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“The Breakdown of Gender Binaries”: Writing Genders in Contemporary Fiction

Ceri Louise Davies

**Submitted to the University of Wales in fulfilment of the requirements for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

Swansea University

2008

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SUMMARY

In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler asked, “[i]s the breakdown of gender binaries ... so monstrous, so frightening, that it must be held to be definitionally impossible and heuristically precluded from any effort to think gender?” (Butler, p.1999, p.viii). Using this question as a starting point, I look at the way that gender is understood and challenged in contemporary fiction. Specifically, I examine novels and short stories that focus on finding one’s place in gender, and the way such narratives write gendered experiences outside of the traditional male/female binary.

In the first chapter, I look at females that live as males, exploring various ways of ‘doing’ gender, both on-stage and off, and the creation of cohesive gender identities. Chapter two looks at the way that sex and gender are medicalised. I argue that the male/female binary is protected by both the media and the medical establishment. This expands into a discussion of the way doctors attempt to preserve this binary in the face of increasing challenges to its very viability. In chapter three, I consider novels that focus on a male-to-female transition, as well as what is at stake in writing gender. Finally, I look at the emergence of ‘genderless’ characters, both in terms of the viability of the term ‘genderless’, and the difficulties in finding a suitable language with which to understand and quantify gendered experience.

DECLARATION

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

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STATEMENT 1

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Throughout the thesis, the following abbreviations will be used:

TTV: Waters, Sarah (1998) *Tipping the Velvet* (London: Virago).

JMB: Duncker, Patricia (2000) *James Miranda Barry* (London: Picador).

Tr: Kay, Jackie (1999) *Trumpet* (London: Picador).

Mid: Eugenides, Jeffrey (2003) *Middlesex* (London: Bloomsbury).

SBB: Feinberg, Leslie (2003) *Stone Butch Blues: A Novel* (Los Angeles: Alyson Books).

SC: Tremain, Rose (1992) *Sacred Country* (New York: Washington Square Press).

Eve: Carter, Angela (2006) *The Passion of New Eve* (London: Virago).

MS: Stace, Wesley (2005) *Misfortune* (London: Vintage).

WB: Winterson, Jeanette (1996) *Written on the Body* (London: Vintage).

Hunters: Messud, Claire (2003) "The Hunters" in *The Hunters: Two Short Novels* (London: Picador).

To more easily distinguish between several of Winterson's works in chapter four, I will be using the following abbreviations:

AO: *Art Objects*

BA&L: 'Books: *Art & Lies*'

BB: *Boating for Beginners*

Books: 'Books: *Written on the Body*'

VWI: 'Virginia Woolf Intro'

WB: *Written on the Body*

INTRODUCTION

There are endless numbers and finite moves
But you can try them all, it's been proved
If you have the patience
Because there are infinite combinations. (Harding, 2007)

*

In *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies That Matter*, Judith Butler takes a pivotal role in interrogating gender, seeking “to counter those views that made presumptions about the limits and propriety of gender and restricted the meaning of gender to received notions of masculinity and femininity” (Butler, 1999, p.vii). *Gender Trouble* in particular, is one of the most influential texts in queer theory, especially in terms of Butler’s theories of how gender is constructed, and by whom, and for what purpose, which forms the basis of this thesis. Jagose explains that “queer describes those gestures or analytical models which dramatise incoherencies in the allegedly stable relations between chromosomal sex, gender and sexual desire” (Jagose, 1996, p.3). Throughout this thesis, ‘queer’ signifies identities that cannot be defined along simple binary lines; identities in which there are not necessarily connections between sex, gender and sexuality; identities which reveal how complex the entire issue of gender and sex is.

In this thesis, I draw primarily upon Butler’s (queer) theories of performativity and gender subversion – specifically the way that “[t]he figure of the interior soul understood as ‘within’ the body is signified through its inscription *on* the body” (Butler, 1999, p.172) – to examine the ways in which gender is explored in contemporary fiction in the context of challenges to the male/female binary. However, I will also draw, on occasion, upon the work of the so-called ‘French feminists’ such as Cixous and Irigaray. Although it might seem unusual to use Butler (who, in many ways is at the forefront of queer theory) alongside French feminists

such as Cixous, I believe it is a useful strategy. Donald E. Hall explains the way that Irigaray “strives to reimagine ‘desire’ in ways that operate outside of heterosexual/heterocentric norms” (Hall, 2003, p.63), while Cixous “challenges the stability of social meanings privileging maleness and masculine authority” (Hall, 2003, p.63). Since part of the focus of this thesis is the way in which we understand gender, I feel it is important to include theorists who have questioned the very basis of sexuality and gender, “disrupt[ing] notions of normality and stable, enduring meaning” (Hall, 2003, p.87).

Butler, in particular, argues against the notion of ‘true’ and ‘false’ gender expressions, and expresses distrust of “expressions of gender that ... produce new forms of hierarchy and exclusion” (Butler, 1999, p.viii). This accords with Marjorie Garber’s belief that “one of the most important aspects of cross-dressing is the way in which it offers a challenge to easy notions of binarity, putting into question the categories of ‘female’ and ‘male,’ whether they are considered essential or constructed, biological or cultural” (Garber, 1992, p.10). Where Garber chooses to subtly question the notion of ‘truth’, Butler explicitly attacks it as an untenable position, seeking an explanation for the refusal of society to admit to the limitations of gender boundaries: “[i]s the breakdown of gender binaries, for instance, so monstrous, so frightening, that it must be held to be definitionally impossible[?]” (Butler, 1999, p.viii).¹

Part of Butler’s strategy to undermine the male/female binary involves stating that

acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this *on the surface* of the body ... Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are *performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications*

¹ Judith Halberstam, in her book, *Female Masculinity*, argues that “masculinity must not and cannot and should not reduce down to the male body and its effects” (Halberstam, 1998, p.1): therefore it is no longer viable to conflate masculinity with maleness, or femininity with femaleness.

manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means. (Butler, 1999, p.173)

This means that 'gender' (woman/man) is understood as a variety of behaviours, quite separate from 'sex', which is understood as the anatomical designation (male/female). Butler, like Judith Halberstam, believes gender to be unnatural; masculinity and maleness (and femininity and femaleness) should not be conflated.² She further argues that, "there need not be a 'doer behind the deed'" (Butler, 1999, p.181). This raises the question of whether "this construct called 'sex' is as culturally constructed as gender; indeed, perhaps it was always already gender, with the consequence that the distinction between sex and gender turns out to be no distinction at all" (Butler, 1999, p.10).

An extension of this is that drag "fully subverts the distinction between inner and outer psychic space and effectively mocks both the expressive model of gender and the notion of a true gender identity" (Butler, 1999, p.174).³ She argues that "[t]he performance of drag plays upon the distinction between the anatomy of the performer and the gender that is being performed" (Butler, 1999, p.175), problematically assuming that such distinctions can be easily made. Butler believes that "[i]n imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself" (Butler, 1999, p.175), but also makes clear that

² This means that "gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that *man* and *masculine* might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and *woman* and *feminine* a male body as easily as a female one" (Butler, 1999, p.10).

³ Karen Zivi responds to "[c]ritics of Butler's work [who] argue that drag or parody fails to address serious material concerns of the world" (Zivi, 2008, p.160). She claims that "[w]hile we may acknowledge that performances can have political overtones or implications, the common intuition is that performance is distinct from the 'real' politics of public policy making or institutional and material change. Performances are fictional representations of the real, but not the real itself; actors merely adopt a persona, take on a role that they can take up or leave behind at the stage door" (Zivi, 2008, p.161). However, in relation to this, Butler comments that "if I were to argue that genders are performative, that could mean that I thought that one woke in the morning, perused the closet or some more open space for the gender of choice, donned that gender for the day, and then restored that garment to its place at night ... [but] there is no subject who decides on its gender" (Butler, 1993, p.x).

[t]he notion of gender parody defended here does not assume that there is an original which such parodic identities imitate. Indeed, the parody is of the very notion of an original; just as the psychoanalytic notion of gender identification is constituted by a fantasy of a fantasy. (Butler, 1999, p.175)

Drag “enacts and reveals the performativity of gender itself in a way that destabilizes the naturalized categories of identity and desire” (Butler, 1999, p.177).

The sex/gender distinction must not be allowed to overshadow the fact that there are limits to gender choice (although it can be an active possibility), as I shall demonstrate in this thesis.⁴ My intent, within this thesis, is to examine fiction that focuses on finding one’s place in gender. In doing this, I will demonstrate the way that such narratives write gendered experiences outside of the traditional male/female binary. I will look at the limitations of language – the lack of a suitable vocabulary that makes it so difficult to envisage and describe these experiences – and the way writers transcend this to make ‘impossible’ bodies ‘possible’

Butler asks, “[i]f gender is constructed, could it be constructed differently, or does its constructedness imply some form of social determinism, foreclosing the possibility of agency and transformation?” (Butler, 1999, p.11). Her answer is to suggest a new way of examining things:

[i]f it is possible to speak of a ‘man’ with a masculine attribute and to understand that attribute as a happy but accidental feature of the man, then it is also possible to speak of a ‘man’ with a feminine attribute, whatever that is, but still to maintain the integrity of the gender. But once we dispense with the priority of ‘man’ and ‘woman’ as abiding substances, then it is no longer possible to subordinate dissonant gendered features as so many secondary and accidental characteristics of a gender ontology that is fundamentally intact. (Butler, 1999, p.32)

In other words, the categories of ‘man’ and ‘woman’ are important, if only because they create a space in which we can examine and define the characteristics that could

⁴ See the discussion of *The Passion of New Eve* and *Misfortune* in Chapter 3.

be said to form gender. It is equally important, however, to understand that gender expression should not be limited to ‘man’ and ‘woman’, as we shall see.

Gender-Play

The thesis is divided into four chapters, with each chapter focusing on a different aspect of gender issues. I look at the way that gender is inscribed, performed, enforced, and medicalised; understood and misunderstood. Chapter One examines three novels: Sarah Waters’s *Tipping the Velvet*, Patricia Duncker’s *James Miranda Barry*, and Jackie Kay’s *Trumpet*. The texts have in common protagonists who although anatomically female, live as men. This is not to say that the three novels cover the same ground: the protagonists of *James Miranda Barry* and *Trumpet*, James and Joss respectively, both live as men, but Joss almost completely breaks with his earlier female life. James, on the other hand, lives as a man in order to enjoy the greater opportunities it affords, but occasionally considers a return to his identity as a woman. This is a natural extension of the gender play of *Tipping the Velvet*, in which its protagonist, Nancy, starts performing as a man on the Victorian stage – an exaggerated performance intended to mark as obvious the differences between actress and character – but later she attempts to pass as a man on the streets of London.

One of Judith Butler’s focuses in *Gender Trouble* is “the fear of losing one’s place in gender” (Butler, 1999, p.xi). Most, if not all, of the texts I examine in this thesis look at the problems of finding one’s place in gender, and the difficulties inherent in this, when “people can only imagine woman or man, feminine or masculine. We’ve been taught that nothing else exists in nature” (Feinberg, 1996, p.101). Although Butler refuses the idea that “one woke in the morning, perused the closet or some more open space for the gender of choice, donned that gender for the

day, and then restored the garment to its place at night” (Butler, 1993, p.x), the gender-as-clothes analogy remains relevant in the examination of these three novels that draw connections between gender and clothing. Riki Wilchins considers the gender-as-clothing analogy to have some uses: “[i]f my gender is a doing that has to be redone each day just like I pull on those clothes each morning, that would help explain why sometimes my gender ‘fails’. Even though I’ve felt like a man (and then later like a woman), people didn’t always recognize me as such. Even I couldn’t always recognize myself as such” (Wilchins, 2002b, p.24). What Wilchins demonstrates is that the problem of finding one’s place in gender often relates to the way in which people ‘recognize’ the gender of others as either successful or as a failure.

One of the main ways in which gender is expressed in *Tipping the Velvet*, *James Miranda Barry* and *Trumpet* is clothing. As the most visible means of determining gender, donning the clothes of “the gender of choice” (Butler, 1993, p.x) marks one of the first steps in gender transgression. This is not to say that such an activity can always be read in the same way: there is a marked difference in the way clothes are treated in each of the novels. In *Trumpet*, clothes are one of the ways in which Joss stakes his claim to masculinity; he feels “more comfortable once he was dressed” (*Tr*, p.238) because his appearance and his identity match: he is a convincing male, and his clothes aid his performance. In *James Miranda Barry*, James dresses in male clothes, but this fails to cover the fact that his masculinity is unconvincing. Whereas Joss’s clothes set up the expectation that he is a man, for

James the clothes are part of a much larger package – occupation, behaviour, history – that combine to give him a workable, if not wholly believable, identity as a man.⁵

Tipping the Velvet uses clothing in a different way. On stage, Nan and Kitty wear male clothes for their act as male impersonators. The clothes are worn to mark the discontinuity between appearance and anatomy of the performers. The audience is not asked to believe that Kitty and Nan are male – Nan’s costume is actually altered because she initially looks too male, “[a]nd that ain’t quite the idea now, is it?” (*TTV*, p.118). Instead, the enjoyment of the act stems from the humour of women parodying maleness. This behaviour is distinct from the way Nan later behaves when she starts passing as a man off-stage; in this instance, believability is key. Like Joss, Nan is using clothes to look suitably male. Butler believes that “performativity must be understood not as a singular or deliberate ‘act,’ but, rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names” (Butler, 1993, p.2). By putting on male clothes, and acting as men, Joss, James and Nan find that they create a *form* of maleness. And this maleness, in turn, is legitimised by their male behaviours and appearance.

The Medicalisation of Gender

From clothes and props, to surgery and hormones: Chapter 2 examines novels that explore the physical transformation of the body. Jeffrey Eugenides’s *Middlesex* raises issues of the medicalisation of the body, via a pseudohermaphroditic protagonist, Cal; Leslie Feinberg’s *Stone Butch Blues* details a butch woman’s attempts to use surgery to develop a safe space in which she can express both her masculine and feminine sides; Rose Tremain’s *Sacred Country* tells the story of a

⁵ In *Orlando* (which is discussed in more depth in Chapter 3), Virginia Woolf notes that “women are not ... obedient, chaste, scented, and exquisitely apparelled by nature. They can only attain these graces, without which they may enjoy none of the delights of life, by the most tedious discipline” (Woolf, 2006, p.141).

girl who is desperate to become male, but finds that she does not need to complete her surgical transformation in order to find a degree of comfort in her identity.⁶

As recently as 2006, Louann Brizendine argued in her book, *The Female Brain*, that “[t]here is no unisex brain ... Girls arrive already wired as girls, and boys arrive already wired as boys” (Brizendine, 2006, p.12). Such a point of view does not allow for the myriad forms of gender expression outlined in *Middlesex*, *Stone Butch Blues*, or *Sacred Country*. In fact, it does not allow for any deviation from the male/female binary. However, there is a potentially useful gap in Brizendine’s theories:

[c]ommon sense tells us that boys and girls behave differently. We see it every day at home, on the playground, and in classrooms. But what the culture hasn’t told us is that the brain dictates these divergent behaviors. The impulses of children are so innate that they kick in *even if we adults try to nudge them in another direction*. (Brizendine, 2006, p.12, my emphasis)

The belief that one has a gendered essence that is entirely separate from one’s body is something considered throughout this chapter. The idea that such an essence is ‘fixed’, despite the efforts of society to preserve the status of male and female identities, is explored through *Sacred Country*. From at least the age of six, Mary Ward is convinced that she is a boy, and she retains this belief in spite of attempts by her parents to feminise her through feminine pursuits (dancing) and attendance at an all-girls school. Arguably, Mary’s life is made more difficult because she is not allowed to express any masculinity. Judith Halberstam argues that “masculinity must not and cannot and should not reduce down to the male body and its effects” (Halberstam, 1998, p.1), but because masculinity and maleness are so widely conflated, there is no room for Mary to perform masculinity until she takes on the role of being-a-man.

⁶ The term ‘pseudohermaphrodite’ refers to someone who is genetically one sex, but appears to be another. As a male pseudohermaphrodite, Callie is “genetically male but appearing otherwise” (*Mid*, p.413). The term ‘intersex’ is now used in place of ‘hermaphrodite’.

The protagonist of *Stone Butch Blues*, Jess, also grapples with this. As a ‘stone butch’, she struggles to reconcile her gendered identity and her body.⁷ Subject to intense abuse (physical, sexual and mental) as a result of the visibility of her conflicted identity, Jess realises she needs to hide. By undergoing surgery (a mastectomy), and beginning hormone treatment, Jess starts passing as a man: hiding herself *in* herself. The once dangerous body becomes a refuge, and gives her entry to hitherto unsafe territory – male bathrooms, barbershops, employment. It is important to note, however, that Jess begins the process of hiding by first making sure she can “go back to being a butch later, when it’s safe to come out” (*SBB*, p.145). This aim – to one day return to her previous identity of ‘butch’ (an identity that Jess never really leaves completely behind) separates *Stone Butch Blues* from the category of transsexual narrative, and helps to draw a distinction between the gender crises that are explored in this novel, and that of *Sacred Country*. According to Jay Prosser, “transsexual has been conceived conventionally as a transitional phase to pass through once the transsexual can pass and assimilate as nontranssexual – one begins as female, one becomes a transsexual, one is a man” (Prosser, 1998, p.11). From this, it is clear that Jess does not meet the criteria to be considered a transsexual: she never reaches the point where she considers herself ‘a transsexual’, preferring to think of herself as a passing woman, and there is no resolution of the crisis by reaching and embracing the state of ‘man’.⁸ Thus, Prosser’s definition of *Stone Butch Blues* as “the story of a transsexual who turned back” (Prosser, 1998, p.178), does not fully grasp the complexities of Jess’s journey. Describing Jess as “refus[ing] the refuge of fully

⁷ Halberstam defines ‘stone butch’ as “a dyke body placed somewhere on the boundary between female masculinity and transgender subjectivity” (Halberstam, 1998, p.124).

⁸ At first glance, *Sacred Country*’s Mary appears to also fail to live up to the ideal of transsexualism. Although Mary is initially identified as female (by other people, even as she rejects it herself), and then moves towards transsexual, Mary ‘becomes’ a man without completing her surgery. The rejection of genital surgery emphasises the belief that essence is more important than physical perfection.

becoming the other sex and the closure promised by the transsexual plot” (Prosser, 1998, p.178) raises many questions. Is becoming a man really a refuge? How, and on whose terms? It becomes a refuge only if Jess leaves behind her female past and denies the viability and validity of the butch identity. In this chapter I focus on the reconciliation of the past with the promise of the future: Prosser therefore misses the point – there is no destination of maleness that Jess aspires to reach. While Prosser is correct that “Jess’s identification as a stone butch profoundly dislocates her from the category ‘woman’” (Prosser, 1998, p.182), this is not to say that she is therefore forced towards ‘man’. Such a closed reading of gender (if one is not female, one is male) goes against the spirit of the novel, the belief that the male-female binary is too narrow to adequately define human experience: “[t]here’s other ways to be than either-or. It’s not so simple. Otherwise there wouldn’t be so many people who don’t fit” (*SBB*, p.218).

Middlesex demonstrates another mode of ‘not fitting’ – the hermaphroditic experience. Cal’s journey from girl to man explicitly medicalises gender and examines how gender is assigned. Anne Fausto-Sterling explains that

[i]n the current intellectual fashion, men are made, not born. We construct masculinity through social discourse ... In contrast, biological and medical scientists feel quite certain about their world. For them, the body tells the truth. (Fausto-Sterling, 2000a, p.109)⁹

This disjunction powers the novel. As a pseudohermaphrodite, Cal is a genetic male who is socialised as a girl: his learned female behaviours rub up against his male impulses, leaving him struggling to find a place where he fits. Deciding that the presence of a penis means that he is unequivocally male, Cal comes to realise that it is not that easy. Living as a man causes Cal to question the idea that “everything

⁹ Anne Fausto-Sterling is the forerunner of studies on the medicalisation of gender. Her views are particularly useful in the context of her roles as both scientist and gender theorist. See Chapter 2 for further details.

comes naturally” (*Mid*, p.41), especially because “[i]t was all a bluff, but so was it on most men ... My swagger wasn’t that different from what lots of adolescent boys put on, trying to be manly. For that very reason it was convincing. Its very falseness made it credible” (*Mid*, p.449). Cal’s realisation that there is no ‘true’ masculinity or femininity, no ‘correct’ maleness or femaleness, is marked by the simultaneous recognition that there is no space outside of male or female in which he can be allowed to exist. Leslie Feinberg explains how difficult it can be “when the words *woman* and *man*, *feminine* and *masculine*, are almost the only words that exist in the English language to describe all the vicissitudes of bodies and styles of expression” (Feinberg, 1996, p.ix). Cal’s adoption of the male role is therefore also an acceptance of the limits of gender categorisation, something that the novel, and Eugenides as author, struggles with, as I will demonstrate.

The novels that I examine in this chapter have in common a commitment to looking at the issue of surgical/hormonal intervention in a serious light.¹⁰ This is in sharp contrast to John Irving’s 1976 novel *The World According to Garp* which features the character of Roberta Muldoon, a “six-foot-four [MTF] transsexual” (Irving, 1998, p.219). Roberta is used as a comedic device, with Irving attempting to elicit laughter from the disparity between her current life as a woman, and her hyperbolically masculine past as an American Football player.¹¹

¹⁰ By this, I mean that the novels reach some important conclusions about what it means to be male or female, and how one can exist within such a binary after transforming one’s body. In comparison, Iain Banks’s *The Wasp Factory*, in which the female protagonist (Frank) is secretly fed male hormones and raised as a male, is deeply unsatisfactory. When Frank (a previously amoral character with a taste for murder), discovers that she is actually biologically female, she completely changes character in spite of her protests to the contrary, and develops an aversion to her crimes: “I *am* still me; I *am* the same person, with the same memories and the same deeds done, the same (small) achievements, the same (appalling) crimes to *my* name. Why? *How* could I have done these things?” (Banks, 2004, p.242).

¹¹ Throughout the novel, Roberta is marked as ‘different’ because of her stature and strength. In one scene she protects Garp from a potential assassin: “she threw a magnificent cross-body block on Garp and belted him off the soft shoulder and down a twelve-foot embankment into a muddy ditch” (Irving,

A Performance of Womanhood

As each novel thus far explores a female-to-male journey, chapter 3 turns the focus onto male-to-female transformations, highlighting the perceived superiority of male identity over female identity. Evelyn, in Angela Carter's *The Passion of New Eve*, is kidnapped and surgery is performed on him, against his will, to transform him into 'Eve'. However, despite the bodily transformation, Eve retains his masculine viewpoint. Wesley Stace's *Misfortune* details the life of Rose Old, a baby boy raised as a girl, who subsequently decides to exhibit female and male behaviours.

The Passion of New Eve is a complex book, at times anticipating some of Butler's arguments (particularly those of *Gender Trouble*) – specifically, Butler's argument that essence is an illusion created by performance (Butler, 1999, p.173). The novel is caught up in “narrative anarchy” (Gamble, 1997, p.103): “narrated retrospectively in the first person [it] immediately rais[es] the quintessentially modern question: who speaks?” (Suleiman, 1985, p.61). Evelyn tries to answer this question himself, first arguing that the loss of his genitals means “the end of Evelyn” (*Eve*, p.71), but eventually realising that it does not have to mark the end of his maleness. Refusing to accept his new female body as his own, Evelyn keeps his masculinity alive by refusing to acknowledge the female reality of his reflection. *The Passion of New Eve* suggests that there is a clear distinction between anatomy and gender: surgery does not magically transform Evelyn into a woman.¹² It is not until later in the novel, when he starts to adopt female behaviours as a means of survival, that he comes close to creating a cohesive performance of womanhood.

1998, p.528). Upon her death, it is remarked that her replacement had “big shoes to fill, as they say. In fact, size 12” (Irving, 1998, p.562).

¹² Similarly, Paulina Palmer argues that Angela Carter “highlights the connections between gender and fantasy, gender and illusion” (Palmer, 1997, p.30).

Misfortune is markedly less successful than *The Passion of New Eve* in dealing with sex and gender. Drawing on the work of Virginia Woolf, in particular *Orlando* and *A Room of One's Own*, Wesley Stace latches on to Woolf's idea that "the great mind is androgynous" (Woolf, 2004, p.113), expanding upon his own song "Miss Fortune", to create a novel.¹³ Issues of identity have informed much of Stace's career as a musician; song titles such as "Who You Really Are" highlight a theme of trying to get to the heart of identity. "Infinite Combinations", which I quoted at the start of this introduction, suggests that there are many available options in the search for an identity:

[t]here are endless numbers and finite moves
But you can try them all, it's been proved
If you have the patience
Because there are infinite combinations. (Harding, 2007)

"Me Against Me" focuses on multitudes of identity, and the splitting of the self: "[b]ut now I can see that it's me against me/Against me against me against me" (Harding, 2007), while "You In Spite Of Yourself" is a song that one could imagine being addressed to Rose, questioning the way in which other people affect one's sense of identity:

What have they done to you, darling? ...
But give credit where it's due
And you've had a big fakeover
It could be a big improvement
But I guess that you're still you
You in spite of yourself. (Harding, 2007)

"Miss Fortune", the song upon which *Misfortune* is based, tells the story of a baby boy who was "found by the richest man in the world ... who brought me up as a girl" (Harding, 2007), and reaches the conclusion that "[t]here are worse things I confess/Than drinking tea in a pretty dress" (Harding, 2007). The protagonist of

¹³ Wesley Stace is perhaps better known as the musician John Wesley Harding. "Miss Fortune" was written in 1997 and first appeared on Harding's album "Awake".

Misfortune, Rose Old, discovers that he has been lied to, and suffers a fracturing of his identity, which is ultimately resolved by his decision to live as a man, but dress as a woman.¹⁴ Although the novel is a failure in many ways, I have chosen to include it in the thesis because the way that gender is misunderstood is as important as the way it is understood. Through *Misfortune* it is possible to see how the struggle for suitable gender expression can be trivialised and marginalised.

Genderless Characters

The final chapter takes the issue of gender representation to its logical conclusion: texts that move beyond sex to explore seemingly ‘genderless’ characters. Jeanette Winterson’s novel, *Written on the Body*, and Claire Messud’s novella, ‘The Hunters’, both contain protagonists who attempt to evade being labelled as either masculine or feminine, but in doing so, end up doubly-gendered. The limitations of Judith Butler’s theories, which I have already highlighted are evident in this chapter: because Butler completely ignores the issue of pronoun use, she consequently finds herself trapped within the male/female binary that she argues against.

Throughout *Written on the Body*, Jeanette Winterson is playing a game. By not revealing any information about the narrator, except his or her relationships with women, Winterson is trading on her previous autobiographical work to trick the reader into reading the narrator as female, only to then disrupt expectations. Like Leslie Feinberg, Winterson blurs the boundaries of not just male and female, but fiction and autobiography: where Winterson admits “I prefer myself as a character in

¹⁴ The plot of *Misfortune* shares certain similarities with that of Tahar Ben Jelloun’s novel *The Sand Child*. Jelloun’s work focuses on the life of Mohammed Ahmed, a Moroccan girl who is raised as a boy by her father, who desperately needs a male heir. Jelloun recounts Ahmed’s situation with great sympathy, underlining the difficulties faced by someone who is forced to adopt an identity that is at odds with their anatomy: “I imagine him torn between the development of his body and his father’s determination to make him wholly and entirely a man” (Jelloun, 2000, p.28). My reluctance to examine this novel further stems from the fact that it was originally written in French. Fearful of losing something in translation – specifically the nuances on which I demonstrate that gender and gendered language are built – I have limited my study to novels written in English.

my own fiction” (*AO*, p.53), then, as narrator declares “I can’t be relied upon” (*WB*, p.92), Feinberg uses names to close the gap between author and narrator as Prosser also recognises:

the name s/he [gives her protagonist] encourages us to question the difference and partially read through the ‘novel’ to a fictional autobiographical narrative. In the ambivalent gendering of the first name (Jess) and the implicit Jewishness of the last (Goldberg), the narrator-protagonist’s proper name resembles the authorial signature. Jess Goldberg repeats Leslie Feinberg not differently or identically but similarly. (Prosser, 1998, p.196)

Jay Prosser also argues that “gendered contradiction has played a key role in making visible queer pride” (Prosser, 1998, p.179). For Winterson, the contradiction between how the reader wishes to read the narrator, and how the narrator must be read – “[w]e cannot refer to the narrator as a ‘she’ ignoring the text’s insistence that we use the slashed forms ‘s/he’ and ‘her/his’” (Onega, 2006, p.111) – makes visible the way in which people are unconsciously bound by the male/female gender binary, and the language surrounding it.

In contrast, Claire Messud seems almost embarrassed by the attention her genderless protagonist has attracted, claiming he/she was an accident of writing. However, as the protagonist develops a fixation with his/her neighbour, Ridley, and through hatred tries to strip her of her gender, a link appears between ‘The Hunters’ and *Written on the Body*: in each text, the relationship between gender and humanness is debated. As characters are stripped of gender referents, they lose their identities, and it becomes increasingly easy to dehumanise them by using terms such as ‘it’ when discussing them. As such, the genderless characters enter the realm of

the abject.¹⁵

the construction of gender operates through *exclusionary* means, such that the human is not only produced over and against the inhuman, but through a set of foreclosures, radical erasures, that are, strictly speaking, refused the possibility of cultural articulation. (Butler, 1993, p.8)¹⁶

Returning to the title of this thesis, Butler asks, “[i]s the breakdown of gender binaries ... so monstrous, so frightening, that it must be held to be definitionally impossible and heuristically precluded from any effort to think gender?” (Butler, 1993, p.viii). In *Written on the Body* and ‘The Hunters’, the breakdown of gender binaries – the breakdown of any visible category – results in the loss of the human. The problem is that “responses to the question ‘What is a human?’ come far too easily ... defining difference invariably entails the violence of exclusion” (Salih, 2004, p.1).

Language is Power

Butler suggests that “gender identities that do not conform to the system of ‘compulsory and naturalized heterosexuality’ expose how gender norms are socially instituted and maintained” (Salih, 2002, p.49); this explains why gender identities that do not fit within the male/female binary are considered dangerous by both the medical establishment, and society at large.¹⁷ Many of the texts I examine in this thesis look at the use of vocabulary to try and categorise, pin down, or cast out perceived ‘gender deviance’ – drawing attention to such ‘attacks’ on the binarism

¹⁵ Like Butler, I use the term ‘abject’ as it has been defined by Kristeva (“what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules” [Kristeva, 1982, p.4]).

¹⁶ Salih suggests that “readers should learn not to expect what Butler calls ‘radical accessibility’ when they encounter texts that have set themselves the difficult task of rethinking and reconfiguring the possible within political theorizing. By ‘possible’ Butler means the possibly ‘human,’ possible configurations of the social world and possible modes of doing” (Salih, 2004, p.1).

¹⁷ Both the medical establishment and society at large appear to agree upon what constitutes ‘maleness’: “[i]n the genetic male ... the gender of assignment is based on the infant’s anatomy, predominantly the size of the phallus ... [f]or proper masculine socialisation to occur, the little boy must have a sufficiently large penis. There must be no doubt in the boy’s mind, in the minds of his parents and other adult relatives, or in the minds of his male peers about the legitimacy of his male identification” (Fausto-Sterling, 2000a, p.112).

help to mark them as ‘wrong’ or ‘unacceptable’, and so perpetuate the cycle of rejection and hatred. Even so, Butler remains unconvinced of the usefulness of what Zivi terms “hate-speech codes, designed to censor injurious speech and further progressive ends” (Zivi, 2008, p.159), believing that they

assume that words have specific and unwavering harmful effects on individuals ... in asking the state for protection as a way to be free from harm, we fail to appreciate the instability of language and actually increase the control that the state has over our lives. (Zivi, 2008, p.159)¹⁸

For Butler, language is power: she

offers us a notion of the performative subject; instead of a subject with command over language, Butler describes a subject produced through language. In other words, Butler suggests that we are not sovereign subjects who use language as a tool, but, rather, we are beings who come into existence through language (Zivi, 2008, p.161).

Despite realising the power of language, Butler fails to grapple with the issue of ‘language failure’ – specifically what I will refer to here as ‘the pronoun problem’, and consequently finds herself trapped within the male-female binary that she argues against. It is difficult to find an appropriate pronoun to refer to persons who are transgressing traditional gender binaries, manipulating their bodies via surgery and hormones, etc., so throughout the thesis, I use ‘he’ and ‘she’ – which are, of course, inadequate. Annabelle Willox claims that “language (for language, read gender) relies on prior citations of the term for its meaning; one can only describe one's gendered embodied position through culturally available terms if that description is to have any meaning” (Willox, 2003, p.3). If this statement were true, it would be impossible for the protagonists of my chosen texts – indeed, for anybody who wishes to live outside of the gender binary – to live a ‘meaningful’ or significant existence. Instead, this thesis explores the reality of bodies that exist often outside of language:

¹⁸ I would like to thank Samuel Chambers for providing me with a copy of Zivi’s essay.

bodies that subvert the current framework and cannot be easily defined, yet continue to exist.

CHAPTER ONE: GENDER-PLAY

[O]ne of the most important aspects of cross-dressing is the way in which it offers a challenge to easy notions of binarity, putting into question the categories of 'female' and 'male,' whether they are considered essential or constructed, biological or cultural. (Garber, 1992, p.10)

*

Judith Halberstam and Judith Butler state that the dominant views of gender are that "one must be readable at a glance" (Halberstam, 1998, p.23) and "the breakdown of gender binaries ... must be held to be definitionally impossible" (Butler, 1999, p.viii).

Meanwhile, Mary Hawkesworth explains Butler's notion of the 'definitionally impossible' as an attempt to work against a series of "unquestionable' axioms" about gender, including

the beliefs that there are two and only two genders; the male/female dichotomy is natural, being masculine or feminine is natural and not a matter of choice; all individuals can (and must) be classified as masculine or feminine – any deviation from such a classification being either a joke or a pathology. (Hawkesworth, 1997, p.649)

It is Butler's view that "gender is 'unnatural', so that there is no necessary relationship between one's body and one's gender ... it will be possible to have a designated 'female' body and *not* to display traits generally considered 'feminine'" (Salih, 2002, p.46, emphasis in original).

In this Chapter, I look at three texts, Sarah Waters's *Tipping the Velvet*, Patricia Duncker's *James Miranda Barry* and Jackie Kay's *Trumpet* which focus on moments when the definitionally impossible is made possible: *Tipping the Velvet* initially focuses on public performance of gender on stage, before widening its focus to take into consideration private and personal performance. I explain how these modes of performance are clearly distinct from one another, and what it tells us about the complex relationship between gender and sexuality. The eponymous character in

James Miranda Barry takes on a male role ostensibly to escape the limited opportunities open to women in the nineteenth century, and reveals the difficulties in passing as a man when not visibly convincing. *Trumpet* examines the life of jazz trumpeter Joss Moody, who is discovered (after his death) to have been born anatomically female. I examine the way that Joss's secret affects the identities of others: his wife's heterosexuality and his son's masculinity. Because *James Miranda Barry* and *Trumpet* focus on women who live as men, any study will inevitably encounter linguistic problems, particularly in a pronominal context, as Romaine points out:

[w]here pronominal systems are sex differentiated, languages too, like the surgeon's scalpel, impose a dichotomy into male (*he*) and female (*she*), compelling us to choose one or the other in referring to people. (Romaine, 1999, p.45)

In writing about *James Miranda Barry* and *Trumpet*, I therefore have to take into account the inadequacy of language to describe what James and Joss 'are', and I also have to consider the implications of choosing either 'he' or 'she' to refer to them:

pronoun choice has also been an issue for gays, lesbians, and transsexuals ... On [Billy] Tipton's death in 1989 the gay community claimed 'her' as a lesbian and passing woman, and the magazine *Transsexual News Telegraph* also claimed 'him' as a transsexual man. One way in which each group staked its opposing claims was through referring to Tipton as *he* or *she*. (Romaine, 1999, p.46)¹⁹

The issue of gendering after death will be discussed later in this chapter, but it is important to note that, again in the words of Romaine, "pronouns are used to represent not just anatomy, but a complex and varying concept of oneself as a gendered person" (Romaine, 1999, p.47). In view of this, several options present themselves: "[s]ome feminists have suggested new gender-neutral singular pronouns such as *tey* to replace *she* and *he*, or combining them as *s/he*" (Romaine, 1999,

¹⁹ Billy Tipton is the real-life jazz musician whose story inspired *Trumpet*. His story is told in Diane Wood Middlebrook's 1999 book, *Suits Me: The Double Life of Billy Tipton*.

p.105). From my own perspective, writing about Joss and James, none of these options seems appropriate. Using 'they' removes 'she' and 'he' from the equation, suggesting an otherness, but throughout both novels James and Joss have fought to *avoid* otherness and be recognised in their chosen gender. I am also not comfortable using s/he because it implies that James and Joss are somehow in-between male and female, rather than having chosen one specific gender. For the purposes of this chapter, therefore, I am going to refer to James and Joss using male pronouns, because it is as males that they choose to be identified. In the case of Nan in *Tipping the Velvet*, although she performs as a man on stage, and later carries this behaviour into her personal life, she is very clear that she is still a woman, so she will be referred to as 'she'.

Tipping the Velvet

In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler outlined her theory of gender performativity, thus:

acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this *on the surface* of the body, through the play of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organizing principle of identity as a cause. Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are *performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means. (Butler, 1999, p.173, emphasis in original)

Tipping the Velvet is the first novel by Sarah Waters; the story of Nancy Astley – later Nan King – an oyster girl who gets an opportunity to perform in music-halls as a male impersonator. In telling this story, Waters uses the opportunity to explore the validity of Butler's writings on performativity, exploring the links and spaces between body and acts. In order to understand the way in which Nan moves through various performances in an attempt to create a cohesive identity, it is necessary to first identify the three modes of gender performance as delineated by Butler: public

gender performance, private gender performance and personal gender performance. In examining Nan's life through these three lenses, it will become apparent that "on- and off-stage personae bleed into each other in unpredictable and even uncontrollable ways" (Halberstam, 1997, p.105), so that the notion of a concrete performance is destabilized.

Nan's public performance as a male impersonator is the result of her attraction to another male impersonator, Kitty Butler. Compared to impersonators like Nelly Power who had "worn tights and bullion fringe, just like a ballet-girl – only carried a cane and billycock hat to make her boyish" (*TTV*, p.12), Kitty's act is perceived as fresh because at first glance she seems to fully immerse herself in male costume:

[s]he wore a suit – a handsome gentleman's suit, cut to her size ... There was a rose in her lapel, and lavender gloves at her pocket. From beneath her waistcoat shone a stiff-fronted shirt of snowy white, with a stand-up collar two inches high. Around the collar was a white bow-tie; and on her head there was a topper. When she took the topper off ... one saw that her hair was perfectly cropped. (*TTV*, p.12)

The cropped hair recalls the appearance of women who "had spent time in hospital or prison; or ... were mad" (*TTV*, p.13): short hair is synonymous with unfeminine women, and more specifically, women who had 'failed' as wives and mothers. Laurence Senelick has argued that "[w]hen the subservient sex wears the pants, such behaviour is condoned only in anodyne modes which contradict the disguise by emphasizing female allure" (Senelick, 1993, p.81), and this proves true of Kitty. Her seemingly daring costume is actually cut in a way that accentuates her figure, "rounded, vaguely but unmistakably, at the bosom, the stomach and the hips, in a way no real boy's ever was" (*TTV*, p.13), and her shoes have "two-inch heels" (*TTV*, p.13), arguably rendering her as feminine as other male impersonators. According to Judith Halberstam's definitions, Kitty would be more accurately described as a drag

king rather than a male impersonator, because “the male impersonator attempts to produce a plausible performance of maleness ... the drag king ... makes the exposure of the theatricality of masculinity into the mainstay of the act” (Halberstam, 1998, p.232). Sara Maitland agrees that such an act “does not seek to confuse ... it does not really require deception. It *pretends* to be deceptive, and is thus, so to speak, doubly deceptive” (Maitland, 1986, p.10).

Nancy is added to the act when Kitty’s manager, Walter, is “looking for something that will lift the act above the ordinary, and make it really memorable” (*TTV*, p.112), and has the idea of “[a] *double* act! A soldier – and his comrade! A swell – together with his chum!” (*TTV*, p.112). When Nancy puts on a suit, she makes an effort to look as male as possible, completely missing the point of male impersonation (only a quasi-plausible performance). Walter realises that “[i]t’s not quite right” (*TTV*, p.118) but is not sure why, until Mrs Dendy, the landlady, explains: “[s]he’s too real ... She looks like a boy. Which I know she is supposed to – but if you follow me, she looks like a *real* boy ... And that ain’t quite the idea now, is it?” (*TTV*, p.118). Senelick explains that “female assumptions of male identity appeared in the theatre as a novelty, a salacious turn, a secular Johnny-come-lately” (Senelick, 2000, p.326). The point of the act is not to ‘be’ men, insofar as such a thing is possible, but to parody them, using costumes to illustrate the type of man being imitated (“what think you of a policeman’s jacket? Or a sailor’s blouse? What think you of peg-top trousers or a pearly coat?” [*TTV*, p.83]). Of course, as Butler points out, “[p]arody by itself is not subversive ... for parodic displacement, indeed, parodic laughter, depends on a context and reception in which subversive confusions can be fostered” (Butler, 1999, p.176).

Marjorie Garber, however, argues that

one of the most important aspects of cross-dressing is the way in which it offers a challenge to easy notions of binarity, putting into question the categories of 'female' and 'male,' whether they are considered essential or constructed, biological or cultural. (Garber, 1992, p.10)

In this novel, Waters is suggesting that the most important aspect of cross-dressing for the stage is actually the way it *confirms* binaries. Kitty deliberately sabotages her costume (that is, she makes it more feminine), to emphasise that she falls short of being a 'real' man. In contrast, Nancy is considered "unpleasing" (*TTV*, p.118) because her performance fails to "pla[y] upon the distinction between the anatomy of the performer and the gender that is being performed" (Butler, 1999, p.175).

To re-stabilise Nancy's performance of gender, Walter modifies her costume in order to accentuate her femininity:

[m]y new shoes looked quaint and girlish, like a principal boy's in a pantomime. The trousers were shorter, their line rather spoiled. The jacket flared a little, above and below the waist, quite as if I had hips and a bosom – but it felt tighter than before, and not half as comfortable. (*TTV*, p.119)

As a result of Walter's efforts, Nan finds herself "clad not exactly as a boy, but, rather confusingly, as the boy I would have been, had I been more of a girl" (*TTV*, p.120). With a new stage name, Nan King is thus born. Although Kitty and Nan are a double-act, Nan is the weaker performer:

[t]he act, I knew, was still all [Kitty's]. When we sang, it was really she who sang, while I provided a light, easy second. When we danced, it was she who did the tricky steps: I only strolled or shuffled at her side. I was her foil, her echo; I was the shadow which, in all her brilliance, she cast across the stage. (*TTV*, p.127)

Butler has argued that the "notion of an original or primary gender identity is often parodied within the cultural practices of drag [and] cross-dressing" (Butler, 1999, p.174). However, it is "the relation between the 'imitation' and the 'original'" (Butler, 1999, p.175) that is the key feature of Kitty and Nan's act. Even as Kitty is imitating men, she is also the 'original' that Nan is imitating. According to Butler,

“the action of gender requires a performance that is *repeated*. This repetition is at once a re-enactment and reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; and it is the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimation” (Butler, 1999, p.178). When Nan repeats Kitty’s actions, it is as an overtly-feminised ‘man’, whose female identity is at once readable: echoing Irigaray, the audience is “firmly convinced, without possible hesitation ... that there is no ambiguity possible” (Irigaray, 1985b, p.14). Any fears that the audience may have about Kitty’s motives for appearing on stage dressed as a man, and any concerns they may have about Kitty’s on-stage activities overlapping with her private life, are assuaged by Nan’s appearance. Ironically though, Kitty’s life and work *are* conflated: Kitty’s off-stage femininity, already in evidence on stage through costume tricks, is magnified by her proximity to Nan’s overtly feminine male drag. Likewise, Nan’s role, “the one historically assigned to the *feminine*: that of mimicry” (Irigaray, 1985a, p.76, my emphasis), draws attention to what Kitty is doing: mimicking rather than ‘being’.²⁰ Thus, the doubling-effect of two women on stage actually serves to further undermine Kitty’s (and Nan’s) credibility as men.

Off-stage, Kitty is very aware of the possibility that people may confuse her act with her private life, and goes to great lengths to mark the two as separate, ensuring she is always “clad as a girl, and walk[ing] like a girl, with her plait fastened to the back of her head and a parasol over her arm” (*TTV*, p.45). Kitty’s concerns increase when she embarks upon a relationship with Nan, saying to her, “[y]ou won’t let on, will you, to anyone? You will be *careful* – won’t you?” (*TTV*, p.108). In contrast, Nan does not appreciate the need to keep their relationship hidden, responding to Kitty’s request with teasing: “I am the Queen of Carefulness. I

²⁰ Irigaray argues that “[o]ne must assume the feminine role deliberately. Which means to already to convert a form of subordination into an affirmation, and thus to begin to thwart it” (Irigaray, 1985a, p.76).

shall go on being careful for ever, if you like – so long as I might be a bit reckless, sometimes, when we are quite alone” (*TTV*, p.108). When Nan suggests that she “do[es]n’t think [she] should be able to keep from kissing” (*TTV*, p.114) Kitty, Kitty tries to explain her fears: “[y]ou will have to get used to it ... Otherwise – well, what a show *that* would be!” (*TTV*, p.114). At this point, Kitty is unwilling to explain the specific consequences of her relationship with Nan being discovered, and neither will she permit any discussion of what their relationship means. What Kitty does do is blame her reticence on others: “Kitty had given me leave to love her; the world, she said, would never let me be anything to her except her friend” (*TTV*, p.127).

When Nan meets two women backstage whom she describes to Kitty as being “like us” (*TTV*, p.131), Kitty is horrified: “[t]hey’re not like us! They’re not like us at all! They’re *toms* ... They make a – a *career* – out of kissing girls. We’re not like that!” (*TTV*, p.131). Despite being able to describe what she and Nan are *not*, Kitty finds it difficult to explain what they *are*: “[y]ou would have to give up the stage,” she said seriously, ‘and so would I, if there was talk about us, if people thought we were – *like that*’” (*TTV*, p.131, emphasis in original). Nan is dissatisfied with this non-answer, but her attempts to get clarification end in frustration:

‘We’re not like anything! We’re just – ourselves.’
‘But if we’re just ourselves, why do we have to hide it?’
‘Because no one would know the difference between us and – women like that!’ (*TTV*, p.131)

Kitty’s terror of being identified as a lesbian is so great that it cannot even be vocalised. Therefore, Kitty’s construction of her off-stage persona – a heterosexual ‘normal’ woman – is actually what Butler identifies in her theory of performativity as “the construction of the gendered body through a series of exclusions and denials, signifying absences” (Butler, 1999, p.172). Sagri Dhairyam expands this to argue that “the very impossibility of ‘being’ a gender initiates a belief in gender: the lack

that structures gender identity provides the imperative for that identity. Identity is precisely what it cannot be” (Dhairyam, 1994, p.28) – and this is also true of sexual identity: Kitty’s lesbianism exists only as a silence; when this silence is broken, her act faces its biggest challenge.

A drunk audience member awakens to see Nan and Kitty on-stage. His response (“Girls? You call them girls? Why, they’re nothing but a couple of – a couple of *toms!*” [TTV, p.140]) leads to an ‘Emperor’s New Clothes’ scenario; the audience, previously reacting to the girls “graciously” (TTV, p.138), have their eyes opened to the reality in front of them:

Toms! At the sound of it, the audience gave a great collective flinch. There was a sudden hush; the shouts became mumbles, the shrieks all tailed away. Through the shaft of limelight I saw their faces – a thousand faces, self-conscious and appalled. (TTV, p.141)

Following this ordeal, Kitty makes several changes, designed to create a sense of space between her on- and off-stage personas. Her first step is to “question Walter ... about the other acts” (TTV, p.143) she and Nancy have to share a bill with. Now informed, Kitty refuses to work alongside certain acts that transgress gender boundaries (such as a man touring under the name “Paul or Pauline?” [TTV, p.143]), for fear of being made to appear “freakish by association” (TTV, p.143). A far more acceptable engagement is a contract to appear in pantomime. Kitty plays the Principal Boy – the prince – and does so with no fear of being judged, in contrast to the dangers of her double-act with Nan:

[i]t was rather odd to see Kitty spooning with [Cinderella] upon the stage, kissing her while the clock showed a minute-to-midnight – though it was odder still, perhaps, to think that no one in the audience called out *Toms!* now, or even appeared to think it: they only cheered when the Prince and Cinderella were united at the end. (TTV, p.147)

There is no negative reaction here – and no fear of a negative reaction in spite of the Principal Boy being celebrated as “all boy and all girl *at the same time*” (Carter,

1994, p.107, emphasis in original). Sara Maitland would attribute the lack of negative reaction to the idea that “[t]he hallowed antiquity of Pantomime seems to have taken some of the moral danger out of cross-dressing on the stage” (Maitland, 1986, p.26). Laurence Senelick’s claim that “the principal boy played by a woman and the dame played by a male comedian are not evading the standard gender binary” (Senelick, 2000, p.11) is better understood through Judith Butler’s explanation of heterosexuality as “operat[ing] through the regulated production of hyperbolic versions of ‘man’ and ‘woman’” (Butler, 1993, p.237). Kitty’s performance with ‘Cinderella’ is therefore actually a hyperbolic mirroring of heterosexuality – a normative state – that reaffirms the gender binary. This only works because the ‘maleness’ of the Principal Boy is taken seriously: as Angela Carter argues, “[t]he Principal Boy is a male/female cross, like the Dame, *but she is never played for laughs*. No. She is played for thrills, for adventure, for romance” (Carter, 1994, p.107, my emphasis).²¹

The second and “biggest change” (*TTV*, p.144) that Kitty makes is to move out of Mrs Dendy’s small room to “the top two floors” (*TTV*, p.145) of a large house. Kitty instigates the move, claiming that “it looked queer, us still sharing a room, and a bed, when we had the money to live somewhere ten times the size” (*TTV*, p.145). Sharing a room is understandable as a necessity for Kitty and Nan when struggling financially, but continuing to share when they are both earning a reasonable wage can only lead to the perception that they are sharing through choice, i.e. they are ‘like that’.

Unbeknown to Nan, Kitty is cultivating a secret relationship with Walter.

