] in an upward position through an artful bandage" (Krafft-Ebing, 257).
8. Chapter 5 reads Leo Bersani's theorization of this relation between rectum and vagina as it is expressed in AIDS panic accounts in the 1980s. My own analysis comes at this relation not as a semiotic figure that explains a homophobic association of gay men with women, but rather reveals trans femininity as the figure on which this relation hinges in the historical case. Trans women are the people who, historically, have been most fully subjected to this understanding of bodies. In other words, when gay men are associated with the relation between the rectum and the vagina, the figural "woman" whose condition they suffer from association with is herself composed of a mutually reinforcing figure of trans and cis womanhood.
9. See Sautman for more on working-class lesbian culture in France in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.
10. See Meyerowitz, 20–30.
11. See Chauncey 43 for more historical detail on the Cercle Hermaphrodites.
12. See Chauncey, chapter 1; and R. Rosen, chapter 2.
13. A similar story can be found at <http://transascity.org/a-distant-mirror-mildred-1942/>. D. M. Olkon and Irene Case Sherman, "Eonism with Added Outstanding Psychopathic Features—Presented before the Chicago Neurological Society, October 15, 1942," *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease* 99, no. 2 (1944): 159–67.
14. Consider Subject 129 and June's reporting in contrast with Freud's theorization of anal eroticism outlined in the section "Freud's Critical Metaphor of Trans Femininity" of chapter 1 of *The New Woman*. As I observe in those pages, in several texts that span his output, Freud suggests that anal eroticism is the result of the desire to be the sexual object of men. Subject 129 and June, in contrast, report gendered sensations and understandings of their bodies that are free of any particular object. This is the crux of the challenge that this life writing makes to Freud's theories which were crafted with reference to sexological case study narratives, but clearly did not reflect the full scope of those narratives' contributions to theories of sex and embodiment.
15. The book was translated into German in 1932 and English in 1933 under the title *Man into Woman: An Authentic Record of a Change of Sex*. The German edition listed Elbe as the author, whereas the Danish and English version simply listed Hoyer as the editor and listed no author. For a full account of the translation and authorship history of the text, see Meyer.
16. See Spade, "Medicaid Policy and Gender-Confirming Healthcare for Trans People: An Interview with Advocates," for more on the dismissive understanding of trans health care as cosmetic.

17. The postwar period saw several centers of trans health care embedded in university-based research projects at Johns Hopkins University and UCLA (see Meyerowitz, chapter 6). Transsexuality officially entered the American Psychiatric Association's *DSM III* in 1980 (Lothstein, xi).

18. A related source of such stories are those of indigenous people who identify as and indigenous communities that recognize male-assigned, female-identified people, although perhaps the very notion of birth sex assignment is not relevant here. First nations include people identified as *boté*, *mujerado*, *mahu*, and other social terms that named this experience and identity. Late twentieth-century indigenous thought and political practice have produced the concept of “two spirit” to allow collective reference to these people and experiences. The inclusion of two-spirit stories from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in this chapter would be inappropriate. The story that this chapter tells is about the formation of diverse vernacular expressions of trans femininity as this experience was categorically distinguished from cis femininity in the later half of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century. This distinction was an imposition of Euro-American doctors, judges, police officers, and, yes, troops who encroached on native and colonized land and sociality. But to posit that site of enforcement, a moment when Euro-American logic folded indigenous two-spirit people into an association with trans femininity, would be to repeat that colonizing gesture. European sexological texts included mention of these social categories in anthropological catalogs of trans feminine types, often placed alongside historical surveys of gender and sexual nonconforming types going back to ancient Greece (see Krafft-Ebing, 199). For an account of U.S. officials with the Bureau of Indian Affairs who in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries incarcerated two-spirit people, forced them to cut their hair, wear male clothes, and do manual labor, see Morgensen, 39–40. These pages also describe indigenous communities protecting two-spirit people and protesting their maltreatment by government officials.

19. Genet himself had things to say about *Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs* and Divine that do not reflect the reality of the life writing. For instance, in a letter to Sartre he writes that “to pervert [sexuality] through pseudo-feminine behavior” is “the meaning of drag queens’ gestures and intonation” (qtd. in Vandervoort, 132).

20. These features of the diagnostic narrative include early childhood recognition of sex cross-identification, consistent “divergence” between “psychological sex” and “physical sex,” and “persistent discomfort” with one’s assigned sex (*DSM IV*).

21. The *DSM* reflects this understanding of sex in its identification of *GID* with the “preoccupation with getting rid of primary and secondary sexual characteristics . . . or belief that he or she was born the wrong sex” (*DSM IV*, 581).

22. Irigaray writes that “it is impossible exhaustively to represent what woman might be, given that a certain economy of [scientific] representation . . . functions through a tribute to woman that is never paid or even assessed. The whole problematic of Being has been elaborated thanks to that loan” (Irigaray, 21).

23. For a more extreme example, consider director Doris Wishman’s 1978 exploitation film *Let Me Die a Woman*, in which a voice-over narrative de-

scribes a trans woman as a “monstrous biological joke” and triumphantly claims that doctors “have made genetic men into real women” as the result of a study of trans women that the voice-over parses in the futuristic and exploration-themed idiom of “a journey into inner space.”

24. [http://www.gendernetwork.com/Magnus-Hirschfeld.html#.VrY\\_PISqzBI](http://www.gendernetwork.com/Magnus-Hirschfeld.html#.VrY_PISqzBI).

## CHAPTER 5

1. See the section entitled “Femininity Disavowed” of chapter 1.

2. Although the actor Divine was male identified, the persona Divine was trans feminine and for this reason I use she/her pronouns.

3. Butler’s theory is then applied to Genet’s text by Modernist scholars. Observe Edith Vandervoort’s reading: “In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler, inspired by Esther Newton, insists on the fact that drag, by enacting extreme imitations of gender stereotypes, mocks ‘the notion of a true gender identity’” (Vandervoort, 137). Vandervoort argues that Genet’s trans characters “accept the classical distinction between male and female and exaggerate this difference so as to shake the very foundation of traditional definitions of masculinities. . . . Despite her feminine appearance, her exuberant language, dramatic gestures, and her lack of virility, Divine remains a man. In this novel, Genet speaks about ‘*la duplicité du sexe des tantes*’ and accentuates that even though she is a ‘woman,’ Divine *est aussi un homme*” (ibid., 133). While Vandervoort accurately cites the one place in the novel in which Genet says that Divine is “*aussi un homme*,” Genet also remarks that his autobiographical narrator is “a male who knows that he really isn’t one” (Genet, 114).

4. This rediscovery of the allegorical potential of trans femininity hinges in part on the desire to find a theoretical figure that is against the identitarian categories that grounded feminism and gay liberation. In 1990 Judith Butler asked “to what extent . . . *regulatory practices* of gender formation and division constitute identity . . . To what extent is ‘identity’ a normative ideal rather than a descriptive feature of experience?” (*Gender Trouble*, 23). By 2004 she suggested that Queer Theory “is understood, by definition, to oppose all identity claims,” although by that point she does not think this an accurate statement of the field’s position (*Undoing Gender*, 7). In that same year, Lee Edelman voiced his complete “refusal of identity politics” (Edelman, 165). Edelman’s disavowal of identity hinges on his Lacanian perspective that desire is shattering to the self. Heterosexuals deny this non-identity and queers acknowledge and celebrate the freedom from identity that desire allows. For Edelman, as for Barthes, woman is the mark of the heterosexual. These same theories position trans woman as an effect on masculinity rather than a feminine presence. For Butler, as for Foucault, trans is a conceptual way out of the fixity of sex (*Gender Trouble*) and the provocation for a “New Gender Politics” (*Undoing Gender*). In each case, the critical allegory of trans femininity provides the means to push past woman as a political category.

