

CHANGING SUBJECTS:

TRANSGENDER CONSCIOUSNESS AND THE 1920s

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ABSTRACT

This study conducts transgender readings of literary and visual texts by female writers and artists from the modernist period. It analyses works by Romaine Brooks, Gertrude Stein, Radclyffe Hall, and Virginia Woolf in a cultural and historical context and from a contemporary theoretical perspective. The selected works, which all entered the public sphere during the 1920s, are:

Romaine Brooks's portraits Renata Borgatti au Piano (c. 1920), Peter (A Young English Girl) (1923-24), Self-Portrait (1923), and Una, Lady Troubridge (1924); Gertrude Stein's The Making of Americans (1925); Radclyffe Hall's The Well of Loneliness (1928); and Virginia Woolf's Orlando (1928).

My survey of a range of discourses and non-fictional materials from the period demonstrates a growing public interest in the concept of sex and gender changes. Each chapter provides some discussion of the writer or artist's interest in or enactment of some form of unconventional self-fashioning. Close readings of the selected texts against these cultural and biographical backgrounds, but also alongside transgender narratives and visual representations from the second half of the twentieth century, explore the

relationship of each text to an incipient transgender consciousness.

The introduction conducts a brief review of the critical field and a longer discussion of the historical and political development of transgender identities. Some cultural and historical context is provided, including a detailed consideration of the "masculine woman". Sexual discourses of the period and the radical journal Urania are also examined. Chapter 1 uses sexological theories of inversion from the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries to foreground transgender elements of Hall's representation of the "mannish woman" in The Well of Loneliness. Chapter 2 compares the dissonant visual effects of Romaine Brooks's portraits of cross-dressed women with those of the 1990s self-portraits of transsexual photographer Loren Cameron. Chapter 3 considers public and private narratives of identity through a discussion of the biographical and fantastical elements of Woolf's Orlando and twentieth-century transgender autobiographies. Chapter 4 examines the ways in which Stein's experimental prose fiction The Making of Americans challenges representations of identity through its verbal and grammatical innovations.

INTRODUCTION

Gender . . . is the far more elaborated, more fully and rigidly dichotomized social production and reproduction of male and female identities and behaviors—of male and female *persons*—in a cultural system for which “male/female” functions as a primary and perhaps model binarism affecting the structure and meaning of many, many other binarisms whose apparent connection to chromosomal sex will often be exiguous or nonexistent.

—Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Epistemology of the Closet (27-28)

My thesis identifies a transgender presence in some of the key literary and visual texts from the 1920s by female modernists. The selected texts are: Romaine Brooks's portraits Renata Borgatti au Piano (c. 1920), Peter (A Young English Girl) (1923-24), Self-Portrait (1923), and Una, Lady Troubridge (1924); Gertrude Stein's The Making of Americans (1925); Radclyffe Hall's The Well of Loneliness (1928); and Virginia Woolf's Orlando (1928). Taken together, these works are shown to enact a founding principle of transgender

politics in their questioning of the linguistic and cultural enforcement of naturalising concepts of identity. My analysis of the individual works and their effects identifies themes and tensions that are often present in transgender representations and discourses. Most notably these are: a link between the processes of self-creation and the practices of art, a co-existence of opposing reactionary and radical forces, and a foundational intransigence of sex and gender binaries.

In its cultural context, each of the selected texts can be seen to stand outside of or position itself against the gendered aesthetics of "Modernism", in particular, what Peter Nicholls in Modernisms: A Literary Guide calls "the absolute fixing of sexual difference, which is seen as the condition of the self's autonomy" (194). In my study, the sexed and gendered binaries which construct that "difference" are shown to be unsettled by narratives and images of sartorial and somatic transformations, and more radically opposed through writing strategies which seek to replace representation with a linguistic materiality. Hall's novel and Brooks's portraits of cross-dressed women fashion different styles and poses of masculinity. In Woolf's Orlando a fluidity of identity, manifested in various playful sex- and gender-crossings, sets the agency of personal narratives against the public authority of official

narratives of medicine, science and law. Stein's experimental text The Making of Americans challenges representational notions of identity through its verbal and grammatical innovations.

It would be conceptually dangerous to argue that any of these women are expressing notions of transgender in a late-twentieth-century sense in their writing or painting. Nevertheless, in their works and lives they all evince a preoccupation with dissident identities and undertake some form of unconventional self-fashioning. Although these women are commonly identified as either lesbian or, in the case of Woolf, as having lesbian desires, in each case it is transgressions of gender as much as sexuality that appear to form the basis of their interests and self-representations. To some degree this can be understood as a culturally enforced displacement from the forbidden area of same-sex desire to a more acceptable aspect of personal identity, especially as female masculinity had become something of a fashion statement during the 1920s. Even with that pressure, the apparent desire to breach or evade binary gender codes produces its own distinct effects. Gender cannot be considered in pure isolation from the other main poles of identity (sexuality, race, class), but if it is taken as the primary focus of analysis, rather than as a subsidiary to sexual desire, different interpretative

possibilities arise. Furthermore, an examination of the gendered elements of the works I have chosen for discussion, both in their cultural and historical context and from a contemporary theoretical perspective, demonstrates a forceful rationale for this revisionary project.

In a survey of a range of non-fictional materials from the period—including sexological works, the journal Urania, and life-narratives—I will identify a growing awareness of the phenomenon of sex and gender changes in both public and private discourses. By considering the selected texts alongside transgender representations from the second half of the twentieth century, and in light of queer theory's concept of gender performativity, I will show this development to be a significant phase in the prehistory of an evolving transgender consciousness.

Feminist revisions

Over the past twenty years female modernists have been the subject of major cultural and literary studies. Women writers and artists from the opening decades of the twentieth century have been considered both singly and as a diverse but distinct group. Most scholarly works have directed attention to the relationships between these women's lives and works, frequently

drawing on biographical and literary resources in equal measure for their observations on the various intersections of experiences of class, gender identity and sexuality. Many of the women discussed are from financially privileged or educated backgrounds, and this is usually recognised as an important factor in their artistic production and achievements. Some degree of social independence is an important issue at a time when women still struggled to find publishers and, in some instances, chose to set up their own publishing houses or to distribute their work privately. In addition, women who were publicly identified as both upper class and "artistic" tended to enjoy a degree of protection from censure of both their lifestyles and works. Such tolerance had its legal limits, as Radclyffe Hall was to discover when her novel The Well of Loneliness was successfully prosecuted as an obscene publication in 1928. The cross-dressing of some modernist women has been understood as a coded expression of their same-sex desires; it has also been viewed in the context of a relaxation of sartorial and social rules amongst middle- and upper-class women following the First World War. In their expressions of same-sex desires, both private and public, coded and overt, the works and lives of modernist women have been

revised by some critics as a "Sapphic modernism".¹

Of these rich and varied feminist revisions of modernism, a key text to have appeared in the past decade is the critical anthology The Gender of Modernism (1990), edited by Bonnie Kime Scott. Importantly, the anthology does not seek to replace a white Anglo-American male canon with a similarly restricted female version, but instead represents writings by women and some men from a wide range of cultural origins including African-American writers. In this respect, it challenges definitions of modernism on the basis of both gender and race. Scott has also produced an influential two-volume study, Re-figuring Modernism (1995). In Volume 1, The Women of 1928, Scott adopts "the web" as an enabling metaphor in an examination of the lives and works of Virginia Woolf, Rebecca West, and Djuna Barnes. Volume 2, Postmodern Feminist Readings of Woolf, West and Barnes, analyses some of these women's major works in light of developments in contemporary feminist theory.

Shari Benstock's Women of the Left Bank: Paris 1900-1940 (1986) and Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's three-volume critique of women and modernism, No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century (published between 1988 and 1994), have also

¹ See Shari Benstock's essay "Expatriate Sapphic Modernism: Entering Literary History" for a fuller discussion of the origins of this term and its conceptual difficulties.

made important contributions to the field. Benstock's comprehensive survey examines modernist women writers and artists in the context of the artistic and cultural communities of Paris. Benstock explains in the text's preface that her project aims to trace "differences between and within literary practices and lived circumstances of this period", rather than "write literary history" from the single perspective of gender or define a "Modernist feminist poetics" (n.p.). In terms of my own study, one of the more problematic elements of Benstock's feminist critique has been her reductive response to cross-dressing women from the middle and upper classes, who tend to be viewed purely in terms of the reactionary and misogynist practices they are deemed to be upholding. Benstock argues that: "Although female cross-dressing of this type was an antisocial act that called attention to societal definitions of female homosexuals as 'inverts' and 'perverts,' it nonetheless was not a sign of liberation from heterosexual norms or patriarchal domination" (181). My discussion allows for a greater degree of ambivalence in the effects of that appropriation.

Gilbert and Gubar's epic work covers a vast selection of material from the 1880s to the 1930s and examines a range of gender issues. In Volume 2, Sexchanges (1989), the primary focus is "changing definitions of sex and sex roles" culminating in "the

virtually apocalyptic engendering of the new for both literary men and literary women" (xii). The section on "Reinventing Gender", particularly the chapter "Cross-Dressing and Re-Dressing: Transvestism as Metaphor", has some parallels with my own work in terms of its analysis of what they call "the trope of transvestism and transsexualism" (326) in literary and visual texts. Gilbert and Gubar's citing of these distinct cultural identities as a "trope" (not even two separate tropes) reflects a common critical practice of employing transgender identities for their figurative, rather than literal, potential. There is a further reductiveness evident in the gender-bias of such observations as: "where male modernist costume imagery is profoundly conservative, feminist modernist costume imagery is radically revisionary" (332). In this respect, I share Bonnie Kime Scott's reservations, voiced in The Women of 1928, about the "self-serving selectivity" of "the all too neat division they [Gilbert and Gubar] often make between failed male and superior female modernists" (xxxvi). In Women Writers and Artists: Modernist (Im)positionings, Bridget Elliott and Jo-Ann Wallace also take issue with Gilbert and Gubar's methodology and its tendency to flatten out "important differences . . . between women active in the field of modernism" (13).

Women Writers and Artists (1994) is another authoritative text in terms of its feminist revisioning of the cultural history of modernism. Elliott and Wallace adopt a cross-disciplinary approach for their re-evaluation of canonical and noncanonical modernist women in the context of issues of cultural production and critical reception. A chapter on Romaine Brooks and Natalie Barney, "Fleur du Mal or Second-hand Roses?", questions critical responses to Brooks's work that have read its "derivative" elements as evidence of a "second-rate" art form and the product of conservative and patriarchal impulses. They challenge the traditional notions of "originality" which underpin those interpretations and question why poststructuralism's dismantling of the original/copy binary is only felt to be applicable to visual works of recent production. In the chapter "The Making of Genius", Elliott and Wallace compare Gertrude Stein's artistic self-representation with that of the artist Marie Laurencin. Stein's identification as a "male genius" is viewed in terms of its relationship to the dominant discourse of creative (gendered) genius at the time, and Elliott and Wallace's discussion raises important issues of identity and representation.