Stumbling upon them together, Nan is stunned: “[i]t isn’t true!’ I said. ‘Oh tell me,

²¹ This is in direct opposition to the character of Eve/Evelyn in *The Passion of New Eve*, which will be explored in Chapter 3. Eve/Evelyn, who is arguably a “male/female cross” (Carter, 1994, p.107) is mocked by various characters in the text.

tell me – say it ain’t true!’ ... At last, she met my gaze. ‘It’s true,’ she whispered” (TTV, p.168). The conditions of silence have been reversed; now it is heterosexuality that cannot be spoken of: “‘I didn’t like to do *it!*’ she said miserably. ‘At times I could hardly bear *it* – ’” (TTV, p.170, my emphasis). Kitty explains her actions as the result of desperation: “I didn’t know what else to do” (TTV, p.169). The gulf between Nan and Kitty’s different responses to the notion of socially acceptable behaviour widens: Nan asks “Why couldn’t we have gone on as we were...?” (TTV, p.170), and Kitty restates the code of silence that must surround their lesbian behaviour: “‘You *know* why! It is all right, that sort of thing, when you are girls. But as we got older... We’re not a couple of scullery maids, to do as we please and have no one notice it. We are known; we are looked at – ’” (TTV, p.170, emphasis in original). Kitty is reiterating the argument she made regarding their living quarters – their behaviour must be appropriate to their circumstances. The danger of not changing – of remaining in Mrs Dendy’s house, and being ‘careful’ – is that they “should never be careful enough! You are too much – Nan, you are too much like a boy” (TTV, p.171).

Although it is risky to appear “too much like a boy” (TTV, p.171) on stage, it is even more dangerous to carry this behaviour off stage. However much effort Kitty puts into appearing ‘normal’, if she remains with Nan she will be, as she fears, “freakish by association” (TTV, p.143). To counteract the gossip surrounding them, Kitty must boost her heterosexual credentials by marrying Walter and distancing herself from Nan:

‘Walter has a plan. For a new act. He wants to return to the halls...’
‘To the halls? After *this*? With you and me – ?’
‘No. With me. Just me.’ (TTV, p.171)

Although Kitty plans to marry Walter, she is doing so only to draw attention away from her relationship with Nan: ““this is for the best[.] With Walter as my husband, who would think, who would say – ?’ I pulled away; she gripped me tighter – then cried at last, in a kind of panic: ‘Oh, you don’t think, do you, that I’ll let him take me from you?’” (*TTV*, p.172).

Earlier in the novel, Nan is shown to be naïve about the risks of being open about her lesbianism. Here again, she would rather confess their relationship than risk losing Kitty to Walter. So when Walter claims to know about Nan and Kitty’s relationship, Nan makes sure he knows the exact terms of the romance:

‘I know,’ he said slowly, ‘that you were – sweethearts, of a kind.’
‘Of a kind. The kind that – what? Hold hands? Did you think, then, that you were the first to have her, in this bed? Didn’t she tell you that I *fuck* her?’
(*TTV*, p.173)

By explicitly revealing the facts of the relationship, Nan is challenging Walter to try and measure up to her. However, as Judith Butler has argued, identity is produced “along the culturally intelligible grids of an *idealized and compulsory heterosexuality*” (Butler, 1999, p.172). Butler develops this idea in her essay,

“Imitation and Gender Insubordination”, explaining that

[c]ompulsory heterosexuality sets itself up as the original, the true, the authentic; the norm that determines the real implies that ‘being’ lesbian is always a kind of miming, a vain effort to participate in the phantasmatic plenitude of naturalized heterosexuality which will always and only fail.
(Butler, 2001, p.20)

Therefore, Walter’s identity is endowed with so much more power than Nan’s that he does not need to utter a word in reply to her challenge: “[h]e was too much the gentleman to make me a foul-mouthed reply, but his expression – a curious mixture of contempt, complacency, and pity – was a speaking one. It said, *That was not fucking, as the world knows it!*” (*TTV*, p.173). Nan admits that Walter has “defeated” her (*TTV*, p.173), a defeat based not on being ‘worse’ than Walter, but on not having

her sexual preferences acknowledged in the same positive way as (and by) Walter.

For the first time, Nan realises the basis of Kitty's fears that people would not be able to understand and support their relationship.

Unable to compete with Walter, Nan looks for a situation where she can safely express her sexuality, and ends up accepting the role of Diana Lethaby's "tart" (*TTV*, p. 248). In this role, Nan is forced to enact a private performance of an 'appropriate' gender: instead of being openly female, Nan is required to pass as a man in public, so that Diana gains a sense of power from being the only person aware of the 'performance'. Nan's first impression upon meeting Diana, is that Diana has mistaken her for a real 'man'. Trying to explain "I haven't got what you're after" (*TTV*, p.233), Diana makes her control of the situation known by stating, "[y]ou have exactly what I'm after" (*TTV*, p.233). For her new role, Nan is given a new (male) costume: "a jacket and trousers of bone-coloured linen, and a waistcoat, slightly darker, with a silken back ... three piqué shirts ... collars, white as a new tooth; studs, of opal, and cuff-links of gold" (*TTV*, p.269). Waters makes it clear that while Diana is attracted to the dissonance of Nan's female body in male clothing, it is the female body that is the main attraction:

my breasts – which had grown used to being as it were put aside with my corset and chemise – seemed at her touch to rise and swell and strain against their wrappings. I felt like a man being transformed into a woman at the hand of a sorceress. (*TTV*, p.239)

Diana particularly enjoys having the power to disrupt Nan's performance by bringing into sharp focus the gap between Nan's body and costume: "[i]n a moment she had her hand through the slit of my drawers, had seized a corner of the cravat, and began to tug at it. The silk uncurled, and squirmed and susurrated its way out of my trousers, like an eel" (*TTV*, p.240). It could be said, then, that as far as Diana is concerned, a man would not be 'good enough' for her.

Diana appropriates the male power role, and she inverts gender for her own amusement. Nan's fine clothes are revealed to have been picked "to match" (*TTV*, p.272) the interior of Diana's club, The Cavendish Ladies' Club: Nan is intended to fulfil the role of exhibit, a role that would normally be reserved for a woman in a heterosexual arrangement. The club is a 'safe' place, bridging the gap between public and personal: Nan is openly identified as a woman ("[t]his is Miss King, my companion" [*TTV*, p.271]), but also displayed in her male guise. The other club members join in the reading of Nan as a display, talking *about* her rather than *to* her, and ignoring the fact that she is a human being: "it speaks!" she cried. 'All this' – she gestured to my face, my costume – 'and the creature even speaks!'" (*TTV*, p.273). Nan arouses interest for the club members, in part because she is a 'creature' – neither male nor female, and in consequence, not human either. Here, Waters is engaging with Judith Butler's reference in *Bodies that Matter* to "those abjected beings who do not appear properly gendered; it is their very humanness that comes into question" (Butler, 1993, p.8).²² Subject to intense scrutiny from Diana's friends, Nan appears to subvert Laura Mulvey's notion of the gaze:

[i]n a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*. (Mulvey, 1989, p.19)

However, closer inspection reveals this not to be the case. Although it can be said that the fantasy of a female gaze (Diana's) is projected onto a male figure (Nan's), nevertheless, Nan's male figure is one that is superimposed onto a female body. Nan, as a woman, is still enacting a "traditional exhibitionist role" (Mulvey, 1989, p.19),

²² This is something which I will examine in more detail in Chapter 4's focus on genderless narrators within contemporary texts.

but what is worse in this particular scenario is that Nan does not even realise what role she is playing. Mulvey asserts that “[t]here are circumstances in which looking itself is a source of pleasure, just as, in the reverse formation, there is pleasure in being looked at” (Mulvey, 1989, p.16); it is clear that Nan’s “pleasure in being looked at” (Mulvey, 1989, p.16) is only possible as long as she does not understand *how* she is being perceived.

Nan remains in blissful ignorance of her powerlessness until forced to hear it from Diana’s lips: “[d]o you think it matters to me, how you feel about anything? Get in my bedroom at once, you little bitch, and take your clothes off” (*TTV*, p.296). Not only is Nan an exhibit, but also a servant, and her role can be summed up as “I posed and wore costumes” (*TTV*, p.301). Her role beyond the Cavendish and Diana’s home is very different. In public, Nan is introduced as Diana’s ward, “Neville King” (*TTV*, p.279). By renaming Nan, Diana is marking herself as an authority-figure within their ‘relationship’ because naming is “an act of power ... assigning the symbol, the act of ‘I-am-he-who-tells-you-what-or-who-you-are’” (Gary Strankman, cited in Romaine, 1999, p.121). In contrast to the club/home situations, Diana is not trying to be exhibitionist in the outside world, but is instead trying to remain unnoticed. This is because Diana has less power – beyond the boundaries of her home and club, she is just a woman (worse, a widow), and cannot risk being embroiled in controversy, so it is important that Nan successfully passes as a man. When Nan draws attention to Diana’s group on a trip to the theatre, it makes Diana angry:

our seats were very good ones, in the centre of one of the front rows of the stalls. I had made us late, however, and the stalls were almost full: we had to stumble over twenty pairs of legs to reach our seats. Dickie spilled her wine. Satin snapped at a lady with a fox-fur around her throat. Diana, when she sat as last, was thin-lipped and self-conscious; this was not the kind of entrance she had planned for us, at all. (*TTV*, p.290)

At the theatre, Nan sees Kitty's new act, but fails to realise the parallels between their new existences. Kitty is still part of a double-act, but she is no longer the driving force, or the first name on the bill: "Walter Waters and Kitty" (*TTV*, p.291). In this act, Kitty has lost her last name; she is just a secondary part of Walter's act. The role she is now playing is a degrading one – Walter plays the role of father, and Kitty plays his son:

she was dressed in a boy's sailor-suit – a baggy white blouse with a blue sash, white knickerbockers, stockings, and flat brown shoes; and she had a straw hat slung over her back, on a ribbon. Her hair was rather longer, and had been combed into a curl. (*TTV*, p.295)

The role is actually doubly degrading, because in "play[ing] the child, with her husband" (*TTV*, p.295), Kitty is enacting Irigaray's conception of women as "a commodity ... marked phallicly by their fathers, husbands, procurers" (Irigaray, 1985a, p.31). A child-wife to her father-husband, Kitty has lost her own identity. Walter, as father-husband-manager, owns all that Kitty is, and exercises his power by taking over her act and forcing her to graphically display on-stage the multiple ways in which he has ownership of her.

Nan makes the mistake of believing that her own performance of masculinity gives her power, but the power she exercised on the stage alongside Kitty is conspicuously absent from her interactions with Diana. In spite of the "terrible shame" (*TTV*, p.295) Nan feels when watching Kitty's act of powerlessness, she fails to realise that she and Kitty are in the same position, controlled by someone else. Attempting to mount a challenge to Diana's authority, Nan finds her position made clear: "do you think you are mistress here, to give orders to my servants? Why, you *are* a servant! What is it to you, if I ask my girl to bare her backside for me? You

have bared yours for me, often enough!” (*TTV*, p.315). Nan may be the actor, but it is Diana who writes and directs this private performance.

Ejected from Diana’s home, Nan tries to be accepted into a new home.

Realising that her male impersonation act will not translate well to ordinary life, Nan adopts a brand new role. The role Nan chooses is that of housewife, and she uses her newly-discovered ‘female’ skills to try and persuade Florence, the homeowner, to let her stay: “I could clean and cook, like I did today. I could do your washing ... I could look after your little boy while you are at work” (*TTV*, p.368). Laying claim to a femininity she does not possess, Nan is trying to emphasise how ‘normal’ she is: “I met fifty women in your street today, all doing exactly those things! It’s natural, ain’t it” (*TTV*, p.371). When Florence acquiesces, Nan is pleased, admitting to herself the extent of her deception: “[w]hat did it matter, that I was not all that I pretended? I had been a regular girl once; I could be regular again” (*TTV*, p.373).

Nan regards being a ‘regular girl’ as just another act, remarking that “there were moments at Quilter Street, when I found myself handing out cups of tea, rolling cigarettes, nursing babies while other people argued and laughed, when I thought I might as well still be in Diana’s drawing-room, dressed in a tunic” (*TTV*, p.378). Nan’s stage is the ‘real’ world and she is moving towards a personal performance – transforming herself *for* herself, and examining the elements of her fractured identities to try and form a cohesive ‘true’ identity. Before she gets to this point, Nan is still playing with identities to try and find one that will help her fit in. However, the effort of trying “to be ordinary” (*TTV*, p.380) proves too great. Changed by her transgressive experiences, Nan finds she cannot just slip back into the role of ‘woman’, especially having experienced liberty and power. This struggle is played out via costume. First, she trades her boots for “shoes with bows on” (*TTV*, p.381),

and then she gets “a hat with a wired flower and a dress with a ribbon at the neck” (*TTV*, p.381). This desperate attempt to *become* a woman by *looking* feminine fails because it is a role Nan is no longer suitable to play: “I only looked extraordinarily awful ... it was as if wearing gentlemen’s suits had magically unfitted me for girliness, for ever” (*TTV*, p.381). Nan finds that she is adopting masculine characteristics without having to consciously think about it, “produc[ing] the effect of an internal core or substance” (Butler, 1999, p.173) that Butler describes. Being a ‘girl’ no longer comes ‘naturally’ to Nan – she has to work at it, as she once worked at appearing as a man. The use of the word ‘magically’ to describe how Nan has changed fits in with the theatrical/performance element of the novel, but it also reflects the way Nan’s unconscious performance of gender is produced – seemingly instantly, with the audience left to guess at the ‘how’ and ‘why’ that they cannot see now that Nan has mastered her own sense of self.

Although Nan accepts the female role, she finds herself needing an outlet for the expression of her masculinity. To this end, Nan

bought a pair of moleskin trousers, and a set of drawers and a shirt, and a pair of braces and some lace-up boots; then, back at Quilter Street, I knocked on the door of a girl who was known for doing haircuts for a penny and said: ‘Cut it off, cut it all off, quick, before I change my mind!’ (*TTV*, p.404)

Nan finds the experience liberating, remarking that “it was not like she was cutting hair it was as if I had a pair of wings beneath my shoulder blades, that the flesh had all grown over, and she was slicing free” (*TTV*, p.405). Nevertheless, Nan promises herself that “for the sake of the neighbours, I would only wear [my trousers] to do the housework in” (*TTV*, p.405). Within a month, the lure of the trousers has proven as strong as any drug, and it encroaches into other areas of her life:

the neighbours had all caught glimpses of me in them, and since I had become known in the district as something of a trouser-wearer, it seemed rather a fuss to take the trousers off at night and put a frock on. (*TTV*, p.406)

In doing this, Nan faces some opposition: “Mrs Monk’s daughters, next door, would run squealing when they saw me. Ralph’s union colleagues tended to look me over, as they debated, and then lose the thread of their text” (*TTV*, p.407). Nan downplays the fuss, arguing that “in some houses in Bethnal Green ... it was a luxury to have any sort of clothes at all, and you regularly saw women in their husbands’ jackets, and sometimes a man in a shawl” (*TTV*, p.407). There is a difference in cross-dressing through necessity, and doing so through choice, and the issue goes back to Kitty’s decision to no longer share a room with Nan: in making a conscious decision to transgress, Nan is declaring herself ‘like that’ – a cross-dresser, a lesbian, a “freak” (*TTV*, p.278) – and bringing her personal gender performance into the realm of the public.

Accepting that she does not fit ‘normal’ definitions of what it means to be a woman, Nan feels able for the first time to face her memories of her on-stage career. Responding to someone asking whether Nan is “that Nan King gal, what used to work the halls with Kitty Butler” (*TTV*, p.419), Nan finds her sense of reality threatened even though she responds confidently: “‘I *am* Nan King.’ It was the truth, and yet I felt like an impostor – as if I had just said, ‘I *am* Lord Rosebery’” (*TTV*, p.419). Butler argues “[t]hat the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality” (Butler, 1999, p.173). The appearance of a postcard featuring a picture of herself and Kitty in male drag makes Nan feel as if she is “gazing into someone else’s past” (*TTV*, p.420). Afraid of forgetting what performing (on stage) feels like, afraid of losing a part of herself that she can only access through performing, Nan asks if she can keep the photograph: “I lost a lot of stuff, and never cared to think of it till now. This,

however ... [w]ell, it won't hurt me, will it, to have this little reminder?" (*TTV*, p.424).

Gaining strength from drawing on her past, Nan falters when she comes face-to-face with Diana once again. More specifically, it is Diana's new companion, "Reggie" (*TTV*, p.450), who shakes Nan to the core by reminding her of the powerless depths to which she once fell. Reggie is a carbon copy of Nan, and suggests that Nan herself was an imitator rather than an original: "[t]he trousers were handsome, and bulged at the fork. The boy himself was tall and slight; his hair was dark, and cut very short. His face was a pretty one, his lips pink as a girl" (*TTV*, p.451). Nan has been replaced, as easily as an understudy taking on the main role, and she realises that she was only attractive to Diana because of her ability to pass as a man, rather than because of any individual traits.

Shaken, Nan reaffirms her new power when she joins Florence's brother Ralph on stage at a Worker's rally, not only helping him recite his speech on Socialism, but altering it to better fit the demands of her performance: "I found myself adding a few little rhetorical flourishes to the speech, as I went along" (*TTV*, p.457). She performs "as if I were a pantomime dame, and Ralph my cross-chat partner" (*TTV*, p.457). The interesting aspect of Waters describing Nan as a 'pantomime dame' is the male undercurrent to such a role, emphasising that Nan has not completely abandoned her masculinity. She achieves a measure of happiness because she can perform on her own terms. When the novel ends with "a muffled cheer, and a rising ripple of applause" (*TTV*, p.472), it is only fitting that a book that is dedicated to pretence, performance and the lure of the stage, gives the last word to the stage.

I have already argued that Nan and Kitty enact the role of drag king, rather than male impersonator, on-stage. The drag king represents a complex relationship between the on- and off-stage persona: Halberstam argues that

[t]he drag king might make no distinction between her off-stage and on-stage persona or she may make an absolute distinction; she may say that on- and off-stage personae bleed into each other in unpredictable and even uncontrollable ways. (Halberstam, 1997, p.105)

Kitty tries to emphasise the distinction between her on-stage and off-stage persona: off-stage, she is “clad as a girl, small and slim and shapely, a false plait smothering the lovely, ragged edges of her crop” (*TTV*, p.36), and she chooses Walter over Nan to preserve her image as a heterosexual, ‘normal’ woman.²³ By comparison, Nan’s relationship with her on- and off-stage image is a difficult one, affected by her growing feeling that the distinction between the two is perhaps not as great as she first expected: Nan, in an echo of Halberstam’s words, finds that her “on- and off-stage personae bleed into each other” (Halberstam, 1997, p.105). As a successful performer, Nan depends on stereotypes to construct (un)believable characters.

Tipping the Velvet shows that cross-dressing on stage is not necessarily concerned with creating a perfect representation of gender, and constitutes an altogether different type of performance. Unlike James (*James Miranda Barry*) and Joss (*Trumpet*) Nan is able (on-stage) to show that her manhood is a construct, and is in fact encouraged to make this visible. She only encounters problems when she continues this behaviour off-stage, and finds the boundaries between her on- and off-stage persona, and masculine and feminine behaviour blurred.

²³ Kate Bornstein asks, “who can you fall in love with? Must we follow the unwritten law that ‘real men love women and real women love men’?” (Bornstein, 1998, p.98). But of course, this leads to the question of what marks people as ‘real men’ or ‘real women’: “‘real man’ and ‘real woman.’ They’re at once vital concepts and meaningless, useless terms. They’re vital concepts because nearly everyone believes there *is* such a thing as a real man or a real woman ... They’re meaningless, useless terms because of the nearly universal disagreement about what those terms actually *mean*” (Bornstein, 1998, p.22).

James Miranda Barry

There is no such blurring of ‘on-’ and ‘off-stage’ personas in *James Miranda Barry* because James is playing the same role ‘on-’ and ‘off-stage’. Indeed, it could be argued that James is constantly on-stage, never allowed to let his character slip for fear of the possible consequences. *James Miranda Barry* is a fictionalised account of the life of Dr James Barry, a woman who served as a man in the British Army during the 1800s. Marjorie Garber has recognised the proliferation of “stories of lifelong cross-dressers whose ‘true’ gender identities were disclosed only after death” (Garber, 1992, p.67).²⁴ For Halberstam, writing in *In A Queer Time and Place*, the problem is that

[t]ransgender biography [i]s a sometimes violent, often imprecise project that brutally seeks, retroactively and with the benefit of hindsight, to erase the carefully managed details of the life as a passing person, and recasts the act of passing as deception, dishonesty, and fraud. (Halberstam, 2005, p.48)

Garber explains this in another way, in terms of the way such stories “recuperat[e] social and sexual norms ... reinstating the binary (male/female)” (Garber, 1992, p.69), and thus detaching “[w]hatever discomfort is felt by the reader or audience” (Garber, 1992, p.69) from the narrative.²⁵ One of the main differences between

²⁴ See, for example, Diane Wood Middlebrook’s *Suits Me*, which begins “[t]his is the story of a woman named Billy Tipton, a jazz musician who lived as a man from the time she was nineteen until ‘he’ died at age seventy-four and was discovered to be female” (Middlebrook, 1999, p.xiii). Throughout the text, Billy’s female identity is kept at the forefront, his male identity dismissed: “[a]bout a year before she died, Billy explicitly told one of her cousins that she considered herself a ‘normal person’ – specifically, not a hermaphrodite, and by implication not a lesbian; *certainly not a man*” (Middlebrook, 1999, p.60). This view is challenged by *Trumpet*: Joss’s male identity is highlighted, and his female identity marginalised.

²⁵ Jason Cromwell describes how “becoming invisible as transmen/FTMs and only visible as men is precarious and dependent upon how ‘out’ someone is. There is always some risk of being found out and marginalized as a result. Often when discovered, regardless of how and irrespective of the duration of their lives as men, they are turned back into women and again made invisible” (Cromwell, 1999, p.12). However, the real-life cases of James Barry and, more recently, Billy Tipton, show that, far from being “made invisible”, the after-death discovery that a man was born a woman is followed by intense media speculation and investigation into the hows and whys of the situation. Jackie Kay references this with the character of Sophie Stones in *Trumpet*, a tabloid journalist who wants to write a lurid biography of Joss, and expose him not just as a woman, but “weird as fuck... a perv” (*Tr*, p.127/8).

Trumpet and *James Miranda Barry* is the physical presentation of the protagonists. In *Trumpet*, Joss's appearance is convincingly male: being "astonishingly handsome" (*Tr*, p.11) gives him an advantage when passing as a man. By contrast, *James Miranda Barry* operates from the assumption that it is impossible to convincingly appropriate a male role unless one is born male. Duncker crafts her novel in order to expose James's failures rather than successes. Where Joss is good-looking and charming, James looks "like a very well-dressed dwarf that had escaped, in full costume, either from the stage or from the circus" (*JMB*, p.74).²⁶ James challenges perceptions by laying claim to maleness while appearing frail and child-like.

When James accepts the post of "Assistant Surgeon to the Forces at the Cape of Good Hope" (*JMB*, p.178), he is able to hide behind this impressive title as it combines the traditionally male occupations of medicine and combat. Discussing Freud's lecture, "Femininity", Luce Irigaray argues that, in terms of making a distinction between male and female, "[t]he important point, it seems, is for you to be firmly convinced, without possible hesitation, that you cannot be in error, that there is no ambiguity possible" (Irigaray, 1985b, p.14). This is not the case with James: ambiguity follows him throughout his time at the colony, and he finds himself subject to "openly inquisitive stares" (*JMB*, p.182) from the colony's inhabitants, due to his unusual appearance, although his competence in medicine forestalls any direct questioning of his sex. On arrival at the colony, James is presented with a horse from the Deputy Governor: "a gigantic bay mare ... far too large for [James], who would have looked odd on anything bigger than a child's pony" (*JMB*, p.191). In effect, James's presentation of maleness is unsuccessful; he has failed to live up to the Deputy Governor's expectations of maleness (an imposing physicality). Unable to

²⁶ There are three characters in *James Miranda Barry* who share the first name James. To avoid confusion they will be distinguished in the following way: James = James Miranda Barry; Barry = James Barry; Loughlin = James Loughlin.

rely on his physicality to boost his claims of maleness, James instead has to depend on his reputation and behaviour to create a believable form of maleness. Boasting of the four stallions he had when living in Cape Town, James impresses the Deputy Governor with his apparent strength: “a man who has handled four stallions is a man to be reckoned with” (*JMB*, p.191).

During his first week at the colony, James makes an effort to promote his masculinity to everyone:

he scandalised – and delighted – the assembled company at the banquet given in his honour by partaking of a very frugal amount and yet downing several bottles of claret single-handed. Without any trembling of the hands, reddening of the complexion or glazing of the eye. (*JMB*, p.197)

The women of the colony “could not get enough of him” (*JMB*, p.198), finding his “delicate” (*JMB*, p.194) nature attractive. In particular, James is aggressively pursued by Charlotte Walden, the Governor’s daughter. This creates a destabilising role-reversal, with James forced to occupy the role of chaste female as Charlotte acts sexually aggressively: “I can bear it no longer. Forgive my frankness, Dr Barry. I beg you to kiss me” (*JMB*, p.203). In response, James “raised her importunate fingers to his lips and gently kissed them all” (*JMB*, p.203), an action the narrative voice describes as requiring “great presence of mind” (*JMB*, p.203). When Charlotte asks James to kiss her, she provides him with a challenge: if he refuses to respond to her flirtations, he risks being gossiped about and having his sexuality and gender questioned, but a positive response to her overtures could place him in danger of discovery if the ‘relationship’ is furthered.

To avoid the attentions of Charlotte or any other woman who may have designs upon him, James makes it known that “he’s not the kind of man you marry” (*JMB*, p.212): he “flirt[s and] has such a winning way with women” (*JMB*, p.187), and his “impeccable bedroom manners” (*JMB*, p.187) mean that “ladies sought him

out” (*JMB*, p.198), which cements his reputation as a ladies’ man. Charlotte refuses to accept James’s lack of interest, and tricks him into having dinner with her; the evening ends with Charlotte getting hopelessly drunk and James trying to put her to bed, which she interprets as “the doctor’s authoritative approach to seduction” (*JMB*, p.233). James struggles to carry Charlotte to her room: “[t]he door fell open and [James] threw Lotte down into a gleaming pool of white linen, simply because he was unable to carry her one step further” (*JMB*, p.233). She misreads James’s weakness as part of his seduction technique, which forces him into action:

[t]here was only one way to end this. He pulled her face round towards him and kissed her ferociously on the lips ... He kissed her again, harder this time ... With his left hand [James] pulled her skirts right up to her thighs and beyond, then reached down into her most secret places. She cried out, startled and amazed. The doctor’s expert knowledge of anatomy came into play. (*JMB*, p.234)

Duncker’s decision to focus on James’s “expert knowledge of anatomy” (*JMB*, p.234) makes the scene more mechanical rather than sexual, emphasising James’s lack of interest in women.²⁷ She also reconfigures the notion of the doctor: James exploits his medical knowledge to aid his maleness, which puts an ironic twist on the medicalisation of gender.²⁸

It is through the performativity of medical discourse that James performs ‘authority’, which is read as masculine. This can be considered performative because it is a “*fabricatio[n]* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means” (Butler, 1999, p.173, emphasis in original), the corporeal signs in this case being James’s medical skills. The role of medicine in the novel is further

²⁷ The mode of sex could be read as undermining James’s male identity, as it highlights that James cannot fulfil the male duty of “the procreator” (Irigaray, 1985b, p.18). However, the mechanics of the scene could also be read as a type of performance of sexuality, and therefore traditional gender norms.

²⁸ The medicalisation of gender will be examined in greater depth in Chapter 2.

underlined in the American version of the novel, which was entitled *The Doctor*.²⁹

As I have already pointed out, the role of ‘doctor’ is traditionally male. Matt Olson argues that “when we hear the word ‘doctor’, we reflexively picture a male, because as we see on T.V., in books, on commercials, and our own experiences in the doctor’s office, doctors are men while nurses are women” (Olson, 2005).³⁰

At this point I think it would be useful to look at another text written by Duncker. In 1989, Duncker published the short story ‘James Miranda Barry 1795-1865’, her first attempt at writing Dr James Barry’s story. The most striking difference between the novel and the short story is the way James acknowledges aspects of his femaleness in the short story. This is most evident in the short story’s version of the relationship with Charlotte (reconfigured in the short story as an unnamed woman). Where the novel portrays James as an unwilling participant in Charlotte’s romantic plans, the short story reveals a James who wants to sleep with the woman, and is willing to admit, at least partially, his secret:

this was the woman, who, after I had pleased her so many times that the sheets were wet with her happiness, reached for the studs on my shirt. I held her at arm’s length, away from my body, smiling in the candlelight. I felt her tense and uncomprehending – then came the moment of exhilaration, recognition, joy ... ‘What are you?’ she said. ‘You know,’ I replied. And I covered her damp breasts in kisses, all of which she repaid in full (Duncker, 1997, p.41).

Here James is not denying his femaleness, although he is not explicitly admitting it either. Responding to the question, “what are you?” with “you know” (Duncker, 1997, p.41) positions the answer as something to be decided by other people.

²⁹‘The Doctor’ is also the title of a chapter in *Trumpet* which examines a (female) doctor’s examination of (and subsequent reaction to) Joss’s body after his death.

³⁰ Olson underlines his claims with the use of a riddle: “*A young boy and his father were in a car accident. Both were injured and rushed to the hospital ... the doctor assigned to the young boy stared at him in surprise. ‘I can’t operate on him!’ the doctor exclaimed to the staff, ‘That child is my son!’ ... [the riddle’s] ability to stump intelligent, educated people speaks volumes of the expectations people have for the sex of certain professionals*” (Olson, 2005).

Duncker's decision not to offer an explicit response to the issue of James's identity however, reflects her own difficulties in answering the question satisfactorily: "her [first] attempt to write a novel based on the character stalled after 100 pages when she couldn't resolve the problem of saying 'him' or 'her' in the narration" (Wroe, 2000).³¹ Duncker herself recalls the issue differently in a 2002 review of Rachel

Holmes's biography of James Barry, *Scanty Particulars: The Life of Dr James Barry*:

I agree with Holmes that, because Barry chose to live as a man and be known as a man, "his choice of identity should be respected". I chose to tell a version of his story in a split narrative: I/he, a private life of indeterminate sexual identity and a public life as "a gentleman, a man of honour and an Englishman". (Duncker, 2002b)

Duncker has reinterpreted her pronoun difficulties, choosing to "tell a version" (Duncker, 2002b) of her writing process that rewrites Duncker's problems as a commitment to portraying the 'truth' of James's life.

The complexity of James's character is such that it is worth considering

Judith Butler's questions:

[c]an gender complexity and dissonance be accounted for by the multiplication and convergence of a variety of culturally dissonant identifications? Or is all identification constructed through the exclusion of a sexuality that puts those identifications into question?" (Butler, 1999, p.84)

In the short story, although James presents himself as a man, he ultimately chooses not to exclude those elements of identity (i.e. the body) that undermine his manhood.

Although Butler suggests that successful identities require a degree of exclusion (which can be expanded to suggest that a masculine identity requires the exclusion of what are regarded as feminine traits) this is not the case with James in the short story.

After the scene with the unnamed woman, James takes a walk along the beach where he encounters a group of women: "[o]ne woman, her headscarf superb as an Egyptian crown, leans slightly towards me. 'Evenin', Doctor.' I bow to the group. I

³¹ This is an issue I will develop in Chapter 4's examination of genderless narrators and characters.

do not speak. 'Is all right, man. Sid down ... We know what y'are'" (Duncker, 1997, p.42). Once again, James's identity is reduced to the unspoken (you know/we know) where having knowledge is more important than revealing it. Diana Fuss argues that "[m]an and 'woman' are not stable or universal categories, nor do they have the explanatory power they are routinely invested with" (Fuss, 1990, p.3). The claim that the women know what James is, stands in opposition to calling him 'man', so the category 'man' is destabilised, calling into question exactly what a man is.

Nonetheless, James feels "contented" (Duncker, 1997, p.42). The women 'know' that James is a woman, even though they call him 'man': he is "no longer misunderstood" (Duncker, 1997, p.42) because of the women's double identification of him, tacitly acknowledging the open secret of his femaleness within the label of 'man'.

This tacit acknowledgment is less visible in the novel, where James utilises hyperbole to be read as a man. When Captain James Loughlin has his marriage proposal rejected by Charlotte, he unleashes his jealousy on the man he perceives as his rival: the "tiny, dwarf-like, red-haired" (*JMB*, p.206) James Miranda Barry. Loughlin challenges James to a duel, unaware of James's reputation as "a crack marksman [who has] already fought half a dozen duels and killed his man every time" (*JMB*, p.215). Although Loughlin is willing to forgo the duel, James is insistent that he will "discharge [his] obligations to the letter" (*JMB*, p.216). James's over-performance of masculinity relies on props, such as "a brace of engraved silver duelling pistols, custom-built by one of London's finest gunsmiths" (*JMB*, p.218), and he behaves with an air of theatricality, talking "as if he's repeating lines that have already been written" (*JMB*, p.216). In this performance, James enacts Judith Halberstam's definition of the drag king: "a female ... dress[ing] up in recognizably male costume and perform[ing] theatrically" (Halberstam, 1998, p.232). The strategy

of employing a hyperbolic performativity to create a sense of ‘normal’ masculinity is also used by Joss in *Trumpet*: “[h]e was into the shaving business. He got all elaborate about it ... He had to do this big masculine number on [Colman] because he didn’t have one. He wanted one and he didn’t have one, did he” (*Tr*, p.122).

Hyperbole is necessary because appropriate maleness requires being ‘more’ than female, because “[t]he ‘feminine’ is always described in terms of deficiency or atrophy, as the other side of the sex that alone holds a monopoly in value: the male sex. Hence the all too well-known ‘penis envy’” (Irigaray, 1985a, p.69). The exaggeration extends to James’s behaviour during the duel:

[Loughlin] staggered back, his throat and left ear on fire. [James] had neatly sliced off one epaulette and a dark curl of hair. The shot had been careful and deliberate. Had he wished, [James] could have forged a channel directly into [Loughlin’s] heart or laid his brains waste in the wilderness, as he had supposedly done to other men on other occasions. (*JMB*, p.219)³²

James’s legend is more fully realized by Duncker in the short story: “there was talk, of course. I really did fight a duel on her behalf, killed the man and was posted elsewhere as a result” (Duncker, 1997, p.41). In contrast, the novel suggests that James’ actions are embellished:

two stories did the rounds: one about a quarrel in which [James] had sliced off his opponent’s finger at the dinner table with a fruit knife ... [Isaac] often polished the fruit knives at the residence, and they were barely effective for slicing through the flesh of a ripe apricot. (*JMB*, p.187)

Throughout the novel, Duncker makes it increasingly difficult for James to be read as a man. This is not be a new phenomenon in the Dr James Barry story. June Rose’s version of the story is subtitled “[t]he remarkable life of Dr James Miranda Barry, the woman who served as an officer in the British Army from 1813 to 1859”, and

³² The use of ‘supposedly’ suggests that the open secret of the short story has made its way into the novel; other characters are not necessarily convinced of James’s masculinity regardless of how many stories he tells: he has already experienced “Cape Town gossip concerning his identity” (*JMB*, p.203).

throughout this text, Rose ironises the book's actual title, *The Perfect Gentleman*, by referring to James using female pronouns. Garber says of the title:

since [it is] called *The Perfect Gentleman* we might suspect some irony in the juxtaposition, but Rose – like Barry's other biographers – insists on solving the mystery by emphasising Barry's identification as a woman, suggesting a variety of motives for 'her masquerade'. (Garber, 1992, p.204)

In fact, Rose's stance on the issue of how to refer to James is made explicit in the opening comments of the prologue:

[i]t was 1865 – the year the 'first' woman doctor in Great Britain, Elizabeth Garrett Anderson, graduated. And yet another woman – James Barry – had already served with distinction as physician and surgeon for forty-six years in the British Army. (Rose, 1977, p.12)

Rose seems to have a great deal of difficulty in understanding James's motivation, commenting that "the ambiguity of her birthdate ... seems curious, almost as if she chose to be known only by her public persona" (Rose, 1977, p.17). This ignores the prime factor of James' life – his decision to live as a man – and that James *was* only known by his public persona. For Rose, James' story raises too many questions that cannot be comfortably answered: "[w]ho was she? How did she manage to conceal her sex from the Army for forty-six years? Why did she decide to take on a man's role and a man's work?" (Rose, 1977, p.16). The only way Rose can reconcile herself to James's decision is to look upon it as an "obvious, but incredible solution" (Rose, 1977, p.21) to the problem of how a woman could fulfil her potential, and she ends up turning it into a story of one woman's battle for liberation: "[w]hat makes Barry so exceptional is that she anticipated female emancipation by nearly a hundred years. And she did so not as a woman but from within the stiff conventions of an exclusively male world" (Rose, 1977, p.153).

Isobel Rae's earlier account of James Barry, *The Strange Story of Dr James Barry*, also suffers from the author's insistence upon using female pronouns to refer

to James (“Dr Barry, having gained her M.D., was not prepared to rest on her laurels” [Rae, 1958, p.15]). The most glaring statement in this text comes at the very end, in a discussion of the discovery of Barry’s ‘true’ sex after his death: “[p]oor Dr Barry! Her last wishes had been disregarded and the secret of her sex revealed” (Rae, 1958, p.117). Other than the exclamation point, which destroys any sense of true regret, Rae disregards Barry’s wishes by constantly referring to him as ‘her’ and ‘she’. Marjorie Garber remarks that, “[s]ee Barry is a woman!” is effectively the denouement of the historical biographies as well as the acknowledged fictionalizations of James Barry’s life” (Garber, 1992, p.204); this has undoubtedly influenced Duncker, leading to the way that the novel treats James. Duncker emphasises that James is ‘lacking’ as man by forcing him to be compared with Loughlin. They have a complex relationship which is underscored by their shared name. At the beginning and end sections of the book, James is referred to as ‘James’, but in the middle section, when Loughlin appears, James is referred to as ‘Barry’; Loughlin has usurped James’s position – the ‘real’ man has taken over.

Following their duel, and James’s willingness to spare Loughlin from serious injury or death, the two men strike up a friendship. Having heard rumours around the colony, Loughlin wonders if James could “be some kind of hermaphrodite, with a spectacular intelligence? He was neither man nor woman, but partook of both. He had a woman’s delicacy and grace, but the courage and skill of a man” (*JMB*, p.226). James’s ambiguous presentation confounds Loughlin’s understanding of gender as a binary that cannot be transgressed. Loughlin finds himself drawn to James: by the time they part he “had succumbed to [James’s] magic, and was, knowingly, a little in love with this man who had been tempted to kill him” (*JMB*, p.229). At a loss to comprehend both his feelings and James’s identity, Loughlin unconsciously

reconfigures James as female, so that when he considers James and Charlotte as a couple, he dismisses “the perversity of Charlotte’s passion” (*JMB*, p.229) and “a scene of passion that was, indeed, quite beyond the reach of his imagination” (*JMB*, p.229).

Mark Llewellyn argues that “[t]he ‘queerness’ of [*The Deadly Space Between*] and Duncker’s first novel *Hallucinating Foucault* (1996) is located firmly within heterosexuality and male homosexuality” (Llewellyn, 2007, p.92). I would argue that this is also in evidence in *James Miranda Barry*. James’s attraction to, and friendship with, Loughlin has homosexual undertones that are queered by the reader’s knowledge of James’s female body.³³ This is evidenced as Loughlin starts to “[acquire] a peculiar sense of intimacy with and admiration for the doctor” (*JMB*, p.238). Trapped within heterosexual thought patterns, Loughlin treats James like a girl, “sending [James] a huge cluster of wild orchids” (*JMB*, p.239). When a cholera outbreak hits the island and Loughlin is ordered to leave the colony, he is unsure of how to conduct himself. He admits that he “couldn’t go without saying goodbye ... leav[ing] unsaid the very things that were still simmering in the air between them” (*JMB*, p.264). The only acknowledgement that James gives of their relationship is to dispense “motherly advice” (*JMB*, p.264) through his medical expertise: “[t]ake care. Boil all your water. Don’t forget that. Don’t do silly things” (*JMB*, p.264). Although Loughlin’s apparent heterosexuality (and by extension, James’s sexuality and identity) is challenged, it remains only a challenge because this strand of the novel is then discarded until after James dies. The brief crack in James’s identity, wanting to be close to Loughlin while simultaneously keeping him at a distance, is a result of

³³ It could also be argued that James and Loughlin are enacting a queered heterosexuality.

not feeling in control of who he is; he cannot exist outside of his male identity without disappointing the people who made him, as we shall see.

A Son's Privilege

As a very young girl, James is marked as different. His mother, Mary Ann, is “very, very beautiful” (*JMB*, p.344), but James does not share her good looks.³⁴ Mary Ann’s attractiveness is rated far more highly than her other attributes: although “[she] was clever too. She read widely. She wasn’t shy and she had a sharp wit” (*JMB*, p.344), her success depends upon being attractive to her lover, Francisco: “Francisco always loved beautiful women. Would he have gone on being in love with her when she was no longer beautiful?” (*JMB*, p.344). Francisco initially hopes James will “look like [his] mother” (*JMB*, p.3), but later revises his opinion, declaring that “it was more important to be clever than to be beautiful” (*JMB*, p.19), which suggests his belief in the incompatibility of beauty and intelligence.

Francisco exposes James to an exciting male world and gives him access to education: “[i]t was Francisco who taught me to read and write. He taught me geography, history, philosophy, Latin, Greek, German and Spanish” (*JMB*, p.18). Francisco’s efforts do not extend to providing James with a female education; he excels in the lessons Francisco provides, but “never learned how to draw, press flowers into delicate arrangements or execute passable watercolours, and ... didn’t have a dancing master” (*JMB*, p.26). Over time, Francisco abandons “girl” (*JMB*, p.3) and starts calling James “soldier” (*JMB*, p.12), referencing the way James is starting to copy Francisco’s behaviour (Francisco is an army General), although it should be pointed out that at this stage, James shows no preference for either gender, so he is awaiting inscription from somebody.

³⁴ For consistency, I will continue to refer to James using male pronouns.

However, Francisco is not the only man that James learns from. James's uncle, James Barry (who can be read as the true patriarch in this novel), plays a vital role in the shaping the man that James becomes. James is "afraid of him" (*JMB*, p.14) but "tried to remember all his swear words [and] practised them in secret (*JMB*, p.14). What James first identifies as fear is in fact "fascination" (*JMB*, p.14). Specifically, James recalls that "[t]here was one particular thing about him which held me in thrall. He looked like me" (*JMB*, p.14), recalling Lacan's Mirror Stage: "[t]he child, at an age when he is for a time, however short, outdone by the chimpanzee in instrumental intelligence, can nevertheless already recognize as such his own image in a mirror" (Lacan, 2004, p.441). James Barry provides the unity of 'self' which James is looking for, but both Barry and Francisco represent a connection to the masculine world and the possibility of James escaping femininity.

As James delves deeper into education, Francisco and Mary Ann not only allow him to take a step back from the female world, but actively encourage his entry into the male world, and Mary Ann follows Francisco's lead, and starts referring to James using male pronouns ("[h]e can't have been more than three years old" [*JMB*, p.27]). In *Communicating Gender*, Suzanne Romaine writes that "[t]he names we give to things are not arbitrary" (Romaine, 1999, p.121) and this argument can be extended to pronouns. Mary Ann and Francisco refer to James as 'he' because he plays male games and acts in a male manner, and this in turn encourages James towards male behaviours: "names [or in this case pronouns] can wrap us up with sticky labels that give us a permanent address on the other side" (James Valentine, cited in Romaine, 1999, p.122). When the family spends the summer with the Erskines, Lady Erskine is surprised by the way Francisco and Mary Ann are letting James live, stating that he has "grown up into someone quite different from what I

had expected” (*JMB*, p.39). However, despite Francisco and Mary Ann’s willingness to let James grow up unconventionally in their own home, there are still certain rules that must be obeyed within society (particularly a society that knows James is biologically female): “[w]hen the ladies rose to take coffee in the drawing room Francisco pulled back my chair too. ‘Hop it soldier’” (*JMB*, p.42).

As they get used to James, the Erskines start calling him “chap” (*JMB*, p.52), although they are humouring James rather than accepting him as male. Their staff are not gossiping about James’s gender, having decided that he is male, but they are very interested in his parentage. When James meets Alice Jones, the kitchen girl, he is immediately asked whether he is “Mr Barry’s natural son” (*JMB*, p.35). James faces “embarrassment” (*JMB*, p.35) as he tries to explain that he is not actually a son at all, (the issue of being ‘natural’ being an ironic one in view of James’s gender transgressions) because this is the first time he has actually had to defend his gender. By saying “I’m not a son” (*JMB*, p.35), he is denying his manhood, but not actually accepting his womanhood. In this moment, James is “in limbo between the safe worlds of either sweet ribbons or breeches” (*JMB*, p.35). Alice tries to help James by removing the ambiguity, using a vernacular version of the doctor’s medical-speak to suggest that he can be easily defined: “[i]f you’re a boy you’ve got a prick and if you’re a girl you’ve got a hole” (*JMB*, p.35). But this definition flounders with James. Appearing masculine, but with female sex organs, James does not fit into Alice’s categories. Alice struggles to reconcile the two disparate elements: “[w]ell, you’re a sort of girl, I suppose. But definitely not like me. Perhaps you’re a girl dressed up as a boy? Or a boy that’s got enough girl for it not to matter too much either way” (*JMB*, p.35). James ends up tearful and “floundering in a pool of ambiguity” (*JMB*, p.35), and it takes Alice’s reassertion of a specific gender to help

him: “[d]on’t cry. Boys don’t cry” (*JMB*, p.35). Despite her realisation that James is not a ‘normal’ boy, Alice shows belief in James as a boy, going so far as to coach him in his male role: “[k]iss. No silly, on the mouth. Cook says boys kiss girls on the mouth, not the nose” (*JMB*, p.38). Although James knows he is not traditionally male, he is also aware that he is not a typical female, admitting to his femaleness only in terms of how it matches Alice’s: “[t]his was all I had in common with Alice Jones: forbidden knowledge and powerlessness” (*JMB*, p.50).

Before the decision is made to allow James to live as a man, he has to follow certain rules. Mary Ann realises that James is transgressing too many boundaries when he announces that he plans to attend the summer ball with Alice. It is acceptable for James to be ‘male’ within the confines of the family and their friends, but to act as such at a ball attended by neighbours and villagers is to force the issue of his gender ambiguity out into society. Mary Ann and James are both concerned with appearing gender appropriate, but they approach the issue of what is appropriate from different directions. For Mary Ann, being appropriate is being recognisably female: “[y]ou ought to wear a dress for the ball, dear. People do talk” (*JMB*, p.54). James feels that he needs to be male to make his attendance with Alice legitimate: “I can’t ask Alice if I don’t wear trousers ... We’d be two girls” (*JMB*, p.55). James’s apparent regard for some of the rules of society is revealed to be no more than a desire to promote his ambiguity: “I realised that my ambiguous clothes were what had made me special and interesting in the eyes of Alice Jones” (*JMB*, p.55). This entire scene, then, is not a battle to be male, but James “fighting for the right to remain interesting” (*JMB*, p.55). As a girl, James holds no curiosity value and even less power, so will not submit to wearing a dress. Louisa Erskine finally decides that James can wear “smart blue regimentals, dressed as a soldier. Costume was much

more acceptable than disguise” (*JMB*, p.55). Nan uses a similar outfit in *Tipping the Velvet*, when she tries to pass as a man: “my favourite costume – the guardsman’s uniform, with its brass buttons and its piping, its scarlet jacket and its neat little cap” (*TTV*, p.228). The military uniform is like the title ‘doctor’, causing people to “reflexively picture a male” (Olson, 2005). This also works in a sexual context: Butler argues that “[h]omosexuality ... is simultaneously produced and proscribed by military and governmental authorities, which *require* ‘homosexuality’ in order to maintain the cohesion of the straight male community” (Salih, 2002, p.110).

Garber believes that “the appeal of cross-dressing is clearly related to its status as a sign of the constructedness of gender” (Garber, 1992, p.9) but most people find James “charming” (*JMB*, p.58) in his costume because it is not taken seriously as a statement about or against gender: as Judith Butler has pointed out, “parody by itself is not subversive” (Butler, 1999, p.176). The guests view this girl-as-boy with amusement and a sense of wonder: “Mrs Emmersley, the vicar’s wife, told my mother that she had been quite convinced that I was in fact a mechanical doll, perhaps even a musical one, as I was so realistic” (*JMB*, p.58). Of course, realistic is not the same as real, as I have demonstrated in the case of *Tipping the Velvet*. What James is doing in this scene is not only transgressing the boundaries of male and female, but also real and not real. For the vicar’s wife, not knowing James’s gender causes her to doubt James’s realness. It is impossible for her to conceive of a situation where James would be allowed to develop as he has: “grotesque [like] a puppet dressed in carnival costume” (*JMB*, p.113).

Alice’s mother recognises the opportunity that James has been presented with. Referring to James as “Mrs Bulkeley’s famous tomboy daughter” (*JMB*, p.53), she suggests that his position affords him certain rights: “I hope your stepfather

intends to continue your own education ... Your mother must insist upon it. You're dressed up like his son, not his daughter. You can claim a son's privilege" (*JMB*, p.54). Mary Ann also realises this, telling James to "believe every word [Francisco] says and to be exactly like him" (*JMB*, p.23). Mary Ann desperately wants her child to have a more fulfilling life than is traditionally afforded to women, and tells him, "[y]ou must never marry! Never! I forbid it" (*JMB*, p.25). Gayle Rubin draws on Marxist analysis when she asks,

[w]hat is a domesticated woman? A female of the species. The one explanation is as good as the other. A woman is a woman. She only becomes a domestic, a wife, a chattel, a playboy bunny, a prostitute, or a human dictaphone in certain relations. Torn from relationships, she is no more the helpmate of man than gold in itself is money. (Rubin, 2004, p.770)

If women are only oppressed within relationships, James can be protected if he is removed from the sphere of marriage. As Francisco's lover, Mary Ann struggles to maintain her position in society: "she wasn't a happy woman, not in herself. She was never married to Francisco, you know. He could have cast her off at any time" (*JMB*, p.343). As an almost-wife, Mary Ann is forced to try to survive without the support of marriage, but does not want her daughter to be a wife. She recognises that the only true freedom is one that does not rely upon men at all, but rather depends upon the self for everything. However, this self must also be male, which is what sets Mary Ann's plan in motion. James's uncle tells him that "all societies are based on the seizure, slaughter and slavery of women, child. You ask your mother" (*JMB*, p.31).

Similarly, Irigaray remarks that

woman is traditionally a use-value for man, an exchange value among men; in other words, a commodity. As such, she remains the guardian of material substance, whose price will be established, in terms of the standard of their work and of their need/desire, by "subjects": workers, merchants, consumers. Women are marked phallicly by their fathers, husbands, procurers. And this branding determines their value in sexual commerce. (Irigaray, 1985a, p.31)

Francisco, James Barry, and David Erskine decide that they “can’t waste” (*JMB*, p.59) James by letting him grow up as a woman, and after tempting him with the offer of a university education, they reveal the cost of such an opportunity: “[t]here’s just one thing that you’ll have to remember from now on. You never will be a girl” (*JMB*, p.60). To make James’ transformation complete, he is given a new name and position in society: “[y]our uncle and I are giving you our names. And David’s volunteered to be your patron and guardian” (*JMB*, p.60). The patriarchal act of naming constructs a masculine ideology that has to be lived up to; that the men give James their names also allows them to claim James as a son and reaffirm their own masculinity:

[man’s] contribution to gestation – his function with regard to the origin of reproduction – is hence asserted as less than evident, as open to doubt. An indecision to be attenuated both by man’s ‘active’ role in intercourse and by the fact that he will mark the product of copulation with *his own name* ... [and] put his trademark upon the finished product. (Irigaray, 1985b, p.23)

This is particularly evident in the case of Francisco. There has always been gossip surrounding the identity of James’s father; Francisco questions Mary Ann, in the hope of finding out that James is his: “[s]he could have been mine ... can you swear to me that she is not my child?” (*JMB*, p.7). By letting Francisco give James his name, Mary Ann is staking an indirect claim on Francisco and helping her daughter to “claim a son’s privilege” (*JMB*, p.54).