5. This is also a shift from Marxist feminists to male Post-Structuralists as the theoretical touchstones for complex thinkers of gender in contrast to feminism’s dull literalism.

6. Barthes makes this critical move, which associates trans femininity with fetishism and misogyny, in the context of similar claims made by feminists from the 1970s to the present. See Raymond for the most famous and complete expression of this view.

7. This critical phrase is inspired by the poet Trish Salah's question "How might women march together?" from "Next Year in Jerusalem" found in *Wanting in Arabic* (TSAR Publications, 2002).

8. See Spade, *Normal Life*; and Koyama.

9. Both of which, it is of interest to note, were inspired by the story of the serial killer Ed Gein.

10. See my discussion of Silverman in chapter 2 and Madden in chapter 3.

11. Whereas the term "fairy" generally denoted any flamboyantly effeminate homosexual man (whose self-presentation resembled that of a female prostitute), numerous references in the early twentieth century make it clear that the word was sometimes used specifically to denote men who actually worked as prostitutes selling sexual services to "normal" men.

12. See the section "Attendant Disavowals" of chapter 1.

13. Najmabadi discusses widely read poetry dating from the 1870s that describes the lothario-protagonists' sexual liaisons with male and female servants and prostitutes that were "generous with descriptive detail" and that did not distinguish between male and female partners (Najmabadi, 24). By the end of the nineteenth century, however, "many of the accounts of male homosexual liaisons became embedded in the political critique of one's opponents, or within the moral critique of 'a country in decay'" (ibid., 23).

14. Najmabadi clearly parses the correspondence between this feminization and the loss of the *amrad*'s value: "Once love was shifted from homosocial eroto-affectivity to procreative marriage, the strong link forged between love and sexuality would carry gender categories of femininity and masculinity from the domain of marriage and family onto the domain of love. The gender marking of male homoerotics was facilitated by this shift. The desiring subject became the male hyperheterosexual, who can have sex with both man and woman; the object of desire, woman and the feminized male. This meant that it was not the feminized male who approximated the female, a reversal of the previous typology. It also meant that he came to share the position of abjection that belonged to woman. The male beloved, now feminized, became subject to ridicule and loathing, whereas the young male beloved of the classical text was the object of adoration" (Najmabadi, 59–60).

15. Najmabadi faults feminist scholarship on the period for failing to address this history and focusing solely on the disciplinary work of the figure of female excess—the "Westoxicated" woman, one who mindlessly imitates "the West" (Najmabadi, 8). This emphasis has complemented "feminism's burden of birth—its disavowal of male homoeroticism" (ibid.). I would add that inattention to subjects like the *amrad* and the fairy constitutes a transmisogyny that is another feminist burden of birth. This is especially true in relation to the point that this paragraph makes about the exclusive right of the wife to the sexual attention of her husband. The figures for this inattention, in both Iran and in England, were feminized degraded subjects. In Iran, this was the *amrad*. In England,

it was the prostitute. The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries' focus on sex work as an object of bourgeois women's political activity teaches us that this was both a site for important solidarity work (as in the successful campaign to repeal the Contagious Diseases Act) and a site of misogynist paternalism on the part of bourgeois women. See chapter 1 of Walkowitz's *Prostitution and Victorian Society* for more on late nineteenth-century British feminist work on the issue of prostitution. See S. Marcus, *Between Women*, chapter 5 for a careful outlining of the politics of marriage reform in the late nineteenth century.

16. When I began this investigation I assumed I would find that British attitudes toward *hijras* would be a significant mode for inflicting the heteronormalization of society in South Asia. The sources I found indicate that in fact *hijras* were viewed as one among many "criminal castes" rather than, as was the case with Iranian *amrads*, as egregious violations of modern gender norms and thus impediments to national modernization. The colonial descriptions of *hijras* indicate that there were many different understandings of the sex and sexuality of *hijras*. See Reddy, chapter 2, for more on the colonial interpretation of the *hijra*.

17. See Sinha; Chowdury; Nandy; and Krishnaswamy.

18. In *Orientalism*, Edward Said traces the association of Mohammed with sodomy back to the Middle Ages (Said, 62). He cites Flaubert's description of "a young man who had himself publically bugged by a monkey" as an indication of the nineteenth-century French writer's sense of Oriental sexual peculiarity (*ibid.*, 103).

19. See Gupta; and Narrain.

## CHAPTER 6

1. See Stryker, *Transgender History*, chapter 2.

2. Judith Walkowitz demonstrates that official use of the phrase "common prostitute" dates back to the British Contagious Disease Act of 1864 that required women named by policemen as "common prostitutes" to submit to gynecological exams; if signs of gonorrhea or syphilis were present, they could be interned in hospitals for a period of up to nine months. See Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society*, 1–2.

3. Two other sources on vernacular trans feminine life in the period require special mention. First, Teenie Harris's photographs demonstrate the rich sociality of African American gay and trans people in Pittsburgh's Hill District in the late 1950s. See Hopper for information about a 2007 exhibition of these photographs at the Warhol Museum. Second, Frank Simons's film *The Queen* documents the multiracial drag ball scene in New York City in the early 1960s.

4. This association goes back to Julian Eltinge, as we saw in the "Introduction."

5. "Hormone queen" is the vernacular term for trans women who take estrogen and therefore have breasts.

6. In one of the acts that Newton describes, a queen wears a fake pregnant belly as part of her costume and spends much of the act complaining about the indignities and discomforts of pregnancy (Newton, 54). The gag operates as a joke both on pregnant women and the fact that the audience knows that the queen is not actually pregnant. This is the kind of cultivation of female experi-



ence as female injury, an injury that can be supposed to reside in female morphology, that I'm discussing. When you consider camp and drag icons—Marilyn Monroe, Judy Garland, Tammy Fay Baker, Dolly Parton—these are artists who foreground feminizing experiences of disrespect, neurosis, and betrayal. The female spectator (both cis and trans) is hailed in the position of either identification or rejection of all this vulnerability.

7. See Thuma, “Against the ‘Prison/Psychiatric State.’”

8. The offer of temporary housing on the part of older queer people to younger queer people who arrived in cities to begin gay lives is evidenced by Cei Bell's observation that nearly all young gay people landed in Philadelphia Third World and Gay Liberation movement activist Kiyoshi Kuromiya's apartment (see Bell, 121). Also see the description of STAR House in the following section.

9. See the “Magnus Hirschfeld's Case Studies” section of chapter 4.

10. This use of “sexist” as a descriptor for anti-trans woman attitudes is not unique. In the period, Trans Liberationists used the term to refer to both the enforcement of gender norms and the denigration of women and feminine people.