My decision to focus on works by female modernists has a historical and thematic rationale. The texts I discuss all enter the public sphere during the 1920s,

although Stein's The Making of Americans was completed in 1911. Historically, the first two decades of the twentieth century have been identified as being an especially productive period for creative women. Martha Vicinus's essay on the roots of modern lesbian identity states that during the 1910s and 1920s "lesbians" were making a "self-conscious effort to create a new sexual language for themselves that included not only words but also gestures, costume, and behavior" (487).

However, in terms of the focus of my study, a more comprehensive analysis of an evolving transgender consciousness in the modernist period could range more widely in its time span and could include works by men, as well as other female writers and artists. George Moore's short story "Albert Nobbs", published in his anthology Celibate Lives in 1927, might be compared with D. H. Lawrence's novella "The Fox" (first published in 1923) for their different representations of masculine women.² Texts in which gender transgression is represented as "monstrous" and "dysfunctional" can be as valid to a study of a developing transgender consciousness as those texts which adopt a more playful or reverent approach; but that is not to suggest any clear and consistent divide

² "Albert Nobbs" was originally privately published in A Story-Teller's Holiday in 1918. A shorter version of "The Fox" was published in July 1919 in Hutchinson's Story Magazine (The Complete Short Novels 11). "Albert Nobbs" and "The Fox" are compared by Gilbert and Gubar for their negative representations of "transvestism" (Sexchanges 336-338).

between female and male modernists' treatment of gender. Ronald Firbank's novels have received queer critical approval for their exploration of "exotic effeminacy" through "a protesting effeminate style that constantly displaced an inability to speak for itself on to other perverse formations, such as lesbianism" (Bristow, Effeminate England 120). D. H. Lawrence evinces a clear discomfort with notions of gender travesties in some of his unsympathetic characterisations of feminine men and masculine women, but those representations are seldom wholly unequivocal in their condemnation and the sexually ambiguous characters can be objects of repressed desire for the "real men" of his stories.³ Equally, many texts by female modernist writers display a degree of ambivalence towards their gender-variant characters. In Rosamond Lehmann's Dusty Answer (1927), whilst the novel's representation of the erotic friendship between Judith Earle and Jennifer Baird departs from dominant heterosexual models of same-sex desire, its characterisation of the interloper to this relationship, the masculine (and racially "other") Geraldine Manners, vilifies the "mannish lesbian" by portraying her as a dangerously seductive and

³ In Women in Love (1921), for example, Gerald Crich is apparently repelled and aroused by the effeminate men he encounters in the bars of London and in the hotel in Switzerland.

ultimately destructive figure.⁴ Similarly, one of the most common criticisms of Radclyffe Hall's The Well of Loneliness concerns the abject depiction of its tortured "masculine" protagonist, Stephen Gordon.

Where my own study differs from previous writing on the works of female modernists is in its identification and foregrounding of transgender effects. My revisioning of texts by female modernists must position itself partly within the critical field of feminist and lesbian remappings of modernism; but my approach can be seen to set my research outside of (and for some critics almost certainly against) this project. The readings I present respond to current developments in histories and theories of sexuality, in particular, the emergence of "transgender" as a culturally specific although diversely experienced identity, a site of ideological debate, and an area of academic study.

Transgender

It was only during the second half of the twentieth century that at first transsexual and latterly, and more inclusively, transgender subjects began to gain recognition as distinct identities both in medical

⁴ For an interesting discussion of Lehmann's novel, see Andrea Lewis's "'Glorious Pagan That I Adore': Resisting the National Reproductive Imperative in Rosamond Lehmann's Dusty Answer".

terms and to an increasing extent culturally and politically. Use of the term "transsexual" to describe an experience of cross-gender identification first appears in an article by D. O. Cauldwell, "Psychopathia Transexualis" (single s in original), published in an American medical journal in December 1949. The development of "transsexualism" as a medical theory and its association with "sex-change" surgery are generally linked to the work of American endocrinologist Harry Benjamin in the early 1950s. Dave King's essay "Gender Blending: Medical Perspectives and Technology" provides a useful account of the medical history of transsexuality from the 1950s to the 1990s. Key developments in that history include coinage of the diagnostic label "gender dysphoria" in the early 1970s, and in 1980 the entry of "transsexualism" in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders as a "gender identity disorder".

On the basis of its entry into public consciousness as a medical condition, some feminist and cultural critics represent transsexuality as a product of that intervention. Janice Raymond's hostile polemic The Transsexual Empire (1979) argues that transsexuals are the victims of a misogynist and homophobic medical conspiracy. Raymond uses the terms "female-to-constructed-male" and "male-to-constructed-female" to highlight her view of transsexuals as surgically (and

culturally) engineered subjects. Bernice L. Hausman's Changing Sex: Transsexualism, Technology, and The Idea of Gender (1995) presents a more balanced view in its examination of the role of medical technology in the development of transsexual subjectivity. Hausman's argument that technology not only "makes transsexualism possible" but also provides a discursive frame within which "the idea of the transsexual becomes conceptually possible" (117) is persuasive. But her own discussion of sexological literature and theories implies the existence of a more complex history and prehistory than her main thesis allows.

Judith Halberstam, in Female Masculinity (1998), challenges those critics who would simplify what she sees as a knot of shared and conflicting identifications and desires to favour the interests of one particular theory or identity group. Halberstam states:

Future studies of transsexuality and of lesbianism must attempt to account for historical moments when the difference between gender deviance and sexual deviance is hard to discern. The history of inversion and of people who identified as inverts . . . still represents a tangle of cross-identification and sexual preference that is neither easily separated nor comfortably

accounted for under the heading of "lesbian."
There is not, furthermore, one history to be
told here (the history of medical technology)
about one subject (the transsexual). (161)

The complexities surrounding the "history of inversion" will be considered in a more detailed discussion of sexological discourses. What is significant here is that the disputed territory which Halberstam's comments identify cannot simply be assigned as *either* lesbian or transsexual. On this subject, Halberstam's study of female masculinity and Gayle Rubin's "Of Catamites and Kings: Reflections on Butch, Gender and Boundaries" (1992) have been influential in their discussions of transgender and lesbian identities and the contested site of masculine identification. Halberstam's work seeks to uphold a diversity of female masculinity by demonstrating a two-hundred-year tradition of masculine women. Rubin's essay identifies a wide spectrum of gender and sexual identities between the contemporary categories of butch lesbian and transsexual man. She argues that although "important discontinuities separate lesbian butch experience and female-to-male experience, there are also significant points of connection" (473). Rubin's essay also describes an antipathy that many lesbians feel towards transsexuals. In spite of "the overlap and kinship between some areas of lesbian and transsexual experience", transsexuals

are seen as "treasonous deserters"; as a group they are "commonly perceived and described in contemptuous stereotypes: unhealthy, deluded, self-hating, enslaved to patriarchal gender roles, sick, antifeminist, antiwoman, and self-mutilating" (474). The kind of hostility Rubin describes is also directed at transsexual women in Janice Raymond's Transsexual Empire and Sheila Jeffreys's "Transgender Activism: A Lesbian Feminist Perspective".

The emergence of "transgenderism" began to counter those constructions of transsexuality that relied upon essentialist notions of sex and gender and medical intervention for their validity. Leslie Feinberg's Transgender Warriors attributes the first use of the term "*transgenderist*" to "trans warrior" Virginia Prince. In conversation with Feinberg, Prince explains: "'I coined the noun *transgenderist* in 1987 or '88. There had to be some name for people like myself who trans the gender barrier—meaning somebody who lives full time in the gender opposite to their anatomy. I have not transed the sex barrier'" (x). Feinberg's own distinction between transsexual and transgender adopts this fundamental difference: "Transsexual men and women traverse the boundary of the sex they were assigned at birth", whereas "[t]ransgender people traverse, bridge, or blur the boundary of the *gender expression* they were assigned at birth" (x). Feinberg modifies this clear

division with the observation that neither category is definitive: "not all transsexuals choose surgery or hormones; some transgender people do" (x).

During the 1990s some transgender subjects sought to distance themselves from the more conservative aspects of transsexual identities, presenting their own gender transgressions as radical and culturally subversive challenges to dominant binary models of identity. A link between transgender and queer theory was forged, primarily by Judith Butler's writing on gender performativity in Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (1990). Butler's evocation of the figure of the drag artist as a principal metaphorical device had an unintended effect in that it appeared to represent the "transgendered subject" as a gender outlaw, capable of parodic subversion through repeated crossings of gender boundaries. In Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex' (1993) Butler contradicts this reading of her work with the statement: "I want to underscore that there is no necessary relation between drag and subversion, and that drag may well be used in the service of both the denaturalization and reidealization of hyperbolic heterosexual gender norms" (125). Nevertheless, a view of "transgender" as politically radical contributes to some poststructuralist constructions of transsexual subjects as gender reactionaries who uncritically

exchange one gender role for another in their fixed trajectory from "male to female" or "female to male".

Jay Prosser's Second Skins: The Body Narratives of Transsexuality (1998) challenges constructionist readings of transsexuality, such as Hausman's, which "fail to examine how transsexuals are constructing subjects" (8). He also questions poststructuralism's conceptualisation of transsexuals as *either* "deliteralizing" and therefore subversive, or "literalizing" and therefore hegemonic. Prosser argues: "In readings that embrace the transsexual as deliteralizing as much as those that condemn the transsexual as literalizing, the referential transsexual subject can frighteningly disappear in his/her very invocation" (14). Prosser acknowledges the productive force of Judith Butler's work both in terms of the emergence of transgender studies and as an enabling strategy for his own reading of transsexual narratives: "transgender would not be of the moment if not for the queer moment" (6). At the same time, he wants to recuperate transsexuals from their elided position in queer theory's performative account of gender by privileging the material, bodily effects of their transitions: "It is imperative to read transsexual accounts now in order to flesh out the transgendered figure that queer theory has made prominent" (6).

Second Skins is a more recent addition to a growing body of formative works by transsexual and transgender critics. In terms of transgender agency this is a crucial development; the direction in which that subjectivity should proceed—what it should look like and how it should present itself—is a contentious and disputed issue. Where Prosser analyses transsexual narratives to demonstrate the “active subjectivity” of transsexuality (10), Sandy Stone’s polemical essay “*The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto*” (1991) challenges the usefulness of many of those same narratives. Prosser argues that the “gendered coherence” of transsexual autobiography is “inextricable from the narrative coherence of the genre” (116); Stone’s essay calls for a move towards narratives which more accurately reflect and disclose the complexities and ambiguities between and within transsexual subjects’ personal histories. Kate Bornstein’s *Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women and the Rest of Us* (1994) is similarly provocative in its desire to dismantle paradigmatic narratives of transsexual experience. Bornstein conducts her project critically and structurally; Prosser describes *Gender Outlaw* as opposing “transsexuality’s telic narrative structure (that it has a gendered outcome) precisely as it rewrites the telic structure of conventional autobiographical narrative” (174). And yet, as a genre,

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transsexual autobiography continues to uphold the dominant conceptual model, and such "populist" narratives are central to an understanding of some of the material differences between transgender and queer, and within transgender itself.