This ‘privilege’ comes at a price: on his deathbed, Barry wants to take full credit, along with Francisco and Erskine, for the man that James becomes, arguing that “we made you what you are. David paid for you. Francisco brought you up. I gave you my name. Without us, you wouldn’t exist. We have some rights over you” (*JMB*, p.133). Barry’s statement can be interpreted as a veiled threat: the men have ownership of James through his secret; the success of his life as a man is dependent

on their on-going co-operation. Mary Ann intended for James to be free, but Barry believes that he and his co-conspirators own the man James has become. Romaine's assertion that "[n]othing is more personal or as closely related to our identity as our names" (Romaine, 1999, p.147) falls apart in relation to James: his name illustrates his lack of a personal identity. It is also a constant reminder that "[o]nly men have a right to the permanency of their names" (*JMB*, p.147); his real (female) name never appears in the text and is lost forever once he becomes 'James Miranda Barry'.³⁵

The men's version of events – their championing of their own roles – is actually a privileging of men, for it is revealed that it was Mary Ann's idea to let James live as a man. Francisco is only able to admit this after Mary Ann dies: "[s]he sent you to us on that damp midsummer night. She was the source of the plot, soldier. It was her idea ... What was she asking of us? To give you the chance to live something other than a woman's life" (*JMB*, p.277). As a woman, Mary Ann is unable to claim credit for her clever plan and has to wait until death to be acknowledged; a reminder of her lack of status in the world. She is not just kept quiet, but gagged: she is absent when the men tell James what is going to happen, either by design or force. It is the men – presented by Duncker almost like the three wise men, bringing enlightenment and hope – that appear to make the decision. Mary Ann is present only as an absence and silence, a 'good' – that is, silent – woman, like the Virgin Mary, in the memory of another 'woman' (James): although the men ignore Mary Ann's influence, James recalls how Francisco's uniform "stank of sweat, alcohol and my mother's musk" (*JMB*, p.59). Women are further gagged in the short story: although James (as a child) declares "I shall never marry" (Duncker, 1997, p.40), it is a man (a painter who appears to be a version of James Barry) who

³⁵ Mary Ann is also known throughout the text as "Mrs Bulkeley" (*JMB*, p.9), carrying the name of a dead husband and reaffirming her status as male property.

states “[t]hen, child, you must become a man. Learn to live in this world. Earn your own money. And stay out of debt” (Duncker, 1997, p.40).

James does not initially realise what it will mean to live as a man. It takes Alice’s greater comprehension of the world to “ma[k]e him understand the ways in which he had been set free” (*JMB*, p.91). Nevertheless, James remains trapped in a number of ways. Mary Ann realises that a consequence of her plan is that James is “alone now. He’ll always be alone. I’ve done that to him” (*JMB*, p.85). This, however, is an inversion of something that Duncker writes in her short story, “I have spent my life in exile, ferociously guarding my privacy” (Duncker, 1997, p.40). The secrecy of the novel implies that James has no choice but to keep certain facts hidden, but the “privacy” (Duncker, 1997, p.40) of the short story suggests a choice – although James is still deliberately withholding information about his private life, he has the option of revealing it. In the short story, James makes a choice to hide from the world (just as he made the decision not to marry), but he is stripped of power in the novel, affected by outside sources: the freedom that Alice promised does not come. Although James believes himself to be “the real thing” (*JMB*, p.135) (that is, a man), ties remain to his female identity: “I am like my mother, a woman of secrets” (*JMB*, p.141). This is in part because James can see parallels between his life and that of his mother.

Like James, Mary Ann “made the best of her life by not always telling the truth. She propagates an official version of events, in which some things will not, do not, cannot, happen” (*JMB*, p.143). The similarity between the two is further reinforced when James describes his mother as “a woman who is performing a part. Her acting is so perfect that she only abandons the stage when she is alone” (*JMB*, p.143). Mary Ann plays many parts, because

woman's 'body' has some 'usefulness,' represents some 'value' only on condition that her sex organs are hidden. Since they are something and nothing in consumer terms ... To sell herself, woman has to veil as best she can how price-less she is in the sexual economy (Irigaray, 1985b, p.115).

To sell herself, Mary Ann continually reinvents herself as “[a] rich man’s wife, a drunkard’s poor widow, another rich man’s mistress. Always a man’s possession” (*JMB*, p.276). This comment, which echoes Rubin (“a domestic, a wife, a chattel, a playboy bunny, a prostitute” [Rubin, 2004, p.770]) is the basis for Mary Ann’s plan: “I asked you to give my child the life I never had ... My child will have the freedom I never enjoyed” (*JMB*, p.276). Unfortunately, Mary Ann’s plan is not as successful as she had hoped. Following her death, James states that his mother “remains unforgiven” (*JMB*, p.297) because “[s]he taught me to believe in fair play, generosity, openness. Yet she gave me an identity within which I could never be anything other than an imposter [sic]” (*JMB*, p.297). He asks himself, “[w]ho is James Miranda Barry?” (*JMB*, p.297) and his answer betrays more than he intends: “No one but her mother knows” (*JMB*, p.297).

In his analysis of the role played by ideology within society and culture, Althusser says that “[i]deology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence” (Althusser, 2004, p.693). I am particularly interested in one statement he makes in regard to this:

[t]hese ‘world outlooks’ are largely imaginary, i.e. do not ‘correspond to reality.’ However, while admitting that they do not correspond to reality, i.e. that they constitute an illusion, we admit that they do make allusion to reality, and that they need only be ‘interpreted’ to discover the reality of the world behind their imaginary representation of that world. (Althusser, 2004, p.693)

Even though James admits that his ‘outlook’ is largely imaginary, the result of creating an identity as a man, this identity is necessary to show that manhood is a requirement of anybody who wishes to be free. The paradox in this case is that James’s public freedom (to travel the world, study medicine, etc.) comes at the cost

of his personal freedom. However, his recognition that his manhood is an Althusserian construction does not give him the power to step out of his identity: “my life can never be disentangled” (*JMB*, p.297).

A Life in Disguise

Towards the end of his life, James starts to question whether he wants to be a woman and if it would even be possible. Negotiating his way through confusion, he turns to Alice Jones to give him the sense of perspective he so badly needs. James’s bond with Alice remains because she is the “one person in the world who remembers me when I was a child” (*JMB*, p.281). Alice represents a link to James’ childhood – his girlhood – that is inaccessible by any other means. James has lived as man for a long time and outlived everybody who knew the secret, so he is no longer under threat of discovery, but it is difficult for him to throw off his manhood because it has become so much of who he ‘is’: “[t]he mask has become the face” (*JMB*, p.281). When James tells Alice that he is going to reveal his secret, Alice is aghast: “[a]re you out of your senses?...They’d probably say you couldn’t possibly have been a real doctor either – if you’d been a woman all along” (*JMB*, p.357). The argument between Alice and James focuses on the notion of a ‘real’ or ‘true’ identity. In *Bodies that Matter*, Butler asks,

[w]hat are we to make of constructions without which we would not be able to think, to live, to make sense at all, those which have acquired for us a kind of necessity? Are certain constructions of the body constitutive in this sense: that we could not operate without them, that without them there would be no ‘I,’ no ‘we’? (Butler, 1993, p.xi)

Alice cannot accept that there is any ‘I’ behind ‘James Miranda Barry’: “[y]our real identity? What is your real identity? You’re James Miranda Barry, near relative to David Steuart Erskine, eleventh Earl of Buchan ... what is genuine? This genuine inner soul you say you want to discover? Nothing’s absolutely genuine!” (*JMB*,

p.358). In her rage, Alice wonders how James can possibly exist if he admits the truth: “[w]hat do you want to do? Go around saying you’re a woman?” (*JMB*, p.358). Alice’s anger masks her fear of what will happen to James if he confesses: “[d]o you think that they’ll try to cure you or make you drawings of your anatomy? Or sell you to a circus?” (*JMB*, p.358).

Asking why James “ha[s] doubts at this stage” (*JMB*, p.359), Alice argues that “you can’t suddenly become a woman. It takes years of practice” (*JMB*, p.368). Butler argues that “performativity must be understood not as a singular or deliberate ‘act,’ but, rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names” (Butler, 1993, p.2). Although Francisco, Barry and Erskine believed that they made James a man simply by saying “from now on you’re going to be a boy. And then a man” (*JMB*, p.160), the process is far more complex. It takes the cumulative effect of ‘reiterative practices’ – constantly acting *like* a man and speaking *like* a man – in order for James to be accepted as a man. Alice argues that it will be no easier for James to be a woman just because he has the right anatomy; she believes that one has to learn how to be something, that all identities are learned. This supports Butler’s belief that “[i]f the inner truth of gender is a fabrication and if a true gender is a fantasy instituted and inscribed on the surface of bodies, then it seem that genders can be neither true nor false” (Butler, 1999, p.174). Alice also claims that one has to depend on others for one’s identity: “[y]ou are who the world says you are” (*JMB*, p.359). Of course, the world states that James is a man because he has spent so much time presenting himself as a man.

One reason that Alice is so against James revealing he is female is because it will affect their relationship: “[r]eceived almost everywhere together” (*JMB*, p.358) as a couple, Alice is afraid that she will be labelled as “some sort of Sapphist” (*JMB*,

p.358). If James is a man, he and Alice can fit into the heterosexual matrix, but if James is a woman, then his and Alice's reputations will be damaged, and they will be denied respectability. This dilemma is also faced by Millie and Joss as will be seen in

Trumpet:

[o]ne of the newspaper articles had the headline *Living a lie*. They found people who claimed to be Joss's friends who said things like, 'He fooled us completely.' But it didn't feel like that. I didn't feel like I was living a lie...my life is a fiction now, an open book. I am trapped inside the pages of it. (*Tr*, p.154)

Similarly, this theme also occurs in *Tipping the Velvet* when Kitty sacrifices her relationship with Nan because she "cannot bear also to be – *laughed at*; or hated; or scorned" (*TTV*, p.171). James tries to explain his turmoil, and expresses his fear that he is as trapped as any woman: "I've spent my life in disguise. I don't know who else I could have been" (*JMB*, p.359). Alice actually helps James to accept his masculine identity by making him acknowledge the success of what he has done: "the most subtle performances are never detected, and cannot therefore be admired" (*JMB*, p.361).

Unfortunately for James, his subtle performance is detected after he dies, in what Garber refers to in *Vested Interests* as "post mortem unmasking" (Garber, 1992, p.47); that is, the discovery after death that somebody's biological sex does not accord with their public gender performance. Her argument could be applied to both *James Miranda Barry* and *Trumpet*. Garber notes that there were "dozens, probably hundreds, of such stories of lifelong cross-dressers whose 'true' gender identities were disclosed only after death" (Garber, 1992, p.67). The use of quotations marks indicates Garber's unhappiness with the way truth is understood. She takes issue not just with the way such cases are explained, but that they require explanation at all: "whatever gender ... is assigned after the fact, the 'explanation' of his (or her)

transvestism is *normalized*, by interpreting it in the register of socio-economic necessity” (Garber, 1992, p.69). Garber is showing that society is reluctant to believe that anybody would cross-dress unless they had specific and important reasons for doing so.

In this context, James’s death causes a flurry of reactions as people try to understand what James really was. Each different theory can be explained via the circumstances in which James Miranda Barry has been received by various factions of society. Following the death, George Graham, the Registrar-General, writes a letter to McKinnon, the man who completed James’ death certificate: “I take the liberty of asking you whether what I have heard is true, and whether you yourself ascertained that he was a woman” (*JMB*, p.363). This is based on the real-life letter that Graham wrote to McKinnon, but the linguistic impossibility of the statement means that in order to categorise James, Graham enacts Butler’s comment that “it will be possible to have a designated ‘female’ body and *not* to display traits generally considered feminine” (Salih, 2002, p.46). Graham’s interest is not a matter of science, but a wish to confirm (or deny) some salacious gossip: “[p]erhaps you may decline answering these questions: but I ask them not for publication but for my own information” (*JMB*, p.363). In answer, McKinnon replies that he “never had any suspicion that Dr Barry was a female” (*JMB*, p.364). As somebody who was “intimately acquainted” (*JMB*, p.364) with James, McKinnon tries to explain away the gossip by suggesting that he was most probably “an imperfectly developed man ... a hermaphrodite” (*JMB*, p.364).³⁶ By defining James in these terms, McKinnon is reducing James to a ‘condition’ with the intent to strip James of any blame for his actions.

³⁶ This verdict illustrates that the decisions that doctors reach in ambiguous cases are based on what they want the patient to be, rather than what the medical evidence says. This will be elaborated on during the *Middlesex* discussion in Chapter 2.

Edward Bradford, the Deputy Inspector of Hospitals, describes the rumours as “too absurd to require serious refutation” (*JMB*, p.365), and takes refuge in McKinnon’s science, asserting that

[t]here could not have been any doubt, among people who knew him, on the subject of his physical constitution which was really that he was a male in whom the development of the organs of sex had been arrested from the sixth month of pregnancy (*JMB*, p.365).

Robert Jobson, James’ medical school friend, believes that the rumours are part of a vicious smear campaign aimed at discrediting a remarkable man:

[h]is diminutive stature and the fine hands which were so advantageous to his work as a surgeon, combined with the above-mentioned professional jealousy of many years’ standing, have led to the insulting slanders published in the press. (*JMB*, p.365)

Perhaps the most unexpected defence of James comes from his namesake, James Loughlin. Loughlin, regarding reports with “mounting amazement” (*JMB*, p.366), relies not on science, but the idea that gentlemanly behaviour is only possible from a man. Loughlin recalls how “[a]n unfortunate misunderstanding led us to confront one another with loaded weapons ... the doctor was an expert marksman, and had his magnanimous generosity not spared my life I had been a dead man” (*JMB*, p.366). Loughlin reminds the public that James was a brilliant shot (a skill associated with men) and also subtly reminds people of what they were fighting over – a woman. Loughlin further reaffirms James’ masculinity by saying that with regard to the duel, “[n]o woman would be capable of such a deed” (*JMB*, p.366). Loughlin’s final act towards James is to protect his identity – to spare James as James spared him. However, Loughlin’s amazement does not tally with his earlier suspicions of James’s identity. I would suggest that Loughlin defends James because of his love for him: to help his friend maintain a lie.

Alice too rewrites James's life for her own benefits. In Alice's version of events, she is "the leading lady" (*JMB*, p.369) and describes their relationship as one in which "she had loved in vain" (*JMB*, p.370). Speaking to a (female) journalist, she protects her own image while destroying James's. In Duncker's version of James's story, it is Alice who "invented the stretch marks" (*JMB*, p.370), describing James's body as "not only ... the perfect body of a woman ... but a woman who had borne a child. Of this I am quite certain" (*JMB*, p.370). James becomes more of a fiction in death than he was in life, with people clamouring to share their own versions of events. The version that closes the novel is Alice's: "the story of the actress and the doctor, the obsession that stretched across decades, continents, the love that never died" (*JMB*, p.371). A life spent struggling with gender is transformed into a love affair and a scandal, and thus brought firmly back into the heteronormative realm of the Romance tale.

James Miranda Barry is given the chance to live as a man, but he struggles to be accepted as such in society because of his unconvincing appearance. Unable to rely on his looks, James depends on hyperbole, overstating his male behaviour to pass as a 'normal' man. According to Butler, "[g]enders can be neither true nor false, neither real nor apparent, neither original nor derived. As credible bearers of those attributes, however, genders can also be rendered thoroughly and radically *incredible*" (Butler, 1999, p.180, emphasis in original). James reaches the conclusion that he has no 'true' gender, and that he can be what he wants to be, but to succeed as a credible man, James realises that he must, ironically, become incredible. In contrast to James, Joss in *Trumpet* easily succeeds as a credible man, but like James, it is after his death that his identity begins to unravel, as people cannot reconcile his female body with his identity as a man.

Trumpet

It is not surprising that Jackie Kay would write a book such as *Trumpet* because she has long been interested in issues of identity: “[w]hen she was 12, she wrote the 80-page *One Person, Two Names* in a school jotter, illustrated by a pal, about a girl living in the States who was black but pretended to be white” (Brooks, 2002). In fact, this early attempt at writing can be seen as the precursor of *Trumpet*, which could be described as a story about a girl living in England who was female but pretended to be a man. Of course, the crucial question is whether Joss ‘pretended’ at all. I find myself in agreement with Butler when she says she “opposed those regimes of truth that stipulated that certain kinds of gendered expressions were found to be false or derivative, and others, true and original” (Butler, 1999, p.viii). Rather than discuss Joss (and James) in terms of ‘real’ and ‘false’ gender then, I think it is perhaps more accurate to think in terms of biological sex and chosen gender, although in this context Butler argues that there are restrictions in choosing a gender (insofar as anyone ‘chooses’ their gender), because “one is *already* one’s gender and one’s choice of ‘gender style’ is limited from the start” (Salih, 2002, p.46, emphasis in original). This, in turn, is because “there is no pre-existing performer” (Salih, 2002, p.45) – one is already inextricably linked with one’s gender. Butler’s central question can thus be reduced as follows: “[i]f gender is a process or a ‘becoming’ rather than an ontological state of being that one simply ‘is’, then what determines what we become, as well as the *way* in which we become it?” (Salih, 2002, p.46).

A large part of Joss’s identity as a man is dependent on his public presentation as a heterosexual, married man; his identity extends beyond his own performance to include his wife, Millie, so that they represent “‘the’ couple, man/woman” (Cixous, 1986, p.64). Within this coupling, both Joss and Millie find

their identity strengthened by the doubling of 'normality' and 'heterosexuality' (two categories which are not treated as separate by other characters in the novel). Before they establish their roles, discord stems from Joss and Millie assuming sexual roles that could be considered inappropriate for their gender roles. When they first begin their relationship, Joss avoids having sex with Millie in order to preserve his secret. Baffled by his apparent disinterest in sex, Millie tries to search for a rational explanation, but ends up facing only two possibilities: "[e]ither Joss is terribly proper and old-fashioned or there is something wrong" (*Tr*, p.15). In contrast to Joss's apparent indifference ("[h]e never tries to touch me ... Three months of kisses on my left cheek" [*Tr*, p.15]), Millie is "madly in love with Joss and terribly frustrated" (*Tr*, p.15). Kay's decision to place this early in the text serves to place Millie in the position of defending her relationship with Joss from the very beginning.

The stabilising of the relationship coincides with the revelation of Joss's secret. As they walk home from a jazz club, Millie is struck by the hope that "[t]onight is *the night*" (*Tr*, p.18). And she is right, it *is* the night that Joss finally takes control of the situation, starting with a passionate kiss:

[h]e goes to kiss me on the cheek, but changes his mind and kisses me full on the mouth. He grabs me up in his arms, sweeping my face towards his. He pulls me closer against him till my feet almost rise from the ground. His breathing is fast, excited. (*Tr*, p.18)

Millie seems detached from the situation, or at least not an active part of the kiss: "I open my eyes and stare at him whilst he is kissing me" (*Tr*, p.19), and this could again be read as subverting the male gaze, as Millie is projecting her fantasy of maleness onto the female figure of Joss. Joss is very much in control until they get to Millie's bedroom, at which point he fails to meet her expectations: "Joss doesn't throw me on my bed like I am expecting" (*Tr*, p.19). Instead, he chooses this moment to reveal that he is biologically female.

Joss undresses in order to reveal to Millie that he was born female, but this takes place in a scene of confusion. Millie's first reaction is that Joss is about to seduce her, and she is "excited watching this man undress for [her]" (*Tr*, p.21)), but this idea is quickly dismissed when Millie sees the "bandages wrapped round and round his chest" (*Tr*, p.21). As Joss "keeps unwrapping endless rolls of bandages" (*Tr*, p.21), Millie gets her first look at his naked body: "I am still holding out my hands when the first of his breasts reveals itself to me. Small, firm" (*Tr*, p.21). Following this revelatory moment, there is a break in the text. By leaving the scene here, the suggestion is that physical evidence can be used to determine sex *and* gender, and that the terms 'sex' and 'gender' are interchangeable because they seem to match, even though Kay uses the rest of the text to explore the theme of gender being unconnected to biological sex. In fact, by giving the reader the opportunity to confront what Joss's body is saying, Kay is undermining Millie's subsequent argument that it was impossible to think of Joss as female.

Although Joss relies on physical cues such as clothes to appear male, the ultimate physical cue – his body – destabilises Joss's identity as a man. The juxtaposition of seduction and revelation is an important one, because it is at the moment when Joss is considered most male (when he is about to commit a sexual act, through which he will prove his virility) that he challenges expectations by confessing his biological sex. It is also highly significant that Joss expresses his sex through a display of what he has (breasts) rather than what he lacks (a penis). By not defining his sex on the basis of what is lacking, Joss is defiantly claiming that he is *not* lacking, and that his body does not determine the extent of his maleness. This scene can also be read as a subversion of Mulvey's concept of the male gaze ("[t]he determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure" [Mulvey, 1989,

p.19]). Millie is placed in the role of active/male, which means that Joss inhabits the role of passive/female. It could be argued that Joss has deliberately constructed this situation in order to create maximum visual impact, so in this sense, Joss demands to be looked at. The break in the text following his revelation illustrates the destabilising effect of his actions: not even the narrative is safe, as words fail. Jackie Kay exercises careful restraint in her writing, refusing to let Millie discuss Joss's body. The only people that are allowed to describe his body are people who did not know him in life – the doctor and funeral director. Whilst Millie discusses Joss's behaviour and ignores his body, they focus on his body and ignore (or are ignorant of) his behaviour.

Millie says that Joss “was always more comfortable once he was dressed. More secure somehow” (*Tr*, p.238). By putting on male clothes, Joss is signalling his entry into a male world, with his suit acting as a marker of his preferred gender and the beginning of his performance. Although Romaine argues that “unisex fashions have made gender boundaries increasingly less rigid” (Romaine, 1999, p.1), I would argue that this is only true for women: “the traffic in cross-gender styles was mostly one way ... most men have steered clear, even abandoning formerly masculine styles once they have been adopted by women” (Steele, 1994, p.552). Therefore, I would suggest that it is not male clothing on its own that helps Joss become a man, since it is considered acceptable (and indeed ‘normal’) for women to wear ‘male’ clothing. Rather, the clothes represent the first step in Joss's expression of his sense of self as a man, and he and Millie develop a ritual to mark the crossing of gender: “[h]e'd say, ‘How do I look?’ And I'd say, ‘Perfect. You look perfect’” (*Tr*, p.238). Although Joss's clothes are the primary marker of his gender insofar as the general public is concerned, his clothes also add to his sense of otherness because “[h]e'd hardly take

any of his clothes off on a baking hot day. He wouldn't take the risk. So I'd laze around in my variety of swimming costumes ... and Joss would be wrapped up in his layers" (*Tr*, p.99). The one thing that Joss uses to draw attention *away* from himself actually draws attention *to* himself.

During the course of the novel, it becomes clear that Joss's gender is not the only thing that is under threat: Millie's heterosexuality is dependent upon Joss's categorisation as male. Millie and Joss get married not only to publicly perform their heterosexuality, but to affirm Joss's maleness. At the wedding, Millie uses her wedding dress to make an important point, choosing one that is "pale green" (*Tr*, p.26), rather than the traditional white. This is a choice designed to reflect the fact that she is not a virgin, that Joss is her lover, and that they are in a heterosexual (and legitimate) relationship. Joss is "proud of himself" (*Tr*, p.26) because when Millie renounces her chaste status, Joss's maleness is confirmed. However, despite their apparent defiance, Millie is aware that having such a public celebration of their love risks their secret, and her thoughts are dominated by the fear that it will be exposed:

[a]t the Registrar's Office, I kept thinking of that bit in *Jane Eyre* where the minister asks if anyone knows of any reason why Mr Rochester and Jane should not marry and the man from the Caribbean suddenly stands up and says, Yes. (*Tr*, p.26)

Jane's wedding to Mr Rochester (which is famously disrupted by the news that Mr Rochester is already married to Bertha Mason) provides an intriguing parallel to Millie and Joss's situation. Bertha is the "daughter of Jonas Mason, merchant, and of Antoinetta his wife, a Creole" (Brontë, 1996, p.325). The use of the word Creole is a deliberate one, emphasising a confused genetic heritage: "[t]he term [Creole] could be applied to a native West Indian of any race ... it is probable that [Charlotte Brontë] means something specific by the expression: that Bertha's mother is of racially mixed origins" (Michael Mason, 1996, p.522). Bertha's English (and by

implication white) father and racially mixed or West Indian mother are reconfigured in Joss's parents: a (white) Scottish mother and a father who was "a black man [from] the West Indies" (*Tr*, p.250). In this context, Joss is relegated from the privileged position of husband to that of Bertha, a "mad-woman" (Brontë, 1996, p.339). Joss's decision to live as a man – which could be crudely termed his 'madness' – could be seen as a result of colour. It is the very fact that Joss is a racial 'other' *and* a gendered 'other' that makes the wedding dangerous.

Although the wedding is a success, Millie is afraid of Joss's past, feeling "unsettled [by] the idea that Joss had not always been Joss, that Joss Moody had once been Josephine Moore" (*Tr*, p.93). Alice Walker argues that "Millie is the only character in the novel who knew Joss as a cross-dresser throughout his life" (Walker, 2007, p.39), but it is actually the case that Millie tries to divorce Joss's actions from his identity. Millie's subsequent realisation that she *cannot* overlook the evidence of her husband's past life threatens to destabilise their relationship and future together, especially when Joss mentions his life as a girl: "[m]y mother called me Josephine after her sister" (*Tr*, p.93). By doing this, he reminds Millie of the constructed element of his persona, and, thus, their marriage, and her response is to insist that Joss is real while simultaneously denying the validity of Josephine by claiming that, "no matter how hard I try, I can't see him as anything other than him, my Joss, my husband" (*Tr*, p.35). The relationship that Millie hides behind throughout the novel is not, as Walker argues, "founded on truth" (Walker, 2007, p.39), but instead based on a series of denials – a rejection of truth.

Like A Man

Millie refuses to consider Joss's past until she wants a child and finds that it cannot be ignored. Judith Butler asks, "[i]s it not purely cultural convention ... that takes

genitalia to be the definitive ‘sign’ of sex?” (Butler, 1999, p.140). In her critique of Dr David Page’s study of the master gene, she says that it is “interesting to note that Page designates the external genitalia, those anatomical parts essential to the symbolization of reproductive sexuality, as the unambiguous and *a priori* determinants of sex assignment” (Butler, 1999, 140). She disagrees with this notion, and elaborates on her reasons why when she turns her attention to Simone de Beauvoir:

[In *The Second Sex*] Beauvoir was willing to affirm that one is born with a sex, as a sex, sexed, and that being sexed and being human are coexistent and simultaneous; sex is an analytic attribute of the human; there is no human who is not sexed; sex qualifies the human as a necessary attribute ... Beauvoir’s theory implied seemingly radical consequences, ones that she herself did not entertain. For instance, if sex and gender are radically distinct, then it does not follow that to be a given sex is to become a given gender; in other words, ‘woman’ need not be the cultural construction of the female body, and ‘man’ need not interpret male bodies. (Butler, 1999, p.142)

Butler is here denying the validity of sex as a determiner of gender. However, returning to *Trumpet*, Joss’s (masculine) gender is overshadowed by his sex (female), because his sex makes him unable to father a child. Contrasting with Butler’s ideas, this part of the novel suggests that sex and gender are not ‘radically distinct’ because once Joss’s sex is brought to the forefront, his gender is placed under scrutiny and its construction is questioned: “[w]hy can’t he give me a child? He can do everything else. Walk like a man, talk like a man, dress like a man, blow his horn like a man. Why can’t he get me pregnant” (*Tr*, p.37). The repetition of ‘like a man’ makes Millie’s claim that she “can’t see him as anything other than him” (*Tr*, p.35) seem hollow and unconvincing.

Having a baby is particularly important to Millie because her role as a woman is being undermined as a result of her proximity to Joss. Her friends expect her life to follow a specific course: “[m]y old autograph book from school haunts me. Margaret

Baxter writing that daft ditty: ‘First comes love, then comes marriage, then comes Millie pushing a baby carriage’” (*Tr*, p.37). Millie finds herself being “jealous of mothers” (*Tr*, p.37), and the language of deceit surrounds both of them: Millie describes the way Joss looks at her, “[l]ike I’m playing dirty” (*Tr*, p.38), then “tell[s] him he tricked me” (*Tr*, p.38). The terms of this accusation resonate loudly with a moment in Jackie Kay’s poem, ‘Fiction’, published in 1998, the same year as *Trumpet*. Describing a writer’s attempts to write, it focuses on one character:

She was a martyr – snivelling, Scottish ...
Fed-up, grief-struck, going on and on and on
And on: how she was the mug, the sucker,
Taken-for-granted, how I could see *her* coming. (Kay, 1998, p.37)

As well as feeling like a “mug”, Millie is both “Scottish” and “grief-struck” (Kay, 1998, p.37), and the connection is even more apparent when Kay later writes in the poem, “[a]s for that man of hers, well he wasn’t a man at all” (Kay, 1998, p.37).

Despite Jackie Kay’s comment that she does not know what Joss is (Nicol, 1998), the poem suggests that she has given the matter a great deal of thought and attempted to show two different sides of the issue in two different forms of writing: although she appears to offer a definitive answer in ‘Fiction’, *Trumpet* offers a more nuanced look at the issue and suggests that there are no easy answers to the gender question.

As Joss and Millie continue to argue, Joss admits his awareness of what he used to be, and his shortcomings as a man:

[i]f he could, he tells me, he would love to get me pregnant. If he could he would love to watch a baby grow inside me. If he could, he’d love to get into bed at night and stroke my big belly and listen to our baby’s heartbeat. If he could, he’d be a good daddy. (*Tr*, p.38)

The repetition of “if he could” illustrates exactly how much Joss cannot give Millie. But as Joss continues to express his pain, he shifts the blame onto Millie, because in accepting him as a man she has gone too far and demanded too much: “[m]iracles are

not possible” (*Tr*, p.38). Joss feels as though what Millie wants is “not fair” (*Tr*, p.38) because she “never said [he] was expected to perform a fucking miracle” (*Tr*, p.38). Although Butler suggests that “the breakdown of gender binaries ... must be held to be definitionally impossible” (Butler, 1999, p.viii), Joss makes the ‘unthinkable’ real by admitting that he is not a ‘true’ man, but also defiantly suggesting that he is male enough, and that Millie wants too much.

Multiple Identities

Joss and Millie are able to settle their differences by adopting a son, Colman, and this gives Joss an opportunity to prove himself as a father-figure. Colman’s journey into adulthood (and manhood) parallels Joss’s efforts to be accepted as a man. Colman struggles with his basic identity because of his adopted status. He tries to address his feelings of rootlessness by attempting to share Joss’s past, believing that he and his adoptive father can connect through their collective experiences as black men.

Taking comfort in Joss’s belief that they are “related the way it mattered” (*Tr*, p.58), Colman still feels the need to belong somewhere and confesses that “[w]hat I wanted when I was a kid was to look like my father” (*Tr*, p.45). It is possible to see how conflicted Colman is when he says “I am the same kind of colour as my father. We even look alike. Pure fluke. Or maybe I copied his smile so much I look like his carbon copy” (*Tr*, p.50). Butler describes the “relation between the ‘imitation’ and the ‘original’” (Butler, 1999, p.175) as complicated because of its dependence on “[t]he notion of an original or primary gender identity” (Butler, 1999, p.174). Basing her comments on Frederic Jameson’s understanding of imitation as pastiche (“without that still latent feeling that there exists something *normal* compared to which what is being imitated is rather comic” [cited in Butler, 1999, p.176]), Butler suggests that

[t]he loss of the sense of ‘the normal’ however, can be its own occasion for laughter, especially when ‘the normal,’ ‘the original’ is revealed to be a copy, and an inevitably failed one, an ideal that no one *can* embody. In this sense, laughter emerges in the realization that all along the original was derived. (Butler, 1999, p.176)

In the case of *Trumpet*, Colman is the ‘imitation’ of Joss, but Joss (the ‘original’) is also an ‘imitation’ insofar as he is playing the role of man. However, when Colman realises that Joss’s identity means he’s lost his own ‘sense of the normal’, the situation is not an ‘occasion for laughter’, but rather a sobering experience that forces Colman to examine his identity. The adult Colman tries to come to terms with the idea that he based his sense of manhood on the manhood projected by Joss, and although he admits his respect for Joss (“I pretended I didn’t give a flying fuck what my father thought of me. But I did. I suppose I wanted him to be proud of me as a man, as a black man. I fucking worshipped him” [*Tr*, p.44]), he feels that because of what Joss has done, every relationship needs to be re-evaluated: “I don’t know my father, my mother or myself. I don’t know any of us anymore. He has made us all unreal” (*Tr*, p.60).

According to Irene Rose, “[t]he novel’s greatest destabilization of fixed identities is achieved through the constant name changes undergone by all but a few of the characters ... An imposed version of bodily integrity is obviously what Joss Moody seeks to avoid when he relinquishes the name Josephine Moore and the perceived female gender position that goes along with it in order to live as the proprioceptive man he feels he is” (Rose, 2003, p.144). Another example of this destabilization can be found in Colman’s difficulty in defining himself, which takes form in the problems surrounding his name. He struggles to reconcile Colman Moody with his pre-adoption identity of William Dunsmore:

[i]f I’d stayed William Dunsmore all my life I’d have been a completely different man. Definitely. I mean a William Dunsmore’s smile would have

been different from a Colman Moody's smile. All my facial expressions would have been different. I bet even my walk would have been heavier if I'd been William Dunsmore. (*Tr*, p.56)

This is very similar to the way Jackie Kay describes her own

obsession with identity [that] comes from being adopted. 'You always ask "Would I have been like this, if I had been brought up with my original parents?" You ask that of yourself, and then you ask that of people whom you see in different situations. What makes them who they are?' (Brooks, 2002)

Furthermore, Kay reiterates these statements in her poem 'Somebody Else', from the *Off Colour* collection:

If I was not myself, I would be somebody else.
But actually I am somebody else.
I have been somebody else all my life.

It's no laughing matter going about the place
all the time being somebody else:
people mistake you; you mistake yourself. (Kay, 1998, p.27)

What Jackie Kay describes at this moment is the difficulty of having more than one identity, each at odds with the other, and this is something that can be applied to both Colman and Joss. She explores the tension between two identities, especially when the identity that brings the most comfort is not the identity a person was born with. Saying that "[i]t's no laughing matter" (Kay, 1998, p.27), Kay is making the point that living like this is extremely difficult because "you mistake yourself" (Kay, 1998, p.27) – that is, you lose sight of the person you once were and no longer know who you are. Indeed, one of Colman's coping strategies evokes the poem: "[h]e needs to bury himself in sleep, to go down and down until he is no longer conscious of himself, until he could be *somebody else* dreaming of himself" (*Tr*, p.242, my emphasis). When Colman declares towards the end of the novel that "I am Colman Moody, the son of Joss Moody, the famous trumpet player. He'll always be daddy to me" (*Tr*, p.259), Kay is making use of a statement made by Billy Tipton's adopted son: "[h]e'll always be Dad to me" (cited in Garber, 1992, p.67). Colman realises

that he can still define himself through Joss, because as long as Joss is still ‘daddy’, then Colman is still his son. But Colman achieves this by conflating Joss’s femaleness with ‘Dad’s’ maleness. In a way, Colman is choosing to ignore his father’s femaleness: “I’m not stopping now just because there’s been a turn-up for the books” (*Tr*, p.259), and his inability to cope with this echoes Butler’s notion of “gender breakdown” being “too frightening” to be think about (Butler, 1999, p.viii).

The idea of one identity depending on another for validation is also visible with Joss and Millie. They try to make Joss seem as ‘real’ as possible by concentrating on their respective gender roles. When one of Millie’s friends meets Joss, she says “I’d watch him. The handsome ones have roving eyes” (*Tr*, p.31). The reading of Joss as a potentially unfaithful man supports Joss’s role as man by suggesting that he is subject to strong (possibly uncontrollable and therefore male) sexual impulses. At the same time, Millie’s knowledge of Joss’s secret gives her a sense of security that would not be possible if Joss were a ‘normal’ man: “[f]or a split second, I feel jealous, imagining what it would be like if Joss were ever unfaithful to me. Then I remember and feel safe. We have our love and we have our secret” (*Tr*, p.29). Millie aids Joss by submitting to the role of the submissive and dutiful wife, strengthening Joss’s claimed position as a husband:

I managed to love my husband from the moment I clapped eyes on him till the moment he died. I managed to desire him all of our married life. I managed to respect and love his music. I managed to always like the way he ate his food. I managed to be faithful, to never be interested in another man. I managed to be loyal, to keep our private life private where it belonged. To not tell a single soul including my own son about our private life. I managed all that. (*Tr*, p.206)

The subconscious message is that for Millie to have achieved all this, Joss must have been worth loving; must have been a worthy husband.

It is essential that Millie and Joss obey traditional behaviour in order to maintain the illusion of a traditional heterosexual relationship because assigning 'male' and 'female' roles often depends on sexual behaviour as Pat Califia has asserted: "the correlation of maleness with masculinity and running the fuck; the correlation of femaleness with femininity and getting run over in bed" (Califia, 1997, p.5). The suggestion that Joss might be a failure is negated by his overtly sexual behaviour throughout the rest of the novel, as though Millie (and Joss) are trying to convince other people (and themselves) of Joss's sexual prowess. Millie reconfigures Joss as both a good lover, ("the only way I'm going to get to like this place is if we christen it right now.' And we did. I slid down the wall and knocked a few cobwebs off when I came" [*Tr*, p.8]), and a specifically male lover: "[w]e make love on the living room floor. He pulls my hair and kisses me all over my face. He pushed himself into me. He mutters things in my ear. I am *possessed*" (*Tr*, p.36, my emphasis). Pat Califia suggests that "one of the achievements that someone must demonstrate to be recognised as a man is sexual potency, the ability to take or *possess* a sexual object" (Califia, 1997, p.48, my emphasis). On a related note, Vern Bullough remarks that "[a] man, fearful of being labeled as exhibiting feminine weaknesses, could demonstrate his masculinity by asserting power over his wife" (Bullough, 1993, p.114). This is not to say that Joss completely rejects 'feminine things'. Millie remembers how "Joss used to comb my hair every night. It was one of the few feminine things he did" (*Tr*, p.8). However, Kay uses this memory to prove that even when Joss is doing feminine things, he is doing them in a masculine way. The description of Joss brushing Millie's hair quickly becomes sexually charged: "I loved it. Him sitting behind me, pressing against me, combing my thick dark hair in firm downward strokes" (*Tr*, p.8). Walker denies that Joss and Millie's relationship is a

parody of heterosexuality because “Joss and Millie’s relationship is not based on ‘gender fucking’ or lesbianism: they are husband and wife, and what could be straighter than that?” (Walker, 2007, p.41). That Joss is identified as a husband is, if not ‘gender fucking’, ‘label fucking’, as it marks an inversion of all that ‘husband’ is ordinarily understood to mean. Jackie Kay herself underlines the difficulty in defining both Joss and Millie, and their relationship:

Joss is a woman having sex with another woman, which most people would define as lesbian behaviour, but Joss thinks of himself as a man and so do the people around him. So, you tell me what that makes Millie? I don’t know the answer” (Jackie Kay, quoted in Nicol, 1998).

Joss is careful to present himself as heterosexual. When Colman asks if Joss has ever been unfaithful to Millie, Joss denies it. It is not the denial that is particularly interesting, but how he phrases it: “I am not interested in anyone besides your mother. Only she can turn me on” (*Tr*, p.168). By talking in these terms, Joss suggests that he could cheat – if he so desired – but that strong sexual attraction stops him. By using a phrase such as “turns me on”, Kay is emphasising Joss’s sexual energy, something that is further highlighted in his discussion with Colman:

[d]o you always do it in bed? I ask, knowing that at any minute I will be stopped and cursed. He laughs, throwing back his head. Come off it, he says. Your mother and I like variety. The spice of life. Any old place will do. A dressing room...A dressing room, I shriek. Why not? What else are dressing rooms for? (*Tr*, p.168)

When Colman reflects on this conversation after finding out Joss’s secret, he thinks of Joss’s sexual behaviour in heterocentric terms: “he would have rammed it in” (*Tr*, p.168). I do not believe that Colman is expressing his acceptance of his father at this stage, but that he is trying to affirm his parents’ heterosexuality and therefore his own identity as their child.

Millie relies upon her heterosexuality once Joss is dead, and seeks refuge in heterosexual labels such as ‘widow’ to try to normalise things:

[m]y husband died. I am now a widow. That is what I will tell them if they come and ask me. My husband died. I am now a widow. My husband died. I am now a widow. Why can they not understand how ordinary that is? Many women have become widows. Many women have gone through what I've gone through. Many women know the shape, the smell, the colour of loss. Many women have aged with loss. Grief has changed the face of many women. I am not alone. I have to tell myself this. I am not alone. (*Tr*, p.205)

She apparently struggles to understand the way that the media perceives both her and

Joss: “No doubt they will call me a lesbian. They will find words to put on me.

Words that don't fit me. Words that don't fit Joss” (*Tr*, p.154). This is because “our readiness to see ‘reality’ naturally carved into male and female as polar opposites is culturally and linguistically conditioned” (Romaine, 1999, p.8). I think this could be taken further – it is not just a readiness, but a need to preserve a rigid gender binary that drives the media perception. And this is especially true because, as Hargreaves asserts, “[i]t is precisely Millie's ordinariness that is the source of the threat she poses to dominant sex–gender systems; neither consciously queer, nor camp, nor femme to Joss's butch” (Hargreaves, 2003, p.3). The media need to relabel Millie – to reaffirm her status as a genderfreak – in order to satisfy themselves that the male/female binary is still intact. From Millie's point of view, the biggest problem with this is that “you end up being defined by what makes you extraordinary” (Nicol, 1998), and yet the definition is so inadequate. Millie looks for the answer in her own past, and admits that, as much as she despises the labels now being put on her, she “loved being the wife of Joss Moody” (*Tr*, p.206), and wants to be known and remembered as “Joss Moody's widow” (*Tr*, p.22).

Irene Rose claims that “Kay represents Joss as a ‘stone butch’, a male-identified lesbian who is unmistakably masculine in appearance and who feels

compromised by being made love to as a woman” (Rose, 2003, p.150).³⁷ It is my view that Rose is wrong: Joss is not a butch, something that becomes clear with a brief examination of *Stone Butch Blues*, a novel about butches that will be discussed in more depth in Chapter Two. One of the stone butches in the novel gets “upset because some women in the bathroom claimed they thought she was a man” (Feinberg, 2003, p.120). This denial of manhood is reiterated in the way the protagonist, Jess, describes her male clothes as “drag” (Feinberg, 2003, p.7) and Feinberg’s description of “strong, burly women, wearing ties and suit coats” (Feinberg, 2003, p.27). It is evident from these examples that stone butches identify *with* but not *as* males. This is very different from Joss: “[Millie] asked Mr Sharif if [Joss] could be registered as a man. She said, rather enigmatically, it appeared to Mohammad, that this would have been important for her husband, to be registered in death as he was in life” (*Tr*, p.79).

In defending her husband’s life, Millie asserts that “I don’t think I ever thought he was wrong. I don’t think so” (*Tr*, p.35). This is undermined by the repetition of markers of uncertainty (“I don’t think” [*Tr*, p.35]), but also by two other lines in the novel. Describing Joss’s initial reluctance to sleep with her, Millie fears that “there is something wrong” (*Tr*, p.15). Perhaps most damning is Millie’s statement on the novel’s opening page that “I haven’t done anything wrong” (*Tr*, p.1). As Walker argues, “[i]f Millie has not ‘done anything wrong’, then the reader can only assume that it is Joss who is guilty of some profound transgression” (Walker, 2007, p.40). Even so, Millie tries (and fails) to deny the impossibility of ignoring Joss’s body. Recalling how she “wrapped two cream bandages around his

³⁷ Rose also argues that “Jackie Kay presents *Trumpet* as a validation of the often forgotten, and sometimes extreme, social costs paid by butch lesbians for transgressing *both* heteronormative and homonormative boundaries” (Rose, 2003, p.149). I would argue that Leslie Feinberg’s *Stone Butch Blues* (see Chapter 2) better makes this point, detailing the often violent consequences of transgressing boundaries.

breasts every morning” (*Tr*, p.238), part of Millie’s recollection is that the situation was awkward: “I didn’t think about anything except doing it well ... He didn’t care if it was uncomfortable. It probably was a little” (*Tr*, p.238). The reference to ‘uncomfortable’ is probably as applicable to the situation as to the bandages, a situation where they did not and perhaps could not talk: “I don’t remember us saying anything whilst I did this” (*Tr*, p.238). Her further confession that “I don’t remember thinking much” (*Tr*, p.238) implies that Millie blocked the truth out so that she was only focusing on the necessity of the act: “I had to help him get dressed so that he could enjoy his day and be comfortable” (*Tr*, p.238). It is my belief that Millie helped Joss to dress, not just because it made him comfortable, but because it made it easier to assert her own position as his wife: Millie could only be a wife if Joss inhabited the role of husband.³⁸ Or as Brooks puts it, “the relationship between Moody and his wife creates and nourishes an identity, allowing him to do the impossible – to live his life as a man” (Brooks, 2002). Although, as I have mentioned, Joss uses clothes to outwardly display what he felt himself to be, he also needs them to hide what he lacked. Once he put on his boxer shorts, Millie “turned away while he stuffed them with a pair of socks” (*Tr*, p.238). It was important for both of them that Millie did not witness the construction of genitals because this is arguably the most important part of the ‘costume’. Traditional categorisation of sex focuses upon the genitals as a means of establishing identity (“doctors look down at a newly-born infant and say ‘It has a penis, it’s a boy.’ Or they say, ‘It doesn’t have a penis, it’s a girl’”) [Bornstein, 1994, p.22]) so Millie could not witness this part of the transformation as it could adversely affect her ability to accept Joss.

³⁸ Hargreaves points out that “in the space between what is publicly acceptable and what is privately desirable, [Millie] cannot entirely forget that Joss was a girl or that he continues to have a biologically female body, in spite of herself: ‘I don’t want to think about her. Why am I thinking about her?’” (Hargreaves, 2003, p.10).

Millie's fear that Joss's body could override his performance is realised after his death. Because Millie refers to Joss as her husband, the (female) doctor has no cause to doubt that she is dealing with the body of a man. However, in the course of the physical examination, the doctor discovers Joss's secret and struggles to define him within the gender binary that she holds so dear: "[w]hen she first saw the breasts (and she thought of them again driving home, how strange they looked, how preserved they looked) she thought that they weren't real breasts at all. At least not women's breasts" (*Tr*, p.43). The doctor is unable to reach a satisfactory conclusion regarding Joss's sex, so feels compelled to take action: "[i]t took her pulling down the pyjama bottoms for her to be quite certain" (*Tr*, p.44). It is interesting that the doctor takes the step that Joss would not in trying to determine sex. Joss went as far as revealing his breasts, but in the eyes of the doctor, the evidence of the body does not tally with the evidence of the wife. As far as the doctor is concerned, the genitals provide absolute and unequivocal proof of sex (and gender), so the next step is to destroy any traces of ambiguity:

[s]he got her red pen out from her doctor's bag. What she thought of as her emergency red pen. She crossed 'male' out and wrote 'female' in her rather bad doctor's handwriting. She looked at the word 'female' and thought it wasn't quite clear enough. She crossed that out, tutting to herself, and printed 'female' in large childish letters. (*Tr*, p.44)³⁹

This is a replication of a real-life incident surrounding Eugene C. Perkins, a medical practitioner from La Jolla, California who died in 1936 (Andrews, 2005): "on the death certificate 'male' was crossed out after examination of the body and 'female' written in red ink" (Garber, 1992, p.67). The doctor has an authority that Joss was denied, as evidenced by the registrar depending on the doctor's decision when

³⁹ For Jamison Green, "[g]ender and genitals comprise a stronghold of control binding all people to a social order that has serious difficulty tolerating diversity or change" (Green, 1999, p.124). Irene Rose reads this moment as the "forcible interpellation of Joss back into the category of female" (Rose, 2003, p.145).

issuing a death certificate: “[h]e told the woman that he could not lie on a death certificate ... He paused before he ticked ‘female’” (*Tr*, p.80). It is undoubtedly significant that Kay chose a doctor to question (and subsequently disagree with) Joss’s gender, because it has been noted that “it’s doctors who dole out the gender assignments, which shows you how emphatically gender has been medicalized” (Bornstein, 1994, p.22). The presence of the doctor therefore marks an opportunity to reassign gender. Although the doctor’s actions could be read as a response to the inadequacy of language to adequately express what Joss is, “[t]he ability to impose one particular view of reality while suppressing others derives not from language itself, but from the power of the dominant group” (Romaine, 1999, p.20). In this case, the doctor (and medical representatives in general) represents a refusal to engage with the problems that people like Joss present.

The doctor’s need to be certain about Joss’s gender is similar to the reaction of Albert Holding, the funeral director. As he prepares the body for embalming, he realises that “the man’s legs were not hairy. Then Holding noticed that he had rather a lot of pubic hair. A bush. The absence of the penis did not strike him straight away” (*Tr*, p.109). Like the doctor, Holding needs to be “quite certain” (*Tr*, p.44) of what Joss is, and “[w]hen he did notice after a few moments that there was no visible penis, he actually found himself rummaging in the pubic hair just to check that there wasn’t a very, very small one hiding somewhere” (*Tr*, p.109). So what conclusions can be drawn from the way the doctor and funeral director behave? Despite their fear that Joss might be female, they are not looking for a vagina. They are desperately seeking a penis – because a penis is irrefutably male, and can override even the gender assumptions that come with breasts. As Bornstein puts it, “[i]t has little or nothing to do with vaginas. It’s all penises or no penises: gender assignment is both

phallogentric and genital” (Bornstein, 1994, p.22). Ultimately, then, Joss becomes a ‘not-male’, rather than a female, for those people gazing at him after death. However, Millie and Colman maintain Joss’s manhood: Millie by calling herself his widow, and Colman by reinstating the father-son relationship.⁴⁰

It is the off-stage performance of masculinity (and maleness) that Joss sustains throughout his life that is the focus of the text. It is ironic that in a novel about performance, Joss’s on-stage performance as a jazz trumpeter is barely touched upon. On-stage Joss is actually a lesser version of off-stage Joss, because in playing his trumpet, Joss “loses his sex, his race, his memory. He strips himself bare, takes everything off, till he’s barely human” (*Tr*, p.131). When he is playing, his identity is reduced to his music, so that although he becomes “something else. Somebody else. Her. That girl” (*Tr*, p.132), his audience does not notice. Joss’s ability to reconnect with his past through his music explains why he otherwise does not need to refer to his identity as ‘Josephine’. The music provides an outlet through which Joss can briefly ‘be’ Josephine, and this is why his ‘Joss’ identity so rarely falters.