11. See Stryker, *Transgender History*, chapter 5.

12. For more on the public housing struggle, see Howard; Feldman and Stall; and Williams. Housing as a survival need was politicized in other feminist projects during the period. The Battered Women's Movement organized the first domestic abuse shelters in the 1970s by pooling organizers' funds to rent houses and offer shelter, space, and time for women leaving abusive partnerships. See Schecter. There were many experiments in collective housing among radicals during the period. See Spencer.

13. STAR's work bears a practice-based solidarity with the many 1970s gay and feminist anti-prison and prisoner solidarity projects. See chapters 6 and of Kunzel for a thorough discussion of gay and lesbian political projects that focused on policing and incarceration.

14. Politicizing rape was a central goal of Women's Liberation. See Brownmiller for the most iconic presentation of this politics.

15. 1970s feminist organizations like the English Collective of Prostitutes and the San Francisco-based COYOTE fought for the decriminalization of sex work. See Jenness for more on COYOTE. See English Collective of Prostitutes for more on that organization.

16. In 1972 lesbians across the United States rallied in support of Joanne Little, a black woman who was put in prison for stabbing her abusive partner. This work was part of a largely gay and lesbian anti-carceral movement. See Thuma, “Lessons in Self-Defense.”

17. We can consider, for example, the work of the autonomous pre-*Roe* abortion collective JANE, a referral network in which women eventually learned to perform abortions and performed thousands of them in the year before *Roe*. See L. Kaplan for a history of JANE.

18. These “feminized tactics” include providing housing, food, and emotional support to those who are participating in political struggle. This chapter understands (informed by many examples of political organizing in the 1970s) that political struggle and survival tactics are deeply intertwined for those populations of people most affected by racism, heteropatriarchy, and transmisogyny.

19. Nancy Jean Burkholder's ejection from the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival (MWMF) in 1991 spurred a queer and trans protest camp called "Camp Trans." MWMF was an enduring emblem of 1970s cultural feminism and, following 1991, instituted a "womyn-born-womyn" policy to bar trans women from participating. Camp Trans ran for many years and spurred debates that ultimately contributed to the festival ceasing operation in 2015. Koyama maintains an archive of writing about MWMF and its policies and the resistance of trans women. See <http://eminism.org/michigan/documents.html>. She also wrote an important article that argued that the debate around whether women should have to prove that they've had genital surgery in order to be welcomed at MWMF was racist and classist. See <http://eminism.org/readings/pdf-rdg/whose-feminism.pdf>.

20. See Mayo, "I Was Born a Boy."

21. Janet Mock's reality as a girl and young woman and the conditions of life were similar to what little we know about the life of Eliza Scott, the West Indian woman who is briefly mentioned in the story of Fanny and Stella. The timeline of trans women's mutual aid and resistance to these conditions also stretches back to the 1870s. What are the legacies of the work done by Trans Liberationists in the 1970s that reflect the priorities that trans women define? The contemporary landscape of Trans Liberation work is vast. It includes focus on issues that are familiar from previous decades as well as new forms of struggle. The Trans Justice Funding Project maintains a list of hundreds of projects across the United States that address trans health care, prisoner support, trans cultural production, issues that affect undocumented trans people, sexual assault, employment and economic issues, issues of particular interest to trans youth, and many more. See <http://www.transjusticefundingproject.org>. Prominent trans women are speaking and acting in the spirit of Trans Liberation. Cece McDonald was arrested and convicted after she stabbed a man who was attacking her with racist and transphobic epithets. Her case became a rallying point for queer and trans activists. Since her release from prison McDonald has spoken about her radicalization while in prison. She writes that "my political education began while I was incarcerated for defending myself against a racist and transphobic attack" (Stanley and Smith, *Captive Genders*, 1). In prison she connected with other incarcerated people who shared her political perspective. She plans to start an education project in prisons to bring similar material to incarcerated people. Monica Jones was arrested for "manifesting prostitution" under an Arizona law that is so broadly written that any woman suspected of prostitution is at risk for arrest. A political movement developed around her efforts to politicize her arrest. See Strangio. The political situation of Chelsea Manning, a U.S. Army soldier and trans woman who was convicted of espionage for releasing materials that in her view documented American military abuses in Iraq and Afghanistan, has become a rallying point for trans politics that deal with both military resistance and prison abolition. She has since published an article entitled "On the Intersection of the Military and Prison Industrial Complex" in *Captive Genders*, an anthology addressing trans politics and prison abolition.

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# Index

- abortion, 317n17  
*Adventures of Hajji Baba of Ispahan*,  
36  
aestheticism, 86, 94; penis and,  
193–94  
AIDS, 286, 287; compared to  
syphilis, 287  
alienation, 10, 15, 18  
allegory, 10. *See also* trans feminine  
allegory  
Almodovar, Pedro, 244  
Althusser, Louis, 290  
*Ambisexual Art Dealer, The* (Barnes),  
151–52, 152  
*American Weekly*, 197  
*Am I That Name?* (Riley), 289–97  
*amrad/gbilman*, 250–51, 315nn14–15  
“Anal Eroticism and Castration”  
(Freud), 44  
anal sex, 35, 51, 250–51, 312n14;  
anal examinations, 164–65;  
contagion, 287; movement of  
bowels, 51; rectum as vagina,  
286–89, 312n8  
*Anatomy of Melancholy, The*  
(Burton), 310–11n12  
Andreas-Salomé, Lou, 44  
androcentrism, 244, 289  
androgyny, 15, 33, 68, 69, 70  
*Antiphon, The* (Barnes), 151  
Armstrong, Tim, 16, 17, 180–81,  
185, 304n20  
audience, 91. *See also* exhibitionism  
*Autobiography of an Androgyne*  
(June), 3–4, 172–78  
autonomy, 260–64, 272–74  
*Bad Education*, 244  
Balzac, Honore de, 19, 205–20;  
feminized bond, 210, 220;  
*Sarrasine*, 207–21; speech patterns,  
219; variant of female experiences,  
215  
Barbette, 8  
Barbin, Herculine, 19, 207; memoirs,  
205, 221–26  
Barnes, Djuna, 9, 15, 16, 18, 62, 97,  
260  
career: as autobiographer, 101;  
as essayist, 101–7, 309n3;  
as literary author, 99–152;  
as painter, 151–52, 152; as