The field of transgender studies has also received not always welcome contributions from non-transgender cultural critics. Works include Marjorie Garber's Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety (1992); Pat Califia's Sex Changes: The Politics of Transgenderism (1997);⁵ and many of the essays collected in the anthologies Body Guards: The Cultural Politics of Gender Ambiguity (1991), edited by Julia Epstein and Kristina Straub, and Blending Genders: Social Aspects of Cross-Dressing and Sex-Changing (1996), edited by Richard Ekins and Dave King. Over the last ten years there has been an increasing number of biographies of transgender figures who traditionally have been seen by the lesbian community as part of their historical lineage. New readings of people such as Jack Bee Garland, Joe Carstairs and Billy Tipton either locate their subjects in transgender frames or acknowledge the more ambiguous elements of those

⁵ Since writing this book Califia has self-identified as a transgender man.

"lesbian" identities.⁶ The most recent subject to have been "claimed" by both transgender and lesbian communities is Brandon Teena, a young transgender man who was raped and murdered in Nebraska, USA in December 1993. Critical and biographical accounts of Teena's life include the Kimberley Peirce film Boys Don't Cry (2000). Transgender subjects, both living and imaginary, have also been the inspiration for novels such as Rose Tremain's Sacred Country (1992), Jackie Kay's Trumpet (1998), Patricia Duncker's James Miranda Barry (1999) and David Ebershoff's The Danish Girl (2000).

The increasing availability of and demand for such critical, biographical and fictional studies reflects a corresponding growth in transgender as a cultural phenomenon. It can also be seen to derive from and encourage a popular fascination with gender transgression that extends beyond its more usual comic manifestations epitomised by the "Drag Queen" and the "Pantomime Dame".

At the turn of the twentieth-first century, the terms "transgender" and "transsexual" are often used interchangeably; "transgender" also often functions as an umbrella term for a diverse range of transgressive gender and sexual identities, which may include pre-,

⁶ See Louis Sullivan's From Female to Male: The Life of Jack Bee Garland (1990); Kate Summerscale's study of Joe Carstairs, The Queen of Whale Cay (1997); and Diane Wood Middlebrook's Suits Me: The Double Life of Billy Tipton (1998).

post- and non-operative transsexuals. Despite this apparent movement towards a more inclusive, unified community, important historical and ideological distinctions remain. The differences between and within transsexual and transgender subjects are more complex and numerous than this brief account can hope to describe adequately.

In light of these ambiguities, my own choice of terms needs some clarification. Where I use "transgender", I am employing the term in its wider, collective sense; "transsexual" will be utilised where the subjects being discussed make this distinction themselves, or where the cultural specificity of the term is more applicable. My use of "transsexual" as an adjective rather than a noun, most notably in my reference to transsexual subjects, avoids the more cumbersome and increasingly outdated terms "female-to-male" and "male-to-female". In a project of this kind, where texts from a specific historical period are being viewed from a present-day perspective, questions of language use are not purely limited to whether I favour "transgender" to "transsexual" in my discussion; they must also embrace how such vocabulary can be employed meaningfully. In this respect, my analysis aims to sustain the distinctness of cultural identities from different periods. More generally, my use of the conventional binaries of gender-marked language—

male/female, man/woman, feminine/masculine, he/she—recognises both the provisionality and changing nuances of such terms.

The readings I present of texts from the 1920s clearly rely upon specific ideas of gender identities that have materialised during the second half of the twentieth century. However, developing concepts of transgender draw upon discourses and cultural practices from the past. My own historical survey of the 1920s enables me to locate my readings in the context of what might now be recognised as an incipient transgender consciousness. A key element in that process of disclosure has been the critical examining of sexological discourses of the period.⁷

Sexological discourses

During the second half of the nineteenth century, sexological discourses categorised and defined variant sex and gender practices against a dominant paradigm of heterosexuality and strict binary codes of difference. Virginia Woolf's Orlando characterises the nineteenth century as a period when: "The sexes drew further and

⁷ Sexology in Culture: Labelling Bodies and Desires, edited by Lucy Bland and Laura Doan, brings together essays by cultural and literary critics on a range of issues relating to sexological writings and theories. Bland and Doan have also published Sexology Uncensored: the Documents of Sexual Science, a companion volume of primary materials. Also see George Chauncey's "From Sexual Inversion to Homosexuality: the Changing Medical Conceptualization of Female 'Deviance'".

further apart" (219). As part of this process, same-sex desire was no longer viewed as a deviation from a perceived norm of sexual behaviour, but was recast as part of a pathological or congenital identity.

Inversion theory became the major sexological explanation for this emerging model of homosexuality, according to which "perverse" erotic practices and identifications were attributed to "inverted" sexual instincts. A range of sexual experiences and behaviours were labelled using this guiding principle; research, often of a highly pseudo-scientific kind, was conducted and presented in case studies and a new sexual vocabulary was formed. Sexologists variously wrote of Uranians and Urnings, sexual inverts, mannish women and effeminate men, and intermediate types. The terms homosexuality and heterosexuality also entered the public domain for the first time.⁸

Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, Carl Westphal and Richard von Krafft-Ebing are three of the more influential sexologists working in Austria and Germany during the late 1800s. Krafft-Ebing's Psychopathia Sexualis: A Medico Forensic Study (1892) is one of the most important studies of sexual "perversions" of the period, a fact perhaps marked by the recent publication

⁸ Joseph Bristow cites an entry in the supplement to the OED which records that these terms were introduced into the English language in an 1892 translation of Krafft-Ebing's Psychopathia Sexualis (Sexuality 4). The term "lesbian" was not adopted by the sexologists or Freud; it also rarely appears in other narratives of the period.

of a new translation.⁹ British sexologists include Havelock Ellis and Edward Carpenter. Ellis's Studies in the Psychology of Sex, which includes a case study of his wife, runs to seven volumes. The second volume, Sexual Inversion, produced in 1897 with the help of the poet and critic John Addington Symonds, is Ellis's best known work. Carpenter, a liberal sexual reformer and theorist, presents his ideas on "intermediate types" in The Intermediate Sex: A Study of Some Transitional Types of Men and Women (1908).¹⁰

Inversion theory, then, conceptualises homosexual desire as a form of psychical and, in some instances, physical hermaphroditism. It reflects the view that same-sex desire is caused by a reversal of the "normal" sexual instincts, since the "natural" object of desire will always be a person of the opposite biological sex. According to this theory, the inversion of a person's sexual instincts indicates an inversion of their gender; hence the homosexual is represented as a man or woman who has the wrong soul for their body. Ulrichs introduces this notion in the 1860s, adopting the concept of Uranian love (from Uranos in Plato's

⁹ The translator's unqualified use of current sexual terminology for the various case studies, including the term "transsexual", may produce a more accessible text for readers but is reductive in terms of historical and cultural accuracy.

¹⁰ Of the few women working in the field of sexology at this time, Marie Stopes and Stella Browne are probably the most prominent figures. See Lesley A. Hall's "Feminist Reconfigurations of Heterosexuality in the 1920s" for a discussion of their work.

Symposium) for his theory of male same-sex desire as a female soul inhabiting a male body,¹¹ but it has perhaps its most vibrant expression in Krafft-Ebing's metaphor for the female invert as a "masculine soul, heaving in the female bosom" (399). The parallel with popular explanations of transsexuality using a similar, although less melodramatically worded, analogy is unmistakable and significant. The shift of emphasis from the soul to the body as the erroneous factor reflects developments in sex-reassignment surgery that allow the body to be hormonally and surgically altered. Some transsexual and transgender critics challenge this "wrong body" narrative as pathologising and, therefore, contrary to transgender agency. Kate Bornstein argues: "It's time for transgendered people to look for new metaphors—new ways of communicating our lives to people who are traditionally gendered" (66).

My discussion here and in my first chapter contributes to a transgender discourse which seeks to uphold the historical and cultural distinctiveness of the "invert" as an identity which conflates same-sex desire and cross-gender identification. Recent discussions of sexology in relation to The Well of Loneliness appear in Halberstam's Female Masculinity (75-110) and Prosser's Second Skins (135-170). As I

¹¹ For a fuller discussion of Ulrichs's model of Uranian desire see Bristow (Sexuality 20-24).

have already observed, sexologists believed that the reason a person is attracted to the same sex is that she or he in fact belongs psychically, and to an extent physically, to the opposite sex. If an inverted man or woman expresses any experience of cross-gender desire or identification this just proves the sexologists' point irrefutably, as does the presence of secondary sexual characteristics: the "masculine distribution of hair" in the female invert, for example (Ellis, Sexual Inversion 253). A close examination of sexological case studies, however, particularly those which include first person narratives, demonstrates the diverse range of erotic and gendered experiences and behaviours being accounted for by inversion theory. In this respect, as other critics have argued, the figure of the invert does not translate simply to lesbian and gay or, indeed, transsexual or transgender. Instead, "inversion" can be seen as a repository for overlapping histories and narratives of dissident sexual and gender identities.

Critical arguments that subjects of the sexologists' case studies are simply reciting the medical narrative available to them oversimplify what is clearly a complex and uncertain area.¹² The view proposed by Lillian Faderman in Surpassing the Love of

¹² As already noted, similar concerns have been expressed about the reliability of transsexual narratives, in some instances by transsexual writers themselves. See Sandy Stone's "The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto" (290-293).

Men that the "mannish lesbian" is a product of the sexologists' theories is curious. Faderman's argument, briefly summarised, is that the sexological construction of "lesbian morbidity" stigmatises many romantic, but sexless, friendships between women. Faderman speculates as to "how many romantic friends, who had felt themselves to be perfectly healthy before, suddenly saw themselves as sick, even though their behavior had in no way changed, as a result of the sexologists' formulations" (244). Yet her own text cites historical and fictional accounts of female masculinity dating back to the thirteenth century. Her discussion of what she terms "transvestite lesbians" includes a case from the early-sixteenth century of a French woman who, disguised as a male, is employed as a stable boy and then a vineyard master and marries a woman. After living together for two years, the dildo that the young woman uses to "counterfeit the office of a husband" was discovered (51). She was arrested and, following her confession, burned alive. In this and other instances Faderman gives it seems it is the woman's transgression of gender or biological rules, rather than erotic ones, that is considered to be the more heinous crime. In this light, the morbidification of "masculine" women by nineteenth-century sexologists can be seen to have a historical precedence, and even today female masculinity continues to be a particular

source of cultural and political anxiety. The sexologists may have pathologised masculine women but that does not mean they invented them.