Nan in *Tipping the Velvet* finds the boundaries between her on- and off-stage persona blurred. In contrast, Joss finds himself torn between two off-stage identities: that of Joss, the husband, father and famous trumpeter, and Josephine, the daughter. Because there is no space in his life for Josephine, Joss has to physically separate her from his life, so that he ends up living two lives. When Joss and Josephine collide, Josephine proves powerful enough to threaten Joss, and so Joss has to be careful to preserve his male identity. In *James Miranda Barry*, James finds he is not allowed a separate, private performance. His ‘on-stage’ (public) performance as a doctor is a hyperbolised version of his ‘off-stage’ (personal) performance: the personal

⁴⁰ This point is also made by Irene Rose: “[n]ot only does Millie’s grief as a widow support Joss’ masculinity, but in Colman’s eventual loving acceptance of Joss as his *father*, the fact of having or not having a penis is rendered obsolete in Joss’ claim to masculinity” (Rose, 2003, p.151).

performance is strictly controlled by James in order to prevent anybody from realising his secret. Throughout each of the texts, boundaries are blurred and identities are confused. It is difficult to pinpoint exactly where one identity ends and another begins because constantly enacting performances means that gender starts to become unconsciously performed, altering the concept of 'natural' and 'false' gender performances.

CHAPTER TWO: THE MEDICALISATION OF GENDER

[T]here are two, and only two, possible destinations – male and female.
(Fausto-Sterling, 2000a, p.109)

*

In the essay “How to Build A Man”, Anne Fausto-Sterling has claimed that “biological and medical scientists feel quite certain about their world. For them, the body tells the truth” (Fausto-Sterling, 2000a, p.109). However, according to postmodernism, ‘truth’ is not a fixed entity, but is discursively contingent upon the position of the interpreter – and in the case of much of the medical establishment, this position is affected by the belief that “there are two, and only two, possible destinations – male and female” (Fausto-Sterling, 2000a, p.109). There are increasing challenges to this position: the conflict between identity and medical discourse, which was hinted at in *Trumpet* and *James Miranda Barry*, is a central theme in *Middlesex*, *Stone Butch Blues* and *Sacred Country*, and in this chapter I will examine the role of medicine and the medical establishment in defining and understanding identity. I argue that the medical establishment’s reliance on the male/female binary is a limitation that affects the way that sex and gender are understood and inscribed. When ‘male’ and ‘female’ are the only options allowed, the validity of the concept of a ‘normal’ gender identity is threatened. As identities are re-written and performed, the blurring of boundaries, which was explored in Chapter One, becomes more pronounced: the availability of surgery and hormones means that the concepts of ‘real’ and ‘natural’ face scrutiny: science has defined the categories of ‘male’ and ‘female’, but it has also provided the opportunities for these categories to be transgressed.

Bonnie Spanier argues that

[w]hen scientists look to nature, they usually bring with them their socio-political beliefs about what is natural. This self-reinforcing, internally

consistent process, then, creates, reflects, and reinscribes often unquestioned assumptions about our world. (Spanier, 1991, p.330)

The tension between the medically-defined ‘natural’ and the transsexed or hermaphroditic body is the product of desperate attempts by the medical world to preserve the categories ‘male’ and ‘female’, and hide the fact that “[i]deologies of masculinity and femininity cannot simply be peeled back like a mask to reveal the ‘naked truth’ of the body ... underneath there is quite simply nothing: no central core of identity or meaning” (McGrath, 1988, p.58). This resonates with Butler’s understanding of performativity: “acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance ... Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are *performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications*” (Butler, 1999, p.173, emphasis in original). The fear that the body can be overridden is overshadowed by the greater fear that previous methods of gender and sex categorisation are inadequate:

[t]he investigation of gender identity in terms of performance begins by diminishing the importance of a few natural objects. The vagina, for instance. This organ is no longer capable, all by itself, of turning someone into a woman. A lot more is required to *do* womanhood: specific styles of talking, ways of walking, dressing, addressing. A womanly way of screaming, raging, smiling, eating, soothing, loving. If gender is not fixed and physical but viscous and performed, the body’s sexual organs are not enough to mark it. (Mol, 2002, p.38)

Middlesex

Middlesex is the second novel by Jeffrey Eugenides, and the only text I examine that features an intersexed character, Callie, who despite being born “[a] beautiful, healthy girl” (*Mid*, p.216), finds out fourteen years later that her sexual organs have been wrongly interpreted: she is “genetic[ally] male” (*Mid*, p.303). When this discovery is made, it is left to the doctors to determine what surgery Callie ‘needs’. In violation of the common medical belief that “the body tells the truth” (Fausto-

Sterling, 2000a, p.109), doctors have to first decide whether Callie fits more easily into the category of male or female, and mould her body accordingly. To make this decision, the doctors must first “set the standards of normality. They articulate what it is to be normal and to behave in a normal way” (Mol, 2002, p.58), and from this point determine whether Callie meets the requirements of maleness or femaleness. Thus, my focus is on how the medical establishment attempts to reshape and reinscribe Callie’s body, and the way in which intersexed bodies challenge the viability of the male/female binary.

For the first twelve or so years of her life, the only thing that marks her as different is her Greek heritage: “[o]ur religion’s adherence to the Julian calendar has once again left us out of sync with the neighbourhood” (*Mid*, p.15).⁴¹ However, as she grows older, she realises that she does not fit in with the other girls at school because her body has not developed; she has “[n]o breasts. No period either” (*Mid*, p.295). By “January of seventh grade” (*Mid*, p.303), Callie begins “a growth spurt of uncommon proportions and unforeseeable consequences” (*Mid*, p.303) and her “voice began a slow descent” (*Mid*, p.303). However, “nothing seemed unnatural. My slight build, my thin waist, the smallness of my head, hands, and feet raised no questions in anybody’s mind. Many genetic males raised as girls don’t blend in so easily” (*Mid*, p.303). Callie’s fears for her development are displaced onto her identity as one of the school’s “‘Ethnic’ girls” (*Mid*, p.298), where her strangeness is easily identified:

my friends and I had always felt completely American. But now ... upturned noses suggested that there was another America to which we could never gain admittance. All of a sudden America wasn’t about hamburgers and hot rods anymore. It was about the *Mayflower* and Plymouth Rock. It was about

⁴¹ The decision to make Callie Greek has a particular significance. As Feinberg states, “Greek mythology was ... filled with references to sex-change, intersexuality, and cross-dressing” (Feinberg, 1996, p.56).

something that had happened for two minutes four hundred years ago, instead of everything that had happened since. (*Mid*, p.298)

Callie's fear that she will never become a 'real' American masks her true fear that she will never become a 'real' woman, and raises the question of what it means to *be* a 'real' woman. For Callie's mother, Tessie, this state is achieved through menstruation ("I'm worried about Callie ... She still hasn't gotten her period ... I think something's wrong" [*Mid*, p.329]). Callie conflates her ethnic identity and gender identity problems, blaming her undeveloped body on the Greek diet her mother provides for her: "I had come to a dire conclusion. I had begun to believe that the Mediterranean Diet that kept my grandmother alive against her will was also sinisterly retarding my maturity" (*Mid*, p.288). After a fight where Callie demands "normal food ... American food" (*Mid*, p.288), Tessie arranges for her to visit to "a ladies' doctor" (*Mid*, p.340), although this is downplayed as a routine visit to "make sure everything's okay" (*Mid*, p.340). "Filled with dread" (*Mid*, p.350) at the prospect of this appointment, Callie fakes the onset of her period, convincing her mother that she is developing 'normally'.

In order to appear 'normal', Callie must, like other women, subscribe to a substantial beauty regime: "Sophie Sassoon took care of my facial hair. I went in about twice a month, adding depilation to an ever-growing list of upkeep requirements. I started shaving my legs and underarms. I plucked my eyebrows" (*Mid*, p.311). Alan Petersen has argued that "[w]omen have become receptive to the message that the body-commodity is 'deficient and in need of attention'" (Petersen, 2007, p.67).⁴² Thus, women who do not "engage in the 'work of femininity'" (Jagger, 2000, p.55) are failures, due to the promotion of the idea that "beauty is not

⁴² Wendy Chapkis suggests that "public acts of femininity, like applying make-up, tend to rely on an underlying message of female inadequacy. There is a problem to be corrected, a basic improvement to be made" (Chapkis, 1985, p.6).

naturally given but achievable by all” (Jagger, 2000, p.56): there is therefore no excuse for failing to live up to this ideal.

As Callie starts to wonder if something might be wrong with her, she also battles with her sexuality. She realises she is different from other girls when she becomes obsessed with a fellow pupil at the all-girls school she attends. Questioning whether she felt “any inkling of her true biological nature ... [and] that what she was feeling was wrong” (*Mid*, p.327), Callie answers ambiguously: “[y]es and no ... [i]t was perfectly acceptable ... to get a crush on a fellow classmate. At a girls’ school a certain amount of emotional energy, normally expended on boys, gets redirected into friendships” (*Mid*, p.327). Despite an awareness of the commonality of such feelings among the pupils, “the school remained militantly heterosexual” (*Mid*, p.327). The institutional element of gender allocation is important: here, it is the educational institution that determines ‘correct’ gender expression (which can only be ‘correctly’ performed through adherence to heterosexual behaviour) through a system of intimidation and force: “[a]ny girl suspected of being attracted to girls was gossiped about, victimized, and shunned” (*Mid*, p.327). Jeffrey Weeks argues that “[h]omosexual desire is socially eliminated from childhood by means of a series of family and educational mechanisms. The power of oblivion generated by the social mechanisms with respect to the homosexual drive is such to arouse the immediate answer: this problem does not concern me” (Weeks, 1998, p.692). In the case of Callie, the issue is not that homosexuality “does not concern” her, but that it must not be *allowed* to concern her, because she fears the consequences. Unlike the girls that had “envious crushes on other girls” (*Mid*, p.327), Callie’s feelings are stronger: “[i]t felt physical, my crush. It wasn’t a judgment but a tumult in my veins. For that reason I kept quiet about it” (*Mid*, p.328). Later in the novel, the educational

institution will be replaced by the medical institution, which will place a greater reliance on biology over behaviour but engage in similar acts of violent enforcement.

Understanding Normality

In the essay “Trans Studies”, Henry Rubin discusses “the imperative to be heterosexual after transition” (Rubin, 1999, p.183), which is the belief that ‘heterosexuality’ proves that the transition (from male to female, or vice versa) has been realised successfully.⁴³ Callie is in a difficult situation: on the one hand, her attraction to girls is the basis for what becomes her heterosexuality when she is ‘male’, but before she makes this transition, her behaviour is coded as lesbian, and by implication, ‘wrong’. In *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory*, Nikki Sullivan points out that “the 1970 edition of The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary ... defines ‘heterosexual’ as ‘pertaining to or characterised by the normal relation of the sexes’” (Sullivan, 2003, p.119). Heterosexuality is always and inevitably ‘the norm’, so Callie struggles with her apparently abnormal feelings.

Callie’s relationship to normality takes centre stage once the medical establishment becomes aware of Callie’s condition. Following an accident, Callie is taken to hospital, where her severe abdominal pain warrants further examination. When the doctor and intern see Callie’s genitalia, they react with shock: “[t]he doctor bent closer, mumbling to himself. The intern, rather unprofessionally, raised one hand to her throat and then pretended to fix her collar” (*Mid*, p.396). There is something ‘wrong’ – “the way the doctor and nurse reacted made it clear” (*Mid*, p.396) – and so Dr Luce, the novel’s representation of the medicalisation of gender,

⁴³ This is an element of what Deborah Rudacille terms the “myth of the ‘classic’ male-to-female transsexual. A classic transsexual was essentially a traditional woman who happened to have been born in a male body. She was attractive, with feminine mannerisms and a feminine outlook and had felt like a girl all of her life. She was, above all, heterosexual and desired marriage and, when possible, children by adoption or step-parenting” (Rudacille, 2005, p.130).

steps forward to ‘correct’ Callie. Callie describes him as “the world’s leading authority on human hermaphroditism” (*Mid*, p.409). Luce believes “that parents weren’t able to cope with an ambiguous gender assignment. You had to tell them if they had a boy or a girl” (*Mid*, p.413). There is no room in Luce’s world for anybody who does not fit into the categories of male or female. Specifically, Callie exists to be corrected: as a hermaphrodite she is a “problem which a binary logic attempts to erase” (Jones and Stallybrass, 1991, p.80). What is most concerning is the “slide into the assumption that gender is a *known* quantity which is then, at a second stage, destabilized” (Jones and Stallybrass, 1991, p.80, emphasis in original).⁴⁴ Anne Fausto-Sterling explains Foucault’s view that “[t]he role of many science professionals ... [is] to optimize and standardize the body’s function” (Fausto-Sterling, 2000b, p.7). Increasing scientific knowledge has “encouraged physicians to attempt to control the very gender of the body” (Fausto-Sterling, 2000b, p.8), and the consequence of this is that “progress in the handling of intersexuality involves maintaining the normal. Accordingly, there *ought* to be only two boxes: male and female” (Fausto-Sterling, 2000b, p.8).⁴⁵ This protection of the ‘normal’ only serves to underscore its very ‘unnaturalness’: “[b]ecause anything that is not male or female is not a true sex, we pronounce them ‘abnormal,’ fit them legally into male or female, and fit them physically into boy or girl by cutting them up at the rate of about five every day. Thus are ‘natural’ males and females maintained” (Wilchins, 2002c, p.40).

⁴⁴ As Wilchins argues, “[t]he possibility that intersex infants’ sex might not be immediately available to us, that they might not have the sort of binary sex the doctors are so anxious to locate and assign, just doesn’t register” (Wilchins, 2004, p.75).

⁴⁵ Elizabeth Weil points out, “[m]ost people believe, reflexively, that irregular-looking genitals would be extremely difficult to live with – for a child on a sports team, for an adult seeking love and sex – so why not try to make them look more normal?” (Weil, 2006).

Dr Luce's role in the novel, enlightening patients about their conditions, is tempered by his decision to only tell them what he decides they need to know. This decision is marked by the power of medical knowledge: "[d]octors told the truth ... or at least they were the only ones able to correct each other in so far as they didn't" (Mol, 2002, p.7). With the character of Dr Luce, Eugenides is exploring the way that the medical world manipulates data in order to deliver 'easy' answers that can be used as the basis for assigning gender. For Luce, the body provides data that he can use to decide the best course of action: the 'truth' of the body can be (and is) overridden if the doctor believes it appropriate.

When Luce first meets Callie, he is provided with a wealth of information concerning her genetic make-up. With "the results of the endocrinological tests ... Luce was able to make an educated guess that [Callie] was a male pseudohermaphrodite – genetically male but appearing otherwise" (*Mid*, p.412). However, Luce is prepared to accept that being "genetically male ... did not mean that [Callie] had a male gender identity" (*Mid*, p.413), because the "sex of rearing [was] female" (*Mid*, p.413). However, in his notes, Luce acknowledges that the situation may not be so clear-cut:

the subject has been raised in the Greek Orthodox tradition, with its strongly sex-defined roles. In general, the parents seem assimilationist and very 'all-American' in their outlook, but the presence of this deeper ethnic identity should not be overlooked (*Mid*, p.436).

Fausto-Sterling refers to John Money's sexual identity research to illustrate the way medical researchers think about sexual identity:

[p]otential males take a series of turns in one direction, potential females in another. In real time, the road begins at fertilisation and ends during late adolescence. If all goes as it should, then there are two, and only two, possible destinations – male and female. (Fausto-Sterling, 2000a, p.110)

In order to try to understand ‘what’ Callie is, Luce devises a questionnaire that he hopes will enable him to pinpoint Callie’s gender identity. The questions range from “[d]o you like any sports?” (*Mid*, p.416) to “[a]re you sexually attracted to girls?” (*Mid*, p.416). The problem with this sort of questioning is the assumptions that lie behind it, for example, sports are considered a stereotypically ‘male’ pastime, so an interest in sports could therefore be interpreted as evidence that Callie is male. The question of whether Callie is sexually attracted to girls throws up greater concerns. First of all, Luce asks “[i]s there a boy at school you like?” (*Mid*, p.416), but when Callie deflects this by pointing out that she attends an all-girls school, he asks the more explicit question, “[a]re you sexually attracted to girls?” (*Mid*, p.416). In contrast to the way Luce quickly drops the issue of Callie’s attraction to boys, he determinedly pursues the issue of whether Callie has had relationships with girls:

this is all between us, Callie. I’m not going to tell your parents anything that you tell me here ... Your mother says you have a close relationship with a friend of yours ... Do you feel sexually attracted to her? Or have you had sexual relations with her? (*Mid*, p.416)

Despite Callie’s denials, Luce later shows her a pornographic film, asking afterwards, “[w]hich one turns you on? The woman or the [pool boy]?” (*Mid*, p.419). When Callie reluctantly answers “[t]he boy” (*Mid*, p.419), Luce pushes her: “I dig the pizza girl myself. She’s got ... incredible tits ... You like her tits? Do they turn you on?” (*Mid*, p.419). Luce is aggressively focusing on Callie’s relationships with girls because of his awareness of Callie’s status as a “genetic XY (male)” (*Mid*, p.435), and Eugenides uses this scene to emphasize the shortcomings of Luce’s methods. Firstly, Luce is basing his decision on the answers that Callie gives him – answers which could be (and are) affected by Callie’s desire to appear ‘normal’. Secondly, and most importantly, with his focus on sexuality, Luce is trying to define Callie by using a heteronormative framework: that is, if Callie likes girls, she can be

made into a heterosexual male, but if she likes boys, she can be made into a heterosexual female; Luce's research is ignoring other possibilities, which are equally 'normal'.

Eventually, Luce comes to the conclusion that Callie "is a girl who has a little too much male hormone" (*Mid*, p.428). Ominously, Luce presents Callie's condition as something that can be easily 'fixed': "[w]e're going to do an operation to finish your genitalia. They're not quite finished yet and we want to finish them" (*Mid*, p.433). Fausto-Sterling points out that "[i]n the genetic male ... the gender of assignment is based on the infant's anatomy, predominantly the size of the phallus" (Fausto-Sterling, 2000, p.112). She asks, "[h]ow small does a penis have to be before we call it a clitoris?" (Fausto-Sterling, 1985, p.85). In his medical notes, Luce refers to Callie having "a penis so small as to appear to be a clitoris", and this undoubtedly influences his decision to make her a girl. Eugenides demonstrates that part of Luce's strategy in dealing with Callie's parents is an avoidance of specific terms. Although Luce refers to a penis in his notes, by the time he talks to Callie's parents the threatening term 'penis' has been replaced with the more neutral 'genitals', so that Luce can avoid highlighting Callie's maleness, and convince her parents to accept his diagnosis, which is that "[t]o leave the genitals as they are today would expose [Callie] to all manner of humiliation" (*Mid*, p.437). Alan Sinfield explains that "surgeons, coming upon infants whose anatomical sex appears mixed or indeterminate, intervene to construct what they regard as more satisfactory gender characteristics" (Sinfield, 2000, p.153). Luce tries to avoid causing panic in parents, but it can be viewed in more sinister terms, as a way of controlling the parents' reactions. Luce's work has taught him that "[y]ou did not tell the parents of a newborn, 'Your baby is a hermaphrodite.' Instead, you said, 'Your daughter was



born with a clitoris that is a little larger than a normal girl's. We'll need to do surgery to make it the right size" (*Mid*, p.413). Implicit in this is a value judgement, as mentioned by Fausto-Sterling: the penis must be large, the clitoris must be small. Further to this, Feinberg asks "[a]nd what is the criteria for a penis being 'too small'? Too small for successful heterosexual intercourse. Intersexual infants are already being tailored for their sexuality, as well as their sex" (Feinberg, 1998, p.8).

Luce emphasises the necessity of genital surgery by suggesting that "sexual pleasure is only one factor in a happy life. The ability to marry and to pass as a normal woman in society are also important goals" (*Mid*, p.437). The emphasis is on being 'normal', so Luce underlines the necessity of surgery by referring to a previous patient who is now living what could be considered the heterosexual ideal: "I just got a postcard from a former patient," Luce said consolingly. "She had a condition similar to [Callie's]. She's married now. She and her husband adopted two kids and they're as happy as can be" (*Mid*, p.429). The judgement of what constitutes happiness comes from Luce, highlighting his total control over the information made available to Callie's parents.

In a final attempt to convince Callie's parents of his diagnosis, Luce confuses them with science. Eugenides constructs baffling paragraphs where Luce scientifically explains Callie's situation, then dilutes them into easily-digestible sound bites:

[d]ue to her 5-alpha-reductase deficiency, Callie's body does not produce dihydrotestosterone. What this means is that, in utero, she followed a primarily female line of development. Especially in terms of the external genitalia ... The simplest way to put it is like this: Callie is a girl who has a little too much male hormone. (*Mid*, p.427)

Dr Luce insists that Callie has surgery, claiming that her genitalia "are not quite finished yet and we want to finish them" (*Mid*, p.433), to "make Callie look exactly

like the girl she feels herself to be” (*Mid*, p.428). Despite Luce’s assurances, Callie develops her own understanding about both normality, and Luce’s relationship to it:

[n]ormality wasn’t normal. It couldn’t be. If normality were normal, everybody could leave it alone. They could sit back and let normality manifest itself. But people – and especially doctors – had doubts about normality. They weren’t sure normality was up to the job. And so they felt inclined to give it a boost. (*Mid*, p.446)

There is a reason that the doctors – Luce in particular – are so preoccupied with the notion of normality. Tiffany Atkinson argues that “the positing of any kind of embodiment as ‘natural’ or ‘normal’ is freighted with political consequences, demanding as it must an opposing field of the *unnatural* and deviant” (Atkinson, 2005, p.4). By marking out ‘normality’, the doctors are also creating clear boundaries for ‘abnormality’ so that people that fall into the latter category can be easily identified and ‘cured’. In her examination of gender studies, Holly Devor suggests that “[p]opular conceptions of femininity and masculinity ... revolve around hierarchical appraisals of the ‘natural’ roles of males and females” (cited in Elam, 2000, p.175), which prompts Diane Elam to ask “whether the West could ever understand the un-naturalness of its own assumptions about nature and break away from gender stereotypes” (Elam, 2000, p.176). A reliance on gender stereotypes, however, is an essential part of Luce’s work: “[i]t was impossible to be in Luce’s line of work without falling back on ... stereotypes. He knew their limitations. But they were clinically useful” (*Mid*, p.417). But it is this reliance on stereotypes that causes ‘normality’ to fall short of what is expected, and results in the need for surgery and/or hormone treatments.

Fearing that Luce is hiding something from her, Callie searches for answers in “the Reading room of the New York Library” (*Mid*, p.429). Using the Webster’s dictionary, Callie follows the synonym trail from “hypospadias” – a word she has

heard Luce use in relation to her – through “eunuch” to “hermaphrodite”, where the entry suggests examining the “synonyms at MONSTER” (*Mid*, p.430). Reading ‘monster’ in the dictionary gives the word power, and Callie recognises that “[t]he synonym was official, authoritative; it was the verdict that the culture gave on a person like her. *Monster*” (*Mid*, p.430). Collado-Rodriguez explains that

the established notion of monstrosity has ... been ironically undermined by the narrator in his/her continuous play with the binary Same/Other and their reference to ‘humanity.’ If, in categorical terms, the monster is a being other than human, the narrator has progressively stressed that, from the beginning of the twentieth century, people have also become other than human. We have become postmodern entities. (Collado-Rodriguez, 2006, p.82).

Just as important is the fact that the label of ‘monster’ has a history specific to intersexuals that Callie is unaware of:

[i]n ancient times anatomical differences between men and women were used to ground the social development of individuals based on sex. The intersexual confounded such bifurcation. During this time, the intersexual was included in the loose classification of ‘human monster’. These beings were considered a double violation of the natural order: half-human and half-animal. (Hird & Germon, 2001, p.165)

At first a threatening term, ‘monster’ is weakened because of

increasing regulation within medicine and psychiatry [that] partially disqualified the individual as a legal subject. The intersexual ‘monster’ became less powerful; a figure more to be pitied than respected. This provided a discourse with which to pastorally regulate the intersexual through medicine and psychiatry. (Hird & Germon, 2001, p.165)

Realising that Luce has been less than honest with her, Callie steals a copy of her notes from his desk and discovers that she is a “genetic XY (Male) raised as female” (*Mid*, p.435). This prompts her to run away, leaving a note to her parents that describes Luce as “a big liar”, and declares that she is “not a girl. I’m a boy” (*Mid*, p.439). Mary in *Sacred Country* (examined later in this chapter), explains her situation in the same terms: “I am not a girl. I’m a boy” (*SC*, p.5). What is interesting about these assertions is that the declaration of what one is *not* comes before the

declaration of what one *is*. This fits with Diane Elam's assertion that "we satisfy our prescribed gender role more through a knowledge of what we are *not* rather than what we are" (Elam, 2000, p.169, emphasis in original). In making this declaration, Callie has decided that her genitals reveal what she is: the presence of a penis (however small) therefore makes her male. As Womack and Mallory-Kani state, "Calliope's moment of evolutionary truth occurs when she decides to accept her biological reality and establish a new life for herself as [a boy named] Cal" (Womack and Mallory-Kani, 2007).

Interspersed with the story of Callie's past are passages about Cal's current life as a forty-one year old man living in Berlin. These sections of the novel focus predominantly on Cal's burgeoning relationship with Julie Kikuchi, a photographer who is unaware of his past. This relationship reveals both Cal's lingering doubts about his masculinity, and his psychological difficulties with being intimate with people. Early in the narrative, Cal admits that "despite [his] androgenized brain, there's an innate feminine circularity" (*Mid*, p.20) to his story, a statement that highlights his difficulties in living as male after experiencing the first fourteen years of his life as a girl. Although he boasts that he has "lived more than half [his] life as a male, and by now everything comes naturally" (*Mid*, p.41), Cal also acknowledges that he is over-reliant on props to aid his identity: "[t]he cigars, the double-breasted suits – they're a little too much. I'm well aware of that. But I need them. They make me feel better. After what I've been through, some overcompensation is to be expected" (*Mid*, p.41). The use of the term "naturally" draws attention to the unnaturalness of all performances, and illustrates that Cal remains plagued by uncertainties regarding his believability as a man. In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler argues that,

gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts* ... If the ground of gender identity is a stylised repetition of acts through time and not a seemingly seamless identity, then the spatial metaphor of a “ground” will be displaced and revealed as a stylized configuration ... The abiding gendered self will then be shown to be structured by repeated acts that seek to approximate the ideal of a substantial ground of identity, but which, in their occasional *discontinuity*, reveal the temporal and contingent groundlessness of this “ground”. (Butler, 1999, p.179)

Cal’s need to constantly assert his maleness with the use of clothes and other props actually undermines his maleness. He protests that he is “not androgynous in the least” (*Mid*, p.41), but then admits that there are times when “Calli[e] surfaces ... like a childhood speech impediment” (*Mid*, p.41), and that his maleness (“I use the men’s room” [*Mid*, p.41]) is diminished by “[n]ever [using] the urinals, always the stalls” (*Mid*, p.41).⁴⁶

Cal’s identity remains incomplete because his family struggles to accept him as a man: his father, Milton, dies without having a chance to see Cal as a man, which has the effect of arresting Cal’s development:

I like to think that my father’s love for me was strong enough that he could have accepted me. But in some ways it’s better that we never had to work that out, he and I. With respect to my father I will always remain a girl. (*Mid*, p.512)

Although Cal’s mother, Tessie, has the opportunity to meet her son, Cal “remain[s] in essential ways Tessie’s daughter” because he is “still the one who remembers to call her every Sunday ... the one she recounts her growing list of ailments to [and] like any good daughter [he]’ll be the one to nurse her in her old age” (*Mid*, p.520).

Cal is treated as a daughter not just because he has learned traditionally female behaviours, but also partly because Tessie cannot accept Cal as a man, suggesting to him that “it would have been easier just to stay the way you were” (*Mid*, p.520).

⁴⁶ The ability to use the men’s room is an important test of the ability to pass; this is developed in more detail in my examination of *Stone Butch Blues* later in this chapter.

Tessie's inability to understand, together with Cal's own worries about his gender, causes him to feel a great deal of shame, something he is "trying my best to get over it" (*Mid*, p.106). His shame means that he is "closeted at work" (*Mid*, p.107), and struggles with dating:

[t]he tailored suit comes off. The Thomas Pink shirt, too. My dates can't fail to be impressed by my physical condition. (Under the armor of my double-breasted suits is another of gym-built muscle.) But the final protection, my roomy, my discreet boxer shorts, these I do not remove. Ever. Instead I leave, making excuses. (*Mid*, p.107)

Cal's 'lack' of a penis, as alluded to by the roomy boxers, affects his confidence because he defines his maleness according to his genitals, as does the medical establishment. Interestingly, Francisco Collado-Rodriguez describes Cal as "somebody who was born apparently a girl, was subsequently brought up as such, but finally underwent a painful process of physical, psychic, and cultural transformation that turned her/him into *what society considers to be a man*" (Collado-Rodriguez, 2006, p.74, my emphasis). The fact is that Cal is a man *on the surface*, and goes to great lengths to emphasise his masculinity in order to hide the fact of his genital 'lack'.

Suzanne Kessler explains that in relation to medical construction of gender, "[t]he formulation 'good penis equals male; absence of good penis equals female', is treated in the literature and by the physicians interviewed as an objective criterion, operative in all cases" (cited in Elam, 2000, p.174). Similarly, Anne Fausto-Sterling points out that

[f]or proper masculine socialisation to occur, the little boy must have a sufficiently large penis ... In childhood, all that is required is that he be able to pee in a standing position. In adulthood, he must engage in vaginal heterosexual intercourse.⁴⁷ The discourse of sexual pleasure, even for males,

⁴⁷ Pilcher and Whelehan explain that "heterosexual penetrative intercourse is regarded as *the* determinant of heterosexual sex because it facilitates procreation, seen as governing 'normal' sexual response (regardless of what sexual practices heterosexuals individually favour)" (Pilcher and Whelehan, 2004, p.155).

is totally absent from this medical literature ... sexual pleasure clearly takes a backseat to ensuring heterosexual conventions. Penetration in the absence of pleasure takes precedence over pleasure in the absence of penetration. (Fausto-Sterling, 2000a, p.112).

The doubts in the mind of Cal's mother, together with what Cal terms his "physical predicament" (*Mid*, p.107), leave him feeling unable to have sex. At one point, Cal admits that he "invited Julie ... to go away for the weekend [but] made a point to emphasize that we would have separate rooms" (*Mid*, p.232). Cal's failure to consummate his relationship with Julie weighs on his mind, and at one point he interrupts the narrative to reflect on his lack of progress, saying "before I go on with [the] story, I want to update you on developments with Julie Kikuchi. With regard to the main point: there have been no developments" (*Mid*, p.272).

At college, Cal has a sexual relationship with a girl named Olivia – chosen because she is unthreatening: "Olivia had been savagely attacked when she was only thirteen, nearly raped ... The ordeal had arrested her development" (*Mid*, p.319). This situation appeals to Cal because he too is "emotionally adolescent" (*Mid*, p.319). Describing "the first time we took off our clothes in front of each other" (*Mid*, p.319), Cal likens it to "unwinding bandages" (*Mid*, p.319) illustrating the torture of slowly revealing his body to someone. Cal believes himself to be 'unfinished' – still waiting to be 'fixed', but when he sleeps with Olivia, Cal is contributing to the diminishment of his maleness by emphasising his under-developed body, describing himself as "as much of a man as Olivia could bear at that point. I was her starter kit" (*Mid*, p.319).

By the novel's end, Cal decides to explain himself to Julie, telling her that "[t]here's something you should know about me" (*Mid*, p.498). Eugenides does not let the reader into Cal's explanation to Julie – how he explains or defines himself – but in the last scene with Julie, she finally knows Cal's secret and they decide to

sleep together. Cal takes the dominant role: “I led Julie into the bedroom, where I hadn’t led anyone in quite a long time” (*Mid*, p.513). However, his control soon gives way to nervousness: “I was ... taking off my clothes. So was Julie. It was like jumping into cold water. You had to do it without thinking too much. We got under the covers and held each other, petrified, happy” (*Mid*, p.514). That Cal’s last present-day section of the novel ends with him in bed with Julie Kikuchi could be construed as a victory of sorts: despite his ‘difficulties’, Cal is finally a ‘real man’ because he is going to have sex with a woman. However, the ‘type’ of sex is left unexplained, which subverts this notion. As Zachary Sifuentes notes, “[w]hether in biological or performative ways, a hermaphrodite’s sexual practice jeopardizes dominant and radical visions of sexuality alike, in which the sustained ambiguity of the body unseats the very concept of sexual orientation, regardless if it is based on gender, sex, or some complex of the two” (Sifuentes, 2006, p.145). The fact that Cal might not be engaging in heterosexual penetrative intercourse affects his claims to maleness: Fausto-Sterling points out that “medical literature insists [that in] adulthood, the penis must become large enough for vaginal penetration during sexual intercourse” (Fausto-Sterling, 2000a, p.112). What Cal is actually doing is enacting “a very queer sexuality – one decidedly *hetero* in outward appearance but evidently strange behind the closed door and in the dimmed lights of the bedroom” (Sifuentes, 2006, p.146).

This means that on first glance, the ending of *Middlesex* appears unsatisfactory: Cal proves his masculinity by sleeping with a woman. However, the complexities of gender – specifically the lack of opportunities and acceptance for anybody who wishes to live outside of the male/female binary – mean that Eugenides is limited in the kind of conclusion he can craft. As a novel of Cal’s journey from

female to male, it is important that this journey has an end – a destination of ‘maleness’ that is diametrically opposed to femaleness – and it is because of this that Eugenides has to instead use Cal’s ethnicity (his previously mentioned struggle between his American identity and Greek heritage) to make his point. By the novel’s end, Cal finds himself torn between his Greek and American identities (symbolising Callie and Cal), but aware of the possibilities that are open to him.

Reinventing the Self

Cal’s past informs his future: the story of his grandparents’ crossing from Turkey to America reveals how identities can be transformed. In order to get a French passport that would allow him to flee Turkey, Cal’s grandfather, Lefty, “puckered up his lips and expelled air, as he’d seen Frenchmen do” (*Mid*, p.61). This marks the beginning of Lefty’s realisation that he can transform himself into whatever he wants to be, simply by changing his behaviour:

Lefty never discouraged any speculation. He seized the opportunity of transatlantic travel to reinvent himself. He wrapped a ratty blanket over his shoulders like an opera cape. Aware that whatever happened now would become the truth, that whatever he seemed to be would become what he was – already an American in other words – he waited for [his sister] to come up on deck. (*Mid*, p.67)

On arrival at America, Lefty declares that “[w]e’re all *Amerikanidhes* now” (*Mid*, p.99): his use of Greek terms underlines the belief that one can choose identities at will. Judith Butler opposes this notion, asking,

[i]f gender is a construction, must there be an ‘I’ or a ‘we’ who enacts or performs that construction? How can there be an activity, a constructing, without presupposing an agent who precedes and performs that activity? ... it takes a certain suspicion toward grammar to reconceive the matter in a different light. For if gender is constructed, it is not necessarily constructed by an ‘I’ or a ‘we’ who stands before that construction in any spatial or temporal sense. (Butler, 1993, p.7)

The way that Cal starts living as a male suggests that he agrees with Lefty: first choosing the identity and then adopting the behaviours. This is especially visible when Cal rejects the concept of a unified identity; although he considers himself to be very much “an American” (*Mid*, p.440), Cal later notes that “[w]e’re all made up of many parts, other halves. Not just me” (*Mid*, p.440). When Milton dies, it is Cal “who, upholding an old Greek custom no one remembered anymore, stayed behind [at the house], blocking the door, so that Milton’s spirit wouldn’t reenter the house. It was always a man who did this, and now I qualified” (*Mid*, p.529). The connection that is made between Cal’s Greek and male identities shows that he can adopt elements of the cultures and behaviours that are open to him, and use them when necessary or desirable. Cal’s fear that “there was another America to which we could never gain admittance” (*Mid*, p.298) exposes his fear that he might not be enough of a man, but the adventures of his grandparents prove to him that the most important thing is to have conviction in his own chosen male identity.

Stone Butch Blues

In her book, *Female Masculinity*, Judith Halberstam aims to answer the question, “[w]hat is ‘masculinity’?” (Halberstam, 1998, p.1). Despite the inherent difficulty in answering the question effectively, Halberstam is adamant that “masculinity must not and cannot and should not reduce down to the male body and its effects” (Halberstam, 1998, p.1). However, she is equally certain that “masculinity and maleness are profoundly difficult to pry apart” (Halberstam, 1998, p.2), and emphasises the “limitations of a discussion of masculinity that interpreted ‘masculinity’ as a synonym for men or maleness” (Halberstam, 1998, p.13). *Stone Butch Blues*, written by Leslie Feinberg, looks at the issue of feeling comfortable in one’s body and the way that intersects with cultural constructions of gender. The

main character, Jess, is a woman who finds it hard to accept the label of 'woman'. She embraces her 'female masculinity' to the point where she feels it may be safer to live as a man rather than be visible as a butch. However, in order to do this, Jess realises that acceptance as a man is dependent on hiding her past as a woman, leaving her trapped between herself and her body. The body, as far as Jess is concerned, is a site of conflict, never truly displaying what she feels she is. In part, this is because of the lack of a viable space in which to live: "[a]ll kinds of people, all kinds of identities, in other words, are simply not accounted for in the taxonomies we live with" (Halberstam, 2004, p.759). As Wilchins argues, "[b]uilding an 'accurate' imaginary body, which maps closely to the social reading of my body, is critical to navigating social space. It's integral to knowing which clothes to wear, who I can ask for a date, how to get my hair cut" (Wilchins, 1997, p.151). The novel, like *Middlesex*, rejects the notion that "the body tells the truth" (Fausto-Sterling, 2000a, p.109), arguing instead that the body is an experimental space.

In the context of traditional gendering practices, Judith Butler has referred to "the medical interpellation which...shifts an infant from an 'it' to a 'she' or a 'he,'" and states that "in that naming, the girl is 'girled,' brought into the domain of language and kinship through the interpellation of gender" (Butler, 1993, p.7). Jess's birth confirms Butler's argument, with Jess's mother's saying "[p]ut the baby over there" (*SBB*, p.14): Jess is reduced to 'baby' and denied a gender, an inversion of typical birth narratives. In Butlerian terms, Jess has not been 'girled'. In this context Butler also claims that

th[e] founding interpellation is reiterated by various authorities and throughout various intervals of time to reenforce [sic] or contest this naturalized effect. The naming is at once the setting of a boundary, and also the repeated inculcation of a norm. (Butler, 1993, p.8)

In the case of Jess, she finds that the otherness is established at birth and constantly highlighted: “[n]o one ever offered a name for what was wrong with me. That’s what made me afraid it was really bad. I only came to recognize its melody through this constant refrain: ‘Is that a boy or a girl?’” (*SBB*, p.13). Jess’s situation is summed up by Halberstam’s comment that “gender assignments rely so heavily on the visual” (Halberstam, 2005, p.104). By failing to be clearly distinguishable as either a man or a woman, Jess attracts anger and a lack of understanding.

Jess’s confusion as a young adult is eased when she discovers lesbian bars, and in particular, butch lesbians with whom she can identify. Encouraged by what she sees, Jess starts to create and live her own butch identity; one that is not reliant on the “normative constraints” (Butler, 1993, p.x) that Butler deems necessary for “heterosexual hegemony” (Butler, 1993, p.xii). Having been worn down by society’s prejudice, and feeling “self-conscious about being so butch” (*SBB*, p.78) in the outside world, Jess draws some strength from a butch who has chosen the route of hormones and surgery:

[s]tanding in the doorway was a mountain of a woman. She wore a black leather jacket unzipped. Her chest was flat, and it was clear she wasn’t wearing a binder. Her jeans were low slung, unbelted. She carried her riding gloves and her helmet in one hand. Rocco. Her legend preceded her. (*SBB*, p.95)

Jess is impressed because Rocco “worked as a man on a building site” (*SBB*, p.95), but she does not seriously consider Rocco to *be* a man, as evidenced by her use of female pronouns when discussing Rocco. This can also be seen when Jess and her friends discuss another butch who has chosen surgery: “‘You know Ginni? She got on a sex-change program, now she calls herself Jimmy.’ Edwin glared at Grant. ‘He asked us to call him he – remember? We ought to do it’” (*SBB*, p.144). As far as Jess and her friends are concerned, surgery and hormones will not make these butches

men, but rather provide a cover under which they can hide themselves, and remain safe.

Rocco therefore represents a departure from Foucault's notion of the body as "caught up in a system of constraints and privations, obligations and prohibitions" (Foucault, 1977, p.11), insofar as she represents a new understanding of the body as a site of personal gender expression, and her story makes Jess question which direction she is heading in: "[n]o matter how painful it was to be a he-she, I wondered what kind of courage was required to leave the sex you'd always known, or to live so alone" (*SBB*, p.95). The emphasis on Jess's sex as something she had "always known" makes it clear that her subsequent thoughts about surgery are not prompted by a specific desire to be male. This contrasts with Alan Sinfield's claim that "[i]n Feinberg's *Stone Butch Blues* ... whether [stone butches] should be considered as lesbian or as somehow male is an issue ... Some of the butches seek to ratify their maleness through hormone treatment and surgery" (Sinfield, 2000, p.152).

The Limitation of Binaries

At the same time that Jess is thinking about hormones and sex changes, her femme girlfriend, Theresa, starts to become more politicised, developing an interest in the women's liberation movement. Theresa's argument is that "Butches need women's liberation ... Anything that's good for women is good for butches" (*SBB*, p.138), but this comment only serves to illustrate that butches are considered separate from women. Jess regards her identity as 'woman' as secondary to her 'butch' identity, and actually thinks that 'man' and 'woman' are too simplistic for her needs, saying to Theresa,

I just had this really amazing dream...I had a beard and my chest was flat. It made me so happy...it wasn't about being gay. It was about being a man or a woman. Do you know what I mean? I always feel I have to prove I'm like other women, but in the dream I didn't feel that way. I'm not even sure I felt like a woman. (*SBB*, p.143)

Stating that she “didn't feel like a woman or a man” (*SBB*, p.143), Jess admits she liked being different, suggesting the limitations of binaries to define and contain what Jess is. Giving some more thought to Rocco, Jess feels that she may be “safe” (*SBB*, p.144) if she takes hormones because she'll be able to hide from people, and it will take her into the Butlerian ‘safe’ zone of gender binaries. When she finds out that her friend Ed has started taking hormones, Jess asks, “What happens? Does it just last for a little while? I mean can you go back to being a butch later, when it's safe to come out?” (*SBB*, p.145), indicating that she does not consider taking hormones to mark a permanent change. In fact, Jess tells Theresa that she is thinking of starting on hormones “to pass as a guy” (*SBB*, p.146). Jess does not want to *be* male, and she does not consider it possible – by taking hormones, Jess believes she will look like a man, and be able to convince other people that she is a man, but not that she will *be* a man.

Theresa does not really understand why Jess wants to take hormones, and cannot accept it:

‘[y]ou're a woman!’ Theresa shouted at breakfast...
‘No I'm not,’ I yelled back at her. ‘I'm a he-she. That's different.’
Theresa slapped the table in anger. ‘That's a terrible word. They call you that to hurt you’. (*SBB*, p.147)⁴⁸

Here the issue of pronouns and their role in fixing gender identity raises its head again. In this context, Suzanne Romaine argues that “pronouns are used to represent not just anatomy, but a complex and varying concept of oneself as a gendered

⁴⁸ Feinberg reclaims the term ‘he-she’ in *Transgender Warriors*: “[s]he’ and ‘he’ are customarily used to describe *both* the birth sex *and* the gender expression of an individual. But ‘he-she’ and ‘she-male’ describe the person’s gender expression with the first pronoun and the birth sex with the second” (Feinberg, 1996, p.97).

person” (Romaine, 1999, p.47), and by adopting the compound ‘he-she’, Jess is revealing the inadequacy of either ‘she’ or ‘he’ to define her. Jess embraces the category of ‘he-she’ – normally a term of abuse – as a means of self-definition and this is the closest that language gets in the novel to an accurate description of what Jess is because it corresponds with her feeling of not comfortably fitting in to either gender category, but possessing elements of both.

Riki Wilchins points out that “there is not a single word for people who don’t fit gender norms that is positive, affirming, and complimentary. There is not even a word that is neutral ... Language works against you. It is meant to, because the language of gender is highly political” (Wilchins, 2004, p.38). Jess is trying to reclaim language, to make the power of language work for, rather than against, her. Nonetheless, Theresa feels that she cannot accept Jess as a man because it calls into question her own category as a lesbian and a femme, saying she doesn’t want to be “some man’s wife, even if that man’s a woman” (*SBB*, p.148). The viability of ‘lesbian’ as a distinct category is further eroded by Halberstam’s assertion that “[s]ome queer identities have appeared recently in lesbian zines and elsewhere: guys with pussies, dykes with dicks, queer butches, aggressive femmes, F2Ms, lesbians who like men, daddy boys, gender queens, drag kings, porno afro homos, bulldaggers, women who fuck boys, women who fuck like boys, dyke mommies, transsexual lesbians, male lesbians. As the list suggests, gay/lesbian/straight simply cannot account for the range of sexual experience available” (Halberstam, 2004, p.760). Similarly, Joan Nestle explains that “[w]hat I have come to understand is that there are pluralistic gender histories, pluralistic challenges to the male/female, woman/man, lesbian, butch/femme construction and identities as I had come to know them” (Nestle, 2002, p.9).

Jess knows she “can’t go on much longer without something changing” (*SBB*, p.151), but Theresa reiterates that she does not want to be with a man. As a femme, Theresa faces a different set of problems from Jess. Although, according to Nikki Sullivan, butches are “‘masculine’ women who made explicit the existence of lesbianism” (Sullivan, 2003, p.27), the problem is that femmes are often visibly indistinguishable from heterosexual women. Femmes, then, are suffering an alternative discrimination, where they are either not derided for being lesbians, because they are wrongly assumed to be heterosexual, or become “largely invisible or passed over as ‘pseudo lesbians’” (Waterhouse, 1993, p.106). Riki Wilchins argues that “[i]n a culture where masculinity is defined by having sex with women and femininity by having sex with men, all gay people are genderqueer” (Wilchins, 2002a, p.12). However, Theresa’s problem is that she is not read as queer enough.⁴⁹ Therefore, she cannot accept Jess’s decision because of the implications it will have for her own queer identity, which is confirmed by Jess’s female masculinity:

I put on lipstick and high heels and walk down the street arm in arm with you, Jess. This is my life, and I’m damn brave to love who I love...If I’m not with a butch everyone just assumes I’m straight. It’s like I’m passing too, against my will. I’m sick of the world thinking I’m straight. I’ve worked hard to be discriminated against as a lesbian. (*SBB*, p.151)⁵⁰

While Jess is fleeing discrimination, Theresa actively seeks it. Jess has to constantly “defend who [she is]” (*SBB*, p.148) because she cannot avoid being identified as a butch, but Theresa has the opposite problem: as a femme, her lesbianism is either not taken seriously, or “everyone assumes [she is] straight” (*SBB*, p.151), and so she

⁴⁹ Defining ‘genderqueer’, Wilchins argues that “[w]ords work well for things we can repeat, that we hold in common. What is unique or private is lost to language. But gender is a system of meanings that shapes our experience of bodies. Genderqueerness is by definition unique, private, and profoundly different. That’s what makes it ‘queer’” (Wilchins, 2002c, p.46). From this definition, it is clear that Theresa is not different enough (at least, not visually) to be understood as queer.

⁵⁰ Sonya Bolus makes the same point in “Loving Outside Simple Lines”, a narrative detailing her reaction to her butch lover’s decision to have chest reconstruction, and begin living as a transgender man: “[m]y greatest fear is of how this might affect my own sense of self. ‘Just don’t ask me to be straight,’ I tell you. ‘It took me too much pain, and time and struggle to come out queer, lesbian, and femme-proud. I can’t go back’” (Bolus, 2002, p.116).

needs to be with a butch to validate her identity as a lesbian. Theresa's position is echoed by Maltz in "Fading to Pink". Maltz has coined the term "[f]emme invisibility" (Maltz, 2002, p.161) to describe the way in which femmes "are misread as heterosexual" (Maltz, 2002, p.161). For Maltz, being a femme is in itself characterised by the struggle to be recognised as queer: "GLBT pride means being visible queer, and being visibly queer means compromising my femmeness" (Maltz, 2002, p.161). Just as butches fight against the assumption that masculinity is synonymous with maleness, so do femmes battle "against the assumption that femininity in a female means [they are] heterosexual" (Maltz, 2002, p.161). To return to Halberstam's words, the problem femmes face is not being "readable at a glance" (Halberstam, 1998, p.23). Maltz admits that it is difficult to read her as queer because her queerness is only read through her declaration of queerness, or her proximity to other (more visible) queers, and queer situations: "I am persistently outing myself ... I am also marked as queer through my affiliations with queer organizations, my friendships, my writing, and the presence of my partner, a stone butch" (Maltz, 2002, p.162). Irene Rose's simplistic assertion that "butch/femme lesbian couples ... liv[e] their lives perceptually as heterosexuals" (Rose, 2003, p.149), is challenged by Feinberg's depiction of the complex relationship between Theresa and Jess. Like Maltz, both Theresa and Jess are haunted by how others perceive them and their bodies. Although Jess wants to try and pass as a man, Theresa cannot bear the thought of being perceived as heterosexual, and so their irreconcilable positions ultimately force them apart.

The 'Bathroom Problem'

Jess is haunted by her body because it stops her interacting with the world, and marks her as different. As she says on a number of occasions, "I just don't want to be

different any more” (*SBB*, p.159). With her first hormone shot, Jess hopes she can, as she says, “finally be [her]self” (*SBB*, p.164). Choosing to have surgery is a more notable decision than taking hormones because it is not easily reversed, and it must be contrasted with her initial wish to take hormones as a temporary measure. Tiffany Atkinson suggests in the context of bodily dissection that “[w]ith the opening of the cadaver to the scientific gaze, anatomists effectively became ‘the first modern persons to distinguish man from his body’” (Atkinson, 2005, p.6). Jess’s decision to have surgery will not distinguish her from her body because she will be appearing as male and passing as male, but, in the sense that Jess actually considers herself to be female, she is being distinguished from her newly acquired ‘male’ body.