- photographer, 146–47; as playwright, 151; as reporter, 101–7  
 themes: bodily dispossession, 309n1; border areas, 101–7; death, 118–27, 144; mystical discourse, 133–34; phallic tongue, 117; sexual difference, 150; suffering female, 99–152 *passim*; violence, 101–7, 116–17, 143  
 works: *Ambisexual Art Dealer, The*, 151–52, 152; *Antiphon, The*, 151; *Book of Repulsive Women, The*, 107–14; “Corpse A,” 111; “From Fifth Avenue,” 108–9; “How It Feels to Be Forcibly Fed,” 101–7, 106; *Ladies Almanack*, 114–18, 310nn5–6; *Nightwood*, 18, 97, 99–101, 127–52, 309n1, 310nn7–11, 311n16; “Rabbit, The,” 112; *Ryder*, 118–27; scrapbook, 106, 106, 146; “Seen from the ‘L,’” 110; *Spillway*, 112; “Suicide,” 111; “To a Cabaret Dancer,” 113, 127; “Twilight of the Illicit,” 110  
 Barnes, Elizabeth Chappell, 118  
 Barnes, Wald, 118  
 Barnes, Zadel, 118, 311n18  
 Barthes, Roland, 13, 19, 205–6; frame of five codes, 208–9; linguistic exploration, 207, 208; *Lover’s Discourse, A*, 215; *S/Z*, 19, 205–20, 207–21; theme of lack, 207–21; theme of snare, 210–12  
 bath houses, 307n4  
 Baudelaire, Charles, 62, 113; “To a Red-Haired Beggar Girl,” 62, 113  
 Beauvoir, Simone de, 229–30  
*Being Geniuses Together* (McAlmon), 99  
 Bell, Cei, 20, 267–69  
 Belle, Lulu, 8  
 Benjamin, Harry, 303n17  
 Benstock, Shari, 15; *Women of the Left Bank*, 15  
 Bersani, Leo, 256, 312n8; “Is the Rectum a Grave?,” 286  
 binary sex, 14, 16, 39, 54, 69, 141, 167, 226, 249, 291, 303n15  
*Birds, The*, 241–42  
 bisexuality, 42, 43, 54  
 Bishop, John, 75, 81  
 Black Cat (Los Angeles), 256  
 “Blind Spot of an Old Dream of Symmetry, The” (Irigaray), 45  
 blues music, 8, 300–301n7  
*Bodies That Matter* (Butler), 232–34, 278  
 body, 127–52 *passim*, 237, 255, 296; alienation from, 15, 18, 101, 112, 141–42; bodily being, 293; body modification, 273; embodiment and feminizing experience, 294; embodiment and psychic fissures, 100; entrapment narrative, 4, 17, 23, 27, 154, 155, 299n3; female embodiment, 4, 16, 101, 159–61; menstruation, 159, 293, 308n16; mismatched with mind, 4; pregnancy, 316–17n6; sexed sensations, 158–60; somatic metaphor, 101, 103–7; somatic understanding, 158–60; understanding, 3  
*Book of Repulsive Women, The* (Barnes), 107–14  
 Boone, Joseph Allan, 85  
*Bostonians* (James), 148  
 Boulton, Stella, 162–65  
 British Modernism. See literary Modernism  
 bureaucracy, 167–68, 204  
 Burke, Carolyn, 107, 112, 113  
 Burton, Robert: *Anatomy of Melancholy, The*, 310–11n12  
 Butler, Judith, 14, 19, 46, 204, 207, 226–41, 259, 294, 314n3; *Bodies that Matter*, 232–34, 278; body parts, 233–34; category of “woman,” 226–41; *Gender*

- Trouble*, 203, 223, 226–41 *passim*, 314nn3–4; reading of Barbin, 226–28; reading of Foucault, 226–28; *Undoing Gender*, 14, 237–41
- Carpenter, Edward, 24, 28–29, 31–33, 34–39, 156, 160, 204, 243, 248, 306n11; *Intermediate Sex: A Study of Some Transitional Types of Men and Women*, *The*, 28–29, 32, 34–39, 306n14
- case studies: Case 128 (Krafft-Ebing), 156; Case 129 (Krafft-Ebing), 3, 13, 157–62, 259, 293, 299n2, 312n14; Case 150 (Krafft-Ebing), 312n7; character representation, 61; Hirschfeld, 165–72; Krafft-Ebing, 156–62; as life writing, 155–56
- Castle, Terry, 148
- castration, 8, 24, 26, 42, 45, 49–50, 63; aspiration to vs. escape from, 100; in Balzac, 207–21; castrati, 72, 307n7, 307n8; desire of, 140; double castration, 19; in Joyce, 84; young girl, 47
- Caughie, Pamela, 16–17
- Cercle Hermaphroditos, 172
- Chauncey, George, 29–30, 164, 170, 247; plasticity of gender assignment, 30
- “Child Is Being Beaten, A” (Freud), 92
- cis men, 283
- cis sex, 8, 14, 97, 278; decentering, 285; privilege, 278; sex as cis, 247, 252
- cis women: cis lesbians, 273; masculinity and, 28; sex work, 247; suffering female, 99–152 *passim*; trans feminism alliance, 16, 26–27, 137, 142, 150, 157, 259
- Civilization and Its Discontents* (Freud), 91, 309n24
- Cixous, Helene, 69, 70
- Cocks, H. G., 36
- Cocteau, Jean, 8
- colonialism, 204, 206, 313n18; heterosexualization, 206, 249–51; sex as cis, 247
- community, xvi, 10, 156. *See also* survival practices
- Compton Cafeteria (San Francisco), 256
- contagion, 287, 316n2
- Contagious Disease Act (1864), 164
- Cordova, Jeanne, 270–71
- Corey, Dorian, 235
- Corydon* (Gide), 38–39
- Cowell, Roberta, 197–200
- COYOTE, 317n15
- criminalization, 155, 162–65, 177, 181, 206, 246, 254, 257, 280, 283; cross-dressing, 258; incarceration, 265, 317n13, 317n16, 318n21. *See also* violence
- Crisp, Quentin, 13
- cross-dressing, 258, 272, 300n6
- cross-identification, 17, 18, 67, 75, 81, 87, 91, 92, 313n20
- Cushman, Charlotte, 307n6
- dandyism, 303n16
- Daughters of Bilitis (DOB), 269–72
- De Lauretis, Teresa, 101, 105, 130–31
- Demme, Jonathan, 241–42
- democracy: Greek foundation, 35; homogenic attachment, 35. *See also* equality
- Derrida, Jacques, 86
- Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorder* (DSM), 186, 187, 303–4n19, 313nn19–21
- Dialectic of Sex, The* (Firestone), 285
- Discipline and Punishment* (Foucault), 184
- Divine (actor), 204–5
- Douglas, Angela, 272
- Drag, The* (West), 9
- drag scene, 234–36, 260, 278, 300n6, 314n3; denigration and, 260; gay men dressing as drag queens, 273