Faderman's view can be contrasted with Emily Hamer's argument in Britannia's Glory that "the history of sexology has only an extremely tangential relevance to the lives and the history of British lesbians" (11). In seeking to sustain a narrative of lesbian identity which predates the sexologists, Hamer is in danger of over-minimising the pervasive influence of their theories. Cross-gender identification and same-sex desire continued to be viewed as related signs of homosexuality in both men and women until the early 1950s, and images of the butch lesbian and the effeminate gay man still function as stereotypes (as well as being lived identities) in some sections of Western cultural and media representations. The medico-scientific concept of inversion which informed and, to an extent, validated those identities filtered its way into some of the literary texts and visual images of the 1920s in their depictions of "mannish women" and "effeminate men". The Well of Loneliness and the cartoonists' representations of its author, Radclyffe Hall, following the novel's censorship, are the most obvious examples from the period. As will be seen in my discussion of the publication Urania, there is also evidence in newspaper reports from around the world of

gender-crossings and sex changes that can be seen as being contemporaneous with rather than the product of these theories.

Judith Halberstam responds to critics like Sheila Jeffreys (and by inference Faderman) who see butch/femme roles as the invention of sexologists,¹³ by arguing that theories of inversion "were wholly dependent on, and interactive with, a plethora of complex self-definitions circulating within emergent communities of inverts and their lovers" (130). To suggest that theories of inversion were "wholly dependent on" existing self-definitions imparts a neutrality to the sexologists' work that is doubtful given the highly subjective nature of much of their rhetoric: Halberstam's idea of a reciprocal communication between the sexologists and the subjects of their case studies as the basis for the theories that emerge depicts a more likely scenario.

Hamer's view that sexological theory had little to do with the experiences of "British lesbians" is ultimately as constrained as Faderman's argument that the sexologists invented a sexual identity for female same-sex relationships. The first view credits the sexologists with too little influence, the second view with too much, and both views tend to disregard the

¹³ See Jeffreys's The Lesbian Heresy: A Feminist Perspective on the Lesbian Revolution, especially Chapter 1, "The Creation of Sexual Difference" (1-19).

complex interplay between official and personal discourses in the history of subcultural groups and formation of public identities. Critical responses which simply attribute accounts of cross-gender identification to the sexologists also fall prey to a weakness of sexological practice itself in that they fail to address the range of experiences related. Furthermore, sweeping observations about sexological theory overlook subtle but important differences in the views and approaches of its various practitioners (and contradictions within the theories of individual sexologists).

Havelock Ellis, in particular, is keen to distance himself from some of the less scientific pronouncements of his contemporaries and, in this respect, his work is closer in character to Freud's psychoanalytic theories. In Sexual Inversion Ellis dismisses Ulrichs's explanation of inversion as the co-existence of "a male body . . . with a female soul" as little more than an aphoristic device, stating: "It merely crystallizes into an epigram the superficial impression of the matter" (310). In its place Ellis attempts to construct a more scientifically orientated theory, basing his speculations on a combination of "the latent organic bisexuality in each sex" and the "complex interaction of the glandular internal secretions" (316). Ellis rejects as "absurd" the idea that an "inverted sexual

instinct . . . is developed in early embryonic life", arguing that a "predisposition" to homosexuality forms "at an early stage of development" (317). This move towards a construction of homosexuality in which a homosexual propensity derives from a bisexuality common to all human subjects has clear affiliations with aspects of Freud's theories.¹⁴

On the basis of this model, Ellis argues against ideas that associate homosexual desires with the presence of physical signs of gender inversion. Ellis observes that although inverted women may "convey an impression of mannishness or boyishness, there are no invariable anatomical characteristics associated with this impression" (251). This position seems to be contradicted by Ellis's case studies, which devote a considerable amount of discussion to examples of unconventional physical sexual characteristics in inverted females. Describing a Miss M., Ellis notes: "with arms, palms up, extended in front of her with inner sides of hands touching, she cannot bring the inner sides of forearms together, as nearly every woman can, showing that the feminine angle of arm is lost" (229). At other points in his studies Ellis remarks

¹⁴ Although theories of bisexuality are popularly linked to Freud, it appears that Ellis is one of a number of sexologists writing at the time to employ this model as an explanation of inversion. Other writers on the subject, referenced in a footnote to Freud's "Three Essays on Sexuality", include: E. Gley who is thought to have introduced the theory in 1884, Krafft-Ebing, Wilhelm Fliess and Otto Weininger (54-55).

that inverted women frequently have a "masculine distribution of hair" (253) and a "certain tonicity of the muscles" (255).

Setting aside these apparent inconsistencies in theory and practice, Ellis's desire to distinguish between notions of sexual inversion and gender inversion results in the development of a theory of "aesthetic inversion" or "eonism" in his later work.¹⁵ In Eonism and Other Supplementary Studies (1928), the seventh volume of Studies in the Psychology of Sex, he defines the aesthetic invert according to two sub-types:

the most common kind, in which the inversion is mainly confined to the sphere of clothing and another, less common but more complete, in which cross-dressing is regarded with comparative indifference but the subject so identifies himself with those of his physical and psychic traits which recall the opposite sex that he feels really to belong to that sex (36)

The parallel with present day distinctions between transvestism and transsexuality is striking here.¹⁶

¹⁵ The term "eonism" derives from the case of the Chevalier d'Eon, a French diplomat who lived as a woman during his life in England in the eighteenth century. See Gary Kates's essay "D'Eon Returns to France: Gender and Power in 1777".

¹⁶ Dave King also notes this resemblance in "Gender Blending: medical perspectives and technology" (82).

Ellis's theory of aesthetic inversion has two important implications: first, it begins to dismantle the "wrong soul" model of homosexuality; second, it positions gender, rather than sexual desire, as the primary focus of study and thus begins to formulate non-erotic explanations for gender inversion.

Like Ellis, Sigmund Freud's writings and theories also challenge some of the prevailing notions of inversion. This aspect of Freud's work is important to my discussion both in terms of its historical contemporaneity and, more generally, its profound influence on Western discourses of sexuality and gender during the twentieth century. What follows does not represent the career-long developments in Freud's theorisations of sexuality, but instead highlights some of the important ways in which his ideas build on and distinguish themselves from other sexological theories of the period.

Freud's psychoanalytic theories of sexuality draw on published research of a range of sexologists. In a footnote to "The Sexual Aberrations", the first essay in Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality (1905), Freud references his sources as the "well-known writings" of sexologists including Krafft-Ebing and Havelock Ellis.¹⁷ A further note added in 1910 states:

¹⁷ Bristow observes that Krafft-Ebing was a colleague of Freud's at the University of Vienna (Sexuality 26).

"The data obtained from the psychoanalytic investigation of inverts are based upon material supplied to me by I. Sadger and upon my own findings" (45). On the subject of homosexuality, Freud's research leads him increasingly to challenge traditional explanations of inversion; in particular, he questions the popular view of inversion as a form of "psychical hermaphroditism". In "The Psychogenesis of a Case of Homosexuality in a Woman" (1920) he states:

The mystery of homosexuality is therefore by no means so simple as it is commonly depicted in popular expositions—"a feminine mind, bound therefore to love a man, but unhappily attached to a masculine body; a masculine mind, irresistibly attracted to women, but, alas! imprisoned in a feminine body". (398)

Freud's rhetoric displays, with apparently conscious irony, a hyperbole reminiscent of Krafft-Ebing's analogising of the female invert as "[t]he masculine soul, heaving in the female bosom" (399). The theories of homosexuality Freud presents in "The Sexual Aberrations" are derived from ideas of human bisexuality first suggested in the 1880s, and identify constitutional and social factors as related determining causes. Sexologists had tended to categorise inversion as either "innate" or "acquired". According to Freud's model, inversion is the product of

a "bisexual disposition" in combination with "disturbances that affect the sexual instinct in the course of its development" (55). On the matter of what form that "disposition" might take Freud, like Ellis, is undecided, but he rejects the notion that it is expressed physiologically. The visible signs of inversion, which are the object of such obsessive interest and rigorous investigation in many of the sexological case studies, are described as a common feature of human anatomy and quite independent of a person's sexual instincts (53). Freud finds that "a large proportion of male inverts retain the mental quality of masculinity" and "possess relatively few of the secondary characters of the opposite sex" (55). His comments about female inverts display less consistency, attributing "masculine characteristics, both physical and mental" to the "active inverts" (57). This divergence of views in part reflects the generally disproportionate attention given to the subject of female inversion. Both Krafft-Ebing and Ellis comment on the scarcity of recorded cases of female inversion, and Ellis cites men's general indifference to female homosexuality as one reason for the lack of investigation into this area (Sexual Inversion 203). Another obstacle to research was the widespread cultural view of women's essential passivity and

ignorance in sexual matters. In Sex, Politics and Society Jeffrey Weeks observes:

The prevailing definitions of female sexuality in terms of the "maternal instinct", or as necessarily responsive to the stimulation of the male, were overwhelming barriers in attempts to conceptualise the subject. (116)

Freud, in relation to his own remarks, acknowledges that further study into this area "might reveal greater variety" (57), but reference to his later work reveals an enduring association of female homosexuality with "masculinity".

Unlike the sexologists before him, Freud uses the terms "masculine" and "feminine" to represent different stages of an individual's sexual development, rather than biologically determined physical and mental attributes. When he describes the behaviour and attitude of a female as "masculine", he is referring to what he has theorised as the "active" pre-Oedipal stage of childhood development. Freud argues that the "masculinity complex" experienced by female infants in response to and denial of the experience of "female castration" is returned to in adulthood by the female homosexual. Freud's essay "Femininity" (1933) proposes two reasons for this "regression": the disappointments attributed to the father during the Oedipal phase; and

a "constitutional factor, a greater amount of activity, such as is ordinarily characteristic of a male" (164).¹⁸ In continuing to use terms which identify "activity" with maleness and masculinity, and in defining these qualities as an innate feature of female homosexuality, Freud's psychoanalytic theories fail to shrug off entirely sexological notions of gender inversion. They also demonstrate the continuing influence of late-Victorian views of active (sex) drives as "basically male in character, with the female conceived of as a passive instinct" (Weeks, Against Nature 23). In his theorising of female homosexuality Freud, like the sexologists before him, appears to be unable to break free from a conceptual framework in which an active female sexuality can only be construed in male terms. These cultural prejudices obfuscate further the already conceptually ambiguous figure of the female invert.