So it would seem that the hormones and surgery are only worthwhile as long as they help Jess to consolidate a ‘performance’ of masculinity which will pass as male, and so she must test her appearance to ensure that she is a convincing ‘man’. Jess goes to a barbershop and when the barber responds warmly to Jess and calls her “sir” (*SBB*, p.172), she feels “excitement” at “entering men’s turf” (*SBB*, p.172), but I would argue that her pleasure comes not just from being perceived as a man, but from not being rejected. The next self-imposed test will serve to confirm this success: Jess decides it is “time for the most important test of all: the men’s room” (*SBB*, p.172). Halberstam devotes an entire section of her book *Female Masculinity* to what she calls “The Bathroom Problem”:

in public bathrooms for women, various bathroom users tend to fail to measure up to expectations of femininity, and those of us who present in some ambiguous way are routinely questioned and challenged about our presence in the ‘wrong’ bathroom. (Halberstam, 1998, p.20)

Halberstam uses a scene in *Stone Butch Blues* where Jess is mocked for using the women’s bathroom as an illustration of what she terms the ‘bathroom problem’ but she ignores Jess’s test in the men’s bathroom, even though Jess-as-man is the “self

that masquerades as another kind of self and does so successfully” (Halberstam, 1998, p.21). Despite overlooking this, Halberstam does admit that “for the FTM, the men’s room represents the most severe test of his ability to pass” (Halberstam, 1998, p.25).

Marjorie Garber also focuses attention on ‘the bathroom problem’, looking at Lacan’s discussion of “Urinary Segregation” (Garber, 1992, p.13). The important issue for Garber is that “[t]he signs on the doors do not contain pictures of sex organs; they satisfy a desire for cultural binarism rather than for biological certainty” (Garber, 1992, p.13). Garber points out that “the words ‘men’ and ‘women’ or ‘ladies’ and ‘gentlemen’ have been replaced by signs showing a figure dressed in male clothes – trousers – and a figure dressed in female clothes – a skirt or a dress” (Garber, 1992, p.14). She adds a curious afterthought to this: “[y]et no one (except perhaps transvestites and transsexuals) interprets these signs literally or mimetically” (Garber, 1992, p.14). I would say that no one *including* transvestites and transsexuals, interprets the signs literally. If transvestites or transsexuals were to go into the ‘wrong’ bathroom (and here we enter the problem of what the ‘right’ bathroom is), they do so perhaps because they wish to pass, or perhaps because they are dissatisfied with the gender they were assigned at birth, not because they have misread the signs.⁵¹ In this sense, using a public bathroom, for everyone, becomes a

⁵¹ Diane Elam makes a similar point: “the pictures which accompany or replace the written designations on Western toilet facilities do not necessarily bear a strict resemblance to those individuals who are hailed by them. Women will not necessarily wear the familiar skirt which inevitably adorns the women’s room, and men in kilts and djellebas will not particularly resemble their trousered counterparts” (Elam, 2000, p.171). However, Elam adds, “there must, underneath it all, be a moment of visual accountability. Women who fail to resemble sufficiently stereotypic women will be likely to find themselves accosted by law enforcement officials and asked to prove why they should be using the women’s not the men’s room – presence of the wrong set of genitals indicates the presence of a pervert” (Elam, 2000, p.171).

statement: this is what I wish to be (today).⁵² For Jess, using a public bathroom is an opportunity to show how she wants to be perceived.

Now that she does not have to hide, Jess thinks life will be easier, but when Jess starts living as a man, she finds that she has placed herself under constraints, stating that

passing didn't just mean slipping below the surface, it meant being buried alive. I was still me on the inside, trapped in there with all my wounds and fears. But I was no longer me on the outside. (SBB, p.173)

Jean Bobby Noble contrasts Jess's situation with that of Mary in *Sacred Country*:

“[o]ne of the strategies of survival that Jess chooses – a strategy that eventually works both with and against the conditions of (un)intelligibility mandated by the sex/gender system – is that of passing. Where Martin emerges to enable Mary's *becoming more himself*, especially once Mary leaves Swaithey for London, Jess's passing enables self-alienation and almost virtual erasure” (Noble, 2003, p.109). Jess does not ‘become more herself’ because being male is not her ultimate aim. As she finds it easier and easier to pass as male, Jess is getting further away from her butch identity. In part, this is because Jess is afraid of bumping into someone who knew her as a woman, and who could therefore ‘out’ her, a sentiment echoed by the American journalist Norah Vincent, who undertook an experiment in 2004 to live as a man: “[y]ou are always afraid that someone knows you are not who you say you are, or will know immediately if you make even the slightest false step” (Vincent, 2006, p.269). Although strangers are ‘fooled’ by Jess's appearance, Jess realises that forming relationships means keeping quiet about her past. A potential employer explains that he is interested in hiring Jess because “[y]ou look like a clean-cut

⁵² A male-to-female transsexual who felt she was “too read[ily] encourage[d] to have a sex change operation” (Batty, 2006) told a General Medical Council disciplinary hearing that she “feels unable to live as either a man or a woman” (Batty, 2006), specifically finding it difficult to choose which bathroom to use: “I get very confused when it comes to even simple things such as choosing which conveniences to use. It is very hard” (Batty, 2006).

young man”, although Jess knows that “[o]nly a short time before I had been a monster” (*SBB*, p.174). Therefore, this new-found acceptance, which is based on a falsehood, is essentially worthless: “[a]ll my life I’d been told everything about me was really twisted and sick. But if I was a man, I was ‘cute’. Acceptance of me as a he felt like an ongoing indictment of me as a he-she” (*SBB*, p.178). Gender is here portrayed as inter-relational, constructed through social discourse, and Feinberg is questioning whether gender can exist in solitude and/or isolation.

Woman or Man?

In spite of the fact that Foucault claims that “[s]olitude was necessary to both body and soul” (Foucault, 1977, p.143), Jess finds constant solitude overwhelming because it does not present her with the opportunity to validate her identity. She took hormones to hide her difference and blend into society, and has gone to a lot of effort to change the way people see her, but now nobody is looking because she looks ‘normal’. Butler acknowledges that “I may feel that without some recognizability I cannot live. But I may also feel that the terms by which I am recognized make life unlivable [sic]” (Butler, 2004, p.4). What this means is that Jess is grappling with a similar problem to Theresa. Theresa needed people to *see* her with a butch to know that she was a lesbian. If she had stayed with Jess after surgery, people wouldn’t have seen her as a femme because they would not have been looking. Solitude therefore poses a problem for Jess because of her lack of confidence in her male identity, experiencing “the constant terror of discovery” (*SBB*, p.173). Her fractured identity is therefore difficult to maintain.

Dissatisfied with the direction her life has taken, Jess finds herself drawn back towards the butch/femme world, not least because there she finds someone who

will accept her identity.⁵³ Edna is a femme that Jess has long been attracted to, and Jess feels accepted because Edna “smiled, as though she liked what she saw” (*SBB*, p.211). When Feinberg writes this, she is not trying to say that Edna recognizes Jess as male, but that Edna approves of Jess as a butch, regardless of her body. Edna reaches out to Jess not just emotionally, but physically, causing Jess to have regrets about her transformation: “Edna ran her fingertips across the beard stubble on my cheek. I wished I had shaved before I’d gone to the gym” (*SBB*, p.212). Edna offers an interesting perspective on the success of Jess’s transformation, saying that, “[i]n a way I don’t know how anyone in the world could think you’re a man, especially if they looked into your eyes” (*SBB*, p.212). Edna is able to see the beauty that Jess represents as an individual, even as she stumbles over the vocabulary to describe it: “[y]ou are so beautiful,” she whispered. ‘Handsome, I should have said you are so handsome’” (*SBB*, p.216).

Romaine claims that “Language is fundamental to understanding gendered selves” (Romaine, 1999, p.xi), and that it “reflects existing social identities rather than constructs them” (Romaine, 1999, p.xiii). Edna is confused, using the word ‘beautiful’, because it is a word often applied to women, but switching to ‘handsome’ as it seems more appropriate for Jess’s masculine appearance. This, as Romaine argues, reflects Jess’s current identity as masculine, but also reveals the inadequacy of language: “languages ... like the surgeon’s scalpel, impose a dichotomy into male (*he*) and female (*she*), compelling us to choose one or the other in referring to

⁵³ Jess also finds herself drawn back to her past by the realisation that “[t]here is no ‘other’ side, no ‘opposite’ sex, no natural divide to be spanned by surgery, by disguise, by passing” (Halberstam, 2004, p.761). The very thing that begins Jess’s gender journey – the lack of a perfect identity – is also what ends up bringing her back to her butch roots. Jess failed to live up to society’s conceptions of the ‘perfect woman’ because of her masculinity, and she subsequently realises that gender is not a system of opposites, but rather a spectrum of identities. There is no ‘other’ side for her to reach, so instead of gaining her freedom, Jess is in the same position she was always in – unable to tell the ‘truth’ about her identity and fearful of people discovering who she is.

people” (Romaine, 1999, p.45). The compulsion to choose one or the other leads Edna to attempt to avoid the issue while seeming to give support to Jess’s masculine identity. Because Edna appears to understand this issue of Jess’s gender, she is asked to provide Jess with an answer to the question that has plagued her for so long: “Do you think I’m a woman?” (*SBB*, p.217).

In asking this, Jess is looking to somebody else to explain what she is, just as she has relied on other people to identify her as masculine. Not having anybody she can turn to stops Jess from reaching any definite conclusions, and limits her response: “[t]here’s never been many other women in the world I could identify with. But I sure as hell don’t feel like a guy, either. I don’t know what I am” (*SBB*, p.217). Edna’s answer to this problem takes into consideration all the struggles that Jess has faced to try and fit in: “[y]ou’re not alone in the feeling that you’re not a man or a woman ... You’re more than just neither, honey. There’s other ways to be than either-or. It’s not so simple. Otherwise there wouldn’t be so many people who don’t fit” (*SBB*, p.218). Although this grey area is the area occupied by people in general, Jess finds that by appearing to ‘fit’, she is further alienated from herself. Jess wishes that “everything could go back to the way it was” (*SBB*, p.218) and starts to understand that passing is not the answer. The problem for Jess is, as Jason Cromwell points out, “passing means blending in and becoming unnoticeable and unremarkable as either a man or a woman” (Cromwell, 1999, p.39). However Jess reconfigures her body, she cannot escape its implications. By blending in, she has shut the door on her old life as a butch, but as a man she is excluded from the lesbian world. She asks herself,

who was I now – woman or man? I fought long and hard to be included as woman among women, but I always felt so excluded by my differences. I hadn’t just believed that passing would hide me. I hoped that it would allow

me to express the part of myself that didn't seem to be a woman. (*SBB*, p.222)⁵⁴

This references Jess's earlier identification as a he-she. In trying to prove herself as a 'he-she', Jess tries to emphasise her masculine side, but it ends up overshadowing her female identity, to the point where she didn't get to explore being a he-she, she "simply became a he – a man without a past" (*SBB*, p.222).

Following Edna's suggestion that either-or is not the only way, Jess decides to try and go back to being a he-she, saying "[w]hat *if* the real me could emerge, changed by the journey. Who would I be? Suddenly, I needed to know" (*SBB*, p.222). Jess believes that once the hormones wear off, she'll discover she's gone "full circle" (*SBB*, p.222), and this does seem to be the case when she describes her anxious wait for her body to change back, which parallels the initial impatience she felt when she first started hormones:

[n]othing happened when I stopped taking hormones. For months I got up every morning and raced to the mirror, breathless with anticipation. Nothing changed. It was sort of anti-climactic. It took many hours of electrolysis before I began to feel the softness of my cheeks again. One morning I got up and found menstrual blood on my BVD's. (*SBB*, p.224)

Feinberg presents Jess as having no regrets about passing. She is not trying to correct a mistake because she "wouldn't have survived much longer without passing" (*SBB*, p.224), and she does not regret her changed body either, stating that "surgery was a gift to myself, a coming home to my body" (*SBB*, p.224). In the midst of her change, Jess reverts back to the unknown:

[m]y beard grew wispy and fine from electrolysis. My face looked softer. Once my voice was hormone-lowered, however, it stayed there. And my chest was still flat. My body was blending gender characteristics ... Woman

⁵⁴ According to Sullivan, "the process of naming inevitably involves (re)constructing oneself in and through humanist identity categories – often imposed by others – and moreover, bracketing off or veiling over all the aspects of oneself that do not seem to fit neatly with such a designation" (Sullivan, 2003, p.53). By identifying as a 'man', Jess has to cut herself off from anything that could draw attention to her past as a butch.

or man: they are outraged that I confuse them. The punishment will follow. The only recognition I can find in their eyes is that I am 'other'. (SBB, p.224)

Jay Prosser reads *Stone Butch Blues* as “the story of a transsexual who turned back; or, rather, of a subject who, like Feinberg herself [sic], halts her transition through surgery and hormones to found an embodied transgendered subjectivity” (Prosser, 1998, p.178). To Prosser,

the narrative suggests that Jess’s move away from femaleness is emphatically not a case of a ‘lesbian’s’ or a ‘woman’s’ going under cover as a man to escape stigmatization but part of one stone butch’s attempt to embody her transgender. Passing for Jess (in spite of how the plot turns out) is emphatically not a woman’s or a lesbian’s passing phase. (Prosser, 1998, p.183)⁵⁵

Referencing this reading, Halberstam asserts that “when the main character, Jess Goldberg, chooses to halt his transition from female to male, we see the necessary insufficiency of binary gender rather than the solidity of transsexual identification” (Halberstam, 1998, p.148). Prosser’s claims, and Halberstam’s use of ‘him’ to describe Jess, contrast with my own reading of the novel, which argues that Jess’s transition is not halted, simple because being a man is not her intended destination. Rather, Jess wishes to conceal her femaleness until such a time as she can openly live as a butch. Jess herself makes this clear when she asks “can you go back to being a butch later, when it’s safe to come out?” (SBB, p.145). I disagree with Halberstam’s

⁵⁵ Jason Cromwell explains that “[w]ithin transsexual discourses, passing means blending in and becoming unnoticeable and unremarkable as either a man or a woman. Blending in as normal means that one has succeeded and become a ‘real’ man or woman. With ‘realness,’ an individual is no longer a member of the stigmatized group of transsexuals; she or he has completed ‘transition’ and is now ‘just a woman’ or ‘just a man’. To do otherwise is to fail” (Cromwell, 1999, p.39). This differs from the way passing is understood within mainstream discourse “when female-bodied people who have lived as or who do live as men are discovered” (Cromwell, 1999, p.39). In this situation, such success is read as “disguise, masquerade, and pretense. The assumption is that a reader knows the meaning behind the behaviour and actions and that these involve intentional artifice; the person is something other than what he or she says or does” (Cromwell, 1999, p.39). This provides a way to understand the reactions of characters to both Joss (*Trumpet*) and James (*James Miranda Barry*) after their deaths. However, what Cromwell does not articulate is that these differing views can also be explained in terms of discovery (pre- or post-death). The reading of passing as “disguise, masquerade and pretense” (Cromwell, 1999, p.39) obviously does not apply if the individual is never discovered to be passing. In such a case, passing would mean, as in transsexual discourse, “blending in and becoming unnoticeable” (Cromwell, 1999, p.39).

assertion that Jess is, or was, ever in transit from female to male. Although Halberstam refers to the 'insufficiency of binary gender', she ironically depends on this binary too much, implying with her reading that Jess can only be either male or female. Feinberg takes great pains to show that Jess does not want to be a man, revealing her hope that she will be able to go back to being a butch when the political situation changes, as well as including many instances where Jess rejects the label of 'male' and 'man'. Because of this, I am also troubled by Halberstam's use of the male pronoun (his) to describe Jess. Although Jess does want strangers to respond to her as a man, it is important to draw a distinction between this and her lack of identity as a man when she is alone. The identification as a man is only necessary to reduce the risk of attack from prejudicial sources – the very reason that prompted her initial decision to start hormones.

Reconnecting with the Body

Once the transformation is underway, Jess decides that it would be safer if she moves away to New York, where nobody knows her, but even there she is subject to questions from people who do not know how to categorise her, asking "are you a guy or what?" (*SBB*, p.230). Jess is not completely sure of the answer herself, but a vaginal infection forces her to reconsider her identity as 'woman'. In spite of her efforts to control it, Jess's 'haunted' body provides the catalyst that saves her, even though her attempt to get help at the women's health clinic is met with ridicule:

'[t]his clinic is for women,' the receptionist smiled.
I nodded. 'I know. I have a vaginal infection,' I whispered.
'A what?' she asked ... 'Are you kidding?'
I shook my head ...
'Have a seat sir'. (*SBB*, p.234)

Jess is fortunate to be treated by a doctor who, although not completely willing to believe her, is willing to give her the benefit of the doubt: “[y]ou might be a man. But if you are a woman, I don’t want to send you away. It doesn’t cost me anything to write you out a prescription” (*SBB*, p.236). This semi-acceptance of her as a woman prompts Jess to consult a bookstore in a bid to understand what the term ‘woman’ actually means. In the bookstore, Jess describes how

the Women’s Studies section tempted me. By leafing through the books I could eavesdrop on the discussions going on between women without being seen. It turned out to be true that I couldn’t understand a lot of the theory. But I felt as though I was rushing into a burning building to rescue the ideas I needed in my own life. (*SBB*, p.239)

Jess initially fails to see any connection between herself and what she is reading, until she considers herself through somebody else’s eyes:

[a]t first I skimmed past all the words and pages about reproductive rights. I had no relationship to my own uterus. But I remembered how upset Theresa had been after I got busted in Rochester because she couldn’t remember when she had her last period. I never kept track of my menstrual cycle. But Theresa always knew when my period was in relation to hers. It suddenly made sense to me: she was afraid I might have gotten pregnant. The idea had never occurred to me. What would I have done if I’d gotten pregnant after a rape? (*SBB*, p.239)

This is a troubling part of the narrative: by rethinking her relationship to her body, Jess starts to accept that she is a woman. In other words, Feinberg is suggesting that Jess’s body equals Jess’s identity. Along with the menstrual blood in her BVDs and her vaginal infection, the possibility that Jess could fall pregnant is presented as evidence of the apparent immutability of her female identity. And yet, this must be contrasted with Jess’s success in crossing from female and male (achieved by changing her body with the aid of surgery and hormones) and her identity as a he-she.

Once Jess starts accepting her own gender status, she “stop[s] skipping over the sections in books about women controlling their own bodies. Maybe all of these

things that were so important to other women would prove to have meaning for me, too” (*SBB*, p.240). Jess (re)constructs her female identity book by book, idea by idea. Her body is a vessel through which she can start to understand what is expected of her – and what she cannot avoid in terms of the development and possibilities of her body. The concept of woman remains too narrow for her, so having re-embraced her identity as a woman in the only way she can – through her butchness – Jess comes to the realisation that Theresa was correct, and that some of the words she used to define herself were just an expression of her own self-hatred: “I’m a butch. A he-she. I don’t know if the people that hate our guts call us that anymore. But that single epithet shaped my teenage years” (*SBB*, p.296). Revealing her feelings at a gay rally, Jess is rewarded when people respond positively to her: “[w]hen I handed the mike to the woman who was chairing, she put her arm around me. ‘Good for you, sister,’ she whispered in my ear. No one had ever called me that before” (*SBB*, p.296). Referencing Jess’s earlier hopes, she says “I felt my whole life coming full circle. Growing up so different, coming out as a butch, passing as a man, and then back to the same question that had shaped my life: woman or man?” (*SBB*, p.301)

At the novel’s end, Jess has reached a sense of peace regarding her identity. She feels comfortable in her surgery-scarred body, and no longer haunted by it, because it represents the male and female elements of who she is, but also because it reflects the hard journey she has been through: from confused child to butch woman, surgically-altered woman to passing man, and nonperson to butch. At times, the body reflects how Jess feels, but at other times the distance between the body and Jess’s sense of ‘essence’ is intolerable. Jess is haunted by what she ‘is’, as if her being is essence, which runs counter to what Butler states:

[t]hat the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality ... if that reality

is fabricated as an interior essence, that very interiority is an effect and function of a decidedly public and social discourse, the public regulation of fantasy through the surface politics of the body, the gender border control that differentiates inner from outer, and so institutes the 'integrity' of the subject. (Butler, 1999, p.173)

Halberstam's statement that "[m]asculinity and maleness are profoundly difficult to pry apart" is proven when Jess's surgery-scarred body fails to resolve her problems, but the acknowledgement that her female physiology of vagina, womb and ovaries can exist within the labels of 'he-she' and 'butch' is the major break-through and it releases Jess to her body from the demons which have haunted her all her life. Jess makes a conscious decision to live as a man for a short period of time, with the intent of one day re-identifying as a butch when the political climate has changed sufficiently to make such an identity 'safe' to adopt, which it is at the novel's culmination. As a result, the process of having surgery and following a drug regime does not cut Jess off from herself. On the contrary, reconfiguring her body allows it to more accurately reflect the mix of masculinity and femininity that constitutes her identity.

Sacred Country

In *Masculinities Without Men?* Jean Bobby Noble draws parallels between *Stone Butch Blues* and *Sacred Country*, another of my chosen texts, particularly in the way that the protagonists of both novels equate masculinity with suffering, and attempt to improve their lives by passing as male.⁵⁶ However, my own findings cause me to disagree with Noble's view. *Stone Butch Blues* and *Sacred Country* are two very different books, dealing with extremely different gender crises. Whereas *Stone Butch Blues* temporarily passes as a member of the opposite sex, the protagonist of *Sacred*

⁵⁶ According to Noble, "both Mary Martin and Jess seek out medical interventions in order to alter their bodies ...they both retreat from this process and choose to reside permanently in No Man's Land, neither one gender nor the other but *both*" (Noble, 2003, p.100).

Country is committed to sex reassignment surgery and a permanent transition from female to male, only to eventually refuse the final stage of the transformation (genital surgery). In Emma Parker's "The Real Thing: Transsexuality and Manhood in Rose Tremain's *Sacred Country*", the most recent writing on *Sacred Country*, Parker argues that "a penis is superfluous to Martin's identity as a man" (Parker, 2007, p.307). Unconvinced by this reading, I argue instead that Martin actually achieves peace in his Butlerian designation of "not-woman", thus rendering the final act of surgery unnecessary.

Although Mary is convinced from the age of six that a "mistake" (*SC*, p.5) has been made, and that she is "not a girl" (*SC*, p.5), her subsequent attempts to realise her male identity expose the failings of this identity, and raise questions about what it means to 'be' male or female.

Mary is first conscious of being 'different' during a silence to mark the death of King George VI. In Jason Cromwell's study of female to male transsexuals, it is stated that "[s]ome individuals may believe or come to believe that they are in the wrong body or at least use language that imparts the same meaning" (Cromwell, 1999, p.104). Mary makes it clear that "I am not a girl. I'm a boy" (*SC*, p.5), and spends the rest of the narrative attempting to (re)write and control her body narrative. Alan Sinfield suggests that "every identity is an exclusion as well as an inclusion" (Sinfield, 2000, p.150), while Jay Prosser reads identity as "inarguably violent work. As Judith Butler and other theorists of identity working out of psychoanalysis so cogently show, identification, whether with an ideal or with an embodied subject, is inextricably entangled with disidentification. To claim an identity for myself is by implication to disclaim others" (Prosser, 1999, p.88). Mary's subsequent choice to identify as 'Martin' is as much as a rejection of her 'Mary' identity as it is an

acceptance of her 'Martin' identity. In the case of *Trumpet*, Joss's male identity results in an explicit rejection of his 'Josephine' identity, but this is a rejection that Millie shares in; a direct result of her investment in Joss's identity. This process starts with the understanding that she will not be able to fulfil the conditions for womanhood that have been set down by her family:

she had never been able to imagine herself growing up to be like Grandma Livia. She knew she would not become beautiful or join the Women's League, whatever a Women's League might be. And after the day of the two-minute silence, she knew she would not even be a woman. (*SC*, p.6)

Mary fixates on her "coming life as a boy" (*SC*, p.13), and constructs elaborate stories to explain how she will one day become male:

[t]here was a swing at the farm. It was tied to the limb of a Scots pine. Sonny had made it for Tim from a tractor tyre and a length of rope ... There was a gap between the low limb of the pine and its higher branches. When Mary stood in the tyre, it was this gap she was aiming for. The gap was a test ... If she could make the tyre go up into the gap with such speed and power that she and it flew vertically above the pine limb and down again on the other side, completing a circle, well, then anything she prayed for would certainly happen. In particular, becoming a boy would happen. (*SC*, p.26)

By setting herself impossible tasks, Mary ensures that her failure is built into her narratives, although in a partially concealed way that ensures that she does not have to confront the truth. When her attempt ends in failure ("the tyre wouldn't go high enough to reach the gap. It wouldn't even get to the vertical point where Mary was upside-down" [*SC*, p.27]), she can accept the defeat by convincing herself that "more practice" (*SC*, p.27) is all that stands between her and her dream. By thinking in these terms, Mary is able to retain hope for the future. When she finally does confront the impossibility of the task she has set herself, and subsequently harbours real fears that she might not succeed, Mary formulates a test that she has hopes of passing: "if I suffer a lot, I will grow a man's skin. If I suffer and refuse to cry, a penis will grow out of all that is locked away inside. It needs only time" (*SC*, p.29).

This belief stems from Mary's attempts to cope with her difficult life by believing she will be rewarded for her pain, and her interpretation (formed by watching her depressed father) of the male experience. Mary is so certain of her beliefs that as she practises withholding emotions, she believes she is experiencing "the feel of [her] body, trying to grow its man's skin" (SC, p.32).

Names

Mary's male identity is boosted following a stay at her grandfather's house. Shown a theatre programme with a picture of the actress Mary Martin on it, Mary decides that "Mary Martin was a good name ... I would call myself that from now on" (SC, p.47).⁵⁷ A few days after deciding to be called 'Mary Martin', Mary dispenses with her first name, using the name's length to draw attention away from her desire to have a male name: "[m]uch as I like Mary Martin as a name, it is rather long, Grandpa Cord. So I think you can just call me Martin" (SC, p.47). In spite of Cord agreeing to this, the issue of Mary's name continues to dominate the narrative. Known as 'Martin' by Cord (as well as in her own mind), Mary is still referred to as 'Mary' by others (who do not know of her wish to be male). In addition, the sections of novel that Mary narrates continue to be labelled 'Mary' long after Mary has a mastectomy, starts taking hormones, and begins passing as Martin. This suggests that Tremain is making the point that Mary does not become Martin through surgery (which partially explains why Martin later rejects the suggestion of "reconstructive surgery" [SC, p.311]). Mary phrases her thinking in terms of "[w]hen I'm a boy" (SC, p.14): Tremain is actually showing that this 'when' will never definitively come, and her use of 'Mary' and, much later, 'Martin', actually marks Mary's own

⁵⁷ The actress Mary Martin is arguably most famous for her role in the TV movie *Peter Pan* (1960), playing the eponymous boy who never grew up (and thus never became a man – an ironic inversion of Mary's dreams).

beliefs in her identity. Although Mary believes she is a boy, and easily adopts the name 'Martin' it takes a long time for her to accept that she has actually attained 'maleness'.

Changing her name proves to be less useful than Mary hoped, as shown during a conversation with Cord. Mary tells Cord that she does not understand what the phrase "moving inwards" means:

'[w]ell, no, I don't expect you to, Martin, not at your age, but later when you're in your proper life, you will'.

I said: 'Do you mean, when I'm Martin Ward?'

'You *are* Martin Ward,' said Cord. (SC, p.48)

Cord believes that Mary *is* Martin, simply because she calls herself Martin; Mary's comment suggests that she will not *be* Martin until she can physically embody maleness. Therefore, there is a fracture in Mary's self-narrative: on the one hand calling herself Martin, but on the other, admitting that she has not yet attained the necessary qualities for that identity.

This fracture comes to the fore when Mary writes a letter to her institutionalized mother: "I hope you are getting better. I want you to get better now, this moment, and not be there when we arrive. love from Mary" (SC, p.50). Through the act of writing this letter, Mary is trying to rewrite her life, to create a healthy mother, and to deny her own identity confusion. The use of 'Mary' is an attempt to erase the spectre of Martin, because Mary knows her mother will not be able to comprehend or accept him. Mary defends her actions by pointing out that she visited her mother while wearing "my Martin clothes, my aertex shirt and my grey shorts and my plimsolls, Blanco'd white" (SC, p.50).

Clothes have a strong effect on the way Mary reads herself, and when she begins attending Grammar school, she uses the uniform ("the tie which was red and white and like a man's tie" [SC, p.73]) to bolster her identity as Martin. This is

particularly important because her surroundings – a girl’s school – challenge her claims to maleness. Calling herself “the only boy” (*SC*, p.72) and separating herself from the girls as “ninety-seven girls and me” (*SC*, p.72) works insofar as she keeps these thoughts to herself, and remains unchallenged. When the girls are asked if they have any nicknames, Mary sees this as an opportunity to cast off her female name, and rewrites her past to claim that “I’ve never been Mary, I have always been Martin, and I would like to be called Martin, please” (*SC*, p.73). In requesting the use of a nickname, Mary is secretly acknowledging her identity crisis by stating that she has “never been Mary” (*SC*, p.73), but her efforts are unrewarded: the teacher ‘mishears’ (or perhaps is unwilling to tolerate such a transgression in naming) and so Mary becomes “Marty” (*SC*, p.73).

As “Marty”, Mary becomes infatuated with one of her fellow pupils, Lindsey Stevens, declaring “I will get Lindsey Stevens to be my friend, or I will die” (*SC*, p.74). In order to achieve this, Mary relies on her constructed past. Seeking an explanation for her perception that she is not a girl, Mary discovers the notion of previous lives (specifically, the thought that she “could have been a man” (*SC*, p.67) in a previous incarnation). Using this as a starting-point, Mary begins to “construct her previous life. She had been a magician, known as ‘The Great Camillo.’ His hair had been black and shiny. He had been clever and good-looking” (*SC*, p.68). The figure of the magician is chosen following something Mary reads in a book: “[h]e who learns to be a magician makes himself master of the seemingly impossible. In his world, the laws of nature appear to be defied. He puts before one’s very eyes that which one never dreamed to behold” (*SC*, p.74). In casting herself as the magician, Mary is appropriating the ‘he’ of the text, and hoping that she can harness the power to fight “the laws of nature” (*SC*, p.74) and so become a man.

Reconfiguring the Body

In spite of Mary's hopes, nature proves a too-powerful opponent. As she goes through puberty, Mary's body 'rebels' (that is, it follows the expected path for a woman), and takes on a shape that Mary cannot accept: "[s]he was fifteen and she could feel and see damage all around. It had begun in her. Her flesh had refused to harden as she believed it would. It had disobeyed her mind. In her mind, she was Martin Ward, a lean boy" (*SC*, p.97). To try and reverse this metamorphosis, Mary starts a training regime: "[s]omeone had told her you could grow by stretching yourself. In the school gym, she hung by her hands from the wall bars. At home, she swung from door lintels" (*SC*, p.82).

When this fails, Mary can do nothing to halt her body's progress: her breasts are reconfigured in her body narrative as "parasites" (*SC*, p.97), and further understood in terms of illness: "[s]he always touched them when she woke, hoping vainly to find them shrunk or burst or sliced away" (*SC*, p.97). This reaction is, according to Jason Cromwell, common for female to male transsexuals:

it is the rare FTM or transman who does not know from an early age what his gender identity is. What many experience, however, is body-part dysphoria, which focuses on elements such as breasts and menstruation that are quintessentially female. Those who do talk about having breasts do so with feelings that range from revulsion and denial to matter-of-fact acceptance. (Cromwell, 1999, p.105)

Mary's inability to accept her body can be attributed to the fact that "breasts are the primary sign of female women and, by implication, femininity" (Cromwell, 1999, p.105); her body is signalling an identity that she refuses to accept. Unable to rid herself of her breasts, Mary hides them: "she wound a crepe bandage round and round them seven times and fastened it with a safety pin. She was Martin in her mind and

she hoped that, with the bandages on, it would be her mind that showed” (*SC*, p.98).⁵⁸

Unfortunately, what is shown (or what is read) is Mary’s failure as a woman: her father, Sonny, brands her “an abomination” (*SC*, p.102), something Mary agrees with, but for different reasons. Sonny regards Mary as an abomination because she rejects her femininity, but to Mary, it is her body’s failure to be male that makes her repulsive. To punish Mary for deviating from ‘normal’ behaviour, Sonny forces her to look at her body. This is “a thing she never wanted to do and never wanted him to see as long as she lived ... the worst moment of [her] life” (*SC*, p.102). Faced with the dissonance of her body and mind, Mary bursts into tears, abandoning her hope that “[i]f I suffer and refuse to cry, a penis will grow out of all that is locked away inside” (*SC*, p.29). Noble argues that “[o]ne of the things Mary Martin shares with ... Jess Goldberg is the belief that masculinity is somehow coterminous or metonymic with suffering ... both Jess and Mary learn that to ‘be a man’ means to suffer silently and bravely within impossible contradictions” (Noble, 2003, pp.117,119).

With her dreams in tatters, Mary looks towards medicine to help her become a man. Despite expecting that the doctor “won’t believe what I’m going to say” (*SC*, p.131), Mary hopes the doctor’s medical knowledge will help her, because she is “ill ... It’s something internal” (*SC*, p.131). Describing herself in these terms, Mary is suggesting that she can be ‘cured’. She tells the doctor that, “although in some respects I’ve got a girl’s body, I have never felt, I mean not for one hour or one day or one minute, that I was a proper girl or that I’d grow up to be a woman. I have always felt male” (*SC*, p.132). Annemarie Mol argues that doctors “set the standards

⁵⁸ Mary’s denial (“[the bandages] could have been secretly washed and hung to dry out of Mary’s window, but part of her refused to believe that she would keep on needing them” [*SC*, p.101]) must be compared with Joss’s use of bandages in *Trumpet*: at least to the extent that he lets Millie help him with his bandage-disguise, Joss silently acknowledges it as a daily necessity for the world’s acceptance of him as male.

of normality ... They may also actively intervene so as to bring about normal states” (SC, p.57). In order to protect against a transgression of the gender binary, the doctor uses medical knowledge to reframe Mary’s issue as a ‘woman’s problem’:

‘You have breasts?’

‘Yes.’

‘Presumably you menstruate?’

‘No.’

‘You know what menstruation is?’

‘Yes’...

‘You have no menstrual cycle?’

‘No.’

‘And because of this, you’ve come to believe you’re not a girl?... Your delusion is probably allied to hormone deficiency. Once your cycle is established, I’m sure it will disappear.’ (SC, p.132)

The doctor’s response fails in two ways: first, he ignores the facts that Mary has presented, and second, Mary does not want her problem *explained*; instead she wants to know how she can become male. Mary argues that “it’s explained to prisoners how they came to be locked up in a cell with an iron bed and a grey blanket and a bucket. This isn’t enough to make them enjoy prison” (SC, p.148). Jonathan Sawday has described how, in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the body was considered to be “the close prison which perpetually sought to constrain the expansionary desire of the soul” (Sawday, 1999, p.12). This inverts Foucault’s assertion that “[t]he soul is the prison of the body” (Foucault, 1977, p.30). Referring to Foucault, Butler says:

[t]he figure of the interior soul understood as ‘within’ the body is signified through its inscription *on* the body, even though its primary mode of signification is through its very absence, its potent invisibility ... The soul is precisely what the body lacks; hence, the body presents itself as a signifying lack. That lack which *is* the body signifies the soul as that which cannot show. (Butler, 1999, p.172)⁵⁹

⁵⁹ It is my belief that an incompatibility of body and soul leads to a feeling of being imprisoned. Jess feels trapped because her body initially fails to correspond with her essence (or vice versa).

Mary believes that the soul ‘cannot show’ – not because the body is lacking, but because the body actively imprisons it as it continues to develop along female lines.

Mary decides she has to leave her village for the sake of her body: “I had to transmigrate. Not my soul, which I knew would probably stay behind, hiding in the Suffolk lanes or in a ditch like my old tennis ball, but my body. I had to move it, or it would die right here” (*SC*, p.151). The desire to move away is also experienced by Jess in *Stone Butch Blues* and Cal in *Middlesex*. All three characters realise it is impossible to remain in their hometowns because people know them as girls or women: Cal is worried that “[e]veryone ... will talk” (*Mid*, p.439), while Jess finds that New York’s “anonymity ... attracted me” (*SBB*, p.225). This can be explained in terms of Sandy Stone’s argument that

[t]he highest purpose of the transsexual is to erase him/herself, to fade into the ‘normal’ population as soon as possible. Part of this process is known as *constructing a plausible history* – learning to lie effectively about one’s past. What is gained is acceptability in society. (Stone, 1991, p.295, emphasis in original)

Any history that Cal, Jess and Mary write risks being challenged – especially when they are surrounded by people who knew them as girls. Moving away marks a split in the original narrative, the construction of a new narrative, and the denial of the past: “[t]he most critical thing a transsexual can do, the thing that *constitutes* success, is to “pass”. Passing means to live successfully in the gender of choice, to be accepted as a “natural” member of that gender. Passing means the denial of mixture” (Stone, 1991, p.296). Moving away becomes both a rebirth, and a test of the new identity: a chance to see whether the new life has a chance of success.

Gender Conservatism

Mary’s rebirth begins with a wardrobe change: she “hurled all the skirts she owned out of her window” (*SC*, p.156), a symbolic act that marks her first stage in casting

off the constraints of femaleness. Told by an agony aunt that “[o]thers have suffered as you are suffering and have been helped by counselling and, in some cases, by surgery” (SC, p.176), Mary feels less alone. The agony aunt suggests that Mary tries once more to get help from the medical world:

see your GP and ask him to refer you to a psychiatrist specialising in sex counselling. Only he will be able to ascertain what path is the right one for you. Only he will be able to discover whether you could adapt to life as a member of the opposite sex. (SC, p.176)

The duplication of “only he” emphasises both the absolute power of the psychiatrist in determining Mary’s treatment, and the masculine world of medicine; this echoes the portrayal of Dr Luce in *Middlesex*. Dr Beales, Mary’s psychiatrist, is more understanding than her first doctor, but his initial observation on meeting Mary is that she will struggle to be a convincing man: “[y]ou’re very small. There aren’t many men of your height” (SC, p.177). The idea that men need to be tall is a value judgement designed to protect the concept of maleness, because “cases of female to male gender reclassification ... are perhaps best looked at in terms of social promotion to a superior status” (Shapiro, 1991, p.270). This is particularly significant in light of the fact that medicine is an overwhelmingly male field. Thus, men are in control of who is allowed to become a man, and in this way also control the images of men in society.

In order to ascertain whether Mary should begin treatment to become a man, Dr Beales asks a series of questions, based on stereotypes of male and female behaviour:

[h]e asked me whether I could mend an electric fuse and whether I knew the rules of cricket. He said: ‘Do you enjoy or repudiate domestic tasks, such as Hoovering?’ He said: ‘Are you jealous of men’s superior strength?’ He said: ‘Have you ever been train spotting?’ (SC, p.177)

Dr Luce uses the same technique, asking Callie “[d]o you like any sports? ... Are you sexually attracted to girls?” (*Mid*, p.416). Unfortunately, this technique is also used by real-life psychiatrists: after Dr Russell Reid was censured by the General Medical Council for “improperly authorising sex changes” (Bindel, 2007), one of his male-to-female patients revealed that “during the 45-minute consultation, Reid asked her how she was earning her living; how long she had been taking hormones; and *whether she had played with dolls as a child*” (Bindel, 2007, my emphasis). Mary’s conversation with Dr Beales is very much like a job interview, with Mary applying for a ‘promotion’ – the job of being male. In order for Mary to be successful, she has to represent her ‘condition’ in a way that the psychiatrist deems acceptable.

Annemarie Mol has drawn a link between disease and performance that provides a useful framework for discussing this:

[w]hen a disease is being done, we say that it is *performed* in a specific way. The word “performance” has various connotations. There may (but need not be) a script available for doing a disease ... If there is no script, actors improvise. The stage props are as important as the people, because, after all, they set the stage. (Mol, 2002, p.32)

Mary is judged by the way she performs her claim to a male body, as well as the way in which she dresses (prop usage): “I imagined he was describing me to himself – the open-neck shirt I wore, my jeans and my jeans jacket, my heavy-frame glasses, my brown hair cut in a Beatles style” (*SC*, p.177). Judith Shapiro sees this circularity as a means of ‘protecting’ the designations ‘male’ and ‘female’:

gender conservatism of transsexuals is encouraged and reinforced by the medical establishment on which they are dependent for therapy. The conservatism of the doctors is in turn reinforced by their need to feel justified in undertaking as momentous a procedure as sex change surgery. (Shapiro, 1991, p.254)

The binary categories are further protected by Dr Beales’s assertion that even with “hormone treatment and eventually surgery” (*SC*, p.179), Mary’s eventual

'male' body will be no more than an imitation: "you will never be a man. Not a true biological male" (SC, p.178). Jay Prosser explains that

in science sex is no longer located monolithically in the genitals but disseminated through the inscrutable parts of the body: the gonads, the chromosomes, even the brain – parts of the body that cannot be exchanged in sex reassignment ... the transsexual can alter sex only partially and superficially (Prosser, 1998, p.63).

Dr Beales's use of the word 'true' is important, demonstrating his belief that Mary will only ever be able to pass. Shapiro argues that

[t]he relationship of the transsexed body to the "naturally" sexed body calls attention to notions of nature as being associated, on the one hand, with "reality" and, on the other, as something to be manipulated and controlled by science. (Shapiro, 1991, p.261)

Dr Beales recognises his ability to control science to create a new body, but believes that such a body can only be marked as 'unnatural', placing Mary outside of both male and female: "you will not be a man. Nor will you any longer *be* a woman" (SC, p.179). In *Gender Trouble*, Judith questions "how ... non-normative sexual practices call into question the stability of gender as a category of analysis" (Butler, 1999, p.xi). Dr Beales is grappling with the way that medical practices challenge 'sex' as a stable category. A dependence upon biology to determine sex means that when surgery enters the equation and alters the biology of the body, the existing language is inadequate to describe what Mary will be, and brings into question what it actually means to 'be' male or female. Mary requests clarification from Dr Beales, who explains that

[y]ou will be a partially constructed male. The world will take you for a man and you will look like a man – to yourself. And so your internal conviction of your essential maleness will receive confirmation when you look in the mirror – and your anguish will cease, or so it is hoped. (SC, p.179)

Dr Beales's insistence that Mary will only be a "partially constructed male" (SC, p.179) reveals his belief in an essence of maleness than cannot be attained through

surgery. In *Middlesex*, Dr Luce wants to perform genital surgery on Callie, to “make Callie look exactly like the girl she feels herself to be” (*Mid*, p.428), acknowledging that all he can do is help to bring Callie’s body in line with her apparent female essence. Likewise, Jess in *Stone Butch Blues* believes that surgery and hormones will not make her a man; instead they will allow her to alter her body into a personal expression of her identity. The protagonists of the three novels I am examining in this chapter have in common a belief in an essence of identity, whether male or female, that, although it can be boosted by surgery/hormones, is not necessarily reliant upon it.

Lies and Delusions

It is by no means certain that Mary will qualify for surgery: there is a fear that Mary’s idea of maleness “could be a delusion or [she] could be lying” (*SC*, p.179).

The word ‘delusion’ is used by Mary’s previous doctor, to describe her situation:

Tremain is illustrating the problems that Mary faces in getting people to listen to and believe her; when Mary likens her situation to that of a patient at her mother’s institution, it throws into question her own mental state:

I was thought to be suffering from a delusion. My mother told me she had a friend at Mountview who thought she was a chicken. And this is why this person was locked up there. No one examined her for feathers. No one offered her a worm. (*SC*, p.133)

Although Mary appears to be suggesting that the two beliefs are comparably ridiculous, she is actually critiquing her situation. The first doctor never took Mary’s claims seriously, or offered her any treatment that could actually help her.

When Dr Beales shows that there may be a way forward, Mary has difficulty believing this:

all my life I had thought this would happen one day, I had believed in it without knowing of any means by which it could happen. And now that I

knew the means, I had trouble believing it. I think this happens to the human mind: it sometimes finds it easier to believe in the dream of something than in the something itself. (SC, p.180)

To try and convince Dr Beales to refer her for treatment, Mary constructs a new past for herself, claiming her parents are dead:

I won't tell him about my life as it's been, but as it might have been. I'll tell him a story. I said: 'I was six years old when they died. They died in a plane going from Southampton to Cherbourg. The airline was called Silver City. You could put cars into those planes and fly them to France. My parents' car was a Humber Super Snipe and it died in the plane also. (SC, p.178)

Mary's revised history eliminates all mention of her brother, Timmy, because of her deep-seated jealousy of him, for effortlessly attaining the male body she is so desperate for. Mary's lies mean that her future is temporarily taken away from her: "I conclude that you have therefore invented all or part of every single thing you've told me. This invalidates every session we've had ... You must find someone else to take your case – if you can. I have no more time for you" (SC, p.205).

Mary finds a new doctor, Dr Sterns, but is uneasy in his company because "[h]is name was Martin – a coincidence I didn't like" (SC, p.213). Sterns is Mary's double; a 'natural' Martin who challenges her claims to masculinity. Nevertheless, he agrees to start Mary on "a monitored metamorphosis" (SC, p.214). At this point, Mary will also be able to have surgery, but she starts having her first serious doubts about becoming a man: "[w]ill Mary be gone utterly? Do I want her gone utterly, or only parts of her? Is there anything about Mary I should remember to save?" (SC, p.180). The wish to keep parts of her female identity is not compatible with being a man, especially because "[t]he gender conservatism of transsexuals is encouraged and reinforced by the medical establishment on which they are dependent for therapy" (SC, p.254). Mary's uncertainty parallels Jess's fears regarding hormones in *Stone Butch Blues*: "[w]hat happens? Does it just last for a little while? I mean can

you go back to being a butch later, when it's safe to come out?" (SBB, p.145). Mary knows that if she has surgery, she can never 'go back', and she rationalises this by stating that "[n]othing is wrong with being a woman. It's only that I'm not one. I never have been" (SC, p.213).

As the hormones start to transform Mary's body, she finds that she appears to be going through a second puberty; her body is assisting in the rewriting of her body narrative:

[c]hange didn't age Mary. It seemed to take her back in time. This was the first thing she noticed – that she looked younger. Her body lost bulk. Small as she was, she began to look lanky, like a youth of thirteen and fourteen. And the hair that grew on her upper lip and in a little line around her jaw was like the hair of puberty, a faint brown fuzz. (SC, p.227)

When a stranger calls her "lad" (SC, p.228), Mary finds that it "stabbed me with pleasure" (SC, p.228). To duplicate this sensation, Mary buys a new suit, and finds it becomes "much easier to behave like a man" (SC, p.232).⁶⁰ Emma Parker states that "clothes enable others to see Mary as she sees herself, that is, as Martin" (Parker, 2007, p.305), but this implies a sense of confidence in her identity. Instead, I believe that, like Cal, Mary uses clothes to project the image of what she would like to be, and to make up for any failings in her performance:

if gender is instituted through acts which are internally discontinuous, then the *appearance of substance* is precisely that, a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief. (Butler, 1999, p.179)

Mary's relationship to her clothes is different from that of Nan and Kitty's in *Tipping the Velvet*: they use clothes to project an image of manhood on stage, in this case to contrast with the *deliberate* failings in their performances.⁶¹

⁶⁰ In *Middlesex*, Cal explains that "double-breasted suits ... make me feel better" (Mid, p.41).

⁶¹ As I have previously stated, the aim of Nan and Kitty's act is not to 'be' men, but to parody them.

The discontinuity between Mary's beliefs and reality is made explicit when she explains how women "expected to come home with me, but this wasn't possible except in my mind. My body had to stay inside its suit, hidden from view" (SC, p.232). As well as the literal suit she is wearing, Mary's body performance is a metaphorical suit that she takes on (and off) as necessary, which recalls Butler's comment: "if I were to argue that genders are performative, that could mean that I thought that one woke in the morning, perused the closet or some more open space for the gender of choice, donned that gender for the day, and then restored the garment to its place at night" (Butler, 1993, p.x).

Reality and Fantasy

Surgery is expected to close the gap between Mary's reality and fantasy; indeed, when it takes place, Mary is able to describe what happens to her in dispassionate, factual terms:

[t]wenty years and six months after the two-minute silence I went into hospital. Three incisions, like a triangle, were made near to my nipples and through these wounds all the breast tissue that remained in me was taken out. The operation was called a bilateral mastectomy. (SC, p.254)

Asked "[i]s it better without tits?" (SC, p.254), Mary responds, "it will be" (SC, p.254); a hint that the results of surgery have not been as powerful as Mary had hoped. It will take more than just surgery to create 'Martin', and Mary briefly wonders whether she has done the right thing:

I had a thought that I hardly ever allow myself to think: why couldn't it have been simple? Why couldn't I have just accepted being Mary Ward? The answers are: because it wasn't. Because I couldn't. Because I am not Mary Ward. And no one ... can explain it better than that. (SC, p.258)

This moment marks not just a failure of language, but the failure of the body to define Mary: surgery has not provided her with the relief she expected. Sterns tries to ease Mary's worries, but confirms that she will not be a 'normal' man: "soon, your

two selves will be better integrated but your status in the world will still be a special status because you will have seen the world from two different perspectives” (*SC*, p.228). Regardless of the treatment that Mary receives, she will always be ‘special’: that is, ‘different’. To cope with this disappointment, Mary – now Martin – rewrites his past to incorporate an attraction to his childhood friend, Pearl.

Roz Kaveney states, with reference to transsexuals, “[i]t is less important to pass than to be accepted” (Kaveney, 1999, p.148). Martin cannot pass with Pearl because “[w]ithin transsexual discourses, passing means blending in and becoming unnoticeable and unremarkable as either a man or a woman” (Cromwell, 1999, p.39), but Pearl knows of Martin’s past as a woman. Martin’s hope that Pearl can overlook his past and fall in love with him is a form of self-sabotage: it gives him outside confirmation that he cannot pass, and gives him the excuse he is looking for to halt his transformation. It also enables him to occupy a suitable position in between the binaries where he is comfortable – like Jess. Martin claims “[i]n the future that I’d imagined she was going to be there. As Martin I was going to love her properly and protect her from other men. And she would love me back. That’s what I’d always planned” (*SC*, p.272). Because Pearl has fallen in love with somebody else, Martin’s maleness is threatened and found wanting, and his life feels as if it is over: “[t]here is no now” (*SC*, p.272).⁶² Noble reads Pearl as “an idealized white feminine subject who functions to reflect and to refract Martin. Recalling that there are no literal mirror scenes in *SC*, one is able to see that Pearl functions as Martin’s metaphorical mirror, without which he fails to exist” (Noble, 2003 p.130). I disagree with this reading. Martin articulates his belief in his male identity long before he knows Pearl, and tries to ‘become’ male largely without her help or knowledge. Although the loss

⁶² It is particularly significant that Pearl falls in love with Martin’s brother, Timmy. Timmy is everything that Martin wants to be – a so-called ‘real man’ – and represents the man that Martin could have been if he had been given the ‘correct’ body at birth.

of Pearl marks the loss of his idealised vision of male life, Martin continues to live as a man, and is able to construct a new male life without Pearl.