- Edelman, Lee: *No Future*, 241–46
- Edwards, Eliza, 165, 312n7
- effeminacy, 246–52, 305n9
- Ekins, Richard, 303n17
- Elbe, Lili, 16, 178–81, 185, 248–49; *Man into Woman*, 16, 180–81, 203
- Eliot, T. S., 9, 10, 15, 16, 18–19, 99, 113, 131, 138–39, 140, 147, 148–49, 152; kairois, 309n22; typist figure, 149; *Waste Land, The*, 19, 99, 149. *See also* Tiresian figures; universal human experience
- Elliot, Beth, 269–72
- Ellis, Havelock, 25, 34, 35, 132, 161, 166, 304–5n3, 306n15; “the Eonist,” 305n4; *Sexual Inversion*, 25, 36; *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, 34
- Eltinge, Julian, 8, 300n6
- embodiment. *See* body
- employment, 167–68, 182, 196; division of labor, 53, 204; domestic labor, 191–92, 254; gender and, 168, 246. *See also* sex work
- endocrinology, 6, 7, 43, 178, 281, 305nn5–6; biochemical imbalance, 5; sex hormones, 5, 14, 26
- entrapment narrative, 4, 17, 23, 27, 154, 155, 299n3
- equality, 293; homogenic attachment, 35; love and, 32
- eunuchs, 174. *See also* castration
- exhibitionism, 83, 91–92
- fairy, 9, 16, 30, 172, 315n11; as anachronistic, 251; cis male partners, 29; fairy model, 248; sex work, 247; street fairies, 248
- family: familial structure, 166; trauma, 129–52
- Farcical History of Richard Greenow* (Huxley), 18, 24, 40, 48–65
- Felski, Rita, 207
- female impersonation, 8, 203, 257–58
- Female Impersonators, The* (June), 172–78
- “Female Sexuality” (Freud), 44, 99, 139–40
- feminine: degradation and, 68, 69, 92, 258–59, 297; injury and, 87
- femininity, 170, 246–52, 305n9; artificiality, 205 (*see also* “realness”); degradation and, 68, 69, 258–59, 297; disavowal of, 27–29, 34–39; as fantasy, 307; fetishism and, 315n3; histrionic femininity, 42; within male homosexuality, 93; misogyny and, 315n3
- “Femininity” (Freud), 139–40, 141, 142
- feminism, 10; feminist literary criticism, 15; separatism, 270–72; transmisogyny, 270–72
- Fineman, Joel, 48
- Firestone, Shulamith, 285
- Ford, Charles Henri, 9; *Young and the Evil, The* (Ford and Tyler), 9
- Ford, Ford Maddox, 28
- Forster, E. M., 49
- Foucault, Michel, 13, 14, 19, 162, 306n16; brandings, 184; Butler critique of, 226–28; *Discipline and Punishment*, 184, 207; *History of Sexuality, The*, 203; reading of Barbin, 205, 207, 221–26; *Use of Pleasure, The*, 203
- framing. *See* trans feminine allegory
- Freud, Sigmund, 16, 75, 90–91, 306n22
- topics: castration, 8, 42, 45, 63; exhibitionism, 83; general psychic operation, 42; genital anguish, 42, 99; inability to identify as woman, 83–84; metaphors of, 24, 39–48; model of inversion vs. model of homosexuality, 17; Oedipus complex, 44–45, 131; penis envy, 43; superego, 45, 91;

- theory of inversion, 7–8; trans femininity, 7
- works: “Anal Eroticism and Castration,” 44; “Child Is Being Beaten, A,” 92; *Civilization and Its Discontents*, 91, 309n24; “Female Sexuality,” 44, 99, 139–40; “Femininity,” 139–40, 141, 142; *Interpretation of Dreams, The*, 130–31; *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, 7, 39–48, 90–91, 306n20
- Futurists, 86, 127
- Garber, Majorie, 15; *Vested Interests*, 15
- Gay Activist Alliance: restrictive membership, 273
- Gay Liberation: male centrism, 261
- Gay New York* (Chauncey), 29–30
- gay rights texts, 27–29, 34–39
- Gay Sunshine*, 272
- gender: concept of, 256–60; detaching desire from gender, 166; division of labor, 53, 204; exploration through linguistic innovation, 70; penetration and, 191 (*see also* penetration); performative aspect of gender, 17, 259; sociality and, 156–57; ungendering, 278
- gender categories, 71, 97, 154, 297; changeability of, 292; cis category, 20; cis terms, xv–xvii; “the Eonist,” 305n4; feminine, 33, 71; framing, xv–xvii, 6, 172; gender distinctiveness, 12; homosexual men, 26; humanness and, 239; man, 93, 150; masculinity, 12; sex, 291; terminology, 304n1; trans feminine, 31; transvestites, 26; woman, 20, 31, 63, 71, 150–51, 226–41, 256, 289–97; woman as pure concept, 291
- Gender in Modernism* (Scott), 15
- Gender Trouble* (Butler), 14, 203, 204, 223, 226–41 *passim*, 314nn3–4
- Genet, Jean, 13, 19, 183–96, 303n16, 313n19, 314n3; male phallicism, 193–94; *Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs*, 13, 19, 154, 183–96; sex difference, 190, 195–96; violence, 193–95; words and sex, 184
- genitals, 6, 14, 87; decoupled from sex, 101; dissatisfaction with, 46; eels’ genitals, 64; female genitalia and identification, 141, 155; fixed meaning of, 176; genital anguish, 42, 99; genital disbelief, 142; genital injuries in war, 12, 301–2n10; genital lack, 100, 101, 142, 201–21, 297; morphology, 156, 250; non-cis understanding of, 288; sex and, 30, 246–47; sexed sensation, 190; violation, 116–17. *See also* entrapment narrative
- Gide, André, 24, 38–39, 248; *Corydon*, 38–39
- Gilbert, Sandra M., 12, 15, 68, 69, 70; *Sexchanges* (Gilbert and Guber), 15, 68
- “girl-boy,” 4, 16
- Going Too Far* (Morgan), 271
- Greenberg, David F., 31
- Griffin-Gracy, Miss Major, 285
- Grosz, Elizabeth, 295
- Gubar, Susan, 15, 68, 69, 70; *Sexchanges* (Gilbert and Guber), 15, 68
- Gutter Dykes, 270–71
- gynocriticism, 15, 16, 70
- Hall, Radclyffe, 302n11
- Hardie, Melissa Jane, 109–10
- Harris, Teenie, 316n3
- Hasty Pudding Club (Harvard), 300n6
- Hausman, Bernice, 303n17
- Hawaii: Merchant Street culture, 279–85

- health care. *See* medicine
- Heart Is a Lonely Hunter, The* (McCullers), 311n1
- Heilbrun, Carolyn, 69; *Toward a Recognition of Androgyny*, 69
- Hemingway, Ernest, 301n10
- hermaphroditism, 43, 53, 96, 169, 306n22
- hermeneutics, 208–9
- heterosexual transvestites, 272
- heterosexualization: colonialization and, 249–51; modernity and, 250–51
- hijra*, 316n16
- Hirschfeld, Magnus, 23, 26, 155, 165–72, 197–200, 248; *Transvestites: The Erotic Drive to Cross-Dress*, 165–72, 248
- History of Sexuality, The* (Foucault), 203
- Hitchcock, Alfred, 241–42
- Homer, 75, 93
- homosexuality: coinage of term, 23; femininity and, 7; gay men dressing as drag queens, 273; gay men separate from trans feminines, 248; historical emergence of, 7; homogenic attachment and equality, 35; macho style, 286; masculinity and, 23–24, 29 (*see also* masculinity); model of inversion vs. model of homosexuality, 17; modernity and, 14, 246–52; social class, 31
- housing, 264–67, 317n8, 317n12, 317n18
- “How It Feels to Be Forcibly Fed” (Barnes), 101–7, 106
- Huxley, Aldous, 9–10, 18, 24, 40, 48–65, 186; *Farcical History of Richard Greenow* (Huxley), 18, 24, 40, 48–65
- Ian, Marcia, 46, 82; *Remembering the Phallic Mother*, 46
- identity: cross-identification, 17, 18, 67, 75, 81, 87, 91, 92; dual axis of gender identification, 158; formation of sexed identity, 100–152; gender identity, 166, 257; identification as a woman, 234; legislation of identity, 238–41; male homosexual, 286; with people of trans experience, 158; regulatory practice, 314n4; restructuring, 276; sex identity, 140, 158–60; social identity and embodied sensation, 184; sociality and, 156–57; somatic identification, 141; transsexual corporeal experience, 100–152; ungendering, 278; with women (trans and cis), 158
- India, 251–52
- indigenous people, 313n18
- Institute for Sexual Science, 23, 26, 165–72, 197–200
- “intermediate sex,” 4, 35
- Intermediate Sex: A Study of Some Transitional Types of Men and Women, The* (Carpenter), 28–29, 32, 34–39, 306n14
- intersex condition, 198, 207
- inversion, 7–8, 17, 23, 24, 25, 161, 306n22; cis women and, 25–26; model of inversion vs. model of homosexuality, 17, 204; narratives of, 304–5n3
- Iran: *amrad/ghilman*, 250–51, 315–16nn14–15; heterosexuality in, 249–51, 315–16n15; Persian poetry, 36, 315n13; women’s rights, 251
- Irigaray, Luce, 45, 83, 229–30, 313n22; “Blind Spot of an Old Dream of Symmetry, The,” 45
- James, Henry, 148, 311n18; *Bostonians*, 148
- JANE, 317n17
- Johnson, Barbara, 100, 208, 215, 216–17, 220
- Johnson, Marsha P., 20, 264–67, 271, 285
- Jones, Ann Rosalind, 70