Sexological theories of inversion, especially those of Richard von Krafft-Ebing and Havelock Ellis, have a direct bearing on my discussion of Radclyffe Hall's The Well of Loneliness as will be clear in that chapter. Hall's interest in the figure of the "invert" is evident in her characterisation of Stephen Gordon, but she also depicts dissident sex and gender identities which do not rigidly adhere to theories of

¹⁸ This essay summarises and reworks ideas originally presented in "Some Psychical Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction Between the Sexes" (1925).

inversion. Although Brooks's representations of female masculinity co-exist with the sexological invert, her portraits do not represent a type of "masculine woman"; instead, through various adaptations of the style and pose of the "dandy", each subject's individual version of masculinity is disclosed and celebrated. Woolf's Orlando mocks the biological determinism of scientific and legal approaches to identity; at the same time, its representation of sex- and gender-crossings has interesting correspondences to some of the more radical theories of sexological discourse. For example, in Psychology of Sex (1933) Havelock Ellis observes:

We may not know exactly what sex is; but we do know that it is mutable, with the possibility of one sex being changed into the other sex, that its frontiers are often uncertain, and that there are many stages between a complete male and a complete female. (194)¹⁹

Orlando's transformations can also be viewed alongside some of the non-fictional "sex-change" narratives of the period which will be discussed here and in Chapter 3. Gertrude Stein studied under the psychologist William James at Harvard, and was familiar with Otto Weininger's account of sexual difference, Sex and

¹⁹ This quote provides one of the epigraphs for Gilbert and Gubar's Sexchanges.

Character (1903). There are no direct allusions to either man's work in The Making of Americans,²⁰ but there is something reminiscent of the sexologists' methods apparent in this book's purposeful attempt to organise human beings into an ever increasing litany of types and sub-types. There is an equally purposeful force at work in the text's grammatical and verbal eccentricities, which reveal such efforts to represent identity as absurd and futile.

The models of identity that these texts construct, with the exception of Stein's The Making of Americans, invoke experiences of gender and sexual difference that can be shown to exist in sexological case studies and first-person narratives of the period. The cross-dressing of Hall's and Woolf's novels and Brooks's portraits also reflect a cultural reality in the sartorial choices and, in some instances, unconventional self-fashionings of a highly visible section of middle- and upper-middle-class society.

Masculine fashions

Both Hall and, to a lesser extent, Brooks adopt masculine poses and styles; the model for Woolf's Orlando is another inveterate cross-dresser of the

²⁰ Lisa Ruddick's discussion of The Making of Americans argues that James's influence is displaced by themes and strategies more resonant of Freudian thinking (92-104).

period, the aristocrat and writer Vita Sackville-West. In the 1920s public expressions of female masculinity became a far more common and generally more tolerated cultural phenomenon. As photographs and cartoon images from the period demonstrate, the wearing of mannish attire by women after the First World War was something of a fashion statement amongst young, financially secure women. During the war women from a variety of social backgrounds were working in jobs which required practical clothing such as breeches and uniforms; the close-cropped hairstyles and tailored clothing of 1920s fashions, although more class-specific, might be viewed as products of this enforced relaxation of sartorial codes. They also represent a visible break with the oppressive strictures of nineteenth-century female dress. The following passage from Woolf's Orlando constructs the crinoline as a symbol of the physically and emotionally debilitating effects of the Victorian period on women:

So she stood mournfully at the drawing-room window . . . dragged down by the weight of the crinoline which she had submissively adopted. It was heavier and more drab than any dress she had yet worn. None had ever so impeded her movement. No longer could she stride through the garden with her dogs or run lightly to the high mound and fling

herself beneath the oak tree. Her skirts
collected damp leaves and straw. (233-34)

In 1928, when Orlando's story ends and the book is published, we are told that she changes from her skirt into "a pair of whipcord breeches and leather jacket" (301); she smokes and drinks, runs up and down stairs, strides along corridors, and is a published and recently acclaimed writer.

Laura Doan's comprehensive account of female masculinities in the 1920s provides evidence of considerable public interest in the boyish woman. Doan includes a number of cartoons from editions of *Punch* in 1927 and 1928 which display the cultural markers of the "Boyette": the long, slim body shape, cropped hair, cigarette, tailored clothes, and monocle. In the cartoons Doan discusses any suggestion of sexual transgression is dispelled by captions which intimate the masculine woman's underlying femininity and heterosexuality. This contrasts sharply with the sexological figure of the "invert" whose masculine appearance is generally taken to be a visible sign of her deviant sexual desires.

Doan's essay also quotes extracts from a Daily Mail report from 1927 which include the following benevolent observations:

The Boyette not only crops her hair close like a boy but she dresses in every way as a

boy In age she appears to be in the last years of flapperdom and her ambition is to look as much like a boy as possible; but little feminine mannerisms disclose her sex and show her . . . amusing herself by masquerade that is harmless enough, though some people may disapprove of it as ultra-tomboyish. . . . A point of interest to the eugenists is that the Boyette has a finer physique than the average boy of her age. One thing that betrays her is that she cannot manage her cigarette like a boy. (qtd. in Doan 673)

The condescending, avuncular tones of the writer's comments neutralise any threat that these masculine women pose to social and sexual norms. Cross-dressing is presented here as an innocent diversion practised, not entirely successfully, by young healthy women unable to conceal their "feminine" identities from the (male) observer.

Setting aside the cultural policing apparent in this report, there is a clear distinction to be made between its representation of the "dressing-up games" of the "Boyette" and the studied masculine image and demeanour of Radclyffe Hall, who was by then in her late forties. Undoubtedly, the fashions of the time provided a degree of camouflage for aristocratic women

like Hall, for whom masculinity was, more than just an accessory or pose, a way of life. In the public arena these more extreme displays of female masculinity might cause heads to turn. Doan describes the dissonant effects produced by the English painter Gluck's masculine appearance, explaining that: "Gluck took exceptional offense that some of the double takes she received on the street came from so-called Modern girls" (690). Yet these women were still being viewed in some quarters of the press as ultra-modern even after The Well of Loneliness became the target of James Douglas's poisonous attacks in the Sunday Express. A report from the Newcastle Daily Journal and North Star of August 1928 praises Hall's masculine style of dress and hairstyle and pronounces them to be the essence of "high-brow modernism" (quoted in Doan 57). As this comment appears a few days after the infamous Sunday Express attack on Hall's novel which includes a photograph of Hall in particularly masculine attire,²¹ it can be assumed that the public association of "mannish" women with "deviant" sexuality took some time to filter through to all sections of society.

The practice of adopting masculine signs as a code for same-sex desire in subcultural circles of the period has been well-documented by cultural critics.

²¹ Douglas's report includes the frequently quoted comment: "I would rather give a healthy boy or a healthy girl a phial of prussic acid than this novel" (qtd. in Souhami, The Trials 178).

The possibility that this self-fashioning might be a sign of a gender identification as much as an erotic one has been a neglected area of discussion, and this is a matter of central concern in my first two chapters.

A quite different source of insight to some of the ways in which gender changes were being thought about and represented at the time is provided by the early-twentieth-century journal Urania.

Urania

Emily Hamer gives a useful account of Urania's history in Britannia's Glory: A History of Twentieth-Century Lesbians (67-73).²² The publication was founded in 1915 by Thomas Baty, a London lawyer, who joined forces with Esther Roper and Eva Gore-Booth, both key figures in trade union, suffrage and internationalist pacifist movements. According to the listing for Baty in Who's Who 1951-1960, the entry for recreational interests includes the comment: "extreme feminist, would abolish all sex distinctions" (qtd. in Hamer 67). Prior to launching Urania, he had been involved in the Aëthenic Union, a group working for the elimination of gender distinctions. Baty failed to get any public support for

²² Although I draw on Hamer's book for my discussion of the history of Urania, I researched a sample of editions from 1919-1940 held at the British Library of Political and Economic Science at the London School of Economic and Political Science.

the group despite letters to Millicent Fawcett, a leading member of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS), and The Freewoman, a feminist journal. The Aëthenic Union lasted only a few months, but Baty was to have more success with his next venture. Urania was published and privately distributed six times a year until 1920, and then three times a year until its final edition in 1940.

Urania's political and philosophical aims appear on the first page of each issue in the following form:

TO OUR FRIENDS

Urania denotes the company of those who are firmly determined to ignore the dual organisation of humanity in all its manifestations.

They are convinced that this duality has resulted in the formation of two warped and imperfect types. They are further convinced that in order to get rid of this state of things no measures of "emancipation" or "equality" will suffice, which do not begin by a complete refusal to recognise or tolerate the duality itself.

If the world is to see sweetness and independence combined in the same individual, *all* recognition of that duality must be given up. For it inevitably brings in its train the

suggestion of the conventional distortions of character which are based on it.

There are no "men" or "women" in Urania. The views expressed here are extreme for the time but fairly straightforward: the binary concepts around which identity is organised (sex and gender) are artificial and antipathetic to individual human experience. By denying the duality of sexed and gendered difference this statement also, inferentially, challenges the normative status of heterosexuality. As Hamer extrapolates: "when women and men became people and escaped the limits of gender, heterosexual relationships would no longer be prioritized over same-sex relationships" (69). Despite the unequivocal nature of Urania's political and philosophical aims, a close study of the publication's contents reveals accounts of sex- and gender-crossings which appear to uphold rather than oppose binary concepts of identity.

Each edition of Urania includes a number of media reports from both national and international sources which detail instances of gender-crossings and sex changes from across the globe.²³ Many of the stories record deliberate acts of masquerade undertaken for

²³ In the editions I researched there tended to be a higher incidence of reports from south-east Asian sources. This has certain resonances in terms of present-day cultural associations of male transvestism and "sex-change" surgery with countries such as Singapore and Thailand. It could also reflect the Western "Orientalist" fantasy of the East as a place of liminality and transgression.

pragmatic reasons. The Spring edition of 1921 includes a report from the Daily Chronicle with the tabloid-style headline: "Girl who became 'boy'". The subject of the report, a fourteen-year-old girl, tells the newspaper that she had run away from home and adopted male attire "in order to be able to earn my living" (25 and 26, January-April 1921, 4). An article from the Japan Advertiser, headlined "Tokio Men Waitresses", reports on a "curious fad" amongst Japanese men for passing as women in order to get employment as waitresses. The writer explains that job shortages have forced these men "to assume the role of women for their daily bread" (73 and 74, January-April 1929, 4).

Various scientific reports describe instances of sex changes amongst species ranging from oysters to guinea pigs. Such reports are the inspiration for a rare editorial intervention in a 1921 edition of Urania. Under the heading "Science Confirms Intuition", the writers present the following observations:

Some seven years ago Eva Gore-Booth formulated a concise statement which we have adopted ever since as the neatest and clearest expression of our views. It declared that sex was an accident and formed no essential part of an individual's nature.

And now comes science with the most astonishing proofs, calculated to convince the most sceptical of its truth.