Cutting himself off from his past, Martin moves to America, where he *can* pass as a man, but remains aware of his 'failings': "[my landlords] believe I'm an ordinary man, not an imaginary one" (SC, p.298). As an Englishman in America, Martin is already marked as different, but this is a difference that is acceptable and controlled, distracting attention away from his sex/gender identity. Martin is insecure about his 'lack' of a penis, wearing "a silk scarf, folded into a pad, inside my blue Y-fronts" (SC, p.298), but refuses to have further surgery even though "[Sterns] thinks I am one of the few female-to-male transsexuals for whom the creation of a penis is of critical importance" (SC, p.311).⁶³ Sara Salih believes that

[t]o theorize sex in terms of interpellation as [Judith] Butler does is to imply that one's body parts (particularly penis and vagina) are not simply and naturally 'there' from birth onwards, but that one's sex is performatively constituted when one's body is categorized as either 'male' or 'female'. (Salih, 2002, p.79)

Emma Parker claims that "a penis is superfluous to Martin's identity as a man" (Parker, 2007, p.307), but I would argue that Martin does not need a penis because he no longer needs to be 'male': he undergoes treatment because of his hatred for his female body, and when he has a mastectomy, his sex becomes 'performatively constituted' because his body has been categorised as 'not-female'. Kate Bornstein believes that "a transsexual cannot be described by the noun of 'woman' or 'man,' but must be approached through active verbs that attest to the constant transformation which 'is' the new identity" (cited in Butler, 1999, p.xi). Satisfied to

⁶³ Sterns's insistence that Martin needs to complete his surgery is an example of "[t]he rhetoric of cosmetic surgery [which] reveals that identity is nowhere more obviously bound to gender and sexuality than in the case of transsexual surgery. And gender and sexuality are nowhere more obviously hemmed in by binary options" (Halberstam, 2004, p.764). If Martin remains as he is, in between genders, he offers a challenge to the medical establishment's assertions that 'male' and 'female' are the only possibilities.

no longer 'be' female, Martin ends the novel located in between male and female, an ironic echo of his condition at the start of the book, when he is torn between his female body and belief of his maleness.

Middlesex, *Stone Butch Blues* and *Sacred Country* all grapple with what it means to 'be' male or female, and the way that surgery can help (or hinder) this categorisation. Mol argues that

genitals are heroically resculptured. Vagina is turned into penis or vice versa. Without those physical interventions, transsexuals, or so they say, have trouble performing the other gender. They need a body with the "right" sex to be able to have a coherent identity. Bodies thus do not oppose social performances, but are a part of them. (Mol, 2002, p.40)

The concepts of 'normal' and 'abnormal' are used by doctors to control access to hormones and surgery: when Dr Luce decides that Callie exhibits 'normal' female behaviour, he wants to perform surgery to "make [her 'clitoris'] the *right size*" (*Mid*, p.413, my emphasis); Jess is nearly refused treatment at the women's clinic because she does not look like a woman 'should'; Mary needs to meet various requirements in order to be given approval to proceed with surgery and hormones.

Echoing the doctors' attempts to rewrite the 'abnormal', Cal, Jess, and Mary are involved in continuous attempts to rewrite their own narratives. In the midst of writing his life story, Cal rewrites himself as a man, engaging in a process of duality: ignoring his past while also giving voice to it. Jess first rewrites herself as a man, but then erases this narrative and, with the help of other stories (notably found in "the Women's Studies section" (*SBB*, p.239) of the bookstore), starts to reclaim her own (female) life story. On the other hand, Mary rejects her own story to live in a world of fantasy that, inevitably, disappoints her. Convincing herself that she will become a man, the realisation that she will need surgery and the subsequent comprehension that she can never be the man of her narratives causes her to rewrite the ending of her

story, so that she finds comfort in being 'not-female'. Cal, Jess, and Mary, while engaged in the process of rewriting, are also 're-righting' themselves: taking control of their stories and casting off the label of 'abnormal' so that they too can be read as 'right'.

CHAPTER THREE: A PERFORMANCE OF WOMANHOOD

[D]oes a change in the coloration of the rind alter the taste of a fruit?
(Carter, 2006, p.68)

*

All of the texts I have examined so far are concerned with the ‘female to male’ journey, from passing to having surgery and taking hormones. In this chapter I will concentrate on two texts, Angela Carter’s *The Passion of New Eve* and Wesley Stace’s *Misfortune*, which focus on characters who move from ‘male to female’. Both texts have been inspired by Virginia Woolf’s writings on gender. Through an examination of *The Passion of New Eve* I demonstrate not only that Carter anticipates Judith Butler’s understanding of essence as an illusion created by performance, but also the ways in which Carter’s work differs from Butler. With *Misfortune*, I demonstrate its shortcomings as a text focused on gender issues, showing how gender can be misunderstood. In *The Passion of New Eve*, Evelyn is forcibly castrated and made to live as Eve, while in *Misfortune*, Rose is brought up as a girl, her male identity hidden from her. In both novels, neither character has a choice; a female identity is forced upon them. This highlights the perceived superiority of maleness and masculinity over femaleness and femininity within society: “[w]oman is valuable in so far as she permits man to fulfil his being as man. But man is valuable in and of himself” (Leclerc, 1981, p.79).⁶⁴ This is not the novels’ only link: both *The Passion of New Eve* and *Misfortune* are inspired by Virginia Woolf’s *Orlando*; *The Passion of New Eve* is the more successful of the two texts in discussing gender, with Carter’s work offering valuable insight into identity politics. However, that is not to say that *Misfortune* is not worthy of examination. Although it is possible to see where Stace has struggled in his attempts to grapple with the

⁶⁴ Cixous points out that “woman is always associated with passivity ... Either woman is passive or she does not exist” (Cixous, 2004, p.349). It is man that represents the (positive) active role.

relationship between gender and the body, this actually serves to highlight Woolf's success (in both *Orlando* and *A Room of One's Own*) in unravelling society's influence on the way gender identities are allowed to be presented. In addition, I will demonstrate how *The Passion of New Eve* also deviates from some of Butler's arguments surrounding gender in key ways.

The Passion of New Eve

At around the same time as she was writing *The Passion of New Eve*, Angela Carter was working on another, equally daring project:

[t]he idea for an operatic version of Virginia Woolf's novel *Orlando* (1928) was conceived in 1976 by John Cox, then Director of Productions at Glyndebourne. In 1979 Michael Berkley agreed to compose the music and suggested Carter as librettist. She wrote a rough outline, followed by two drafts. (Bell, 1996, p.505)

Carter's effort, *Orlando: or, The Enigma of the Sexes*, "went no further than the second draft of the libretto" (Bell, 1996, p.506), but even at this early stage, "she had really begun to engage with Woolf's material" (John Cox, cited in Bell, 1996, p.506).⁶⁵ I consider it no coincidence that *The Passion of New Eve* and *Enigma* were produced side-by-side. On a basic level, the similarities between the protagonists, Evelyn and Orlando, are obvious: "[l]ike Orlando, the hero of Carter's novel is a modern-day Tiresias, a hero who becomes a heroine" (Suleiman, 1985, p.60). However, Suleiman also notes a more important difference between the texts: "Evelyn's story ... unlike Orlando's, is narrated retrospectively in the first person, thus immediately raising the quintessentially modern question: who speaks?" (Suleiman, 1985, p.61). According to Sarah Gamble,

Carter cultivates an extraordinary fluidity in which nothing is incontrovertible, nothing is set – the boundaries between story and history,

⁶⁵ From this point on *Orlando: or, The Enigma of the Sexes* will be referred to as *Enigma* to avoid confusion with *Orlando* (Woolf's novel) and Orlando (the character).

male and female, logic and irrationality all dissolve into the surreal narrative anarchy which is the hallmark of Carter's fiction of this decade. (Gamble, 1997, p.103)

Of course, the appearance of "narrative anarchy" (Gamble, 1997, p.103) hides a careful structure and fits in perfectly with a work in which nothing is necessarily as it seems. And neither *New Eve* nor *Enigma* are Carter's first opportunities to play with narrative: in the short story 'Flesh and the Mirror', she uses a first-person narrative to "deliberately destabilis[e] the narrative voice to such an extent that it cannot be fixed to a clearly defined subject position" (Gamble, 2006, p.112) as she includes "moments of slippage between the first and the third person, who is both 'I' and 'she'" (Gamble, 2006, p.112). This method is also in evidence in *The Passion of New Eve*, where Evelyn slips between male and female identities, and also makes this slip later in the text while referring to Tristessa ("I crept up to him and kissed her pitiful, bare feet" [*Eve*, p.128]).

Who Speaks?

The Passion of New Eve utilises a narrative form that echoes the complexity of gendered identities. At first glance, the narrator is Evelyn (male), but as the narrative unfolds, it is clear that he is telling this story through the prism/prison of his new body: Evelyn has 'become' Eve (female). But what is the nature of this female identity? Evelyn is physically transformed into Eve against his will, the victim of Mother's experiments, but remains mentally a man. Even as his female body offers him a new view of the world, as it reflects the world's reaction to women, his experiences are filtered through his male brain, albeit a brain that has been subjected to "psycho-surgery" (*Eve*, p.72), a programming technique designed to "restructure the essence" (*Eve*, p.68).

Carter reveals details about Evelyn, littering the text with clues. He “took some girl” (*Eve*, p.5) to the cinema, and “paid ... a little tribute of spermatozoa” (*Eve*, p.5) to the apparently female star of the film, Tristessa – someone whom Evelyn has been in love with since he “was a little boy” (*Eve*, p.6). It is only when his “forgotten” (*Eve*, p.9) companion murmurs his name that we discover it is “Evelyn” (*Eve*, p.9). Lindsey Tucker describes this as a “sexually ambiguous name” (Tucker, 1998, p.11), although Nicoletta Vallorani sees things differently, describing Evelyn as “a man given a woman’s name” (Vallorani, 1998, p.179). If ‘Evelyn’ is read as a sexually ambiguous name, it can be viewed as a fitting tribute to the ambiguities of Evelyn’s identity when he is forcibly given a female body, but Vallorani’s reading suggests the identity issue is more clear-cut. Evelyn struggles to define himself throughout the novel, and this uncertainty is echoed by critics when they stumble over how to refer to the character: “Evelyn/Eve” (Palmer, 1997, p.30), “Eve(lyn)” (Sceats, 1997 p.102) and “Eve/lyn” (Jordan, 1997 p.218), to give a few examples. The difficulty is in determining where (if anywhere) Evelyn ends and Eve begins – the ‘who speaks?’ that Suleiman finds so interesting.

To try to make sense of the narrative voice, it is necessary to examine the moment(s) of transformation. After abandoning Leilah, a woman who fulfils the dual role of “whore” (*Eve*, p.20) and “child” (*Eve*, p.30) – a mixture of knowledge and innocence, and one of many instances of ‘doubling’ in the novel – Evelyn embarks on a road trip which leads him to the desert, where he is abducted by a group of women. The leader of the women is “Mother” (*Eve*, p.49) and her followers are labelled “her daughters” (*Eve*, p.49). Although she has constructed a matriarchal position for herself, it is a grotesque hyperbole of motherhood: “[s]he was breastfed like a sow – she possessed two tiers of nipples, the result ... of a strenuous

programme of grafting, so that, in theory, she could suckle four babies at one time” (*Eve*, p.59). Through this transformation, Mother has actually distanced herself from the realm of womanhood and literally marked herself as a deity, as well as a parody of herself: “she had made herself! Yes, made herself! She was her own mythological artefact; she had reconstructed her flesh painfully, with knives and with needles, into a transcendental form as an emblem, as an example” (*Eve*, p.60).

Evelyn is shown a Mother who also embraces the roles of “the Great Parricide ... Castratrix of the Phallocentric Universe ... Mama” (*Eve*, p.67). Simply being in the presence of this “concrete essence of woman” (*Eve*, p.60) is enough to make Evelyn reconsider the power of his male identity: “[b]efore this overwhelming woman, the instrument that dangled from my belly was useless. It was nothing but a decorative appendage” (*Eve*, p.60). So useless is this “appendage” (*Eve*, p.60) that it is not even worthy of being named. In Mother’s role as “The Grand Emasculator” (*Eve*, p.49), she subjects Evelyn first to a psychological castration (“there was no way in which I could show her my virility that would astonish her ... Since I had no notion how to approach her with [my instrument], she rendered it insignificant” [*Eve*, p.60]) and then to a literal castration – an operation which is undermined by the comedic way it is treated by Carter in the text: “[r]aising her knife, she brought it down. She cut off all my genital appendages with a single blow, caught them in her other hand and tossed them to Sophia, who slipped them into the pocket of her shorts” (*Eve*, p.70).

Mother’s plan is ‘simple’: “[s]he’s going to castrate you, Evelyn, and then excavate what we call the ‘fructifying female space’ inside you and make you a perfect specimen of womanhood” (*Eve*, p.68). Following this, she plans to impregnate Evelyn with his own sperm and, thus, “bring forth the Messiah of the

Antithesis” (*Eve*, p.67). Evelyn is quite calm during his castration, noting with bitter humour “the dreadful symbolism of that knife! To be castrated with a phallic symbol!” (*Eve*, p.70). His biggest worry is the viability of Mother’s plan to make him “a complete woman” (*Eve*, p.68). It is worth noting at this stage that

while *The Passion of New Eve* may employ, whether knowingly or not, many of the tropes and conventions of transsexual autobiography, it does not, ultimately, sustain them. ... Carter’s novel is crucially different, in that it is based around a character who makes the transaction from male to female unwillingly ... Carter’s [narrative] evokes a subject who in the wake of surgery is left struggling with the very sense of bodily estrangement the transsexual has left behind. (Gamble, 2002, p.51)

Evelyn’s opposition to surgery leads him to question what it is that makes him a man, and whether he can actually be transformed into a woman. One of Mother’s followers explains the lengths Mother is prepared to go to, to transform Evelyn: “[a] complete woman, yes, Sophia assured me; tits, clit, ovaries, labia major, labia minor...” (*Eve*, p.68). However, Evelyn is not concerned with Mother’s ability to perform surgery – her own “fringe of breasts” (*Eve*, p.60) is testament to her skill at “reconstruct[ing] flesh” (*Eve*, p.60) – but whether this surgery will actually make him the “complete woman” (*Eve*, p.68) that has been suggested: the whole notion of ‘essence’ is brought into question.

The Illusion of Essence

In a sense, Evelyn *will* be a “complete woman” (*Eve*, p.68): the ‘lack’ brought about by his castration will be countered by the fact that to become a woman requires additional parts: “we see an Evelyn that has been reconstructed, since her surgery – a combination of cosmetic reconstruction and organ transplant – has added to his body some previously missing parts – breasts, a clitoris, a uterus” (Tucker, 1998, p.11). In this sense, ‘man’ and ‘woman’ have been inverted: it is man who is burdened with a body of lack, and it is woman (in the form of both Eve’s new body, and the knife-

wielding Mother) who can make him ‘complete’. Nonetheless, Evelyn’s concerns are valid: “does a change in the coloration of the rind alter the taste of a fruit?” (*Eve*, p.68). Sophia dismisses this by claiming that “[a] change in the appearance will reconstruct the essence” (*Eve*, p.68), but this is contradicted by the admission that Evelyn will have to undergo “[p]sycho-surgery” (*Eve*, p.68), a form of “programming” (*Eve*, p.71) designed to ease Evelyn’s passage into womanhood.⁶⁶ As I have already argued in the preceding chapters, Butler regards essence as an illusion created by performance; Carter is anticipating not just Butler’s theories here, but also a constructionist/poststructural stance, as well as the fluidity of gender.

Evelyn’s castration – the literal surgery that necessitates the use of psycho-surgery to create “the effect of an internal core” (Butler, 1999, p.173) – is a crucial moment in the text, not because it turns Evelyn into a woman (if it even succeeds), but because of the way it destabilizes the preceding narrative. If *The Passion of New Eve* is compared to *Misfortune* and *Orlando* then this becomes clear. In *Misfortune*, Geoffroy Loveall first refers to the baby using female pronouns (“[s]he was a tiny red ball” [*MF*, p.23]), and then announces ‘her’ arrival to his mother: “meet your granddaughter” (*MF*, p.40). Through all this, Geoffroy’s servant, Hood, attempts to convey that Geoffroy has made a mistake: “[a] doubt had arisen in Hood’s mind, which he tried to convey with a widening of his eyes” (*MF*, p.40). Eventually, Hood is forced to tell Geoffroy the facts: “[t]he baby you have found is a boy” (*MF*, p.42). Although the baby – Rose – is not told of the facts surrounding her birth, and is raised as a girl, the narrative is straightforward. Told by Rose in retrospect, the narrative falls into two parts: the first half of the novel, where Rose believes she is a girl, and the second half when she finds out she was born a boy and tries to take on a

⁶⁶ The notion of essence is discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.

male role. Although Rose lives as both a woman and a man, Wesley Stace's novel suggests that Rose was male all along: "BOY. I had kept myself from knowing it. I had been waiting for someone to tell me, when I had only to tell myself, to let myself listen to what my body shouted. It had known all along. I had known" (*MF*, p.224).

By contrast, the narrator in *Orlando* simply recounts Orlando's metamorphosis: "[h]e stood upright in complete nakedness before us, and while the trumpets pealed Truth! Truth! Truth! we have no choice left but confess – *he was a woman*" (Woolf, 2006, p.123, my emphasis). The concept of truth is undermined by the last sentence, which gender semantics render an impossible statement. However, Woolf's narrative technique creates a sense of detachment between the narrator and Orlando, allowing the narrator to scrutinise Orlando and come to the conclusion that

[he] had become a woman – there is no denying it. But in every other respect, Orlando remained precisely as he had been. The change of sex, though it altered their future, did nothing whatever to alter their identity. (Woolf, 2006, p.124)

Orlando's change is just a physical one: mentally, she remains the same person she always was, with the same thoughts and feelings: "as all Orlando's loves had been women, now, through the culpable laggardry of the human frame to adapt itself to convention, though she herself was a woman, it was still a woman she loved" (Woolf, 2006, p.144).

Where *Misfortune* and *Orlando* clearly explain the gender situations their protagonists find themselves in, *The Passion of New Eve* is altogether more complex. Evelyn's castration, together with the "massive injections of female hormones" (*Eve*, p.73) he is forced to receive, obviously changes him: physically, he has become a new person – Eve. Returning to the earlier part of Evelyn's narrative – insofar as any of the novel can be said to be Evelyn's narrative – it is clear that the speaker's position needs to be reconsidered: as Suleiman has asked, "who speaks?" (Suleiman,

1985, p.61). Gamble points out that *The Passion of New Eve* is “related not only with all the benefit of hindsight, but also all the possibility for deception that hindsight allows” (Gamble, 2006, p.146). All the clues that Carter has left on those opening pages – Evelyn’s allusions to his boyhood, his “tribute of spermatozoa” (*Eve*, p.5), his apparently heterosexual behaviour – have been designed to trip up the reader.

In *Enigma*, Carter uses a similar strategy with the character of the Archduchess Harriet. Initially called by this name in the directions, Carter describes her as an “ambiguous figure” (Carter, 1996, p.163), noting that “I rather feel we should first be introduced to him as a man” (Carter, 1996, p.163) and in the next sentence referring to him as “the Archduke” and having him enter “with a titter of whores” (Carter, 1996, p.163). Harriet, like Evelyn, is introduced as a man, only to become a woman later in the text (unlike Evelyn, Harriet then reveals that she was male all along, but both texts construct labyrinthine journeys through gender). Evelyn makes a brief mention of his transformation in the opening pages of *The Passion of New Eve*, describing himself in relation to the woman he spent his last night in London with: “[s]he kept a hieroglyph of plastic in the neck of her womb, to prevent conception; the black lady never advised me on those techniques when she fitted me up with a uterus of my own” (*Eve*, p.9). This statement reveals while obscuring further: it explains (briefly) Evelyn’s metamorphosis while confusing the issue of who exactly is speaking. If it is Eve, then what effect has she had on Evelyn’s memories? More importantly: *can* it be Eve?

The End of Evelyn

When Evelyn is castrated, he considers it “the end of Evelyn” (*Eve*, p.71), as though his identity as a man is totally dependent on his genitals. Likewise, Susan Rubin Suleiman describes how Mother “perform[s] the operation that converts Evelyn into

Eve” (Suleiman, 1985, p.62), suggesting that the moment of castration and the moment of identity change are one and the same, and further equating castration with the creation of a female body. Thus, for Suleiman, the penis is the ultimate marker of maleness. This contrasts with Halberstam’s belief that “penises as well as masculinity become artificial and constructible when we challenge the naturalness of gender” (Halberstam, 2004, p.762). The label of Evelyn does not need to be abandoned: it is after all, “a woman’s name” (Vallorani, 1998, p.179), and even Evelyn is able to recognise the irony of his name and situation: “[p]erhaps, I thought, they had utilised my tender body because they couldn’t resist the horrid pun of my name, with all its teasing connotations. Evelyn. Why had my parents chosen to call me Evelyn, of all the names in the world?” (*Eve*, p.73). Evelyn briefly turns to the name ‘Eve’ in order to express the shortcomings of his own identity, feeling he’s been turned “into [his] own diminutive. Eve, the shortened form of Evelyn, this artificial changeling” (*Eve*, p.71). However, Evelyn finds he cannot easily accept what has happened to him: “I would moan, in a voice that grew softer and, against my will, musical with each day that passed” (*Eve*, p.73).

The disjunction between Evelyn’s mind and body is illustrated when Evelyn is finally allowed to look at himself in the mirror: he admits that he “saw Eve” (*Eve*, p.74) but counters this with the assertion that “I did not see myself. I saw a young woman who, though she was I, I could in no way acknowledge as myself” (*Eve*, p.74). As far as he is concerned, “[t]he psycho-programming has not been entirely successful” (*Eve*, p.75), because he regards his reflection – his body – as,

only a lyrical abstraction of femininity to me, a tinted arrangement of curved lines. I touched the breasts and the mound that were not mine; I saw white hands in the mirror move, it was as though they were white gloves I had put on to conduct the unfamiliar orchestra of myself. (*Eve*, p.74)

Despite his denials, Evelyn recognises that ‘Eve’ bears “a strong family resemblance to myself” (p.74), and his narcissism leads him to the realisation that Mother has made him into “the object of all the unfocused desires that had ever existed in my own head. I had become my own masturbatory fantasy” (*Eve*, p.75). Through this thought, Evelyn is able to access his Evelyn-identity and persuade himself that he remains in many ways the same person: “the cock in my head, still, twitched at the sight of myself” (*Eve*, p.75). Although he can locate himself in his psychological processes, he cannot recognise the physical landscape Mother has sculpted, and admits “I don’t find myself at all” (*Eve*, p.75).

In a Lacanian sense, Evelyn needs to relearn the ‘Mirror Stage’, so that he can “recognize as such his own image in a mirror” (Lacan, 1977, p.1) by reading the fragments as a whole. Similarly, Jan Campbell points out that

[i]n [Maurice] Merleau-Ponty’s view the image in the mirror is other. The child knows that what he sees is not where he experiences himself introceptively ... the child must ‘displace the mirror image, bringing it from the apparent and virtual place it occupies in the depth of the mirror back to himself, whom he identifies at a distance with his introceptive body.’ (Campbell, 2005, p.12)

Evelyn struggles to comprehend his new body; this is a struggle shared by the reader, who is left to try to make sense of the multitude of gender fragments pervading both the novel and the individual characters. As previously mentioned, Laura Mulvey argues that “[t]he determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the male figure” (Mulvey, 1989, p.19); drawing from this in an Irigarayan sense, Evelyn-in-the-mirror has a dual role, as an active male forcing his gaze onto his own fantasy-female body which results in a split that means that he is simultaneously Same and Other in one body. Evelyn is fragmented; anticipating and embodying Irigaray’s notion of woman: “[t]he rejection, the exclusion of a female imaginary certainly puts woman in the position of experiencing herself only fragmentarily ... as waste, or excess, what is

left of a mirror invested by the (masculine) “subject” to reflect himself” (Irigaray, 1985a, p.30).

Mirroring

After coming to terms with his appearance, Evelyn must, like Rose in *Misfortune*, Joss in *Trumpet* and Jess in *Stone Butch Blues*, learn how to exist in his new gender role:

Sophia taught me how to make water in the way a woman does and the right way to perform one or two other biologically determined acts, how to comb my hair and plait it, to wash between my legs and under my arms and so forth (*Eve*, p.80).

Although Evelyn is taught to change his behaviours so he can pass as a woman, certain behaviours have to be adapted to make allowances for his changed body. This all serves to illustrate that being a woman does not come *naturally*: that is, having the anatomical attributes of the female does not make one a woman. Behaviours have to be learned – artificial behaviours which are ironically termed the ‘natural’ way to behave: “what we take to be an internal essence of gender is *manufactured through a sustained set of acts*, positioned through the gendered stylization of the body” (Butler, 1999, p.xv, my emphasis).

Evelyn’s biggest test comes with the prospect of getting pregnant and giving birth; something that fills him with “despair at my biological helplessness” (*Eve*, p.77). The fear manifests itself when Evelyn faces the “one test menstruation” (*Eve*, p.77) that Mother permits. Insisting that he is “not ready for motherhood” (*Eve*, p.77) proves that Evelyn is not afraid of “biological helplessness” (*Eve*, p.77), but rather biological power – the power to conceive and become pregnant. The reality of menstruating makes Evelyn realise that “change was absolute and I must climb inside the skin of the girl willy nilly, whether I liked it or not, and learn, somehow, to

live there” (*Eve*, p.80). At this point in the narrative, Evelyn starts becoming more open to the prospect of living as Eve, if only because he knows that he cannot go back to the Evelyn he used to be. As Evelyn tries to accept what is happening, Carter uses the narrative itself to illustrate his dilemma:

I was literally in two minds; my transformation was both perfect and imperfect. All of New Eve’s experience came through two channels of sensation, her own fleshly one and his mental ones. But at length the sense of having been Evelyn began, in spite of himself, to fade, although Eve was a creature without memory. (*Eve*, p.77)

Evelyn is discussing himself in abstract, detached terms, which demonstrates the chasm that exists between his body and mind, and marks de Beauvoir’s notion of ‘becoming’ a woman as an ongoing performative process. For de Beauvoir, “[n]o biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society” (de Beauvoir, 1997, p.296). Instead one learns, and relearns, what it means to ‘become’ a woman. His refusal to be more inclusive of his ‘Eve’ identity also reveals that he has not reached a point where he can confidently state that he *is* Eve. In fact, Evelyn is so frightened of his future that he makes his escape from the women, ready to take his chances in the outside world.

The escape is short-lived: Evelyn is captured by Zero, a poet, and forced to become one of his many wives. Believing Evelyn to be a woman (Eve), Zero initiates him into wifhood by raping him. Evelyn describes Zero as “the first man I met when I became a woman” (*Eve*, p.86), and it is highly significant that this man should also initiate Evelyn into the (female) role of victim. This reverses Evelyn’s previous experiences of sex, where he is the ‘attacker’:

I always managed to have [Leilah] somehow, at the last minute, even if it was up against the wall, while her lips stretched back to show her dark gums in an agony of affront and she gasped: ‘No!’ and her purple fingernails scored my back more out of indignation than passion. (*Eve*, p.31)

As a man, Evelyn downplays his actions, suggesting that any displeasure shown by Leilah is a result of her not wanting him to “smudge her lipstick or otherwise untidy her” (*Eve*, p.31) rather than a conscious refusal to engage sexually. As a woman, Evelyn complains that his virginity “had been no less real because it was synthetic” (*Eve*, p.86), and that he “was in no way prepared for the pain; [Zero’s] body was an anonymous instrument of torture” (*Eve*, p.86). By claiming to be unprepared, Evelyn is indirectly laying the blame for his suffering on Mother: as she reconstructed his body, she also left him open to abuse at the hands of men.

Carter ensures that Evelyn’s sexual encounters with Zero have another dimension, in keeping with Evelyn’s fractured identity: always aggressive, the encounters are “[e]ach time, a renewed defloration, as if his violence perpetually refreshed my virginity” (*Eve*, p.101), and yet Evelyn gains something from the rapes: the ability to identify *with* Zero:

when he mounted me ... I felt myself to be, not myself but he; and the experience of this crucial lack of self, which always brought with it a shock on introspection, forced me to know myself as a former violator at the moment of my own violation. (*Eve*, p.101)

I agree with David Punter, who claims that mirroring is “the symbolic heart of [*The Passion of New Eve*]” (Punter, 1998, p.52). During the sexual act, Evelyn sees himself as if through a hall of mirrors, each one reflecting back another aspect of his identity just as in his earlier failure to recognise himself in a moment of Lacanian panic:

“[w]hen he entered me, the act seemed to me one of seppuku, a ritual disembowelment I committed upon myself, although I was only watching him and only felt my pain and unpleasure in his joy at my pain and pleasure at my distress”

(*Eve*, p.102). Evelyn is both perpetrator and victim of violence, “literally in two minds” (*Eve*, p.77). Although the male-Evelyn may have faded, Evelyn is able to retain a male identity by appropriating the phallus; he channels his thoughts through

the perspective of Zero. Lacan points out that “[t]he fact that the phallus is a signifier means that it is in the place of the Other that the subject has access to it” (Lacan, 1977, p.288). This echoes an experience earlier in the novel when Evelyn is pursuing Leilah through the streets of New York. Wanting to be in control, but fearing otherwise, Evelyn reinstates a sense of equilibrium by reflecting back Leilah’s position: “I dropped down on her like, I suppose, a bird of prey, although my prey, throughout the pursuit, had played the hunter” (*Eve*, p.25).⁶⁷ Vallorani argues that the context of Evelyn’s change is the reason that he cannot bridge the gap between male and female:

[t]he surgical operation has been compulsory and therefore no new awareness is implied in it. A female body has been simply added to a male identity. The two genders exhibit a contiguity which does not – and could never – become continuity. No integration is possible. Eve/lyn’s body and mind diverge but, paradoxically, the resulting chaotic disposition triggers the process of comprehension. (Vallorani, 1998, p.179)

Through his mirrored perspective, Evelyn can at least understand some of what it means to be a woman – something that is aided by his interactions with Zero’s seven other wives.

Zero and his Wives

The wives are Zero’s victims and slaves: “they loved him and did not think they were fit to pick up the crumbs from his table, at which he always ate in solitary splendour” (*Eve*, p.85). Zero believes that “women were fashioned of a different soul substance from men, a more primitive, animal stuff” (*Eve*, p.87), and treats his wives badly, subjecting them to beatings and forcing them to live according to his rules. One of these rules is that they must not speak – “[a] rule they interpreted as a perpetual

⁶⁷ Here, the focus must return to the narrative itself: Evelyn is recalling this event from the later perspective of knowing that that Leilah occupied a prime position in Mother’s group, even though at the time he had no idea of her power – his description of Leilah as both prey and hunter owes a great deal to his later reinterpretation of her role.

whispering; if Zero did not hear them, it was as if they had not spoken” (*Eve*, p.87).

There is only speech if Zero says there is speech: Zero is the absolute authority to which the wives submit, and they, for their part, “all loved him blindly” (*Eve*, p.87).

Annie Leclerc points out that “the master is one who commands. Fine. But as you only command those who obey, it was first necessary to win obedience of those who might seek to act and speak for themselves” (Leclerc, 1981, p.81), something Evelyn echoes when he describes Zero as “powerful yet impotent, since his power depended on his dependants” (*Eve*, p.102). In the absence of children of his own, the wives fulfil the dual role of wife and child (especially given their ages: “the eldest, Marijane, was no more than twenty while the youngest, Betty Louella, was only a child, perhaps twelve, perhaps less” [*Eve*, p.87]). According to Andrea Dworkin,

[w]omen who were molested as children also experience confusion as to what they really wanted when the adult male exercised his sexual will on them, but must, as a condition of forced femininity, accept the male as constant aggressor and forced sex as normative. (Dworkin, 1981, p.58)

Zero’s young brides readily accept his sex-schedule, “decid[ing] to believe that sexual intercourse with him guaranteed their continuing health and strength” (*Eve*, p.88). This inverts a question asked by Irigaray: “[h]ow could material substance enjoy her/itself without provoking the consumer’s anxiety over the disappearance of his nurturing ground?” (Irigaray, 1985a, p.32). Zero is not afraid of losing his ‘nurturing ground’, but provokes in his wives the fear that *they* might miss out on the “sacred fluid imparted by [his] member ... the elixium vitae distilled by [his] immaculate testicles” (*Eve*, p.92). When Zero “demanded absolute subservience from his women ... they gave in to him freely, as though they knew they must be wicked and so deserve to be inflicted with such pain” (*Eve*, p.95). They take their subservience further, so desiring to belong to Zero that they will hurt anyone who

threatens this. Afraid that Evelyn's beauty will lead to him replacing one of them in

Zero's affections, the women attack:

[Marijane] said: 'I guess she won't be pretty at all any more after – ' and, leaving the threat hanging on the air, she seized the plate from which I'd just eaten, broke it in half and advanced on me in a menacing fashion, armed with the two, sharp, splintered surfaces. The other girls all squealed in unison, leaped up from the mattresses on which they sat and broke upon me like a wave equipped with teeth and claws. (*Eve*, p.89)

Evelyn remarks that they were "fighting for their lives" (*Eve*, p.89), because they believe that they are nothing without Zero: "these poor girls had indeed dedicated themselves, body, heart and soul, to the Church of Zero" (*Eve*, p.99). Discussing the concept of women as merchandise, Luce Irigaray asks "[h]ow can this object of transaction claim a right to pleasure without removing her/itself from the established commerce? With respect to other merchandise in the marketplace, how could this commodity maintain a relationship other than one of aggressive jealousy?" (Irigaray, 1985a, p.32). This jealousy manifests itself in the novel: Evelyn notices that the girls "were always betraying one another to a beating ... they fretfully competed amongst themselves all the time for more than their fair share of his attentions" (*Eve*, p.99).

Unable to escape from Zero, Evelyn has no choice but to accept the role of Eve/wife. Afraid of Zero finding out about his past as a woman, Evelyn struggles to keep it a secret, but finds it difficult to be a convincing woman because his female mask keeps slipping, and male behaviours come to the surface: "in spite of Sophia's training ... I would often make a gesture with my hands that was out of Eve's character or exclaim with a subtly male inflection that made [the wives] raise their eyebrows" (*Eve*, p.100). Using the wives as subjects for his "intensive study of feminine manners" (*Eve*, p.101) leaves Evelyn "tense and preoccupied; although I was a woman, I was now also passing for a woman, but, then, many women born spend their whole lives in such imitations" (*Eve*, p.101). Again, this anticipates

Butler's argument that "*gender is a kind of imitation for which there is no original*;
in fact it is a kind of imitation that produces the very notion of the original as an
effect and consequence of the imitation itself" (Butler, 2001, p.723). Punter suggests
that "the structure of doubleness becomes too complex for narrative; we are not
seriously invited, for instance, to explore the cohabitation of Eve's masculine and
feminine selves within a female body" (*Eve*, p.53) but I believe that Carter
competently handles Evelyn's situation to make some important points.

Firstly, 'being' a woman (i.e. having the anatomical attributes of a female) is
not necessarily coupled with feminine behaviour. Passing as a woman means
bringing feminine behaviour to the forefront, so in order to appear to be a 'natural'
woman, Evelyn has to create a hyperbolic performance of femininity which bridges
the gap between gender performance and drag:

[w]hat is "performed" in drag is, of course, the *sign* of gender, a sign that is
not the same as the body that it figures, but that cannot be read without it ...
As an allegory that works through the hyperbolic, drag brings into relief what
is, after all, determined only in relation to the hyperbolic: the understated,
taken-for-granted quality of heterosexual performativity. (Butler, 1993,
p.237)

Carter's comment about such behaviour being common to "women born" (*Eve*,
p.101), which is a nod in the direction of de Beauvoir ("one is not born, but rather
becomes, a woman" [de Beauvoir, 1997, p.295]), illustrates the unnaturalness of
assigning *any* behaviour to a particular gender. Ironically, Evelyn's efforts arouse
Zero's suspicions because he makes himself "too emphatically feminine ... *too much*
like a woman" (*Eve*, p.101). Zero is also afraid that 'Eve' "might be too much of a
woman for him" (*Eve*, p.101). He reaches this conclusion partly because Evelyn is
"the oldest [wife]" (*Eve*, p.93), and so not as naïve as the others, but also because of
Evelyn's "perfection of physical beauty" (*Eve*, p.107). Zero also has his doubts about
Evelyn's sexuality: "[h]is hatred of female homosexuality was inflexible; it was

obsessional” (*Eve*, p.101). This hatred is borne of fear: Zero already feels a failure as a man because he cannot father children. If his wives start turning to one another for sexual satisfaction, then he will be stripped of his power. Irigaray says, “[h]ow can female homosexuality be diminished? By reducing it to ‘acting like a man’” (Irigaray, 1981, p.109). However, it is this fear that the women can replace Zero in the male role that motivates his intolerance of female homosexuality; an intolerance that is expressed most forcefully in Zero’s hatred of Tristessa.

Tristessa

Like the Evelyn of the novel’s beginning, Zero is obsessed with the Hollywood actress Tristessa, but unlike Evelyn, this is an obsession borne out of revulsion, dubbing her “public enemy number one” (*Eve*, p.91). The main charge Zero levels against her is the belief that she has somehow used her “dyke” (*Eve*, p.91) powers to render him infertile:

[t]his is the lousiest woman in the world ... She eats souls. She’s magicked the genius out of my jissom, that evil bitch! And it won’t come back until I stick my merciless finger into this ultimate dyke, like the little Dutch boy. Dyke; she’s a dyke, a sluice of nothingness. (*Eve*, p.91)

He interprets her imagined disinterest in men as a personal attack on his maleness, and is obviously afraid of the idea of a woman who does not need a man; a woman that he cannot control by manipulating ‘her’ desire. Tristessa is Zero’s prey and he devotes many hours to searching for her. As the focus of Zero’s war against women, Tristessa has a mythical status that has only been aided by her retreat from the world (“she retired to, I read somewhere, a hermit-like seclusion in Southern California” [*Eve*, p.8]). When Zero eventually tracks her down, he and his wives break into her home, with the intention of getting revenge: “I am the avenging phallic fire ... I’ve

come to fecundate your sterility, you dyke of dykes, you jamjar of infertility” (*Eve*, p.127).

Beating and stripping her, Zero stumbles upon Tristessa’s secret: “[o]ut of the vestigial garment sprang the rude, red-purple insignia of maleness, the secret core of Tristessa’s sorrow, the source of her enigma, of her shame” (*Eve*, p.128). Tristessa is anatomically male, and Paulina Palmer describes her as “the most interesting example of gender as performance in the novel” (Palmer, 1997, p.30), because “in achieving a sex change, she employs neither surgery nor psychological conditioning. Her willed performance of femininity, combined with her audience’s belief that she is a woman, are sufficient, Carter suggests, to make her one” (Palmer, 197, p.30). A comparable situation arose during an experiment carried out by the American journalist Norah Vincent in 2003. Vincent spent time living as a man, and initially felt that the disguise – male clothing, fake beard, etc. – was most important, but as she gained more confidence in ‘being’ a man in the guise of Ned, she found that she did not need such reliance on props:

I wasn’t wearing my beard anymore. I hadn’t been wearing it for several days. To me it should have seemed obvious that something wasn’t quite right. But this was the test of perception that continually arose with Ned. People saw in him what I had conditioned them to see. When I removed the beard, they saw nothing but a shaved boy. (Vincent, 2006, p.173)

In a Butlerian way (albeit before Butler articulated her ideas), performance and essence are rendered the same thing when Tristessa explains how he transformed himself:

I used to conceal my genitals in my anus. I would fix them in position with Scotch tape, so that my mound was smooth as a young girl’s. But when the years passed and my disguise became my nature, I no longer troubled myself with these subterfuges. Once the essence was achieved, the appearance could take care of itself. (*Eve*, p.141)

Palmer reads Carter as saying that the “audience’s belief” (Palmer, 1997, p.30) plays an active role in making Tristessa seem like a convincing woman, but as Vincent and Carter show, it is the convincingness of the act that makes the audience believe in the ‘reality’ of the performance. Palmer’s reading of Carter’s intentions is a troubling one, also suggesting that Carter is “poking fun at the gullibility of the general public” (Palmer, 1997, p.30). I agree that Carter is “highlight[ing] the connections between gender and fantasy, gender and illusion” (Palmer, 1997, p.30) but this needs to be taken further: Carter is illustrating what Heather L. Johnson calls the “fictive nature of gender” (cited in Gamble, 2001, p.100) rather than mocking. Carter has already shown this when Evelyn learns how to be a woman by copying Zero’s wives, themselves operating a mirroring effect illustrative of their own copying of one another:

[t]he earnest air they shared made them look like sisters and they were dressed alike ... [t]hey wore their hair cut very short and slashed in a straight fringe across their foreheads; each one had a wide gold wedding ring on the fourth finger of her left hand. (*Eve*, p.88)

Evelyn’s performance has also been informed by Tristessa, whose films were shown as part of Evelyn’s psycho-programming: “Tristessa, your solitude, your melancholy – Our Lady of the Sorrows, Tristessa; you came to me in seven veils of celluloid and demonstrated, in your comparable tears, every kitch [sic] excess of the mode of femininity” (*Eve*, p.71). Drag is here being portrayed as producing a more womanly figure than woman/women because it captures an ‘essence’ which does not exist outside of performance. Butler argues, “[t]hat the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality” (Butler, 1999, p.173). The doubled performance of drag (the unconsciously performative and the consciously hyperbolic performance) brings into focus and undermines the “very notions of an essential sex and a true or abiding

masculinity or femininity” (Butler, 1999, p.180). The revelation of Tristessa’s anatomy offers a new perspective on why she was chosen as the face of femininity in Mother’s programming. In addition to being a fantasy woman, Tristessa can teach Evelyn (and other soon-to-be-women) how to project ‘femininity’ without falling into the trap of being “too emphatically feminine” (*Eve*, p.101) and arousing negative attention.

The Riddle of Gender

Like Evelyn, Tristessa has great difficulty in reconciling her mind and body: “the heraldic regalia of his sex appalled him, I thought that Mother would say he had become a woman because he had abhorred his most female part – that is, his instrument of mediation between himself and the other” (*Eve*, p.128). Although Evelyn can accept Tristessa’s revelation, he faces “confusion” (*Eve*, p.128) and stumbles over pronouns when describing Tristessa: “I crept up to him and kissed her pitiful, bare feet” (*Eve*, p.128). These pronouns give way to the dehumanising ‘it’ as Evelyn struggles to make sense of the scene before him: “the proud, solitary heroine who now underwent the unimaginable ordeal of a confrontation with the essential aspect of *its* being *it* had so grandly abandoned” (*Eve*, p.128, my emphasis). Gamble states that Evelyn and Tristessa have in common

the retention, to a certain degree at least, of a masculine viewpoint. Eve has been forced to assume a gender s/he never identified with him/herself ... while Tristessa, for all her feminine glamour, cannot relinquish ‘the awful ineradicable quality of his maleness.’ (Gamble, 2006, p.149)

Zero appears to recognise the unspoken bond between Evelyn and Tristessa, and decides to punish them both by forcing them into a ‘marriage’. Heather Johnson claims that Zero and his wives torture Tristessa “because of her dual nature” (Johnson, 2000, p.129), but it would be more accurate to say that Zero hates women,

and his wives view the world through his eyes, so they cannot understand a man who chooses to live as a woman.

Evelyn is forced to put on a suit and play groom in the mock-marriage.

Surrounded by mirrors, Evelyn sees Zero “step back and I saw his reflection in the mirror step back and the reflection of that reflection in another mirror stepped back” (*Eve*, p.132). This mirroring has the additional effect of echoing the disintegration of Evelyn’s identity:

it seemed, at first glance, I had become my old self again in the inverted world of the mirrors. But this masquerade was more than skin deep. Under the mask of maleness I wore another mask of femaleness but a mask that now I never would be able to remove, no matter how hard I tried, although I was a boy disguised as a girl and now disguised as a boy again. (*Eve*, p.132)

The mirroring is made even more explicit following the ceremony: “[Zero] made us man and wife although it was a double wedding – both were the bride, both the groom in this ceremony” (*Eve*, p.135). This is a situation that Trevenna reads as highlighting the differences between Carter’s and Butler’s understanding of drag:

Butler insists that drag reveals the performative nature of both gender *and* sex since she denies that the two can be separated. While drag, in Carter’s hands, certainly foregrounds the constructedness of gender, it is also shown to hide a pre-existing subject position, conditionally linked to original sexual biology, prior to the exaggerated performance of the ‘other’ gender. This is particularly evident during the mock wedding of Tristessa and Eve. (Trevenna, 2002, p.272)

As I have already noted, Evelyn finds it extremely difficult to recognise himself as Eve, and retains a masculine viewpoint as he recounts his adventures, realising that “his/her ‘womanliness’ is still limited to physicality” (Trevenna, 2002, p.271).

Sarah Gamble regards the wedding as important for different reasons:

[t]he union of the woman who was once a man and the man who has made himself into the perfect woman has profound implications, for in this action not only gendered language but gender itself has been cut adrift from the body, completely reducing sexual identity to a matter of performance. (Gamble, 2001, p.125)

Carter then expands her games, to the point where Zero forces Tristessa to have sex with Evelyn: a double rape that will cause its own doubling: “[m]y bride will become my child’s father” (*Eve*, p.136). The semantic impossibility of this sentence, entering into the realm of metaphor, represents the ‘riddle’ of gender; a complexity that Wesley Stace underestimates in *Misfortune*, as I shall demonstrate. The rape causes Tristessa significant mental anguish, inverting her onscreen role as “the spectacle of *female* suffering” (Gamble, 2001, p.126, my emphasis): Tristessa looks at “his own maleness as if he had never seen it before. He seemed numbed by the rediscovery of his virility; it was incomprehensible to him” (*Eve*, p.141). Driven “quite mad” (*Eve*, p.143) by his suffering, it is inevitable that Tristessa will die, unwilling and unable to accept what has happened to him. His last act is to “chang[e] into his female aspect. He reverted entirely to the sinuous principle of his notion of femininity” (*Eve*, p.156). He returns to his signature role, that of the “glamorously suffering woman” (Jordan, 1994, p.212) before being murdered.

By the novel’s end, Evelyn may or may not be pregnant with Tristessa’s child, and the circulatory nature of the novel makes itself visible again: “[w]e start from our conclusions” (*Eve*, p.191). Evelyn feels able to “leave behind me” (*Eve*, p.191), ready to be taken to the “place of birth” (*Eve*, p.191). As the novel draws to a close, one of Mother’s disciples finds Evelyn and offers him something: “[i]t was a miniature portable refrigerator. Inside, on a bed of dry ice, lay the set of genitals which had once belonged to Evelyn” (*Eve*, p.187). When the woman says that Evelyn “can have them back, if [he] still want[s] them” (*Eve*, p.187), Evelyn responds by laughing and shaking his head; a refusal motivated by his realisation that the genitals are no longer of any relevance to him. Sarah Gamble argues that ‘Eve’ “cannot undo what has been done to her and become Evelyn again” (Gamble, 1997,

p.124), but throughout the course of the text, Evelyn has been very much alive (“his/her femininity is fleshly while his/her masculinity remains cerebral” [Armitt, cited in Gamble, 2001 p.104]), affecting the narrative as it is filtered through his once-male sensibility. Evelyn no longer *wants* to undo the castration – partly because he knows that, after all he has been through, undoing the castration will not be enough to undo everything he has learned about his identity, but also because he has started to accept parts of his female identity. Evelyn could return to ‘being’ Evelyn because Tristessa has taught him about the fluidity of gender and unimportance of anatomy, but the novel ends on a note of rebirth because Evelyn is ready to start ‘being’ Eve and taking on the responsibility of motherhood.

Misfortune

Reproduction can, of course, be read in terms of mirroring; the possible baby is a reflection of Evelyn’s female role, drawing together his fragmented parts to form a cohesive identity for him as ‘mother’. The protagonist of *Misfortune*, Rose, is the embodiment of this type of mirroring. After being found as a baby boy on a rubbish heap, Rose is taken in by Lord Geoffroy Loveall, who decides to raise the baby as a replacement for his dead sister, Dolores. The reconfiguration of the baby’s name to Rose Old (an anagram of Dolores) marks the child as a fragmented mirror-image of the dead woman. This sense of fragmentation is also visible in the text itself. The beginning of the novel is written in the third person, but when Stace starts writing about the life of Rose, the main protagonist, he switches to the first person. Stace (or ‘Rose’) offers an explanation for this:

I should apologise for not revealing myself in the first volume, which I chose not to tell in my own voice. “Why,” you may ask, “when you are so very first person now?” The answer is simple...there wasn’t enough of an I with which to speak, or see. I didn’t think my own voice would be persuasive enough, so

I opted for the old-fashioned narrator, the All-Seeing One – or let’s call him God. (*MF*, p.77)

Stace effects this switch just before ‘the baby’ becomes Rose: before it becomes necessary to dispense with the genderless term ‘the baby’ and resort to pronouns: “shift[ing] an infant from an ‘it’ to a ‘she’ or a ‘he’” (Butler, 1993, p.7). It has been established that Rose is biologically male, but is going to be raised as a female, which raises the problem of which pronoun to use. In the context of writing, Judith Butler notes that “the styles that become available to you are not entirely a matter of choice. Moreover, neither grammar nor style are politically neutral” (Butler, 1999, p.xviii). Stace is aware that describing Rose as either ‘she’ or ‘he’ is to make a political statement about the character’s sex and gender, and seeks to avoid this with the useful gender ambiguity of the first-person pronoun, ‘I’. At this point, it would be useful to consider two of Butler’s questions regarding lucidity and truth: “[w]hat travels under the sign of ‘clarity’? ... What does ‘transparency’ keep obscure?” (Butler, 1999, p.xix). Stace goes to great lengths to reassure the reader who might be uncomfortable with the change in perspective, introducing Rose’s voice by having her claim that “[y]ou know who I am” (*MF*, p.75), and “I deal only in the truth” (*MF*, p.77). To answer Butler’s questions, Stace is depending on the apparent clarity of ‘I’ to hide his difficulty in choosing a gender signifier for his protagonist, and the ‘transparency’ with which he uses ‘I’ disguises the limitations of Stace’s narrative.

Wesley Stace is not the only author to struggle with the ‘pronoun problem’: as I have previously explained, Patricia Duncker’s “[first] attempt to write a novel based on the character [of James Barry] ... stalled after 100 pages when she couldn’t resolve the problem of saying ‘him’ or ‘her’ in the narration” (Wroe, 2000). Brigid Brophy’s novel *In Transit* revolves around a narrator of uncertain gender, causing Brophy to write, “I ... could hardly (could I?) commit myself to a main character at

whose every appearance in my narrative I would be obliged to write he/she, his/her, etc. For which reason I *have* dear Sir/Madam, to remain your I” (Brophy, 2002, p.71). In reference to this novel, Christine Brooke-Rose makes a statement that could easily be applied to Stace and *Misfortune*: “the ‘I’ is not just a fictional character but also an I-narrator quite aware of using ‘I’ *because it is genderless*” (Brooke-Rose, 2002, p.iii, my emphasis). Anna Livia suggests that Brophy “uses the first person pronoun in order to avoid the clumsy neologism *he/she*” (Livia, 2001, p.70), but in Stace’s case, it is a way to avoid using *either* he *or* she, in the hope that he can leave this dilemma to the judgement of the reader.⁶⁸

Anonyma’s Theories

To ensure that Rose is accepted as a ‘she’, Geoffroy realises that she must first be accepted as his daughter; for this to work, Geoffroy needs a wife and so he enlists the help of the librarian, Anonyma Wood, in fulfilling this role. It is almost certain that she will accept Geoffroy’s proposal because of her “age and diminishing prospects. Scarcely any longer of marriageable age – this being in the days when women of thirty-seven were considered spinsters – she had few alternatives” (*MF*, p.83). After she agrees to the marriage, Geoffroy’s manservant Hamilton tells Anonyma that the baby is a boy, but she agrees to Hamilton’s suggestion to raise the baby as a girl for a short time: “[t]here is surely no harm in keeping one in skirts for a short while, and there would be nothing unusual in it. Our new boy, Stephen, will be in skirts, too” (*MF*, p.91).