- Jorgensen, Christine, 197–200, 253, 284  
*Journal of Homosexuality*, 274  
 Joyce, James, 9, 10, 15, 18, 64–97, 307n1; *The Dead*, 308n14; letter about Freud, 67; linguistic innovation, 70; misogyny in, 86; *Ulysses*, 18, 64–97, 307n7, 307n9, 307–8n10, 308nn12–13, 309n23. *See also* *Ulysses* (Joyce)
- June, Jennie, 3–4, 13, 172–78, 299n1, 312n14; *Autobiography of an Androgyne*, 172–78; disavowal of effeminates, 174; *Female Impersonators, The*, 172–78
- Kafka, Franz: “In the Penal Colony,” 184
- Kannenstine, Louis, 108, 118
- Kaufman, Irving, 303n15
- Keats, John, 100
- Kertbeny, Karl Maria, 23
- King, Dave, 303n17
- Knapp, James, 17
- knowledge, xvii; phallogentrism, 295–96; trans self-knowledge, 6, 252–97, 290
- Koyama, Emi, 20, 276
- Krafft-Ebing, Richard von, 3–4, 25, 34, 156–62; *Psychopathia Sexualis*, 3–4, 25, 156–62, 312n7; terminology, 304n2. *See also* case studies
- Kristeva, Julia, 69, 70
- LaBeija, Pepper, 236
- Ladies Almanack* (Barnes), 114–18, 310nn5–6
- language, 69, 83; naming, 289–97 *passim*; semiotics, 20, 69, 70, 183; words and sex, 184
- Lawrence, Louise, 256
- Lesbian Herstory Archive, 275
- Lesbian Tide, The*, 270–71
- lesbianism, 15, 101, 150, 167, 306n15; cis lesbians, 273; phobia of in feminist circles, 261
- Let Me Die a Woman*, 313–14n23
- Levenson, Michael, 61, 63, 304–5n3
- Libidinal Currents* (Boone), 85
- literary Modernism, 8, 9, 10, 40, 46, 131; aberrant type, 61; disembodiment, 62; feminine aesthetic, 63; irony, 62
- Little, Joanne, 317n16
- Livingston, Jennie, 233–37
- Lover’s Discourse, A* (Barthes), 215
- Loy, Mina, 9
- Lyon, Janet, 86
- Madden, Ed, 16, 132–33
- Male Subjectivity at the Margins* (Silverman), 90–91
- Man into Woman* (Elbe), 16, 180–81, 203
- Manning, Chelsea, 318n21
- Man Ray, 8
- Marcus, Jane, 132
- Marie Claire*, 279, 284
- Martin, Biddy, 245–46
- masculinity, 12, 23–24, 78, 117, 305n9, 306n21; emasculation, 132; homosexuality and, 29; modernity and, 246–52; phallic social identity, 193; in women, 28. *See also* gender categories
- masochism, 18, 51, 91, 94, 309–10n4; exhibitionism and, 91–92; female identification, 92; gender roles and, 91; in Joyce, 84, 85, 87
- materialist feminism: category of woman, 289–97
- Materialist Trans Feminism, 13, 162, 252–97; vs. Queer Theory, 19–20
- Maurice* (Forster), 49
- McAlmon, Robert, 99; *Being Geniuses Together*, 99
- McCullers, Carson, 153; *Heart Is a Lonely Hunter, The*, 311n1; *Member of the Wedding*, 153, 154–55
- McDonald, Ceci, 318n21
- McKenna, Neil, 181

- McLean, Barbara: "Diary of a Mad Organizer," 271
- Mecca, Tommi Avicelli, 20, 267–69
- medicine, 177, 294–95; anal examinations, 164–65; cis doctors, 154; *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorder* (DSM), 186, 187, 303–4n19, 313nn19–20; diagnostic narrative of trans feminine, 254; doctor as savior, 179, 198, 238–39, 247; gender dysphoria, 186; gynecological exams, 164; medicalization of trans feminine life, 7, 15, 27, 163–65, 167, 178, 300n4; medicine in Joyce, 88–90; "Modernist Medicine," 16; trans feminine as emblem of medical possibility, 251; trans health care, 15, 179, 273, 312n16, 313n19
- Member of the Wedding* (McCullers), 153, 154–55
- Memoirs of My Nervous Illness* (Schreber), 47
- men: femininity and, 7. *See also* effeminacy; femininity; masculinity
- Meyerowitz, Joanne, 305n6
- Michigan Womyn's Music Festival, 277; Camp Trans, 318n19
- military resistance, 318n21
- Mill, John Stuart: *Womanly Vote*, 293
- Miller, Tyrus, 117, 133–34, 138–39
- misogyny, 86, 257, 259, 290; femininity and, 315n3
- Mock, Janet, xv–xvii, 20, 293, 318n21; *Redefining Realness: My Path to Womanhood, Identity, Love & So Much More*, xv–xvii, 278–85
- Modernism, 6, 117, 153, 184; modernist studies, 15–20; trans feminism as unimaginable in, 153. *See also* literary Modernism
- Modernism: A Literary Guide* (Nicholls), 62
- modernist studies, 15–20
- Moll, Albert, 33
- Money, John, 238
- Money Institute, 238
- Moonshadow*, 253, 254, 273
- Morgan, Robin, 270; *Going Too Far*, 271
- Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America* (Newton), 258, 260
- muteness, 100, 220; vs. vocalization, 100
- "Muteness envy" (Johnson), 100
- Najmabadi, Afsaneh, 36, 37, 249–51, 315–16nn13–15
- narratives, 5, 6, 10, 11; diagnostic narrative of trans feminine, 254; entrapment narrative, 4, 17, 23, 27, 154, 155, 299n3; of inversion, 304–5n3; maturational narrative of becoming woman, 100. *See also* case studies
- Nerval, Gérard de, 38
- New Introductory Lectures* (Freud), 44, 91
- New Negro Woman, 11
- New Woman, 7, 107, 301–2n10; education, 11; employment, 11; labor organizing, 11; leisure, 11; marriage reform, 11; suffrage, 11
- New Woman: Literary Modernism, Queer Theory, and the Trans-Feminine Allegory, The* (Heaney): arguments of, 5–20, 183, 254 (*see also specific topics*); definitions, 5; organization of, 5–7, 13–14, 17, 19, 200, 248; pronouns in, 310n8, 311n2, 314n2
- New York, 7, 237, 247; Barnes in, 102, 112; gay liberation scene, 264, 266, 271, 272, 274, 276, 334n3; June in, 169, 170, 174, 179; Star House, 264–67; Stonewall uprising, 256, 261
- New York Academy of Medicine, 174
- New York Times*, 279
- New York World Magazine*, 102