Dr. Tocqueville's saying that the British Parliament "can do everything except make a man a woman or a woman a man" may at no distant date require revision by the omission of the exception. (29 and 30, September-December 1921, 1)

In light of evidence of "metamorphosis" within "the ranks of far higher organisms" (the article refers to guinea pigs), the writers claim: "the impossible barrier has dropped". The editorial concludes: "Poets and thinkers have realized instinctively that 'sex is no essential distinction'", and expresses the hope that "the so-called 'practical people'" can set aside their preconceived notions about sex (1). In an edition of Urania from 1924, a lecture by a Dr. F. A. E. Crew to the Toyal Institution on "the laws of sex" recounts various "sex-transformations" amongst animal species, and expresses the categorical view that:

There are human intersexes which are neither male nor female, but definitely intermediate, and it is a mistake to label them as either male or female, for they belong to a third sexual category. (47 and 48, September-December 1924, 7)

Although it is impossible to ascertain the validity of many of the sources on which such comments are based, the comments themselves are evidence of a growing interest in the possibility of sex and gender changes. Editions from the mid-1930s onwards begin to include reports of male and female subjects who have changed their sex either by some form of, often unspecified, surgical procedure or, in a number of instances, what would appear to be an intervention of a more miraculous kind.²⁴ A newspaper report in the Spring edition of 1934 under the headline "Another Case of Sex Change" describes a Margaret Hutchison who entered a medical institution in Scotland after becoming ill. The report states: "There, an amazing sex change took place, resulting in the patient being discharged with all the characteristics of a male" (103 and 104, January-April 1934, 6).

Alison Oram's examination of Urania as a radical sexual discourse views such stories as evidence of the journal's "refusal of the essentialist construction of the body itself". Oram concludes: "The sexed body was no more stable than the social category of gender" (215). Although Oram does not refer to Judith Butler in

²⁴ Other sources from this period include a 1931 article by Dr. Felix Abraham, giving a detailed account of the genital surgery carried out on two "transvesite men" in Germany with photographs illustrating the main stages of the surgical construction of a vagina, and Man Into Woman, edited by Niels Hoyer, the partly autobiographical account of Lili Elbe's reassignment surgery in 1933, which included castration and the implantation of ovaries.

her essay, her comments echo Butler's constructionist account of the sexed body itself as a cultural sign in Gender Trouble. Butler argues:

gender is not to culture as sex is to nature;
gender is also the discursive/cultural means
by which "sexed nature" or "a natural sex" is
produced and established as "prediscursive,"
prior to culture, a politically neutral
surface *on which* culture acts. (7)

Oram's argument that Urania foregrounds "the liminality of gender, sexuality and the body" is underpinned by a view of transgender as deliteralising. What this reading tends to gloss over is the obvious dependence on more material, binary concepts of identity in many of the accounts of sex and gender changes.

The range of stories represented in the pages of Urania suggests that the interest in transformations of identity is not confined purely to scientists and doctors, but is in fact part of a more pervasive consciousness which is taking shape through a range of written sources. Of particular interest to my study are examples from three editions of Urania in 1929 which concern fictional and non-fictional accounts of female masculinity.

In an original review of The Well of Loneliness in the Summer edition of 1929, Radclyffe Hall is upbraided for her depiction of female same-sex desire in terms of

a masculine/feminine binary. Although the reviewer's identity is unstated, it would seem that the views expressed are those of the editors:

There is no attraction for anybody in mannishness or effeminacy. It was a gratuitous concession to popular foolishness on Radclyffe Hall's part to make her heroine a little mannish. (75 and 76, May-Aug 1929, 1)

This unequivocal censure of transgressions which uphold gender distinctions is to be expected in a publication committed to the elimination of those differences (a point Hamer also observes). What is less easy to explain is the review's concluding remark: "We think Sapphism contemptible: but we find 'The Well of Loneliness' a triumph of art and delicacy" (1). Hamer suggests that the writers may be using the term "Sapphism" ironically here to evoke a specific notion of lesbianism (72). There is little evidence of ironic tendencies in the writing style, but any other explanation is hard to accommodate within a reading that insists on the publication's promotion of same-sex desire. Hamer's argument that the writers may be mindful of the public prosecution of Hall's novel for obscenity seems similarly constrained given that Urania was only ever privately distributed.

What is perhaps more surprising is that so many of the reports of sex- and gender-crossings in Urania describe individuals who display either "mannishness" or "effeminacy". With regard to the review of Hall's novel, a particularly pertinent example is that of Captain Barker whose story appears in the Spring edition of 1929 (73 and 74, January-April). Doan's essay on female masculinities includes a discussion of Barker's perjury trial in March 1929. She cites a comment by Radclyffe Hall, quoted from correspondence from Hall to her literary agent, which condemns Barker as a "mad pervert of the most undesirable type" (663). Given Hall's range of prejudices, it is hard to know whether this comment derives from homophobia, transphobia or an inflated sense of moral superiority. The difference of emphasis between Hall and Barker is important; although Hall adopts a masculine image she does not try to pass as a man (and neither does her fictional creation, Stephen Gordon). Barker has crossed over the invisible boundary and it is that transgression which may well be a primary cause of Hall's censure.

In Urania a report from New York World describes a "lady who for six years posed successfully as 'Captain' or 'Colonel' or 'Sir Victor Barker'" (73 and 74, January-April 1929, 4). A brief editorial comment remarks: "some episodes of her earlier life indicate

the masculine role was not a disagreeable one" (4). In its suggestion of a degree of transgender agency this observation sets the story apart from the more objectifying accounts of cross-dressing waitresses and sex-changing oysters. Other aspects of the article contribute to this effect. At a particular point in the account of Barker's life the writer starts to use the male pronoun unambiguously. In the following extract, which discusses events following the discovery of Barker's "secret", the continued use of the male pronoun has additional resonances:

After his exposure, many people found they had been suspicious of him all the time. But though no man may be a hero to his valet, less subtle impositions are possible, for B. Wrigley, Captain Barker's valet, never suspected that his master was not a man. (6)

Despite the degree of flippancy here, this apparent acceptance of Barker's chosen gender expression has an affirmative quality which present-day media reports often lack. With respect to its opening statement, the claim by non-transgender subjects to be able to "read" a transgender person's anomalous identity is a familiar narrative; or as Stephen Whittle in his discussion of "gender fucking" puts it: "once we know—won't we always know, and always have known" (212). In conflict with this general consensus, the anecdote about the valet

suggests that Barker was able to pass successfully as a man in the most private dimensions of his life, as well as publicly. This view is further endorsed by a quoted comment from Barker's wife: "'I never for one moment imagined that my husband was anything but the person he always appeared to be'" (5). Such protestations are recognised as familiar stock responses to the exposure of such "illicit" and "perverse" relationships and as such are often greeted with a degree of cynicism. What might be ascertained from the privileging of this first-person narrative and the article as a whole is a collective willingness to sustain a narrative of gender experience at odds with dominant narratives of identity.

In the edition of Urania which follows The Well of Loneliness review, four reports of stories similar to that of Colonel Barker's are reproduced. The case of Peter Stratford refers to "packets of letters, a marriage certificate and other papers" which "revealed the determination of a woman, apparently possessed of all the mental attributes of the opposite sex, to become a man" (77 and 78, September-December 1929, 9). William Sidney Holton is described as "the third 'man-woman' discovered in England within a few weeks" (10). In this instance the reporter adopts the standard practice of many present-day journalists, placing inverted commas around the male pronoun and the word

"husband". But as in the case of Colonel Barker, Holton's ability to pass successfully as a man during his life is unquestioned, both by the people who knew him most personally and the writer of the report. Holton's wife claims never to have suspected her husband to have been anything but the father of her children, and "intimate friends" assert that he "had never given them any reason to doubt that he was a strong hardworking man" (9). The report states that it was only on admission to hospital for enteric fever that Holton's female sex was discovered.

A common feature of narratives of passing men and women is the disclosure of the person's "true identity" by a doctor or surgeon, either during illness or on the person's death. Accounts of the Chevalier d'Eon's life as a woman in eighteenth-century England describe the attending physician's report after death as final and conclusive proof of the Chevalier's "male" identity. More recently, the autopsy report in 1989 on the American jazz musician Billy Tipton, who had lived as a man for over fifty years, records the "fact" of Tipton's female identity.²⁵ The continuing reliance on anatomical evidence in the process of attributing identity at birth and death, regardless of lived experience, is perhaps the last and most obdurate

²⁵ See Diane Wood Middlebrook's biography for a detailed account of private and public responses to the revelation of Tipton's "true" identity.

barrier to transgender subjectivity. The primacy of biological determinism in matters of identity and its relationship to cultural influences and essentialising notions of the "self" are important issues in my discussion of Virginia Woolf's Orlando.

It is difficult to know how stories like that of Colonel Barker might be viewed by the journal's editors, although their inclusion implies a degree of endorsement. And although it might be argued that such gender-crossings reinstate gender duality rather than transcend it, stories of females who successfully pass as men in all areas of their lives might be used to illustrate the extent to which masculinity and femininity are roles which anyone can adopt regardless of their sexed bodies.

Although Hamer's discussion of the contents of Urania refers to articles on "cross-dressing, life-long transvestism, passing women, hermaphrodites, transsexualism" (70), she does not dwell on this aspect of the publication. Given that Hamer's book focuses on lesbian history, her interest is clearly in the journal's significance in terms of its lesbian associations; she claims that Urania is "[o]ne of the clearest cases of lesbian and gay unity in the early part of the century" (67). Her account of Thomas Baty, the journal's founder, includes a discussion of his possible authorship of a lesbian novel, Beatrice the

Sixteenth (1909), under the pseudonym "Irene Clyde". Hamer speculates on whether Baty "was acting as an intermediary for a lesbian, perhaps Esther Roper", and concludes that regardless of whether he was the author of the novel "he certainly had an intimate relationship with 'Miss Clyde' and her work, and agreed with her views on gender, feminism, sexuality and vegetarianism" (68). Alison Oram draws on the work of Daphne Patai and Angela Ingram to represent Baty's relationship to "Irene Clyde" in a significantly different light. Oram argues that Baty is "living out his transgendered persona in print" through the pseudonym, which also allows him to develop "his gender theories at length in his fiction and non-fiction . . . as well as in Urania" (216). Oram cites a review by "Irene Clyde" of Winifred Holtby's Women, which appears in the Spring 1935 edition of the journal. The review refers to the "emancipated exhilaration" of discarding "the idea of sex", and asserts the view: "We have only to refuse to wear the shackles of sex" (109 and 110, January-April 1935 qtd. in Oram 218). Patai and Ingram's discussion of Beatrice the Sixteenth describes the novel's feminist vision and its use of gender-neutral language: "From beginning to end, the narrator eschews gendered nouns and the generic 'he' and instead refers to characters as 'figure,' 'person,' and 'personage'" (266). As I will show in my conclusion, this reading of

the text presents it as more radical and consistent in its treatment of gender than it actually proves to be. Nevertheless, the revelation that "Irene Clyde" and Thomas Baty are the same person offers an intriguing insight into one of the guiding forces behind Urania, and suggests more complex influences at work than Hamer's focus would allow.