Anonyma is presented as very knowledgeable about matters of gender. She uses her job as librarian to study the works of various writers and poets, and through her study of “the printed works of [the poet] Mary Day” (*MF*, p.92) Anonyma

⁶⁸ The issue of pronouns, especially in relation to ‘genderless’ narrators is the focus of Chapter 4.

develops ideas of her own: “every human being is part male and part female ... it was vital for the two halves of the soul to be respected” (MF, p.97). In Anonyma’s mind, it is better to explore both genders rather than take a position firmly in one, and by raising Rose, Anonyma has “literally in her hands, in her arms, a chance to test her theories” (MF, 98) – particularly the idea “of the androgyne” (MF, p.98):

[a] baby’s inner sense of itself was neither male nor female, until society taught it which role it was to assume ... Boys and girls were therefore made and not born, and I would be made. I would without a doubt be the most adorable and original child ever born, and an even more successful adult. Perhaps I would be the most perfect person in the world, a symbolic challenge to every assumption on heaven or earth. (MF, p.98)

Anonyma’s theories self-evidently owe an unacknowledged debt to Virginia Woolf here. Anonyma’s belief that “[w]hen men were too manly, they were as inept as women who were too feminine” (MF, p.98) echoes Virginia Woolf’s comment in *A Room of One’s Own* that “[i]t is fatal to be a man or woman pure and simple; one must be woman-manly or man-womanly” (Woolf, 2004, p.120). Although *Misfortune* comes complete with a ‘Suggested Further Reading’ list of some thirty-two texts, there is no explicit reference to Virginia Woolf anywhere.⁶⁹ However, Woolf retains an implicit presence in the text. In *A Room of One’s Own*, Woolf states:

[t]he normal and comfortable state of being is that when the two [parts] live in harmony together, spiritually cooperating. If one is a man, still the woman part of the brain must have effect; and a woman also must have intercourse with the man in her. Coleridge perhaps meant this when he said that a great mind is androgynous. It is when this fusion takes place that the mind is fully fertilized and uses all its faculties. (Woolf, 2004, p.113)

This is reconfigured in *Misfortune* as “[m]y mother believed that every human being is part male and part female and that the truly poetic mind should harness both these forces” (MF, p.97). Thus, even if Woolf is not given recognition, she remains a

⁶⁹ The ‘Suggested Further Reading’ list, which itself contains several made-up texts, is an example of the author mimicking Woolf’s literary techniques in such texts as *Orlando*.

ghostly presence in the text, conspicuous by her absence. Her suggestion that the “great mind is androgynous” (Woolf, 2004, p.113), which is seized upon by Stace, is dismissed as obvious by Elaine Showalter:

[e]ven clinical psychology confirms that ‘the really creative individual combines “masculine” and “feminine” qualities’; indeed, since masculine and feminine personality qualities are stereotypes to begin with, it is virtually a tautology to say that creative people are not limited to one set. (Showalter, 1999, p.284)

As far as Showalter is concerned, “[t]he androgynous mind is ... a utopian projection of the ideal artist” (Showalter, 1999, p.289). She believes that androgyny is better understood as the complete understanding of one sex “with all its restrictions of sex and anger and fear and chaos” (Showalter, 1999, p.289) rather than an attempt to intimately know both:

[a] thorough understanding of what it means, in every respect, to be a woman, could lead the artist to an understanding of what it means to be a man. This revelation would not be realized in any mystical way; it would result from daring to face and express what is unique, even if unpleasant, or taboo, or destructive, in one’s own experience, and thus it would speak to the secret heart in all people. (Showalter, 1999, p.289)

It is difficult to quantify what it means to be a woman or a man and it is virtually impossible to draw upon the different understandings of gender to form one coherent notion of ‘man’ or ‘woman’. It is more practical, I think, to follow Woolf’s idea and try to harness elements of ‘man’ and ‘woman’, drawing them together and allowing them to merge, thus expanding the elements of one’s gender expression. Of course, such gender experiments are easier in theory than in practice: attempts to reconfigure and play with gender can, in the real world, have devastating (and violent) consequences.⁷⁰ This is something that *Misfortune* chooses to ignore, especially in its treatment of bathroom politics.

⁷⁰ “Engendered Penalties”, a paper written for the Equalities Review, reports that “[t]ransgender and transsexual people face a lifetime of inequalities and discrimination, despite often being amongst the most well educated members of society” (Whittle et al, 2007, p.77). According to Whittle, “[t]rans

Trivialising the ‘Bathroom Problem’

In *Vested Interests*, Marjorie Garber declares that “[t]he restroom as a site of gender identification accords with a child’s earliest training in the use of public accommodations ... and therefore with some of his or her earliest public declarations of gender difference” (Garber, 1992, p.15). However, this issue is trivialised in *Misfortune*, demonstrating Stace’s inability to cope with the gender issues so central to the novel. While Rose is playing with her friends, Stephen and Sarah, they announce that they “have to piddle” (*MF*, p.137), giving Rose an opportunity to see (and misread) different bathroom practices. Sarah opts for a modesty that is read as appropriate for girls, “duck[ing] down behind a tree so she could squat and lift up her skirt in privacy” (*MF*, p.137), while Stephen puts on more of a performance: “on the other side of a small statue of Cupid [he] stood up and sprayed a generous arc ... singing loudly” (*MF*, p.137). Witnessing this, Rose reaches the conclusion that, “[w]e have a choice” (*MF*, p.137, emphasis in original). This response, beyond illustrating Rose’s confused belief that men and women have the same anatomy, shows that she feels the choice is open to her. Insofar as her parents have taken on the role of policing gender to make sure Rose acts appropriately as a girl, their methods are unthreatening (“I had always been *encouraged* to sit down – more ladylike” [*MF*, p.137, my emphasis]). Therefore, Rose sees no obstacle to changing her behaviours: “[i]t made me curious if it would be more fun to stand and sprinkle, and I didn’t see why I couldn’t find out” (*MF*, p.137). When Rose finally tries to emulate the “freedom in Stephen’s technique” (*MF*, p.138), she is caught by her mother. There is “sadness and anger in [Anonyma’s] eyes” (*MF*, p.174) but Rose is

people fear for their safety, to the extent that those not yet living permanently in their new role do not go out in public spaces in their preferred gender. 73% of respondents experienced harassment, with 10% being victims of threatening behaviour when out in public spaces” (Whittle et al, 2007, p.18).

“gently advised that if one sits down, one never misses” (*MF*, 174). Any sinister undertones to this policing are deflected because the scene is framed by the reminiscences of the older Rose, who seems to agree with her mother’s ‘suggestion’ by describing it as “good advice, which I still practice” (*MF*, p.174). Rose never makes any mention of the deceit that lies behind Anonyma’s advice, nor explains why, when she finds out that she is male, she does not adopt Stephen’s more “fun” (*MF*, p.137) methods.

Stace’s sanitised account of the bathroom problem completely ignores the trauma that often surrounds bathroom experiences for those who do not comfortably fit into binaries and the danger that can follow transgression.⁷¹ Garber argues that “[t]he signs on the [bathroom] doors do not contain pictures of sex organs; they satisfy a desire for cultural binarism rather than for biological certainty” (Garber, 1992, p.13). In her reading of the issue, Garber states:

[f]or transvestites and transsexuals, the ‘men’s room’ problem is really a challenge to the way such cultural binarism is read. Cross-dressers who want to pass prefer to read the stick figures literally: those in pants, in there; those in skirts, in here. The public restroom appears repeatedly in transvestite accounts of passing in part because it so directly posits the binarism of gender (choose either one door or the other) in apparently inflexible terms, and also (what is really part of the same point) because it marks a place of taboo. (Garber, 1992 p14)

At this point, it is worth returning to the novel *Stone Butch Blues*, which I discussed in Chapter 2, in order to remind ourselves of the very real problem of ‘bathroom politics’ which Stace treats so glibly. In *Stone Butch Blues*, Jess trials her male identity in the men’s room, and considers it “the most important test of all” (*SBB*, p.172). Before she enters, Jess is alert to the possible dangers of infiltrating male

⁷¹ Wilchins recalls, “[w]hen people started reading me as a woman, I had to very consciously learn how they saw me in order to use the restroom. I had to learn to recognize my voice, my posture, the way I appeared in clothing. I had to master an entire set of bathroom-specific communicative behaviors just to avoid having the cops called” (Wilchins, 1997, p.151). The ‘Bathroom Problem’, as explained by Judith Halberstam and Marjorie Garber, is discussed in more detail in chapter two.

space: “I paced outside the men’s room. What would happen if I walked in?” (*SBB*, p.172). Her fear is based, in part, on the prejudice she has already felt in using the women’s bathroom as a butch woman:

I took a deep breath and entered the women’s bathroom. Two women were freshening their makeup in front of the mirror. One glanced at the other and finished applying her lipstick.

‘Is that a man or a woman?’ she said to her friend as I passed them ... I locked the stall door behind me. Their laughter cut me to the bone. ‘You don’t really know if that’s a man or not,’ one woman said to the other. ‘We should call security and make sure.’

I flushed the toilet and fumbled with my zipper in fear. Maybe it was just an idle threat. Maybe they really would call security. I hurried out of the bathroom as soon as I heard both women leave. (*SBB*, p.59)

The women in the bathroom disapprove of Jess because her appearance challenges traditional notions of femininity: “[t]he old binarism, the old division ‘between the sexes,’ the ultimate grade school taboo (boys’ room/girls’ room) becomes a gender test” (Garber, 1992, p.15). Feinberg depicts the difficulties of using public bathrooms – the fear of negative responses – as a regular occurrence for butches. In another scene at the factory, Jess describes “a ruckus near the women’s bathroom – Butch Jan squared off with two women and a man. It was a fight I’d engaged in many times ... [Jan] was upset because some women in the bathroom claimed they thought she was a man” (*SBB*, p.120).

In the same way that entering the women’s room without problems can be read as an acceptance of butches as women, successfully entering the men’s room without being challenged can be regarded as a major step in Jess’s quest to pass as man: “I could go to the bathroom whenever and wherever I needed to without pressure or shame. What an enormous relief” (*SBB*, p.173). This relief is unfortunately short-lived: an acquaintance at work accidentally reveals that Jess is a woman, leaving her no choice but to resign – largely because of how difficult it will be to use either bathroom in light of the revelation: “I’m out of this job now ... You

don't get it, do you? Which bathroom you think I'm going to use on Monday, Duffy?" (*SBB*, p.207). Using a public bathroom is a decision fraught with danger for Jess. Taking a trip across states with her transgender friend Ruth means that the risk of discovery is doubled, so they decide it is safer to avoid public bathrooms altogether, using bravado to try and downplay the potential hazard: "[t]he world is our restroom! That was our motto on the trip upstate. We brought plenty of toilet paper so we wouldn't need to risk a rest stop" (*SBB*, p.278).

Similar points of view to this can be found in both *Trumpet* and *Middlesex*, corroborating my concern with Stace's treatment. In *Trumpet*, Colman recalls his father's refusal to use urinals, something Joss couches in general terms: "they were common and you could catch things and there were unsavoury men who could be dangerous" (*Tr*, p.56). His point of view is influenced by a fear of what could happen if he is unmasked as a woman. Similarly, Cal (*Middlesex*) admits that "[d]espite my suit, my haircut, and my height, every time I went into a men's room a shout rang out in my head: 'You're in the mens!'" (*Mid*, p.452). *Misfortune* completely avoids the issue of risks even though at the end of the novel Rose discusses the concept of bathroom segregation:

I remember when there were only two bathrooms in the whole house, and neither of them had a flush. Now these lonely private rooms are everywhere, each complete with its own noisy flush, and a sign outside for gentlemen or ladies, to avoid unwitting blushes, but what difference does it make anyway, if everyone's sitting down? In the baths at Bristol when I was young, men and women were never separated, but now it's all prudery and suspicion. Anyway, the signs never affected me one way or the other: I went where I chose. (*MF*, p.516)

With Rose's unconcerned attitude ("I went where I chose" [*MF*, p.516]), Stace disregards the difficulties faced by differently-gendered individuals, and trivialises a

serious issue which is still relevant today.⁷² That Stace even has his protagonist ask “what difference does it make” (*MF*, p.516) shows that he does not grasp this complicated issue since there is nothing in the narrative to suggest this is a politically charged issue.

Narrative Structure

This is not the only point at which Stace struggles with gender issues. *Misfortune* is unsuccessful in many ways, most notably in regards to its first-person narrative structure. In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf claims that “‘I’ is only a convenient term for somebody who has no real being” (Woolf, 2004, p.4), while Elaine Showalter criticises the use of ‘I’ in that text:

despite its illusions of spontaneity and intimacy, *A Room of One's Own* is an extremely impersonal and defensive book. Impersonality may seem like the wrong word for a book in which a narrative ‘I’ appears in every third sentence. But a closer look reveals that the ‘I’ is a persona, whom the author calls ‘Mary Beton,’ and that her views are carefully distanced and depersonalized, just as the pronoun ‘one’ in the title depersonalizes, and even de-sexes, the subject. (Showalter, 1999, p.282)

Woolf’s decision to use the third-person narrator in *Orlando* enables her to consider Orlando’s situation in a detached manner that is dependent on notions of ‘truth’:

“[t]he biographer is now faced with a difficulty which it is better perhaps to confess than to gloss over ... Our simple duty is to state the facts as far as they are known, and so let the reader make of them what he may” (Woolf, 2006, p.59). The choice of narration proves most useful when describing Orlando’s transformation from man to woman: “[w]e may take advantage of this pause in the narrative to make certain

⁷² In October 2006, the Italian politician Vladimir Luxuria found himself at odds with some members of parliament, who disapproved of him using the female bathroom. Luxuria “describes himself as ‘trans-gender’ and, while never having had a sex change operation, he dresses and behaves entirely as a woman” (Hooper, 2006). A complaint was made by a fellow politician, Elisabetta Gardini, who stated that encountering Luxuria in the female bathroom made her feel “as if she had been the victim of a ‘sex attack’” (Hooper, 2006). The suggestion that the problem could be solved by a third bathroom was dismissed by the Christian Democrat party, which “was adamant that ‘there are only two genders-male and female’” (Hooper, 2006).

statements. Orlando had become a woman – there is no denying it” (Woolf, 2006, p.124). With the clarity of a detached observer, Woolf (as the biographer) is ready to deflect claims that the novel is unbelievable:

[t]he change seemed to have been accomplished painlessly and completely and in such a way that Orlando herself showed no surprise at it. Many people, taking this into account, and holding that such a change of sex is against nature, have been at great pains to prove (1) that Orlando had always been a woman, (2) that Orlando is at this moment a man. Let biologists and psychologists determine. It is enough for us to state the simple fact; Orlando was a man till the age of thirty; when he became a woman and has remained so ever since. But let other pens treat of sex and sexuality; we quit such odious subjects as soon as we can. (Woolf, 2006, p.124)

The moment of Orlando’s change is suitably dramatic, as I have indicated:

[w]e are, therefore, now left entirely alone in the room with the sleeping Orlando and the trumpeters. The trumpeters, ranging themselves side by side in order, blow one terrific blast –

‘THE TRUTH!’

at which Orlando woke.

He stretched himself. He rose. He stood upright in complete nakedness before us, and while the trumpets pealed Truth! Truth! Truth! we have no choice left but confess – he was a woman. (Woolf, 2006, p.123)

This passage has similarities to the moment in *Misfortune* when Rose discovers the secret of her birth; the triple word repetition and use of uppercase letters: “BOY on my bed. BOY in my bed. BOY” (*MF*, p.224). However, Rose is in despair (“I hated myself” [*MF*, p.226]), confessing that while he was “perfect on the outside” (*MF*, p.225), he has lost his sense of self: “[w]hat did I call myself? What would my name be? From now on, I could refer to myself only in the third person – was there even an ‘I’ to speak from?” (*MF*, p.225). In direct opposition to this, Orlando is able to look at himself “without showing any signs of discomposure” (Woolf, 2006, p.123) because he “remained precisely as he had been. The change of sex, though it altered their future, did nothing whatever to alter their identity” (Woolf, 2006, p.124).

The major difference between the treatment of gender in *Misfortune* and *Orlando* is that *Orlando* acknowledges that it is easier to live as a man rather than a

woman. In *Misfortune*, Rose struggles to make the transition from female to male, claiming that it is more restrictive and less appealing being a man: “I felt uncomfortable in everything my alternative wardrobe offered. Anything I tried chafed, burned, and abraded” (*MF*, p.238). Rose’s hatred of male clothing is equalled by her love for female outfits: “[a] large skirt is the most convenient and comfortable thing in the world, nor did I ever wish for warmer wear during the winters of my childhood (*MF*, p.238)”. This particular opinion is inconsistent with Rose’s dislike of female clothes as a child: she feels “hampered by [her] skirt” (*MF*, p.167) when trying to copy Stephen’s stone skipping, and although Stephen says she throws “like a girl” (*MF*, p.167), Rose is adamant that “my skirt *was* the reason” (*MF*, p.167), believing that if it was not for the skirts, she “could throw farther, faster” (*MF*, p.167).

Woolf responds to the clothing issue in a more credible manner, emphasising both the positive (attractiveness) and negative (impracticality) aspects of women’s clothes:

these skirts are plaguey things to have about one’s heels. Yet the stuff (flowered paduasoy) is the loveliest in the world. Never have I seen my own skin (here she laid her hand on her knee) look to such advantage as now. Could I, however, leap overboard and swim in clothes like these? No! Therefore, I should have to trust to the protection of a blue-jacket. (Woolf, 2006, p.137)

Woolf goes on to relate the vast effort that is taken by women to make themselves look appropriately attractive for and to men:

‘women are not (judging by my own short experience of the sex) obedient, chaste, scented, and exquisitely apparelled by nature. They can only attain these graces, without which they may enjoy none of the delights of life, by the most tedious discipline. There’s the hairdressing,’ she thought, ‘that alone will take an hour of my morning; there’s looking in the looking-glass, another hour; there’s staying and lacing; there’s washing and powdering; there’s changing from silk to lace and from lace to paduasoy; there’s being chaste year in year out...’ (Woolf, 2006, p.141)

Like Orlando, Rose also has to undertake great efforts to appear suitably feminine: “[o]ur toilet took longer and methods became complex, ever more elaborate combinations of face powder, mascara, and rouge” (*MF*, p.190). However, this is shown to be a result of her development as a male: “the hair above my upper lip and around my cheeks had grown thicker and less babyish ... I truly needed the razor ... [Anonyma] showed me how to take the blade to the hair above my lip and then cover it with the powder, which made me sneeze” (*MF*, p.190). While *Orlando* points out the artificiality that is necessary for women to achieve a ‘naturally’ feminine appearance, *Misfortune* chooses to focus on the discord between Rose’s female identity, and her male body.

Once Rose has discovered and come to terms with the lies her parents told her, she exploits this discord by experimenting with her gender, and this is something that she is encouraged in by her friends: “[t]hey laid out, side by side, the suit and the red dress ... Then they left the room. It was my choice” (*MF*, p.370). The choice Rose makes is to try and live in between genders: “[m]ustaches came and went as I grew older, but this one, at this moment, looked most debonair, particularly in the context of my dress” (*MF*, p.374). Her experiments do not limit her in any way: despite the ways in which she manipulates gender, she ends the novel by staking her claim as the new Lord Loveall while wearing a skirt and “making sure there was a telling display of stocking and perhaps even a hint of garter” (*MF*, p.510). Nonetheless, Rose’s experiments do not actually teach her anything: she gains no great insights from her gender experiences despite having what Cixous would regard as the optimum learning experience:

let us imagine a real liberation of sexuality, that is to say, transformation of each one’s relationship to his or her body (and to the other body), an approximation to the vast, material, organic, sensuous universe that we are ... Then ‘femininity’ and ‘masculinity’ would inscribe quite differently their

effects of difference, their economy, their relationship to expenditure, to lack, to the gift. What today appears to be 'feminine' or 'masculine' would no longer amount to the same thing. (Cixous, 2004, p.350)

Although Emily Jeremiah claims that *Misfortune* "frequently challenges the boundaries between 'male' and 'female' ... [m]ale and female are slippery terms in the novel" (Jeremiah, 2007, p.138), I disagree. Stace has an opportunity to consider the relationship between gender and the body, and to raise some serious questions about the validity of gender categories, but he squanders this opportunity. Jeremiah, however, sees this as evidence that "the text ultimately affirms 'choice' as far as gender is concerned - Rose 'chooses' to wear a dress, even as he assumes his maleness" (Jeremiah, 2007, p.138). In fact, the dress is almost the only evidence of the gender difficulties that Rose has been through.

In contrast to *Misfortune*, Woolf uses her novel to explore the difficulties that Orlando will encounter as a result of changing from man to woman – Woolf is illustrating the limitations Orlando-as-woman will face by comparing them to the freedoms he had as a man:

I shall never be able to crack a man over the head, or tell him he lies in his teeth, or draw my sword and run him through the body, or sit among my peers, or wear a coronet, or walk in procession, or sentence a man to death, or lead an army, or prance down Whitehall on a charger, or wear seventy-two different medals on my breast. All I can do, once I set foot on English soil, it to pour out tea and ask my lords how they like it. (Woolf, 2006, p.142)

Elaine Showalter points out that "whatever the abstract merits of androgyny, the world that Virginia Woolf inhabited was the last place in which a woman could fully express both femaleness and maleness, nurturance and aggression" (Showalter, 1999, p.263), illustrating what fired Woolf's imagination. Cixous argues that

[o]rganization by hierarchy makes all conceptual organization subject to man. Male privilege, shown in the opposition between *activity* and *passivity*, which he uses to sustain himself. Traditionally, the question of sexual difference is treated by coupling it with the opposition: activity/passivity. (Cixous, 2004, p.349)

If masculinity/maleness is represented as active and femininity/femaleness is represented as passive, (“woman is always associated with passivity in philosophy ... Either woman is passive or she does not exist” [Cixous, 2004, p.349]) then the difference between the sexes should be sufficiently noticeable: in *Orlando*, Woolf clearly makes the point that males have greater freedom than females, but despite *Misfortune* being set in the early part of the nineteenth century, Rose has no such problems as she trials various identities. Her penchant for wearing dresses and referring to herself using male pronouns is no obstacle to marriage or fathering a child, “the next heir of Love Hall, Adam Loveall” (*MF*, p.509).

As a study of gender, *Misfortune* is neither insightful nor thoughtful enough, ignoring the harsh realities of a life lived on the margins of accepted gender categories. Although Stace has been undoubtedly inspired by *Orlando*, he does not live up to Woolf’s novel, failing to explore gender with the depth and thoughtfulness which a postmodernist perspective should allow for. Narrative devices and complex plotting fail to mask the novel’s flaws. Rose’s claim that “[she] had been put on earth to challenge convention” (*MF*, p.518) is laughable: although her family try to raise her as a girl, it has little effect on her development: she ends the novel as a heterosexual man, a husband and a father. Her only ‘challenge’ to convention is to wear dresses, but this only works (if it works at all) because the characters around Rose maintain a sense of gender stability: without a surrounding context of gender stability, Rose’s own instability would be completely meaningless.

In contrast, *The Passion of New Eve* is built upon the instability of gender. Characters cast off traditional gender roles, and create new gendered identities through literal and metaphorical transformations. The breakdown of gender in its traditionally understood forms, combined with the mirroring effect of the narrative,

leads to the creation of a text which prefigures some of Butler's most important insights. Carter turns gender on its head, pointing out its fictive nature. This paves the way for the likes of Jeanette Winterson and Claire Messud to try to write beyond gender categories by utilising genderless narrators, as I will demonstrate in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR: 'GENDERLESS NARRATORS'

A writer must resist the pressure of old formulae and work towards new combinations of language. (Winterson, 1997, p.76)

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In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler asks “[h]ow does language construct the categories of sex?” (Butler, 1999, p.xxx). This question is further developed in *Undoing Gender*, when she argues that

[w]hen we ask, what are the conditions of intelligibility by which the human emerges, by which the human is recognized, by which some subject becomes the subject of human love, we are asking about conditions of intelligibility composed of norms, of practices, that have become presuppositional, without which we cannot think the human at all. (Butler, 2004, p.57).

In this chapter, I will interrogate these notions of ‘intelligibility’ and the ‘human’ by concentrating on two novels: Jeanette Winterson’s novel, *Written on the Body*, and Claire Messud’s novella, ‘The Hunters’, both of which reconfigure these issues with their use of ‘genderless’ narrators. In so doing, I will argue that Winterson is utilising gender stereotypes to actually create a ‘doubly-gendered’ character. I will also demonstrate that Winterson’s use of her own biography in her fiction disrupts notions of true and false, fiction and autobiography, with the result that the relationship between gender and ‘humanness’ is highlighted. This will relate to my discussion of ‘The Hunters’, where I will demonstrate how the character of Ridley Wandor is stripped of her humanity through the narrator’s refusal to accept her identity as a woman.

Gerald Prince explains that “any sign in a narration which represents a narrator’s persona, his attitude, his knowledge of worlds other than that of the narrated, or his interpretation of the events recounted and evaluation of their importance constitutes a sign of the ‘I’” (Prince, 1982, p.10). Prince’s statement highlights the fact that everything that “constitutes a sign of the ‘I’” (Prince, 1982, p.10) is filtered through

the lens of he or she (that is, male or female). Winterson and Messud craft narratives that withhold the gender of the narrator, demonstrating a reinterpretation of the very concept of the narrator. Prince argues that “[t]he intrusiveness of a given narrator, his degree of self-consciousness, his reliability, his distance from the narrated or the narratee not only help characterize him but also affect our interpretation of and response to the narrative” (Prince, 1982, p.13). Winterson and Messud’s approaches affect the way that readers interpret not just the narrators, but their own concepts of masculinity, femininity, and humanness, and they achieve this by magnifying the reader’s sense of distance from the narrators by stripping the narrators of recognisable markers of identity.⁷³

Winterson and Messud make full use of the ‘I’ narrator, exploring the failure of language to adequately represent ‘ungendered’ characters, and posing a challenge to the traditional gender binary which embeds itself within language. Patricia Duncker points out that “[i]n *Written on the Body*, Winterson uses straightforward first-person narrative. Incidentally, this is the only option if you want to be cagey about the narrator’s sex” (Duncker, 1998, p.84). The difficulty of finding a mode in which to discuss ‘ungendered’ characters is such that Winterson and Messud’s mode of narration is chosen for them by the constraints of the English language: “we need more language than just feminine/masculine, straight/gay, either/or. Men are not just from Mars and women and not from Venus. We all live on the same planet” (Feinberg, 1998, p.28). Winterson and Messud also introduce the possibility of

⁷³ Grice and Woods explain this in Winterson’s case as “bring[ing] the politics of reading gendered narratives to the foreground once again” (Grice and Woods, 1998, p.2).

bisexuality as a means of denying gendered readings of the narrators, a strategy, however, that ultimately appears to deny a reading of the narrators as human.⁷⁴

Written on the Body

When *Written on the Body* was published, the novel's reception was defined by the author's personal circumstances. From the beginning of Winterson's career, reviewers have struggled to make a distinction between the 'real' life of the author, and the lives of her characters, something Winterson herself must take some responsibility for:

the stability of 'fiction' as a sufficient description of *Oranges [Are Not the Only Fruit]* is called into question immediately because the constructed line between first-person fiction and autobiography is barely meaningful as a marker of generic territoriality ... Protagonist and author are brought up in Lancashire, adopted daughters of an evangelical mother and barely visible father, and both are named Jeanette. (Gilmore, 2001, p.125)⁷⁵

Leigh Gilmore has further argued that *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* "has installed the expectation ... that subsequent texts by Winterson can be read within the context of an autobiographical project, even if Winterson wants to change the rules" (Gilmore, 1997, p.227). Winterson herself likens *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* to both *Orlando* and Gertrude Stein's *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*: "fiction masquerading as a memoir" (*AO*, p.53), and claims that "[I]ike Stein, I prefer myself as a character in my own fiction" (*AO*, p.53). Despite this, Winterson refutes the notion that she is in any way responsible for 'mis-readings' of her work, and blames any confusion on the "late-twentieth-century vogue for literary biography" (*AO*, p.27). Winterson's writing has been overshadowed by her fame: "in the National Curriculum for Schools, in undergraduate curricula and in the academic canon of

⁷⁴ Patricia Duncker argues that "[i]f to be human is to be heterosexual, and there is plenty of historical persecution and available legislation that suggests it is not human to be otherwise, then queer is not quite human" (Duncker, 2002a, p.96).

⁷⁵ *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* is Winterson's first novel, published in 1985.

Contemporary Women's Fiction, Jeanette Winterson has become public property" (Morrison, 2006, p.172). This causes a split in her identity: "the writer Jeanette Winterson, on the one hand, and the polymorphous cultural institution 'Jeanette Winterson' on the other" (Morrison, 2006, p.170). Winterson makes use of the myth of 'Jeanette Winterson' even as she claims that,

the intersection between a writer's life and a writer's work is irrelevant to the reader. The reader is not being offered a chunk of the writer or a direct insight into the writer's mind, the reader is being offered a separate reality. A reality separate from the actual world of the reader, and just as importantly, separate from the actual world of the writer. (*AO*, p.27)

Although she claims that "[a]rt must resist autobiography if it hopes to cross boundaries of class, culture...and...sexuality" (*AO*, p.106), Winterson actually utilises the conflation of art and autobiography as a means of emphasising the fictionality of her work – a project that reaches its zenith in *Written on the Body*.

Fiction and Autobiography

By fictionalising her own life, Winterson affected how her subsequent novels were read. Gregory J. Rubinson points out that "[m]any reviewers ... [of *Written on the Body*] assumed that the narrator is female, associating him/her with the author or finding hints accreting towards such a reading" (Rubinson, 2005, p.129), and blames this on "the often stereotypical and hetero-normative biases in their own reading practices" (Rubinson, 2005, p.129). While the reading of any novel is undoubtedly coloured by the experiences each reader brings to the text, Leigh Gilmore's articulation of Winterson's work as confusing the boundaries of fiction and autobiography offers an important insight into the mechanics of *Written on the Body*.

Incidentally, Leslie Feinberg's *Stone Butch Blues* has suffered the same fate as *Written on the Body*; in the afterword to *Stone Butch Blues*, Feinberg describes parallels between the categorisation of the book and her own personal struggles:

[L]ike my own life, this novel defies easy classification. If you found *Stone Butch Blues* in a bookstore or library, which category was it in? lesbian fiction? Gender studies? Like the germinal novel *The Well of Loneliness* by Radclyffe/John Hall, this book is a lesbian novel and a transgender novel – making ‘trans’ genre a verb as well as an adjective. (*SBB*, p.304)

However, unlike Winterson, Feinberg embraces this confusion, believing that the novel gains its power through reflecting a version of the truth: “[i]s it fiction?’ I am frequently asked. Is it true? Is it real? Oh, it’s real all right. So real it bleeds. And yet it is a remembrance: Never underestimate the power of fiction to tell the truth” (*SBB*, p.304). This is in direct opposition to Winterson’s assertion that “[t]he Victorian denial of art as art (separate, Other, self-contained) was unsustainable ... That art should not be art but a version of everyday life was absurd” (*AO*, p.31). Far more important than art-as-life, for Winterson, is the language that the writer chooses: “[i]f we admit that language has power over us, not only through what it says but also through what it is, we will be tolerant of literary experiment ... A writer must resist the pressure of old formulae and work towards new combinations of language” (*AO*, p.76).

In trying to discuss the novel and narrator, it is immediately clear that the English language is not up to the task. On the contrary, it impedes progress and draws attention to the text itself, as noted by Susana Onega:

[w]e cannot refer to the narrator as a ‘she’ ignoring the text’s insistence that we use the slashed forms ‘s/he’ and ‘her/his’ even if having to use the slashes is irritating, precisely because it is this irritation that will challenge and set into question the objectivity of our patriarchal assumptions about identity. (Onega, 2006, p.111)

This issue is also raised in ‘The Hunters’, as we shall see, and Virginia Woolf expresses this same irritation in *Orlando* when she writes, “[h]is memory – but in future we must, for convention’s sake, say ‘her’ for ‘his’, and ‘she’ for ‘he’” (Woolf,

2006, p.124). Judith Butler also draws attention to the failure of language, especially when attempting to refer to the body:

[t]he linguistic categories ... are themselves troubled by a referent that is never fully or permanently resolved or contained by any given signified. Indeed, that referent persists only as a kind of absence or loss, that which language does not capture, but, instead, that which impels language repeatedly to attempt that capture, that circumscription – and to fail. (Butler, 1993, p.67)

For Winterson, “[t]he art of *Orlando* is its language. Woolf never lets her words tire and slip. It is the taut line, the tightrope of language, that makes possible passages at once delicate and audacious” (*AO*, p.70). It is an “intimate book” (*AO*, p.70) that uses “intimate language” (*AO*, p.70), a charge that can also be levelled at *Written on the Body*. At one point, the narrator breaks off his/her narrative to address the reader on the subject of his/her reliability: “I can tell by now that you are wondering whether I can be trusted as a narrator” (*WB*, p.24), and at another, he/she admits “I can’t be relied upon” (*WB*, p.92). It is this intimacy that obscures the text: the reader is both too close to, and too far from, the narrator, able to see that he/she is not trustworthy (in part because he/she rejects binary gender categorisation), but unable to see what he/she is.

Throughout the course of the novel, he/she engages in many relationships, and by the halfway point of the novel, the phrase “I had a girlfriend once” (*WB*, p.19) has become a familiar refrain. There is “a girlfriend who thought it rude to wear shorts in front of public monuments” (*WB*, p.12), another girlfriend “who was addicted to starlit nights” (*WB*, p.19), one “who had been heavily into papier-maché” (*WB*, p.41), Inge (*WB*, p.21), Jacqueline (*WB*, p.24), Catherine (*WB*, p.59), and of course, Louise, “another married woman” (*WB*, p.32) and the focus of much of the narrative. Anna Livia argues that “Winterson’s novel is a love story, and since her other novels are on lesbian themes, most readers will assume it is a lesbian love

story” (Livia, 2001, p.79). When Winterson says that “the reader should be wary of *Orlando*’s facts, they work too, like wartime signposts, incorrectly pointing the traveller in the wrong direction” (*AO*, p.72), she could be talking about *Written on the Body*.

Up until page 92, it is easy to fall into Winterson’s carefully laid trap, and believe that the narrator is (like the author) both a woman and a lesbian. However, at this point, the narrative takes an unexpected turn: “I had a boyfriend once called Crazy Frank” (*WB*, p.92). Suddenly, the narrative of *Written on the Body* has swerved away from the well-known facts of Winterson’s (real) life. And lest the reader disregard Crazy Frank as an aberration, more boyfriends emerge, in fleeting memories ([i]t reminded me of a pair of shorts a boyfriend of mine had once worn” [*WB*, p.143]) and with the same flippant humour used to describe the girlfriends:

I had a boyfriend once, his name was Carlo, he was a dark exciting thing. He made me shave off all my body hair and did the same to himself. He claimed it would increase sensation but it made me feel like a prisoner in a beehive. I wanted to please him, he smelled of fir cones and port, his long body passion-damp. We lasted six months and then Carlo met Robert who was taller, broader and thinner than me. They exchanged razorblades and cut me out. (*WB*, p.143)

Foucault argues that “we must try to determine the different ways of not saying ... things, how those who can and those who cannot speak of them are distributed ... There is not one but many silences” (Foucault, 1979, p.27). Winterson has chosen to withhold the evidence of the narrator’s sexuality. This silence is a deliberate choice, and deliberately broken, helping the reader to fall into the trap of reading fiction as autobiography. By taking this step, Winterson destabilises the narrative and the concept of art as autobiography. Winterson describes how *Orlando* “calls itself a biography with the same playfulness that Gertrude Stein enjoys in the *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*. In either case there is an immediate challenge to conventional

genre-boxing” (*AO*, p.71), but Winterson expresses dismay that “[Virginia] Woolf’s fiction has been overwhelmed by facts. Her diaries have given licence to a kind of perpetual commentary on every aspect of her being” (VWI). She feels that “a play on the facts warps into a documentary of factoids. Under the stress of this tabloid-style scholarship, her books disappear” (VWI). Arguing that “[a]rt into autobiography is bad enough”, Winterson “wonder[s] if there was a way to open up the work for students and the general reader. A way past the gossip into the text” (VWI). By changing ‘the facts’ and creating a new history for her narrator, Winterson is trying to escape the weight of her own autobiography by employing her own “wartime signposts” (*AO*, p.72) to shake up the expectations of readers.

Gender-Play

Part of Winterson’s game is to exploit the “essentialized and/or stereotypical readings of gender” (Rubinson, 2005, p.130) that Rubinson blames for successive ‘mis-readings’ of the novel; Winterson provides enough clues for the reader to think he or she has unlocked the secrets of the text. Rubinson explains that, while “[Ute] Kauer presents an impressive set of evidence to support the notion that the narrator is a woman ... The clues we may take to be signs of one gender or the other are, as Kauer readily admits, red-herrings” (Rubinson, 2005, p.130). The narrator invokes literary and biblical images in order to confuse the reader, describing him/herself as feeling “like the girl in the story of Rumpelstiltskin” (*WB*, p.44), and playfully saying that he/she will “call myself Alice and play with the flamingoes” (*WB*, p.10), a reference to *Alice in Wonderland*. However, he/she also remembers Louise gazing at him/her “the way God gazed at Adam” (*WB*, p.18) and experiences “a brief Samson moment” (*WB*, p.171) of strength. Although Leigh Gilmore claims that “no gender references are permitted about the first-person narrator” (Gilmore, 1997, p.229) it is

more helpful to read the narrator as doubly-gendered, i.e. 'queer': reliant on stereotypes of male *and* female behaviour, identity and action to create an ambiguous character. Louise Horskjær Humphries states that, "[a]t the same time that the narrator of *Written* is not androgynous, Winterson does seem to celebrate some kind of double-gendered being as an ideal" (Humphries, 1999, p.15). Marilyn Farwell further suggests that "[t]he irresolvability of the narrator's gender may be mirrored in Winterson's refusal to assign him/her a consistent narrative voice or narratee" (Farwell, 1996, p.188), and Bente Gade concurs with this view: "the narrative voice is not identified as either female or male. Instead of stabilising the narrative position through sexing, the gender position of the narrator is perpetually constructed and deconstructed" (Gade, 1999, p.30). Kauer asks "whether a gender-free narrator implies a narration free from gender" (Kauer, 1998, p.46) and comes to the conclusion that "the narrator uses precisely those gender-specific clichés to keep the reader in uncertainty about his/her gender. The refusal to admit the gender of the narrator is based on a play with stereotypes which the reader is supposed to have" (Kauer, 1998, p.46). Furthermore, Lisa Moore argues that "the pastiche of disparate narrative styles, points of view and temporal, spatial and bodily locations typical of Winterson's fiction enact a challenge to traditional categories of sexual identity" (Moore, 1995, p.109).

This gender-play envelops most of the other characters in the novel, so that the concept of gender that the narrator fights against is destabilised anyway: he/she says of his/her ex-girlfriend Bathsheba, "[I]ike Dirk Bogarde she prided herself on her profile" (*WB*, p.46). An ex-boyfriend, Frank, has "the body of a bull, an image he intensified by wearing great gold hoops through his nipples. Unfortunately he had joined the hoops with a chain of heavy gold links" (*WB*, p.93). The narrator notes

that Frank intended an “effect [that] should have been deeply butch” (*WB*, p.93): ‘butch’ is an interesting choice of word. ‘Masculine’ would have been a more obvious choice, suggesting Frank was attempting to reaffirm his male identity, but the use of ‘butch’ invokes thoughts of lesbian identity; a form of female masculinity.⁷⁶ In addition, Frank is not strictly heterosexual: “[h]is ambition was to find a hole in every port. He wasn’t fussy about the precise location” (*WB*, p.93).

Mirroring Frank’s ambivalent identity, the narrator confesses to “years of playing the Lothario” (*WB*, p.20), but this is tempered by the description of him/her “quiver[ing] like a schoolgirl” (*WB*, p.82) when alone with Louise. Louise describes him/her as “beautiful” (*WB*, p.85), which the narrator denies, but he/she describes him/herself as “a cheap thug” (*WB*, p.86). It is Louise who is placed in the role of rescuing the narrator, being his/her “knight in shining armour” (*WB*, p.123).

Throughout their relationship, Louise and the narrator switch between active and passive sexual roles. He/she begins by saying to her, “I had no dreams to possess you but I wanted you to possess me” (*WB*, p.52), but this gives way to different pleas: “Louise let me sail in you” (*WB*, p.80), “I want to roll on to you and push myself into you” (*WB*, p.110) and “Let me penetrate you” (*WB*, p.119). However, he/she is forced to admit that “[Louise] consumes me” (*WB*, p.136).⁷⁷ Not only is Winterson denying a clear reading of sexuality, but also a reading of gendered behaviour within sexuality.

In *A History of Sexuality*, Foucault explains that “[a]t the beginning of the seventeenth century a certain frankness was still common ... Sexual practices had little need of secrecy; words were said without undue reticence and ... one had a

⁷⁶ Judith Halberstam suggests that there is “a word for lesbian masculinity: butch” (Halberstam, 1998, p.120).

⁷⁷ In *Trumpet*, Millie recounts her sexual relationship with Joss using similar terms: “[h]e straddles me. Pushes himself into me” (*Tr*, p.197).

tolerant familiarity with the illicit” (Foucault, 1979, p.3), and he then discusses the Victorian change in attitudes: “[s]exuality was carefully confined; it moved into the home ... On the subject of sex, silence became the rule” (Foucault, 1979, p.3).

Sexual behaviour is therefore split into two categories:

[a] single locus of sexuality was acknowledged in social space as well as at the heart of every household, but it was a utilitarian and fertile one: the parents’ bedroom. The rest had only to remain vague ... sterile behavior carried the taint of abnormality; if it insisted on making itself too visible, it would be designated accordingly and would have to pay the penalty. (Foucault, 1979, p.3)

Foucault goes on to say that,

[i]f sex is repressed, that is, condemned to prohibition, non-existence, and silence, then the mere fact that one is speaking about it has the appearance of a deliberate transgression. A person who holds forth in such language places himself to a certain extent outside the reach of power; he upsets established law. (Foucault, 1979, p.6)

It is possible to read the bisexuality of Winterson’s narrator as a “deliberate transgression” (Foucault, 1979, p.6) of the homosexual category (which is actually constructed as the ‘visible’ behaviour in the text via an autobiographical reading). It is a calculated decision to bring in the character of Frank (and the other boyfriends) so late in the text, and the category of homosexual is disrupted in a surprising and deliberate way (“[when] we are conscious of defying established power, our tone of voice shows that we know we are being subversive” [Foucault, 1979, p.6]).

Ill-Chosen Words

A related trick is Winterson’s habit of obscuring as she seems to reveal. The narrator describes him/herself as “wearing baggy shorts which in [damp] weather looked like a recruitment campaign for the Boy Scouts” (*WB*, p.58), but before the reader can make a connection between his/her clothes and gender, he/she states “I’m not a Boy Scout and never was” (*WB*, p.58). Similarly, he/she says “I used to read women’s

magazines when I visited the dentist” (*WB*, p.74). The reading of women’s magazines is undermined by the location of the reading (the waiting room of “the dentist” [*WB*, p.74]) and the lack of further information – it is not known, for example, if he/she ever reads women’s magazines at any other times, and reading women’s magazines is not, in itself, proof of a female (or male) identity.

Louise remarks of the narrator that, “[w]hen I saw you two years ago I thought you were the most beautiful creature male or female I had ever seen” (*WB*, p.84). “Most beautiful creature” (*WB*, p.84) – the sentiment has the power to stand alone but Winterson insists on labouring and ultimately diluting the point: “male or female” (*WB*, p.84). Rather than adding to the conundrum at the centre of the text, this draws the reader back down to earth with a bump; language is simply not up to the task of describing ungendered persons and the use of ‘male or female’ trips the reader up.⁷⁸ Lisa Moore comments that “Winterson carefully structures the gender ambiguity of her narrator” (Moore, 1995, p.109): if Winterson had made other references to ‘male or female’ throughout the text, then it would suggest a consciousness of the issues she is grappling with, but this sole instance reads as momentary slip in the otherwise controlled narrative. Winterson believes that *Written on the Body* proves “[t]hat it is possible to have done with the bricks and mortar of conventional narrative, not as monkey-business or magic, but by building a structure that is bonded by language” (*AO*, p.189). The language is at fault insofar as it reveals its limitations, but Winterson’s ability to manipulate language is also at fault: she has failed in her self-proclaimed duty as a writer, to “resist the pressure of old formulae

⁷⁸ Ute Kauer makes a similar point: “[c]arefully, even a little too ostentatiously, the narrator avoids both describing him-/herself and reflecting gender in dialogues ... no verbal hint at the gender is given. This must appear contrived, as it is not usual in such situations. The difficulty shows in a narrated dialogue with Louise, where she tells the narrator that ‘you were the most beautiful creature male or female I had ever seen’. The derivation from a ‘normal’ dialogue between lovers, where one would talk about the most beautiful man or a woman, is a bit too pointed not to appear as artificial” (Kauer, 1998, p.44).

and work towards new combinations of language” (AO, p.76). Although Winterson may be intending to attack traditional concepts of gender, she is in fact reaffirming the binary she is trying to fight against.

‘Truth’ and ‘Lies’

The difficulty of so many reviewers and critics to accept the narrator of *Written on the Body* within Winterson’s designation of ‘ungendered’ can be understood in terms of Judith Butler’s assertion that

[t]he category of ‘sex’ is, from the start, normative; it is what Foucault has called a ‘regulatory ideal.’ In this sense, then, ‘sex’ not only functions as a norm, but is part of a regulatory practice that produces the bodies it governs, that is, whose regulatory force is made clear as a kind of productive power, the power to produce – demarcate, circulate, differentiate – the bodies it controls. (Butler, 1993, p.1)

Reading gender as “the social construction of sex” (Butler, 1993, p.5), Butler goes on to explain that “if there is no access to this ‘sex’ except by means of its construction, then it appears not only that sex is absorbed by gender, but that ‘sex’ becomes something like a fiction, perhaps a fantasy, retroactively installed at a prelinguistic site to which there is no direct access” (Butler, 1993, p.5). In *Written on the Body*, the ‘normative’ category of sex, and by extension gender, has been abandoned: there are no clear points of reference from which the reader can construct a reading of the narrator as a gendered being, despite Butler’s claim that “the subject, the speaking ‘I,’ is formed by virtue of having gone through such a process of assuming a sex” (Butler, 1993, p.3). The I-narrator of *Written on the Body* has been deliberately constructed by Winterson: “the narrator has no name, is assigned no gender, is age unspecified, and highly unreliable. I wanted to see how much information I could leave out - especially the kind of character information that is routine - and still hold a story together” (Books). In the case of *Written on the Body*, the subject is formed

by *not* assuming a sex; in fact, this is the most distinguishing aspect of the narrator. When Butler argues that there is “a linking of this process of ‘assuming’ a sex with the question of *identification*” (Butler, 1993, p.3), this is quite right. The narrator’s non-sex and lack of identification paradoxically become his/her identification. Countless reviews and articles discuss and, indeed, focus upon, the novel’s “ungendered, unnamed narrator” (Gilmore, 2001, p.123).

The narrator falls into a category that Butler labels “those abjected beings who do not appear properly gendered” (Butler, 1993, p.8). Although Butler claims that such ‘beings’ find that “their very humanness ... comes into question” (Butler, 1993, p.8), it is a curious fact that this is not the case in *Written on the Body*. Although many other novels such as Rose Tremain’s *Sacred Country*, Leslie Feinberg’s *Stone Butch Blues* and Jeffrey Eugenides’s *Middlesex*, have dealt with the dehumanising state of being ‘in-between’ genders, *Written on the Body* avoids this issue, presumably because the narrator is not ungendered in the view of the other characters.⁷⁹ I would argue that the self-awareness of the narrator indicates that he/she is not ungendered within his/her own eyes, either, as he/she deliberately plays narrative games. The narrator is characterised through his/her unreliability, through the use of circularity, rewriting and a discussion of language. The narrator acknowledges his/her failings, and points them out to the reader, responding to his/her version of events by admitting that “my syntax has fallen prey to the deceit” (*WB*, p.15). He/she alludes to a previous disregard for truth when describing his/her secret relationship with a previous girlfriend: “[t]elling the truth ... was a luxury we could not afford and so lying became a virtue, an economy we had to practise.

⁷⁹ In *Sacred Country*, Mary/Martin is attacked by her father and called “an abomination” (*SC*, p.102); Jess in *Stone Butch Blues* battles against the common view of her as “twisted and sick” (*SBB*, p.178); *Middlesex*’s Cal is beaten up and branded a “fucking freak” (*Mid*, p.476).

Telling the truth was hurtful and so lying became a good deed” (*WB*, p.16). In fact, lying becomes their ‘truth’.

‘Truth’ and ‘Lies’ can be regarded as what Cixous would call “dual, hierarchical oppositions” (Cixous, 1986, p.64); a division into “Superior/Inferior” (Cixous, 1986, p.64) as a result of thought “always work[ing] through opposition ... where a law organizes what is thinkable by” (Cixous, 1986, p.63). Cixous goes on to ask, “[i]s the fact that Logocentrism subjects thought – all concepts, codes and values – to a binary system, related to ‘the’ couple, man/woman?” (Cixous, 1986, p.64). If the answer to this question is yes, then Winterson’s decision to invert truth and lies becomes highly significant in light of her decision to disrupt the man/woman binary through the adoption of a ‘genderless’ narrator. In 1994, Winterson published a novel entitled *Art & Lies*: the title positions ‘art’ as synonymous with ‘truth’, despite Winterson’s claims that “I did not put my life into *Art & Lies*, as people commonly understand the artist at work, but I have put *Art & Lies* into my life” (*AO*, p.160).⁸⁰ A year later, she published *Art Objects*. Two different texts, *Art & Lies* and *Art Objects*: one representing fiction, the other ‘truth’, the similar titles further blur the boundaries between ‘art’ and ‘lies’ (or perhaps art objects and lies), and undermine the concept of binaries. Foucault states that “[p]ower is essentially what dictates its law to sex. Which means ... that sex is placed by power in a binary system: licit and illicit, permitted and forbidden” (Foucault, 1979, p.83). There is no such system in place in *Written on the Body*: the narrator’s relationships with men and women are equally (in)visible. When the narrator of *Written on the Body* draws attention to his/her manipulation of language, he/she also alerts the reader to the possibility that

⁸⁰ *Art & Lies* is a novel that again questions gender roles, by reinterpreting Picasso: Winterson’s aim is to “take the most famous painter of the twentieth century and re-gender him” (BA&L).

language, like the binaries that apparently control it, cannot be relied upon for clarity, and actually obfuscates complexities.