- Newton, Esther: *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America*, 258, 260
- Nicholls, Peter, 10, 62, 63, 113
- Nightwood* (Barnes), 18, 97, 99–101, 127–52, 309n1, 310nn7–11, 311n16; monologues, 101
- No Future* (Edelman), 241–46
- Norris, Margot, 75
- Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs* (Genet), 13, 19, 154, 183–96
- Oedipus complex, 44
- “Oriental” culture, 38–39, 53–54, 316n18
- other, the, 10, 15, 63, 82, 292
- Ouseley, William, 36
- “pansy craze,” 8
- Paris Is Burning*, 233–37
- Park, Fanny, 162–65
- passivity, 84, 288. *See also* muteness; penetration
- patriarchy, xi, 11, 15, 16, 68, 69, 71, 176, 193, 225, 259, 285
- Paul, James Thomas, 164
- pederasty, 25, 35, 38, 249; oriental importation, 35
- penetration, 297; of all bodies, 196; queens and, 259; and womanhood, 14, 164–65, 176, 190–91
- penis envy, 43, 100
- performativity, 17, 259, 287
- Persian poetry, 36
- Phallic Woman, 46, 63, 83, 84
- Philadelphia: Radical Queens, 267–69
- Philadelphia*, 241
- Picture Post*, 198
- Piers Morgan Live*, xv–xvii
- Pittsburgh’s Hill District, 316n3
- Plato, 96; *Symposium*, 96
- Pleasure Man, The* (West), 9
- politics, 294–95; political struggle, 317n18
- Post-structuralism, 206, 217
- power relations: female subordination, 15; male power, 15; passivity, 288; patriarchy, xi, 11, 15, 16, 68, 69, 71, 176, 193, 225, 259, 285; penetrator vs. penetrated, 14. *See also* penetration
- Prince, Virginia, 256
- Problem in Greek Ethics, A* (Symonds), 35
- promiscuity, 286, 287
- Prosser, Jay: *Second Skins: The Body Narratives of Transsexuality*, 225–26
- prostitution. *See* sex work
- Proust, Marcel, 94
- Psycho*, 241–42
- psychoanalysis, 10, 20, 31, 92; maturational narrative of becoming woman, 100. *See also* Freud, Sigmund
- Psychopathia Sexualis* (Krafft-Ebing), 3–4, 25, 156–62, 312n7
- Queen, The*, 316n3
- queens: hormone queen, 316n5; leather queens, 286; misogyny and, 259; social taxonomy of, 258–59
- queer, 30
- Queer Theory, 6, 13, 14, 15–20, 16, 17, 180, 184, 205–41 *passim*, 206, 217, 243, 278, 306n16; identity claims, 314n4; vs. Materialist Trans Feminism, 19–20; minor queer theory, 286; modernist inheritance, 226–41
- “Rabbit, The” (Barnes), 112
- Radical Queens, 20, 267–69
- Radical Queens: The Magazine of the Non-Man*, 267
- Raffalovich, Marc-André, 37, 248; *Uranisme et unisexualité*, 37
- “realness,” 235, 276, 278, 282, 290
- Redefining Realness* (Mock), xv–xvii
- Redefining Realness: My Path to Womanhood, Identity, Love & So Much More* (Mock), 278–85
- Reik, Theodor, 91; *Sex and Society*, 91

- Reimer, David, 238–41  
*Remembering the Phallic Mother*  
 (Ian), 46  
 reproductive labor, 162  
 Richter, Dorchen, 26  
*Riddle of Man-Manly Love, The*  
 (Ulrich), 24–25, 299n3  
 Riley, Denise, 256; *Am I That*  
*Name?*, 289–97  
 Rivera, Sylvia, 20, 264–67, 284  
 Rocky Twins, 8  
*Room of One's Own, A* (Woolf), 69  
 Rosen, Hannah, 182  
 Rowbotham, Sheila, 33  
 Ryder (Barnes), 118–27
- Sacred Prostitute, The* (Loy), 9  
 Said, Edward, 316n18  
 Saint Point, Valentine de, 127  
*Sarrasine* (Balzac), 207–21  
 Savoy, Bert, 8  
 scholarship, 303n17; feminist literary  
 criticism, 15; modernist studies,  
 15–20. *See also* case studies  
 Schreber, Daniel Paul, 47  
 Scott, Bonnie Kime, 15  
 Scott, Eliza, 181–83, 318n21  
*Screaming Queen* (Stryker), 257  
*Second Skins: The Body Narratives of*  
*Transsexuality* (Prosser), 225–26  
 Selavy, Rose, 8  
 Serano, Julia, 277–78, 290; “Trans  
 Woman Manifesto,” 277;  
*Whipping Girl: A Transsexual*  
*Woman on Sexism and the*  
*Scapegoating of Femininity*,  
 277–78  
 sex: assigned sex and social  
 experience, 70; biological  
 definition, 5; chemical definition, 5;  
 concept of, 68, 256–60; decoupled  
 from genitals, 101; sexual  
 difference, 68, 150, 190, 195–96,  
 296  
*Sex and Character* (Weininger),  
 27–28  
*Sex and Society* (Reik), 91  
 sex change, 7, 10, 16, 23, 43,  
 172, 247, 248, 252, 284, 294,  
 296; animal, 26; medical  
 knowledge, 305n6; as not defining  
 womanhood, 157. *See also* surgery  
*Sexchanges* (Gilbert and Guber), 15,  
 68  
 sex hormones. *See* endocrinology  
 sexism: “sexist” as descriptor,  
 317n10  
 sexology, 5, 10, 16, 17, 20, 23, 24–  
 27, 31, 34–39, 88, 165–72, 171,  
 305n10; case study, 61; focus on  
 alienation, 153; framing, 203–4.  
*See also* case studies  
 sexual assault and abuse, 19, 170,  
 204, 277; rape, 104, 142, 143, 151,  
 162–65, 181–82, 317n14. *See also*  
 violence  
 sexual difference. *See* sex  
*Sexual Inversion* (Ellis), 25, 36  
 sex work, 19, 25, 36, 162, 163, 173,  
 177, 205, 247, 254, 257, 280, 283,  
 306n15, 315–16n15; colonialism  
 and, 247; histories of, 204; sorority  
 between cis and trans sex workers,  
 165  
 Shakespeare, William, 72  
 shame, 142  
 Shaw, Harriet Weaver, 67  
 Silberstein, Eduard, 64  
*Silence of the Lambs, The*, 241–42  
 Silverman, Kaja, 90, 92, 94, 153  
 Simons, Frank, 316n3  
 Sinha, Mrinalini, 251  
 sinthomosexual, 244  
 “Sissy Blues,” 300–301n7  
 Smith, Lucy, 182  
 social class, 166, 175; equality  
 and, 32; histories of, 204;  
 homosexuality vs. heterosexuality,  
 31; transmisogyny, 30  
 sociality, 156–57, 171, 256–60;  
 correspondence network, 256  
 social meaning, 190