On the matter of the relationship between Eva Gore-Booth and Esther Roper, Hamer asserts: "their [lesbian] sexuality could not be clearer" (73). Of the publication itself, she observes that the term "Uranian" was "widely known to be a synonym for homosexuality by the early years of the twentieth century" (72). Although Hamer's comments have a certain authority, her argument does not address the cultural and historical distinctiveness of that early-twentieth-century concept of homosexuality. The term "Uranian", which Hamer accepts to have been in common usage by the beginning of the twentieth century, had been part of a sexological vocabulary, as my earlier discussion has shown. Sexological discourses of the period have clear implications for an understanding of Urania's significance and, more specifically, for a reading of what is an important, if at times rather incredible, perspective of sex and gender changes from the period.

It would be wrong to over-emphasise the public impact of Urania, but its influence as a private

publication should not be underestimated. Displaying a wry self-referentiality, the back page of one issue includes the comment:

The statement . . . that the periodical is '*published for private circulation*' seems to the Editor to be self-contradictory, as when a thing is made public it evidently ceases to be private. It would be interesting to have counsel's opinion on the point: but it is cheaper and easier to admit that the privacy is public. (89 and 90, September-December 1931, n.p.)

It is a shame, although hardly surprising, that no mailing list exists. Oram's essay states that the journal was "sent free to anyone expressing an interest in its ideals", and "claimed a circulation of between 200 and 250 throughout its period of publication" (216). Because of Urania's radical aims, the transgressive nature of its content and the public prominence of the figures involved in its founding and circulation, it could be assumed to have had some subscribers within avant-garde literary and social circles. The existence of such publications raises an important question as to how non-fictional transgender narratives might have influenced contemporaneous fictional representations. Urania itself also

constitutes an invaluable resource for transgender historical archives.

The interdisciplinary nature of my thesis is evident from the range of materials introduced so far and the combination of methodological approaches adopted here and throughout the thesis as a whole. Historical and cultural surveys and archival research provide a frame of reference for the close textual readings that are a major focus of each of my four chapters.

Transgender readings

The first two chapters focus on representations of masculine women. Chapter 1 examines Stephen Gordon, the protagonist of Radclyffe Hall's The Well of Loneliness, in light of her sexological archetype the female invert. Through analysis of sexological discourse, and particular attention to case studies of female inversion, I interrogate the construction of homosexuality which informs Hall's characterisation and which continues to influence lesbian/feminist critical responses. I revisit aspects of Stephen's character usually read as signs of a lesbian sexuality and foreground the transgender elements of that representation. My reading considers aspects of the character's gendered embodiment in a queer context and

is especially concerned with notions of gender performance and drag. I also examine Stephen's "difference" in the context of the novel's representation of multiple models of female inversion. In proposing another way in which the masculinity of Hall's character might be read, I contribute to an emerging body of scholarship that addresses the complexities of the historical model of sexuality upon which the novel draws.

Chapter 2 considers the masculine poses and styles of Romaine Brooks's portraits of cross-dressed women. It compares the 1920s female masculinities of Brooks's portraits with the 1990s transsexual masculinities of Loren Cameron's photographic self-portraits and proposes certain visual and cultural affiliations between those representations. Through close analysis of these works I identify shared tensions in their reworking of traditional genres and poses, use of visual dissonances, and organisation of space and gaze. In particular, my reading draws parallels between Brooks's image of the dandy and Cameron's adoption of the look and poses of the bodybuilder. Whilst mindful of the cultural and historical specificities of these figures, I highlight a shared theatricality, an emphasis on show and surface and a certain "drag" quality to that performance. Such areas of correspondence are presented as evidence of the extent

to which the body, rather than clothing, has become the site of difference in images of transgender masculinity during the twentieth century. My consideration of Brooks's and Cameron's work aims to highlight the changes in artistic and scientific technologies that have contributed to those changes in transgender visual representations. It questions how the contradictions and tensions generated by those visual representations might be seen to underpin the formation of other masculinities, and asks to what extent constructions of transgender masculinities as "real" can be said to enact a revisioning of conventional concepts of "maleness" and "manliness".

In Chapter 3 my discussion turns to Virginia Woolf's Orlando, a text in which the sexed body and gender of the title character undergo magical, protean changes. My reading of Woolf's novel centres on the biographical and fantastical aspects of its representation of narratives of identity. The opening section highlights aspects of Woolf's life drawing on biographical material, including diaries and letters, which suggest that her writing constitutes a form of unconventional self-fashioning. That proposed relationship between story-telling and the processes of re-invention is then considered in my analysis of Woolf's mock biography, Orlando, and a range of twentieth-century transgender autobiographies. My

interest lies in the particular tensions and ambiguities between public and private identity narratives which these texts display. Although clear differences of tone and style are made evident in my discussion, I identify a common concern to represent a particular experience of identity that disputes dominant concepts of biological sex and gender. Shared effects of this representation include a revisioning of biographical truth which privileges the realities of the "inner life" over official models of identity. A section on the relationship between textual evidence and photographs in life-writing compares the relative authenticity of these biographical devices in Orlando and the transsexual autobiography, The Renée Richards Story: Second Serve. My reading of Orlando identifies specific ways in which Woolf's text challenges conventions of genre and gender; the reading also demonstrates that transgender autobiographies frequently evince similar effects. I argue that Woolf's representation of a range of sex- and gender-crossings evokes a relationship between fantasy, life-writing and identity construction which is central to transgender narratives from the second half of the twentieth century.

My final chapter shifts the critical focus more radically from representations of variant gender identities to the issue of representation itself. My

reading of Gertrude Stein's The Making of Americans as a "poetics of difference" moves the site of confrontation from the material body to materiality of language. In doing so, my discussion of the performative qualities of Stein's text addresses a question that has ideological and practical implications for the whole thesis: that is, to what extent can a text be said to be challenging binary models of identity when it relies upon those conventions for its meaning? My analysis of Stein's text examines the extent to which its formal eccentricities—the monotonous textual rhythms and absurd verbal patterns—might evoke a culturally alternative subject position: one which has a material rather than linguistic reality and which might therefore transcend the foundational binaries of conventional models of identity. My discussion focuses on aspects of the text's anti-narrative techniques and includes a consideration of its resistance to principles of origin and closure, its punning, and its highly self-referential narrative voice. The effects of these unorthodox writing strategies are considered alongside the text's more conventional representations of identity to examine the destabilising potential of that juxtaposition. A narrative preoccupation with notions of "sameness" and "difference" is one of a number of themes which is considered in this frame.

Another important area of my analysis looks at the narrator's disintegrating subject position in the context of queer notions of identity as derivative and illusory. The revisionary potential implied by this reading is offset by a consideration of the semantic problems of such innovative writing practices, including a section on the troubled publishing history of The Making of Americans and Stein's works more generally.

The ordering of my chapters does not present the works according to production or publication dates. In particular, my decision to place Stein's text at the end of my thesis privileges the coherence of my argument over the more pragmatic issues of chronology. Hence, the thesis looks first at differing representations of sex and gender changes that both challenge and, with varying degrees of ambiguity, continue to uphold binary models of identity, and concludes with a work which to some extent critiques that paradoxical effect through a self-conscious dismantling of its own and (by inference) other texts' linguistic processes.

CHAPTER 1

"The masculine soul heaving in the female bosom":

Theories of inversion and The Well of Loneliness

Ever since I can remember anything at all I could never think of myself as a girl and I was in perpetual trouble, with this as the real reason. When I was 5 or 6 years old I began to say to myself that, whatever anyone said, if I was not a boy at any rate I was not a girl. This has been my unchanged conviction all through my life.

—Miss D. of History XXXIX in Havelock Ellis's Sexual Inversion (235)

All my life I've never felt like a woman, and you know it I don't know what I am; no one's ever told me that I'm different and yet I know that I'm different

—Stephen Gordon in Radclyffe Hall's The Well of Loneliness (204)

If the sexologists put the "mannish woman" into sexual discourse, Radclyffe Hall gives her what is probably her most famous, and certainly most controversial, literary

representation. Hall's The Well of Loneliness (1928) takes this paradoxical figure out of the relative obscurity of the medico-scientific textbooks, and inscribes her in the popular imagination in a manner which far outreaches the influences of the sexological theorists. The publicity the novel received from its successful prosecution by the British authorities as an obscene publication in 1928 has clearly been instrumental in the popularisation and, for some lesbian readers, the iconisation of Hall's masculine female protagonist, Stephen Gordon.

Until recently, most interpretations of the novel have focused on the sexual identity of the character, which has been read as lesbian, whilst her masculine identification has been understood as a physical sign of that sexuality. As such, Stephen Gordon has been cast as the "classic Mannish Lesbian" (Smith-Rosenberg 290). It is understandable that publicly circulated "lesbian responses" to the text tend not to foreground the confusion and disturbance that surrounds Stephen's gender. In constructing The Well as *the* lesbian novel and claiming its protagonist as lesbianism's prime fictional icon, it was politically expedient that her masculinity should be side-lined. This is not to suggest that the transgender aspects of Stephen's character have not been focused on by readers of the novel, but points rather to the way in which critical readings have chosen

to present her. Esther Newton's influential and much cited essay "The Mythic Mannish Lesbian: Radclyffe Hall and the New Woman" interprets Stephen's masculine gender as symbolic, but also considers its literal significance as a form of gender dysphoria. She explains: "Hall and the sexologists were describing something real. Some people, then and now, experience 'gender dysphoria,' a strong feeling that one's assigned gender as a man or a woman does not agree with one's sense of self" (292). In an endnote, Newton disassociates her own use of the term "gender dysphoria" from any connection with "transsexualism", and argues that Stephen's "acceptance of homosexual identity" clearly distinguishes her experience from that of a transsexual man (540).

The question of the political correctness of butch identities has been troubling lesbian feminists for three decades now, and the link between masculinity and lesbianism that Hall apparently endorses and makes public through her creation of Stephen Gordon has fuelled lively and frequently bitterly divided opinion. Some critics have condemned Hall's characterisation for generating butch/femme stereotypes. Lillian Faderman, in Surpassing the Love of Men, describes Hall's use of sexology as perpetuating "congenitalists' theories" of lesbianism, and thus promoting a heterosexual model of same-sex desire. Faderman observes: "if some lesbian relationships were based on such patterns it was because

women were emulating the only examples of domestic situations available to them in a patriarchal culture" (323). Sheila Jeffreys represents The Well in terms of its failure "to provide the next generation with a 'sexual vocabulary'" (The Lesbian Heresy 9). Jeffreys dismisses Newton's belief in the "essential and inevitable quality of lesbian 'masculinity'" as a complete antithesis of the social constructionism of contemporary lesbian feminist theory (13).