The power of language is most pronounced in the middle section of the book, “The Cells, Tissues, Systems and Cavities of the Body” (*WB*, p.113). The narrator has discovered that Louise has cancer, and tries to make sense of this by entering into an exploration of the body. Factual descriptions of the body vie with more poetic interpretations as the narrator tries to find some kind of truth: “THE CLAVICLE IS A LONG BONE WHICH HAS A BONY CURVE ... THE CLAVICLE PROVIDES THE ONLY BONY LINK BETWEEN THE UPPER EXTREMITY AND THE AXIAL SKELETON. I cannot think of the double curve lithe and flowing with movement as a bony ridge, I think of it as the musical instrument that shares the same root. Clavis. Key. Clavichord” (*WB*, p.129). Christy L. Burns explains how Winterson is “pay[ing] tribute to Monique Wittig’s erotic work *Le Corps Lesbien*, where one lover explores the inner places of her lover’s body in a prose marked by split pronouns (*j/e*, translated as *I*) that signify the narrator’s torn desire for and identification with her love” (Burns, 1996, p.297). Burns argues that *Le Corps Lesbien* “reads like an extended and intensive version of Winterson’s own prose section, as it presses on the link between the body and language” (Burns, 1996, p.297). However, I believe that Winterson also highlights the separation of body and language. Many of the texts I have examined in the thesis focus on the way in which language is lacking. As Winterson describes the body, she is describing a body far removed from Louise: the body of science. As the narrator makes clear, science actually strips something away from people:

I can’t enter you in clothes that won’t show the stains, my hands full of tools to record and analyse. If I come to you with a torch and a notebook, a medical diagram and a cloth to mop up the mess, I’ll have you bagged neat and tidy. I’ll store you in plastic like chicken livers. Womb, gut, brain, neatly labelled and returned. Is that how to know another human being? (*WB*, p.120)

The futility of science's attempts to categorise – to *know* – the body is in evidence here, because in learning the facts, the individual is lost: “[f]rontal bone, palatine bones, nasal bones, lacrimal bones, cheek bones, maxilla, vomer, inferior conchae, mandible. Those are my shields, those are my blankets, those words don’t remind me of your face” (*WB*, p.132). Thus, when the narrator declares “[y]ou are what I know” (*WB*, p.120), this is a knowledge that science cannot achieve. A knowledge rooted in feelings and emotion.

Trying to defend his/her behaviour, the narrator wonders why he/she “collude[s] in this mis-use of language” (*WB*, p.56) and wishes he/she could “interpret [his/her] actions in plain English” (*WB*, p.56), but even so, he/she frequently disrupts the narrative with untruths, half-truths and games. The narrator twice claims that “[i]t’s the clichés that cause the trouble” (*WB*, p.10/*WB*, p.155), but later attributes this to someone else (“Louise once said, ‘It’s the clichés that cause the trouble’ [*WB*, p.189]), thus raising the issue of authorship. The character “Gail Right” (*WB*, p.142), a parody of the concept of Mr or Miss Right, the ‘perfect partner’, through her self-identified role as “a fat old slag” (*WB*, p.149), tells the narrator “[t]he trouble with you...is that you want to live in a novel” (*WB*, p.160).⁸¹ When the narrator later tries, and fails, to find Louise, his/her thoughts turn to the same thing: “I couldn’t find her. I couldn’t even get near finding her. It’s as if Louise never existed, like a character in a book. Did I invent her?” (*WB*, p.189). This question, asked on the novel’s penultimate page, destabilises the preceding text by questioning the ‘reality’ of Louise, who is literally a fictional character. When Louise makes her reappearance on the next (last) page, even the narrator does not know

⁸¹ Winterson mentions the concept of Mr/Miss right in *Written on the Body*: “[s]till waiting for Mr Right? Miss Right? And maybe all the little Rights?” (*WB*, p.10). She also questions this notion in her novel, *Boating for Beginners*: “‘I’ve never found *the one*.’ Did *the one* exist, though? This was what Gloria wanted to know. Wasn’t it rather a fantasy of romantic propaganda?” (*BB*, p.93).

what to make of it, wondering if he/she has gone “stark mad” (*WB*, p.190). He/she inverts what has gone before by stating that, although he/she does not “know if this is a happy ending” (*WB*, p.190), the book’s end is actually “where the story starts” (*WB*, p.190). This is only to be expected. *Written on the Body* breaks down binary oppositions: true/false, fiction/autobiography, writer/narrator, beginning/end. This is part of a larger project – the rejection of the male/female binary; a binary that is so entrenched in the language and culture that other binaries need to be attacked and dismantled in order to accommodate the enormity of this challenge.

‘The Hunters’

This challenge is also undertaken by Claire Messud, albeit in a less politicised way than Winterson. Almost ten years after *Written on the Body* first appeared, Claire Messud published *The Hunters*, a collection of two novellas: ‘A Simple Tale’ and ‘The Hunters’. The limited critical notice that the collection has received has focused more on ‘The Hunters’. In a 2002 review in *The Independent*, Michael Arditti concentrated on his belief that Messud had “adopted the Jeanette Winterson technique of leaving [the] gender [of the narrator] unspecified”, concluding that it “adds little but obfuscation” (Arditti, 2002). Certainly, like *Written on the Body*, ‘The Hunters’ illuminates the failure of language when dealing with complex or undefined expressions of gender. When, in an interview with Messud, Rene Todd raised this issue (“he – or she? The pronoun issue becomes a little troubling” [Todd, 2002, p.114]), Messud responded with agreement, highlighting the gap between the often competing requirements of grammar and clarity: “I know. That’s why I keep saying ‘they.’ Even though I have in my mind my high school grammar teacher saying, ‘If it is singular, it cannot be they’” (Todd, 2002, p.114). The use of ‘they’ is necessary – although grammatically undesirable – because of the absence of another suitable

epicene pronoun: Anna Livia explains that “*they* has shown a dogged resistance to the attempts of conservative grammarians to eradicate it, while the various invented pronouns such as *ne, nis, ner; ho, hom, hos; and shis, shim, shims, shimself* exist only in the articles exhorting their use” (Livia, 2001, p.137).⁸² The failure of invented pronouns is attributable to a general distrust of anything that is perceived as a challenge to the two-gender system.⁸³

The Authority of Absence

The narrator of ‘The Hunters’, as well as challenging the male/female gender binary, also challenges the notions of sexuality and humanness. An academic in an unfamiliar city (London), the narrator is alone despite the fact he/she “was, officially, to have had a companion” (Hunters, 2003, p.99). The narrator alludes to the break-up of a romantic relationship with the companion, the most significant aspect of which is that the reader is not told whether said companion is male or female. By the end of the novella, the narrator has “met someone new – or rather, had met again someone whom I had previously, if only vaguely, known, in a different context and in a different way ... [w]e were living together” (Hunters, 2003, p.145). Like the ‘companion’ from earlier, this new person’s gender is also obscured, although the narrator does state that: “[t]his person was not of the same age, *nor even of the same gender*, as the previous lover who had so bitterly and yet blithely gutted my life” (Hunters, 2003, p.145, my emphasis).

⁸² *One*, which “is used in official documents in preference to generic *he* or singular *they*” (Livia, 2001, p.135) is perhaps too formal for this context.

⁸³ As I have previously mentioned, the idea of using “new gender-neutral singular pronouns such as *tey* to replace *she* and *he*” (Romaine, 1999, p.105) suggests an otherness far removed from ‘he’ or ‘she’. Romaine believes that “pronouns are used to represent not just anatomy, but a complex and varying concept of oneself as a gendered person” (Romaine, 1999, p.47). As we shall see, there is a correlation between the use of a standard pronoun (‘he’ or ‘she’) to describe somebody and the perception of that person as human.

The narrator expresses discomfort at the “novelty” of the relationship and the way “it altered me in ways I had not imagined possible” (Hunters, 2003, p.145), hinting at the connection between sexuality and identity that is explored throughout the text. Although it is described as “love at first sight”, the narrator admits his/her surprise at having such feelings “for a soul cloaked in that unexpected body, so thoroughly other from my former predilections” (Hunters, 2003, p.146), and asks, “who, ever, could have envisaged me in such posture, *with such a person?* Not I, who could not even have wished for it” (Hunters, 2003, p.167). Michael Arditti, already unconvinced of the merits of a gender-unspecified narrator, is further unimpressed with the introduction of the gender-unspecified “beloved” (Hunters, p.167), regarding the usage as “doubly alienating” (Arditti, 2002). It is true that the use of characters of unspecified gender makes the reading process difficult, if only because it keeps stripping away the expected markers through which a reader would normally construct a sense of ‘self’ for the narrator.⁸⁴

In *Différance*, Derrida says,

one puts into question the authority of presence, or of its simple symmetrical opposite, absence, or lack. Thus one questions the limit that has always constrained us, still constrains us – as inhabitants of a language and a system of thought – to formulate the meaning of Being in general as presence or absence, in the categories of being or beingness. (Derrida, 1991, p.62)

Writing from within a system where “[s]ex, gender, sexuality [are] three terms whose usage relations and analytical relations are almost irremediably slippery” (Sedgwick, 1991, p.27), the very language fails us. Messud uses ‘they’ to describe the narrator, even though “[i]f it is singular, it cannot be they” (Todd, 2002, p.114) because there is no appropriate singular pronoun that refers to an ungendered person – the language

⁸⁴ Describing her process of reading, Lynne Pearce explains that her involvement in a text is “very much mediated through characters to whom I related” (Pearce, 1998, p.32). Such a relationship between reader and character is tested if it is impossible to determine even the most basic facts about the character. In the case of *Written on the Body* and ‘The Hunters’, the narrators are only visible via their refusal to provide identity information.

does not exist, therefore there are inadequate terms through which to discuss the characters of 'The Hunters', and language can only render the de-gendered inanimate. Language controls and limits the ways identity is defined and understood:

[t]he sign is usually said to be put in the place of the thing itself, the present thing, 'thing' here standing equally for meaning or referent. The sign represents the present in its absence. It takes the place of the present. When we cannot grasp or show the thing, state the present, the being-present, when the present cannot be presented, we signify, we go through the detour of the sign. (Derrida, 1991, p.61).

If there is no sign – or an inadequate sign – then we are forced to compromise, to use the next best sign. In discussing 'The Hunters', I have had to make decisions regarding how to refer to the narrator. The lack of a suitable pronoun has led me to use he/she, as was the case when discussing *Written on the Body*. This is aesthetically displeasing, and suggests an adherence to the male/female binary that I am not wholly comfortable with. Cixous has remarked that "[t]hought has always worked through opposition. Speaking/writing. Parole/Écriture High/Low. Through dual, hierarchical oppositions. Superior/Inferior" (Cixous, 1986, p.64). By using he/she to refer to the narrators, the notion of opposition falls apart: the narrator is both male and female, superior and inferior, and here I am invoking Cixous's notion of bisexuality, "the location within oneself of the presence of both sexes" (Cixous, 1986, p.85). I have, to use Derrida, gone through the detour of the sign. However, this is not strictly true - the sign has taken me on a detour, forced me to use the words that come closest to expressing what I want to say, while not maintaining the precision I would like.

When Rene Todd suggested that Messud had "specifically cho[sen] not to reveal the narrator's gender" (Todd, 2002, p.113), Messud refuted this claim:

[i]t's sort of too bad about that – I feel that people end up seeing that as the main intention of the piece. It's the first thing people think or ask – it becomes a big preoccupation. And in fact, that was not what I set out to do. I

heard this voice – it was very explicit. I had nearly finished the first draft when I realized that this person had not disclosed any gender. (Messud, cited in Todd, 2002, p.113)

Winterson struggled to construct a ‘genderless’ narrator, at one point losing her grip on the language she used, as we have seen, but Messud is attributing her genderless narrator to an accident of writing, while asserting that as a writer, she has been able to escape the hegemonic constraints of binary oppositions.⁸⁵ This idea is especially difficult to credit when taking in to consideration the careful way that Messud manipulated language to avoid using gendered pronouns while discussing the narrator with Todd:

[t]he character is many things, but above all, in the way of voyeurs, is someone who does not want to be revealed. And yet, of course, the narrator reveals a lot about the self despite that. Gender seemed to be exactly the sort of thing that this person would withhold, thinking that it would keep them mysterious, when in fact we see more profound things about them, deeper things, very clearly, just from the things that this person says ... a lot of people have a problem with the narrator because it is such a not-nice person. (Messud, cited in Todd, 2002, p.113, my emphasis)

The fact that Messud uses several ungendered characters in her novella undermines her claims that this is unintentional. When there are several characters being discussed, each of whom has to be discussed through the ‘he/she’ term, the legitimacy of ‘he/she’ is further undermined. In the context of *Written on the Body*, Gilmore describes bisexuality as a “nonidentifying answer to the question of gender” (Gilmore, 1997, p.235). I have already outlined an explanation for the apparent bisexuality of the narrator of *Written on the Body* – Winterson is trying to underline the fictiveness of the apparent autobiography of her novel by departing from the facts of her own life. However, ‘The Hunters’ hints at another explanation.

Bisexuality

⁸⁵ In a review of ‘The Hunters’ Michiko Kakutani emphasises the effort that has gone into it, describing it as both a “carefully crafted tale” and “a masterly exercise in craft” (Kakutani, 2001).

Bernauer and Mahon describe as one of “the major concerns of [Foucault’s] work ... how the truth of our sexuality became the hallmark of our true selves” (Bernauer and Mahon, 1994, p.149), and argue that

[t]he capacity of sexual desire to become the most revealing sign of our truest, deepest selves depends upon a long historical formation through which we were constituted as subjects in a special relation to truth and sex.
(Bernauer and Mahon, 1994, p.150)

However, they do not take this as far as Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble*, who argues that “the ‘unity’ of gender is the effect of a regulatory practice that seeks to render gender identity uniform through a compulsory heterosexuality” (Butler, 1999, p.42). Conversely, though, she also claims that “not all gender identification is based on the successful implementation of the taboo against homosexuality” (Butler, 1999, p.81), arguing that “[i]f feminine and masculine dispositions are the result of the effective internalization of that taboo ... then gender identity appears primarily to be the internalization of a prohibition that proves to be formative of identity” (Butler, 1999, p.81). Therefore, sexuality is rendered uniform (either heterosexual or homosexual, but not a conflation of the two) by the “constant application” either of “compulsory heterosexuality” or the “internalization of [the homosexual] taboo” (Butler, 1999, p.81).

Butler’s reading offers no space for a bisexual identity; indeed, she describes bisexuality as “not a possibility beyond culture, but a concrete cultural possibility that is refused and redescribed as impossible” (Butler, 1999, p.98). From this, she posits that “[n]ot to have social recognition as an effective heterosexual is to lose one possible social identity and perhaps to gain one that is radically less sanctioned. The ‘unthinkable’ is thus fully within culture, but fully excluded from *dominant* culture” (Butler, 1999, p.99). In *Bodies that Matter*, which Butler presents “in part as a

rethinking of some parts of *Gender Trouble*” (Butler, 1993, p.xii), she appears to be more open to the explanation of bisexual identity:

the subject, the speaking ‘I,’ is formed by virtue of having gone through such a process of assuming a sex...linking this process of ‘assuming’ a sex with the question of *identification*, and with the discursive means by which the heterosexual imperative enables certain sexed identifications and forecloses and/or disavows other identifications. (Butler, 1993, p.3)

However, she again calls attention to heterosexuality as the dominant state, ignoring the impact of different identities:

the regime of heterosexuality operates to circumscribe and contour the ‘materiality’ of sex, and that ‘materiality’ is formed and sustained through and as a materialization of regulatory norms that are in part those of heterosexual hegemony. (Butler, 1993, p.15)⁸⁶

Through her reading of Freud’s ‘The Ego and the Super-Ego (Ego-Ideal)’ it is possible to understand why Butler reads (or fails to read) bisexuality as she does: “[t]he conceptualization of bisexuality in terms of *dispositions*, feminine and masculine, which have heterosexual aims as their intentional correlates, suggests that for Freud *bisexuality is the coincidence of two heterosexual desires within a single psyche*” (Butler, 1999, p.77). By reducing bisexuality to “two heterosexual desires within a single psyche” (Butler, 1999, p.77), Butler is reading bisexuality through the lens of “compulsory heterosexuality” (Butler, 1999, p.42) that she finds so troubling in *Gender Trouble*. Cixous’s understanding of bisexuality (“the location within oneself of the presence of both sexes” [Cixous, 1986, p.85]) does at least allow space for an element of homosexual desire in a way that Freud’s does not. Freud’s reading displaces homosexuality, and posits bisexuality as a doubling of heterosexuality, while Cixous allows the possibility of homosexuality without explicitly articulating it.

⁸⁶ Leigh Gilmore suggests that in autobiography, the “discourse on identity is saturated in a presumptive heterosexism that construes heterosexuality as the unmarked category of sexuality, that is, as a synonym for sexuality” (Gilmore, 1997, p.228).

Sedgwick states that “[i]t is certainly true that without a concept of gender there could be, quite simply, no concept of homo- or heterosexuality” (Sedgwick, 1991, p.31). If the narrators of *Written on the Body* and ‘The Hunters’ had relationships with members of only one sex, they could be read as heterosexual (the “dominant” [Butler, 1999, p.99] reading) or homosexual. Of course, Winterson’s identification as a lesbian author brings into question even the concept of dominant readings. Denying attempts to apply gendered readings to the narrators via the lens of sexuality challenges the notion of identity. What is at stake is not just the way in which gender and sexuality co-exist, but the very reading of the narrators as human. This relates back to Butler’s designation of “those abjected beings who do not appear properly gendered” (Butler, 1993, p.8). Butler’s terms owe a debt to Kristeva’s notions of the abject. Of particular interest here is Kristeva’s belief that “[i]t is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules” (Kristeva, 1982, p.4). Fear of the disintegration of the sex-gender-identity order and the abjection it appears to threaten is why, as with *Written on the Body*, so many reviewers feel the necessity to impose either a male or female identity on the narrator. Miranda Seymour argues that

[t]he American narrator, although specifically genderless, appears to be male. (The voice is mildly arch; he can contemplate an evening cruising with a gay colleague; his second partner, said to be of a different sex than the first, is briefly depicted in what sounds to be a female pose.) (Seymour, 2001, p.2)

Far more troubling than the people who explain why they believe the narrators to be male or female (and it all comes back to *male or female* – there is no other possible reading acknowledged) are the people who do not even offer a justification for their reading; the readers who do not even realise how they have manipulated the text to fit their own world view. Amanda Craig, for example, reads the narrator as male:

“*his* intelligence, *his* wit, *his* inventiveness all build an edifice of supposition and fear” (Craig, 2002, my emphasis). In contrast, James Bradley describes the narrator as “an American academic on a working holiday in London. Enclosed in *her* work and a crisis in *her* personal life” (Bradley, 2002, my emphasis). It should be noted that while the female critic reads the narrator as male, the male narrator reads the narrator as female: perhaps neither critic wishes their sex to be held responsible for the delusions of the narrator. A perfect example of the manipulation of information appears in ‘The Hunters’:

‘You’re a professor, aren’t you?’
I winced. ‘How did you know? Did Sheila Cooke say so?’
‘I don’t know Sheila. She’s not upstairs, because upstairs is empty. No, we know from the post, of course. On the table downstairs. The postman leaves the post on the table downstairs.’
‘Of course he does.’ I tried, again, to smile.
‘Postwoman, actually. She.’ (Hunters, p.108)

Messud plays with the confusion of ‘postman’ denoting a woman: the language is perceived as inadequate to define the job in relation to a woman, so a new, but unsatisfactory term is used, “postwoman” (Hunters, p.108), which draws attention to her female status. ‘Postperson’ is never used, nor suggested. ‘Postman’ is regarded as all-encompassing until the narrator makes the mistake of reading ‘man’ literally. When Ridley corrects this, she cannot use ‘person’ because it is not specific enough. The need to be understood overrides the desire to be politically correct. In this same passage, the information that the narrator is a professor does not tell us whether he/she is male or female, and this actually highlights a crucial difference between *Written on the Body* and ‘The Hunters’: in *Written on the Body*, Winterson creates a doubly-gendered character, but in ‘The Hunters’, Messud avoids language that specifically invokes male or female stereotypes, so that the narrator is ‘de-gendered’. Messud and Winterson challenge the notion of humanity in an apparently

'ungendered' space, and this is something that Messud further develops with the character of Ridley Wandor. The rest of the novella focuses on the narrator's concerted attempts to strip her of her gender, specifically by drawing attention to the (allegedly) unsuccessful aspects of her performance.

Ridley Wandor

The name 'Ridley Wandor' gives no clue to the gender of this character. When the narrator's evening meal is interrupted by a knock at the door and the words "It's Ridley Wandor, your downstairs neighbour" (*Hunters*, 2003, p.105), both narrator and reader are unable to place the speaker in a gender category. When Ridley's outline is seen in the darkened hallway, the narrator describes her "significant, ungendered bulk" (*Hunters*, p.104). By refusing to accept that Ridley is a woman, the narrator is also stripping Ridley of her humanity. To the narrator, Ridley appears as no more than a "creature" (*Hunters*, p.105), but when he/she is finally able to see Ridley properly, the narrator is torn between reaffirming Ridley's genderlessness and attacking any hints of femininity. Specifically, the colour of Ridley's nails comes under scrutiny because it marks Ridley as both female and potentially sexual: "a pearly shell-pink which on other fingers might have been alluring in its suggestive discretion but which, on Ridley Wandor, was offensive and grotesque" (*Hunters*, p.106).

As I have argued, the narrator of *Written on the Body* gains a form of identification through his or her lack of identifying markers, and the narrator of 'The Hunters' imposes this lack upon Ridley: "the ugliness of [her face] resided not in any tangible, and hence admirable, disgrace, but in the lack that it represented – lack of color, lack of distinction, lack of features" (*Hunters*, p.107). The narrator makes it

clear that it is through this lack that Ridley's identity, such as it is, is formed: "I could not have described her in any way other than by what she *did not have*, for all I could not have put an age, nor barely, a gender upon her; for all she seemed more emphatically *not to be* than I did, I knew her for the stronger" (Hunters, p.110). The narrator claims that Ridley "did not call out to be looked at but rather *she called out to be ignored*" (Hunters, p.107), an illogical and oxymoronic statement in the sense that calling out at once negates the possibility of being ignored, and one that calls into question the reliability of the narrator.

After several days pass without seeing Ridley, the narrator is able to convince him/herself "that Ridley Wandor had been but a figment, an unfortunate hallucination of my overly tired mind" (Hunters, p.110). However, he/she soon encounters the hated neighbour once again, in the street. Too repulsed by Ridley to look directly at her, the narrator avoids her gaze: "I kept my eyes on the central navy stripe of her soiled pink and blue shell suit" (Hunters, p.111). In doing this, the narrator almost fails to register the evidence of Ridley's body, admitting that "[i]t did not immediately occur to me that the amorphous expanse on which I trained my gaze was, in fact, her bosom" (Hunters, p.111). The issue here is not the disassociation of gender and anatomy – although this is certainly in evidence: by denying Ridley is a woman, the narrator has also denied Ridley's anatomy. However, it is the (belated) realisation of this connection that causes the narrator's embarrassment: "I felt my face color from the roots of my hair" (Hunters, p.111). His/her staring has placed Ridley in the role of sexual object, and him/herself as voyeur.

When Ridley tells the narrator about her friend Terrence, claiming that "he has something of a thing for me" (Hunters, p.153), the narrator is disgusted by the "red[ness] and huffing and tittering" (Hunters, p.153) that accompanies this remark.

Unable to cope with the idea of Ridley's sexuality, the narrator is repulsed: "I found more than ever that I could not look at her" (Hunters, p.153). His/her voyeurism fails here not only because he/she does not wish to be perceived as attracted to Ridley, but because he/she cannot bear to think of Ridley as being attractive to anybody else. In order to remain composed, the narrator denies the reality that Ridley presents to him/her: "I thought of [Terrence] as a creation of Ridley Wandor's (just as she was, at that stage, only my creation to me) ... Not that I didn't believe the man existed, but that I did not believe in her relationship with him" (Hunters, p.153).

Even when Ridley produces a photograph of herself with Terrence, the narrator dismisses their relationship:

what did that say or prove of the man in question, but that he was at least moderately polite and had acceded to her request for a deathside souvenir snap? She described him as her new friend; next to whom I – who barely knew the woman and could not bear her – apparently qualified as an old friend...and had she not said that she wanted a similar photograph of me for her files? For the doctored autobiography, that is. (Hunters, p.154)

In one of his/her final meetings with Ridley, the narrator notices that she is "dressed up, more so than I had ever seen her" (Hunters, p.158). Echoing their first meeting, the narrator again notices Ridley's "perfectly manicured [hands] – their talons an unexpected and inescapable vermilion" (Hunters, p.158). Once again, the narrator is disturbed by the reinforcement of Ridley-as-woman and tries to destroy it by conjuring up the animal imagery of "talons" (Hunters, p.158) and thus detracting from the idea of Ridley-as-human. In addition, the narrator attacks Ridley's attempts to make herself attractive:

[s]he did not have a face that lent itself to maquillage, given that her only distinguished feature was the great chin; and the effect, thus, of the kohl and creams and shadows was, to my horrified eye, clownishly grotesque, as if her eyes had been smeared with soot and her lips with rust-flecked grease. (Hunters, p.158)

In a reversal of the previous 'relationship' between the narrator and Ridley, it is the narrator who starts asking questions about Ridley: "[w]here are you off to? ... a lunch engagement perhaps?" (Hunters, p.159). The narrator's suggestion that Ridley might be meeting Terrence causes panic: "[p]lease, no, please, shush ... It's a very thin door, really. Please don't do this to me. Please. [Mother] may be right there. Listening" (Hunters, p.159). Ridley couples this plea with "a look of such genuine distress, of frank misery washed with – it was unmistakable – fear" (Hunters, p.159). The narrator is shaken by Ridley's fear, not out of any concern for Ridley, but because "it rendered [her] unfortunate physiognomy almost, flickeringly, loveable; it certainly had the undesired and complicating effect of rendering her fully human" (Hunters, p.160). Ridley's humanness is undesired because of the narrator's hatred of her, but it is complicating because of the way it means that the narrator has to "reconstruct and reconstrue" (Hunters, p.159) his/her notion of Ridley, something that is developed by the novella's ending. Here, the narrator is reconstructed as a god-like figure. He/she creates and defines Ridley and Ridley's imagined world through language, attributing to her a monstrosity that, in fact, may not even exist. When Ridley displays her more human qualities, the narrator's mastery of the narrative is challenged; the language is under threat.

Some months later, the narrator discovers that Ridley has died: "[t]hey found her body. Fully clothed, in a ditch at the foot of a bluff in the Lake District" (Hunters, p.172). When the narrator's former neighbour, Mrs Lynch, discusses the mysterious death, and suggests that Ridley may have killed herself, the narrator steps in and dismisses such thoughts as "pure speculation" (Hunters, p.175). For the narrator, his/her beloved, and Mrs Lynch, the "protagonists [of Ridley's story] were made only of words, not flesh" (Hunters, p.172): despite the narrator's glimpse of the

humanity of Ridley, he/she has elected to return to the story that he/she has constructed: one where Ridley is nothing more than “the idle mind’s invention of a bleak and lonely summer, a summer that in itself had all but ceased to exist” (Hunters, p.181). The narrator him/herself speculates that Ridley might have been murdered by Terrence, and even constructs a story in his/her mind to explain Ridley’s final moments, but he/she admits this was “done to assuage my own guilt” (Hunters, p.180); a guilt borne of his/her failure to regard Ridley as human, and his/her desire that Ridley “*would not be*. That she would simply vanish ... Poof. Gone” (Hunters, p.180).⁸⁷ The novella concludes with the narrator admitting that he/she and his/her beloved “have never mentioned [Ridley] since ... because it is all but a story to us – was it ever anything but a story to me? – and one not ripe for retelling because its ending cannot satisfy. Because I’m guilty” (Hunters, p.181). Although the narrator is able to acknowledge that he/she manipulated Ridley’s life into a ‘story’, he/she cannot allow him/herself to view Ridley as a person for fear of fracturing his/her own narrative. Ultimately, the narrator asserts his/her own narrative authority by allowing his/her story to be told. Although the narrator allows for the possibility that his/her narrative is not accurate, he/she only allows Ridley to speak – indeed, to exist – through him/her. Messud uses Ridley as a mirror of the narrator, reflecting back his/her own self-loathing and ‘genderless’ status (“part of the project was to get into the mindset of a character who is projecting or wanting or in some way engaging with the story of somebody else’s life” (Todd, 2002, p.113))

⁸⁷ The narrator’s wish that Ridley would vanish masks a more sinister undertone: the suggestion that Ridley should not be allowed to continue to exist because her humanness is in question. Returning briefly to Kristeva’s notion of what causes abjection “[w]hat does not respect borders, positions, rules” (Kristeva, 1982, p.4), it is clear that Ridley’s intrusive nature at the beginning of the narrative is what sparks the narrator’s hatred: “[s]he came in ... I did not want her in my kitchen ... Even when she had gone, it was as if she were still in the room” (Hunters, pp.105, 109). Despite the narrator’s attempts to avoid Ridley, to stop Ridley intruding on his/her life, Ridley cannot be avoided: “the assault of the doorbell, which had so set me to trembling, was but the first of many such assaults” (Hunters, p.109).

but this is a distorted mirror that refuses to reflect Ridley's gender or happiness back upon the narrator.

By utilising a genderless narrator, Winterson is arguing that the labels 'male' and 'female' are inadequate to express identity, and furthering Angela Carter's work in *The Passion of New Eve* by expressing one way in which fiction can try to exist outside of the gender binary.⁸⁸ Claire Messud has rejected the idea that her own experimentations were deliberate. Nevertheless, her work also highlights the inadequacy of the gender binary. By using a number of ungendered characters in 'The Hunters', Messud strips the text of the normal referents through which characters are usually understood, which forces the reader to find new ways to think about fiction. Winterson and Messud have revealed the inadequacy of language; they are not just "work[ing] towards new combinations of language" (*AO*, p.76), but also new combinations of gender.

⁸⁸ In the absence of the gender referents of 'male' or 'female', the (monstrous) abject is the only lens through which "beings who do not appear properly gendered" (Butler, 1993, p.8) can be read. David Williams explains "[t]he mediaeval concept of the monstrous as a deformation necessary for human understanding" (Williams, 1996, p.3), but in the context of *Written on the Body* and 'The Hunters', the monstrous detracts from the ability to read the narrators as human. What is illuminated is the relationship between language and the monstrous: "[t]he language of the monstrous is parasitic, depending on the existence of conventional language; it feeds, so to speak, at their margins, upon their limits, so as to gain the power to transcend these analytic discourses and, true to its etymology (*monstrare*: to show), it points to utterances that lie beyond logic" (Williams, 1996, p.10). The monstrous exists where there is no appropriate language.

CONCLUSION

No age can ever have been as stridently sex-conscious as our own. (Woolf, 2004, p.114)

*

Writing in 1929, Virginia Woolf could not have predicted that society would remain as sex- and gender-conscious as ever. Attitudes to sex and gender have changed over the last eighty years, and developments in science have pushed the boundaries of what ‘male’ and ‘female’ means, but the failure of language to develop at the same rate means that any form of gender expression that exists outside of the male/female gender binary is still rendered ultimately unthinkable. In the twenty-first century there has been a plethora of works on gender, from theory to television documentaries and films, which has sought to understand and unpick gender. While this illustrates the continued fascination that society has for gender, it has not resulted in greater freedom of gender choice.

Polly Toynebee argues that the policing of gender begins

in infancy, when little girls learn where they belong as soon as they draw their first breath. The pink disease is far worse than it was 20 years ago. ‘Princess on board’, read the yukky signs in family cars. It’s almost impossible to buy toys now that are not putridly pink branded or aggressively superhero male. Bikes, sleeping bags, lunch boxes, nothing is neutral now, everything Barbie and Bratz. (Toynebee, 2008)

The perceived worsening of the ‘pink disease’ can be attributed to increased gender awareness. Nothing is neutral, because neutrality will not protect the male/female binary. As I have noted in chapter two, Cal in *Middlesex* states that “[n]ormality wasn’t normal. It couldn’t be. If normality were normal, everybody could leave it alone. They could sit back and let normality manifest itself” (*Mid*, p.446). The fear that normality might not be normal drives society to aggressively divide people into male and female. From birth, doctors impose the labels of male and female upon babies, and strive to protect the binary by intervening if there is any doubt as to the

child's sex. The gender of the baby will not even be considered; a biologically male baby will be assumed to have a male gender, and a biologically female baby will be assumed to have a female gender. Male will automatically be read as masculine, female as feminine. Having decided what 'normal' and 'abnormal' mean in the context of sex, gender and sexuality, doctors try to protect these terms in the way they deny or acquiesce to requests for treatment to modify the body. This demonstrates a perception within society that there are right and wrong ways of 'doing' gender and sex, as Butler first pointed out in *Gender Trouble*: "the very thinking of what is possible in gendered life is foreclosed by certain habitual and violent presumptions" (Butler, 1999, p.viii). The endless promotion within the media of what is regarded as appropriate behaviours and appearances then reinforces this message.

The control that doctors have, as clearly articulated in the novels examined in chapter two, has been made explicit in the media treatment of the current real-life case of Thomas Beatie, a transgender man who, in March 2008, revealed that he was pregnant as the result of artificial insemination. Beatie "underwent a sex change, which involved regular injections of testosterone, and having his breasts surgically removed (but keeping his female reproductive organs) and legally became a man" (Barkham, 2008). Highlighting the power that doctors wield, Beatie has described how his failure to fit into preconceived notions of 'normality' and maleness has affected the level of medical care he has been able to access:

Doctors have discriminated against us, turning us away due to their religious beliefs. Health care professionals have refused to call me by a male pronoun or recognize Nancy as my wife. Receptionists have laughed at us ... The first doctor we approached was a reproductive endocrinologist. He was shocked by our situation and told me to shave my facial hair.⁸⁹ After a \$300

⁸⁹ William Leith argues that the request for Beatie to shave "sounds like an appalling reaction. But you can see the doctor's point of view" (Leith, 2008). The view is, of course, that one should not present

consultation, he reluctantly performed my initial checkups. He then required us to see the clinic's psychologist to see if we were fit to bring a child into this world and consulted with the ethics board of his hospital. A few months and a couple thousand dollars later, he told us that he would no longer treat us, saying he and his staff felt uncomfortable working with 'someone like me.' In total, nine different doctors have been involved. (Beatie, 2008)

The doctor currently overseeing Beatie's pregnancy is Dr Kimberly James. In an appearance on *Oprah*, Dr James highlighted the way in which even she struggles with the way that Beatie's pregnancy place ideas of normality under question: "it's a challenge to your thinking of what's 'normal' ... once you get past that part and just focus on the pregnancy ... of course this is challenging ... people's normal perceptions are going to be challenged" (*Oprah*, 2008). In part, the prejudice that Beatie has faced comes from the unwillingness of doctors (and media commentators) to separate Beatie's female past and male present. In an article in *The Times*, Rod Liddle counters Beatie's excitement at the birth by suggesting that "[e]veryone else feels just a tiny bit queasy" (Liddle, 2008). Likewise, William Leith, writing in *The Telegraph*, admits that

I found the whole concept deeply disturbing. Lots of people do. The other day, commenting on this case, a gay comedian said, 'I'm not saying it's weird, but even the stork threw up.' That was, more or less, how I felt. A pregnant man? Dear God. I thought it might be a hoax. I hoped it was a hoax. But why? What was my reaction based on? (Leith, 2008)

Dismissing the idea that his prejudices might just be that – prejudices with no rational basis – Leith seeks to normalise his reaction. As with Liddle's reference to "[e]veryone else" (Liddle, 2008), Leith's feelings are presented as not unreasonable because "[l]ots of people" (Leith, 2008) share them. More importantly for Leith, his feelings are also shared by "a gay comedian" (Leith, 2008, my emphasis). In specifically identifying the comedian as gay, Leith is trying to portray the Beatie

as male and desire pregnancy at the same time, because such an occurrence goes against all ideas of pregnancy as an unambiguously female condition.

pregnancy as repugnant even to somebody who is living outside accepted heterosexual norms. The message is therefore clear: if the gay comedian, and by extension the 'gay community', cannot accept Beatie, then how (or why) should the 'straight community'?

Implicit in Leith's article is the feeling that Beatie is not a 'real' man because he has made the choice to get pregnant. For Leith, "there aren't many things weirder than being a pregnant man" (Leith, 2008). Faced with Beatie turning notions of maleness and masculinity on their heads, Leith admits that, "[m]uch to my relief, it turned out that he'd started life as a girl" (Leith, 2008). The expression of relief is of vital importance, as it underpins the entire article: Leith is actually afraid that Beatie is challenging what it means to 'be' a man. Leith goes on the offensive, mixing pronouns in a bid to remind the reader that Beatie is not a 'real' man: "[he] felt that he was actually a man trapped in a girl's body. So he, or she, took a course of testosterone and had an operation to remove his, or her, breasts" (Leith, 2008). Liddle similarly mixes pronouns, but also deliberately deploys a flippant tone as a means of protecting his own entrenched position:

Thomas is transgendered; his, or her, real name, or previous name, is Tracy Lagondino. But Tracy had certain surgical procedures done, a couple of swift hacks up top and a few injections of testosterone and lo, she is now Thomas. But clearly the doctors didn't mess around too much with his womb. Her womb. Whatever. (Liddle, 2008)

The "whatever" tacked on the end illustrates Liddle's apparent lack of interest in Beatie's identity. The real issue, for Liddle, is that Beatie must not be allowed to get away with appropriating a male identity. Instead, Liddle is picking holes in this identity as he dismisses Beatie's claims to maleness as "a couple of swift hacks up top and a few injections of testosterone" (Liddle, 2008). Leith is equally derisive, describing Beatie as "[h]aving dragged himself across the threshold of maleness"

(Leith, 2008), as though there are clear lines marking the difference between male and female – something that this thesis has clearly argued against again and again.

Hoping that Beatie was perpetrating a hoax, Leith turns his thoughts to

James Frey, who had also been a guest on Oprah when he wrote about his addictions to alcohol and crack. Frey, it turned out, had written stuff that wasn't strictly true. Later he made another appearance on the Oprah show, this time to apologise. (Leith, 2008)

One cannot help but sense Leith's desperate hope that Beatie, too, will be forced to make a national apology – this time for daring to challenge maleness.

It is clear that Beatie's critics regard him more as a woman who has taken testosterone than as a man. The idea of giving birth to a child is fundamentally incompatible with notions of maleness and masculinity, and so critics seek to undermine Beatie's male identity at every turn. Natalie Paris relates the fact that Beatie "was encouraged to model by her dad and even became a Miss Hawaii Teen USA finalist" (Paris, 2008), while a BBC article refers to "a thinly bearded Mr Beatie" (BBC, 2008). The knowledge of Beatie's past overshadows his attempts to live as a man, and this is something that Chapter 2 demonstrates in its exploration of the process of transition between the sexes. Leith raises the issue of "[n]ews headlines about Beatie's case invariably includ[ing] a couple of queasily sceptical quote marks – as in "Pregnant" man appears on Oprah" (Leith, 2008).⁹⁰ Leith's primary complaint is that "those quote marks should actually be around the word 'man'. His female reproductive organs are still intact; legally he's a man, but biologically, in many ways that count, he's still very much a woman" (Leith, 2008). So, for Leith, when it comes to determining what makes a man, the "ways that count" are reduced to the reproductive organs.

⁹⁰ Leith makes the point that Beatie's situation is so far removed from 'normal' conceptions of maleness as to be disgusting. The use of quote marks around the word pregnant are themselves indicative of a belief that what Beatie is doing is too distasteful to warrant the name of pregnancy.

This attitude is also visible in my discussion of *Trumpet* in chapter one. In spite of Joss's efforts to hide his female past, it is exposed following his death. In the eyes of society, Joss's male identity is overridden by his female body; his genitals become the only acceptable answer to the questions that surround his identity. After Joss dies, the doctor examines Joss's genitals in order "to be quite certain" (*Tr*, p.44) that he is female, the funeral director finds himself "rummaging in the pubic hair" (*Tr*, p.109) in search of a penis, and Joss's son, Colman, is obsessed with the idea that "[m]y father had tits. My father didn't have a dick. My father had tits. My father had a pussy. My father didn't have any balls" (*Tr*, p.61). The need to reduce Joss to his body parts can be seen as a strategy to protect the labels of 'male' and 'female', and ensure that the labels remain viable.

Discussing the issue of Beatie's pregnancy with acquaintances, Leith reveals that "nobody seemed positive about the idea of male pregnancy. It mostly made them feel threatened" (Leith, 2008). Drawing parallels between Beatie's case and the 1994 film *Junior*, starring Arnold Schwarzenegger, he asks "why is Beatie's situation so difficult to stomach?" (Leith, 2008).⁹¹ In my view, an equally important question is why Schwarzenegger's pregnancy in *Junior* is so much easier to accept. The obvious answer is that *Junior* is fiction, and as fiction offers none of the 'danger' of a real-life transgression of gender boundaries. As fiction, *Junior* can be laughed at or dismissed. As reality, Thomas Beatie makes the seemingly impossible possible, challenging what it means to be male or female. But there is another element at work here. One of the major reasons for the viewing public's acceptance of *Junior* is the presence of Schwarzenegger himself. A five-times Mr Universe winner, Schwarzenegger has carved a career out of playing excessively masculine figures,

⁹¹ Schwarzenegger plays the part of Dr Alex Hesse, a scientist who tests an experimental drug on himself and becomes pregnant.

showcasing his hard-won physique and impressive physical strength. In short, Schwarzenegger is able to play a pregnant man without courting controversy because of his hyperbolically masculine persona: there is no doubt in the viewers' minds that he is a 'real' man.

Leith states that male pregnancy "is not the mild threat of other gender-shuffling ideas – concepts such as the house-husband, the male nanny, the female paratrooper, the female President of the United States. These things are a form of progress. Male pregnancy does not feel like progress. It feels threatening, and horrifying, and appalling" (Leith, 2008). But here we should ask ourselves why a male nanny is somehow less 'frightening' than a pregnant man. If we look at the examples of acceptable "gender-shuffling" (Leith, 2008) that Leith provides, they have something in common: the "house-husband, the male nanny, the female paratrooper, the female President of the United States" (Leith, 2008). Each example has some sort of gender signifier within it: *house-husband*, *male* nanny, etc. And this has a very specific effect in that it subtly polices gender. If we look at *female* paratrooper, the 'female' part of this concept alerts us to the fact that a female is undertaking a traditionally male role. 'Paratrooper' is understood to refer (almost) exclusively to males. The typical maleness of the role is made explicit, as is the femaleness of the person taking on this role.

There are links between this and the sort of gender-play that I refer to in chapter one. In *Tipping the Velvet*, Nan performs on the London stage. To make her act (male impersonation) more palatable to the audience, it is first necessary to make it obvious to all that she is a female taking on a male role, so that there can be no blurring of boundaries taking place without the audience's knowledge. This is related to something that I have already stated in chapter one, "the cardinal rule of gender [is

that] one must be readable at a glance” (Halberstam, 1998, p.23). In a very real sense, society perceives the most dangerous aspect of blurring gender boundaries as when it goes undetected, and thus raises issues of ‘truth’ and ‘realness’.

When Thomas Beatie announced that he was pregnant, he could not be easily (safely) labelled. He looks like a man, and yet he is engaged in a process that is so closely tied up with notions of womanhood. In almost every report of Beatie’s pregnancy, reference is made to his wife, Nancy, and the reason that she is not carrying their child: “[h]e conceived through donor sperm as Mrs Beatie was unable to, having suffered endometriosis and undergone a hysterectomy” (Paris, 2008). Interestingly, nobody questions Nancy’s right to call herself a woman in the absence of womb, although most commentators seem to agree that Thomas’s womb renders him female (or at least, not-male). Stephen Whittle points out that

[i]f we look at the origins of the word [‘man’], in Old English it refers to an adult male. The taxonomy of male is ‘that which begets offspring – performs the fecundating function’. To fecundate is to render fruitful and productive. On that basis there are many human beings, infertile men, who are afforded membership of the legal group of ‘men’ but who are not ‘men’. Furthermore we need to consider whether the taxonomy afforded means that all people who do not perform the fecundatory role are therefore women. If you are not situated in one place are you necessarily situated in the other? (Whittle, 1999, p.20).

The implication here is that, as a ‘real’ woman, if Nancy were able to, she would of course have the baby herself. By continually referring to this, journalists are trying to preserve pregnancy as a uniquely female state. In *Middlesex*, when Callie’s parents discover the truth about her condition, the first question that they ask is, “[w]ill she be able to have children?” (*Mid*, p.428). Dr Luce tries to lessen the impact of his answer by referring to a patient with the same condition who has “adopted two kids” (*Mid*, p.429): what Luce is actually suggesting is that Callie will be able to live a ‘normal’ female life, and that such a ‘normal’ life will involve being a mother.

One of the biggest challenges faced by Joss in *Trumpet* is his inability to father a child. The very phrase ‘father a child’ indicates a lot about what society perceives as the fathering role, and how it is so different to mothering. Fathering, then, refers to the act of impregnating a woman, while mothering is typically understood as a more nurturing role, raising and caring for the child.⁹² Because Joss is unable to impregnate his wife, he is therefore seen as a failure as a man. The adoption of a son alleviates this issue somewhat, as it allows Joss to teach his new son, Colman, how to be a man (another important element of fatherhood). Once Colman discovers that his father is biologically female, he is plagued by “the image of my father in a woman’s body” (*Tr*, p.63). As I have already stated, as far as Colman is concerned, Joss is reduced to his genitals: “[w]hat is it that is eating me? I’m not a bitter guy. Don’t get me wrong. Please. It’s probably the fact that my father didn’t have a prick. Maybe it’s just as simple as that” (*Tr*, p.66). It is more than just that though. Colman is compelled to state that “[m]y father wasn’t a man like myself, showing me the ropes and helping my through puberty” (*Tr*, p.67). And therein lies Colman’s problem: his entire concept of masculinity has been developed through imitation and examination of Joss’s masculinity. The idea that Colman has been taught how to be a man by someone he comes to regard as a woman has completely changed his conception of what it means to be both male and a man.

Pregnancy is so utterly tied up with ideas of femaleness and femininity that even the *idea* of a pregnant man is hard to accept. As discussed in chapter three, Angela Carter exploits this in *The Passion of New Eve*. Evelyn is kidnapped by a group led by “Mother” (*Eve*, p.49) a grotesque parody of matriarchal power, who refers to her followers as “daughters” (*Eve*, p.49). After forcibly transforming Evelyn

⁹² These characteristics are visible when Leith states that “we have the brain chemistry of, on the one hand, a sperm shooter, or, on the other, an egg protector” (Leith, 2008).

into Eve, Mother plans to “make [Eve] a perfect specimen of womanhood” (*Eve*, p.68) so that she can be impregnated. However, this ‘perfect specimen’ is dependent on pregnancy to mark Eve’s transformation as successful: as soon as he becomes pregnant, the last vestiges of his maleness will disappear.

The ‘wrongness’ of male pregnancy is emphasised by Leith, who draws upon expert opinion to confirm his feelings:

no one I spoke to sounded positive. And remember, these are fertility doctors. These are people who have spent their whole lives working against the grain of popular opinion, on long-shot ideas. These are the promoters of IVF and surrogacy, of taking sperm and putting it here, of taking eggs and putting them there, *always pushing the envelope of possibility*. (Leith, 2008, my emphasis)

Leith paints a picture of doctors as being at the forefront of innovation, always striving to break down prejudice, but this is at odds with the picture of the medical profession that I have painted in chapter two. Comments made by the director of the London Fertility Centre, Ian Craft, are worth examining:

[w]hy would a man want to do this? It doesn’t make sense ... I can’t see why you’d want to do it in the first place. Why a man would want to have a baby I can’t possibly contemplate. To me, it defies credibility that anybody would think about doing it. The people who are considering doing it have lost the plot. The plot is that women give birth to children – not men. (Leith, 2008)

The very person who *could* create a pathway to male pregnancy happens to be vehemently against the concept, to the point where he cannot even begin to imagine why any man would wish to do this. Significantly, he expresses doubts about the sanity of “[t]he people who are considering doing it” (Leith, 2008). The lack of specificity in this statement – Craft’s unwillingness to describe them in male terms – makes his feelings clear: such people are not ‘true men’. Craft – a man who has the power to grant or withhold medical treatment to patients – cannot even “contemplate” (Leith, 2008) the existence of a pregnant man.

The ‘problem’, as Leith sees it, is that “the pregnant man would become a father. Or rather, a mother. And here’s the thing. We find this unpalatable ... because it changes something fundamental about the way we see the world. Or rather, about the way we feel” (Leith, 2008). Here, Leith is stating his conjecture as fact, (“[w]e find this unpalatable”), forcing the reader into the position of agreeing with him: “[i]t shocks us on a very basic level. *Naturally*, it does” (Leith, 2008, my emphasis). In the context of the article, ‘naturally’ is a highly charged word to be using. When men are able to give birth, the concept of natural male/female or masculine/feminine behaviour is stretched to its limit. If one is naturally shocked by a pregnant man, then it follows that a pregnant man is *unnatural* – a freak of *nature*.

Leith ends his article by re-emphasising that Beatie is not *really* a man: “[w]e live in a world that is strictly divided into a male half and a female half ... That’s why we are so confused and disturbed by the idea of a pregnant man, even when he did start out as a woman and will still give birth as a woman” (Leith, 2008). Leith is correct when he says that the world remains “strictly divided” (Leith, 2008) according to male and female. The division is such that Patrick Barkham wonders “how someone can identify themselves as male and yet embrace pregnancy” (Barkham , 2008). Beatie explains this himself by arguing that “[s]terilization is not a requirement for sex reassignment, so I decided to have chest reconstruction and testosterone therapy, but kept my reproductive rights. Wanting to have a biological child is neither a male nor female desire, but a human desire” (Beatie, 2008). By relocating his situation as a ‘human’ one, Beatie is drawing attention to the limitations of language: ‘human’ is one of the only words that encompasses his situation, but too often humanity is forgotten. If one is not ‘properly gendered’ then, as I have explained in chapter four, one’s “humanness ... comes into question”

(Butler, 1993, p.8). Butler goes on to argue that “the construction of gender operates through *exclusionary* means, such that the human is not only produced over and against the inhuman, but through a set of foreclosures, radical erasures, that are, strictly speaking, refused the possibility of cultural articulation” (Butler, 1993, p.8).

It is the difficulty in making some forms of gendered (and human) identity culturally intelligible that is at the core of this thesis. Even as language fails in its attempts to capture and define varieties of gender, the arguments surrounding what gender ‘is’ or ‘isn’t’ become more intractable. Woolf suggested that “[n]o age can ever have been as stridently sex-conscious as our own” (Woolf, 2004, p.114), but the truth is that every age is sex-conscious. While the central issues of debate might change over time, the debate itself never ceases. The more we unpick the knot of gender, the tighter it seems to get.

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