- sodomy laws, 29, 251
- solidarity among women, 19, 158, 161; knowledge of other trans women, 169
- Spillway* (Barnes), 112
- spousal relations, 32
- “Squaw men,” 174
- Star House, 264–67, 317n13
- Stead, W. T., 164
- Steinach, Eugen, 26, 43
- Stone, Sandy, 20, 276; “Empire Strikes Back: A Post-transsexual Manifesto, The,” 276
- Stonewall uprising, 256, 261
- Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries, 20
- Street Transvestites for Gay Power, 264
- Stryker, Susan, 257; *Transgender History*, 256
- Studies in the Psychology of Sex* (Ellis), 34
- suffrage, 7, 11, 86, 102, 293, 309n3
- suicide, 111, 172
- superego, 45
- surgery, 6, 7, 16, 23, 26, 172, 177, 179, 238, 249, 281–82, 283, 296, 305n6. *See also* sex change
- survival practices, 255, 260–64, 317n18, 318n21; housing, 264–67, 317n8, 317n12, 317n18; mid-twentieth century, 256–60
- Symonds, John, 35, 248; *Problem in Greek Ethics*, A, 35
- Symposium* (Plato), 96
- S/Z* (Barthes), 19, 205–20
- TACO (Transvestite-Transsexual Action Organization), 272; restricted membership, 272–73
- TAO (Transsexual Action Organization), 253
- Taylor, Alfred Swain, 164
- Thailand, 283, 284
- “third sex,” 4
- Thompson, Frances, 181–83
- Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (Freud), 7, 39–48, 90–91, 306n20
- Time*, 14
- Times, The*, 181
- Tiresian figures, 16, 93, 99, 149, 300n5
- “To a Red-Haired Beggar Girl” (Baudelaire), 62, 113
- Toward a Recognition of Androgyny* (Heilbrun), 69
- trans feminine, 15–20; African-American, 182–83; criminalized commercial sex (*see* criminalization); disavowal of, 27–29, 34–39; as emblem of medical possibility, 251; expert vs. vernacular understandings, 9, 29–34, 153–94, 174, 175, 248, 254; explanatory figure, 206; foremothers, 284–85; framing, xv–xvii, 172, 203; historical perspectives, 204, 206, 246–52, 284–85, 289–97; indigenous people and, 313n18; internal plurality, 206; mutual care (*see* survival practices); pathologization, 15; self-representation, 16; somatic understanding, 158–60; suffering female, 99–152 *passim*; trans feminine alliance with cis women, 16, 26–27, 137, 142, 150, 157, 259; trans partners, 171. *See also* Materialist Trans Feminism; *specific topics*
- trans feminine allegory, 6, 10–11, 17–19, 179, 196, 205, 217, 300n5, 306n16, 314n4; development of, 23–65; Freud and, 39–48
- trans femininity. *See* femininity
- trans feminism, 260–64, 273; after Trans Liberation, 274–78; demands of, 262–63; organizations, 262; trans lesbian feminism, 269–72
- Transgender History* (Stryker), 197, 256

- Trans Justice Funding Project, 318n21
- trans lesbian feminism, 269–72
- Trans Liberation, 257, 260–64, 318n21; “sexist” as descriptor, 317n10
- Trans Liberation Newsletter*, 261
- trans masculine, 158, 171, 301n10, 302n11. *See also* masculinity
- trans meaning, 6, 10, 15, 255
- transmisogyny, 170, 247, 270, 271–72, 274, 282, 315–16n15; feminism and, 270–72, 293; social class, 30
- trans partners, 171
- trans self-knowledge. *See* knowledge
- transsexuality, 15; transsexual as diagnostic term, 303–4n19
- Transsexual Menace, 276
- Transvestia*, 256
- transvestism, 15, 26, 70; heterosexual transvestites, 272
- Transvestites: The Erotic Drive to Cross-Dress* (Hirschfeld), 165–72, 248
- trans women. *See* trans feminine
- trauma, 131; familial, 129–52; of sexuality, 131, 150
- Tyler, Carole-Anne, 225–26
- Tyler, Parker, 9; *Young and the Evil, The* (Ford and Tyler), 9
- Ulrichs, Karl, 3, 5, 23, 24–25, 41, 154; *Riddle of Man-Manly Love, The*, 24–25, 299n3
- Ulysses* (Joyce), 18, 64–97, 307n7, 307n9, 307–8n10, 308nn12–13, 308n18, 309n22
- chapters: “Circe,” 67–68, 83–94; “Lotus Eaters,” 68, 71–74; “Nausicaa,” 68, 75–83, 87, 93; “Penelope,” 68, 94–96
- themes and imagery: being and having, 84; flower imagery, 74, 81; medical scenes, 88–90; menstruation, 81–82, 87, 308n16; transubstantiation, 73–74, 84–94; Virgin Mary, 75–76, 79, 89
- Undoing Gender* (Butler), 14, 237–41
- universal human experience, 140, 147; feminine as, 101; perverse example and, 27; universal nature of perversity, 140
- uprisings, 256
- Uranisme et unisexualité* (Raffalovich), 37
- Use of Pleasure, The* (Foucault), 203
- Vandervoort, Edith, 314n3
- Vanity Fair*, 14
- vaudeville, 8, 163, 300n6
- Vested Interests* (Garber), 15
- violence, 101–7, 116–17, 143, 153–54, 173, 177, 246; domestic violence, 192, 194; gendered structures, 192–93; medical violence, 101–7, 106; police, 153–54, 176; rape, 104, 142, 143, 151, 162–65, 181–82, 317n14. *See also* sexual assault and abuse
- Vorticists, 86
- Walkowitz, Judith, 316n2
- Waste Land, The* (Eliot), 19, 99
- Waters, John, 204
- Weeks, Jeffrey, 31, 286
- Weininger, Otto, 27–28, 132; *Sex and Character*, 27–28
- West, Mae, 9; *The Drag*, 9; *The Pleasure Man*, 9
- West Coast Lesbian Conference (WCLC), 270
- Whipping Girl: A Transsexual Woman on Sexism and the Scapegoating of Femininity* (Serano), 277–78
- Whitman, Walt, 35, 306n12
- Wilchins, Riki, 275–76; flyer, 275
- Wilde, Oscar, 35, 118, 125–27, 163, 228, 304n20
- Wishman, Doris, 313–14n23
- Wittig, Monique, 101, 229–30
- “wolves,” 29–30

- womanhood: competition among  
 women, 19; framing, xv–xvii, 172;  
 menstruation, 159, 293, 308n16;  
 pregnancy, 316–17n6
- Womanly Vote* (Mill), 293
- Women of the Left Bank, 11
- Women of the Left Bank* (Benstock),  
 15
- Women's Liberation, 273. *See also*  
 feminism
- women's rights: linked to gay rights,  
 29
- Wood, Thelma, 146, 147
- Woolf, Virginia, 15, 69, 302n11
- World War I, 10; genital injuries, 12,  
 301–2n10, 302–3n14
- wrong body narrative. *See*  
 entrapment narrative
- Xtravaganza, Angie, 233–37
- Xtravaganza, Venus, 233–37, 278
- Young and the Evil, The* (Ford and  
 Tyler), 9
- Ziarek, Ewa Plonowska, 86, 94



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