Other critics have read Stephen Gordon's masculine identity as central to the novel's political design. Sonia Ruehl is one of a number of critics who discuss The Well in terms of its effects as a "reverse discourse". Drawing on Foucault's constructionist account of sexual identity, Ruehl states: "Hall's intervention can be seen as a step in the process whereby women have firstly been able to group under a publicly available 'lesbian' label and later gone on to demand the right to define that category themselves" (18). Jean Radford also uses Foucault to argue that Hall's novel "adopts terms like 'inversion' transformatively in order 'to demand legitimacy'" (106).¹ Foucault's theory of a counter discourse has been questioned by Judith Butler in her essay "Imitation and Gender Insubordination". Butler expresses scepticism concerning the extent to which lesbians share a

¹ See also Jonathan Dollimore's discussion of The Well in Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault (48-52).

"discursive site" with gay men, and compares the explicit prohibition of male homosexuality with the tacit outlawing of lesbianism. She concludes: "to be implicitly proscribed is not even to qualify as an object of prohibition" (20). The Well might be viewed as an interesting exception to Butler's otherwise persuasive argument, in that its representation of Stephen Gordon and her relationships with other women was explicitly and very publicly prohibited when the novel was censored.

However Hall's fictionalisation of the female invert is viewed, it has made an important contribution to the establishment of a lesbian literary heritage and influenced the development of a visible political identity. This incorporation of Stephen Gordon into a history of lesbian identity politics makes other readings of the character difficult and politically sensitive. Now, with queer theory's re-imagining of butch and femme identities as potentially destabilising enactments of gender performativity (Butler, Gender Trouble 122-24), an interpretation of Stephen Gordon which shifts the focus of critical interest from the character's sexual desire to her gender performance is timely. Furthermore, recent interrogations of the sexological model of inversion which inspire and inform

¹ See also Jonathan Dollimore's discussion of The Well in Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault (48-52).

Hall's characterisation of Stephen Gordon not only authorise, but irresistibly solicit a transgender reading of the text.

Revisionist readings of The Well which adopt similar approaches to my own are conducted by Jay Prosser in Second Skins: The Body Narratives of Transsexuality (1998) and Judith Halberstam in Female Masculinity (1998). Prosser's discussion of inversion case histories constructs sexology as a medium which enabled the "transgendered subject" to move "through narrative-toward transsexuality" (139). When read in this light, Prosser argues, Hall's novel assumes a foundational importance to the materialisation of transsexual subject positions:

Read in situ, as a fictional consequence of inversion's case histories, The Well comes into focus as not only not a lesbian novel, not only our first and most canonical transsexual novel, but a narrative that itself contributed to the formalization of transsexual subjectivity. (140)

The Well's critical reputation as a problematic and contentious lesbian narrative is offered as further justification for this unequivocal recasting of The Well as a transsexual novel. Prosser explains: "we can see that our dogged attempts to read it as lesbian in spite of its narrative have been a case of trying to

fit a square peg into a round hole" (168). He concludes that it is the novel's very irreconcilability as a lesbian text which facilitates its recuperation to a transsexual canon: "for it is those narratives that don't quite fit, which exceed or resist their location that (perhaps like transsexuals themselves) might find belonging in a transsexual context" (168).

My own interest in re-opening discussion about Hall's masculine protagonist derives from a personal and critical dissatisfaction with conventional interpretations. There is something about representations of Stephen Gordon as "mannish lesbian" which does not feel complete; certain ambiguities which surround Hall's representation of her protagonist's experience of difference invite further speculation as to the real source of Stephen's melancholy. Prosser cites an essay by Gayle Rubin, in which Rubin explores the shared origins of homosexual and transsexual narratives, to argue that: "the writing of transsexual history will surely depend upon performing retroactive readings of figures and texts that have been central to the lesbian and gay canon" (167). It is perhaps because of those overlapping histories that I find the terms of Prosser's otherwise intellectually astute argument a little too emphatic.

Judith Halberstam's reading of sexological case studies stresses the differences between the narratives

of female inverts. She argues that quite distinct expressions of sexual preference and gender variance have been flattened out by their medical categorisation and, consequently, overlooked by many critics. Four cases taken from Havelock Ellis's work are examined for their "remarkable range of sexual expressions and female masculinities" (80). A similar diversity is identified in other masculine and passing women of the period, including Radclyffe Hall and Colonel Barker. Halberstam, like Prosser, recognises the common desires and identifications of some inverts and some transsexuals and makes a direct link between "the invention of transsexuality" and the "separating out of gender inversion and same-sex desire" (86). At the same time, she aims to sustain the historical distinctiveness of those categories. In this respect, Halberstam rejects the labels of lesbian or pretranssexual for those inverts who passed and lived as men, describing them instead as "women who wanted to be men before the possibility of sex change existed" (87). Halberstam stresses the need to understand such self-identifications "not as simply transsexual but at least as the beginning of the emergence of a transsexual identity" (95). Her tentative use of historically specific vocabulary, coupled with a sensitivity to the complexities of identity formation, appears to resist the more singular focus of Prosser's

project. In the context of a later discussion in Female Masculinity, Halberstam asserts: "There is not . . . one history to be told here (the history of medical technology) about one subject (the transsexual)" (161).

Although Halberstam and Prosser apply different terms in their readings of Stephen Gordon, however, their arguments derive from similar interpretations of the sexological invert. My examination of the links between Radclyffe Hall's novel and some of the sexological case studies and theories of the time has clear areas of overlap with Prosser's and Halberstam's work, both in terms of material and argument. In the next section I identify ways in which The Well makes visible its sources, and demonstrate why readings of Stephen Gordon must revisit the figure of the "invert" in order to address the contradictions and anomalies which undermine the character's usual designation as "mannish lesbian".

Deconstructing Stephen

A detailed explanation of the sexological model of inversion is provided in my Introduction. Here, I will focus on specific case studies of female inverts and explore the relationship between Hall's novel and sexology.

To recap briefly, one of the main figures to emerge from the theorising of sexologists such as Richard von Krafft-Ebing and Havelock Ellis at the end of the nineteenth century is the invert. Theories of sexual and gender inversion underpin the medical category of homosexuality that evolved out of the classification and ordering of so-called perverse behaviours. The term "invert" reflects the belief that same-sex desire is in fact an inversion of the sexual instincts, since the "natural" direction of sexual attraction within a heterosexual paradigm can only ever be towards a person of the "opposite sex". As gender role and behaviour were deemed to be the natural consequence of sex, if an individual's sexual instincts belong to the opposite sex then, it was reasoned, so must her or his gender attributes. Hence, if a woman is attracted to another woman not only is she conceptualised as male in terms of her sexuality, but she is also constructed as having a masculine gender and, frequently, male secondary sexual characteristics. Krafft-Ebing's representation of the female invert as "The masculine soul, heaving in the female bosom" (399) provides a vibrant metaphor for this congenital identity.

In considering sexological case studies it is, of course, important to be aware of the mediating role of the author of the reports. It is frequently difficult to distinguish between the reported voice of the

subject of the study and the interpreting voice of the sexologist. Even where extracts of dialogue, either written or spoken, are included it is clear that care still needs to be exercised as much can be lost or gained in translation. Having said that, many of the case studies, particularly those including extracts of first-person narratives, seem to suggest that there were women and men for whom this "natural" explanation of their experiences had some kind of personal meaning or "truth". Liz Stanley's essay on lesbian history and biography argues that "the idea of inversion offered an essentialist framework of understanding for many women and men whose experience of themselves accorded with it" (208). In an age in which sex and gender have been constructed and deconstructed into abstraction, it is perhaps necessary to propose that for many of the subjects of these case studies their experiences had an existence that felt "real". On this point, it is also important to highlight the advantages to minoritised identities of supporting what Jonathan Dollimore, in Sexual Dissidence, calls "essentialist conceptions of selfhood" (39). Dollimore comments on the critical role that such models have played:

It would be difficult to overestimate the importance in modern Western culture of transgression in the name of an essential self which is the origin and arbiter of the true,

the real (and/or natural), and the moral, categories which correspond to the three main domains of knowledge in Western culture: the epistemological, the ontological, and the ethical. In other words the self is conceived centrally within those domains. Not surprisingly then essentialist conceptions of selfhood have been crucial in liberation movements and social struggles. (39)

As Dollimore points out, there were political and personal benefits to be derived from being able to claim an ontological basis to the "difference" that was being used to set some women and men apart from others. Whether inversion theory was believed in or not, a congenital explanation of variant sex and gender behaviours and identifications gave the invert an authorised, public status and as such allowed her or him to begin to claim rights.

An examination of the case studies conducted by Krafft-Ebing demonstrates that although an explicit association is made between the female invert and homosexuality, the term is used to cover a range of experiences that, in the modern sense, cannot be identified unreservedly as lesbian (or transsexual). Krafft-Ebing organises females who exhibit what he terms an "antipathic sexual instinct" (or same-sex desire) into two broad categories: "Homo-Sexual Feeling

as an Acquired Manifestation" and "Homo-sexual Feeling as an Abnormal Congenital Manifestation". For those women who belonged to the first of these categories, their condition was frequently deemed to be the result of "*masturbation*" and thus a "temporary aberration" (286) that might be corrected. The category is divided into four grades or "degrees". Interestingly, the third and fourth of these degrees include women who experience "the delusion of a transformation of sex" (328). Initially this "transformation" was confined to the psychical sphere, but ultimately it included imagined anatomical changes. Case 130 describes a Mrs X. who had enjoyed wearing boys' clothing as a child but had exhibited no other signs of a "homo-sexual inclination" (324). Krafft-Ebing reports that following a long illness caused by an "apoplectic stroke" there was "a peculiar change of her psychical and physical feelings" (325). The psychical changes described include "[s]ensations of possessing a penis and scrotum" (327). Such extreme responses are understood as being the final stage in the "disease-process" (328).

In the second category the "homo-sexual feeling" is deemed to have a congenital, rather than pathological, origin. The first of its grades, labelled "*Psychico-hermaphrodisic*", is unlikely to manifest itself in "external appearances nor by mental

(masculine) sexual characteristics" (398); the fourth and most degenerative grade, "Gynandry", is accompanied by the greatest masculinisation of the subject: "The woman of this type possesses of the feminine qualities only the genital organs; thought, sentiment, action, even external appearances are those of the man" (399). Krafft-Ebing refers to these cases as "men-women", a term also used in a medical pamphlet from 1620 with the extraordinary title: Hic Mulier:, or, The Man-Woman: Being a medicine to cure the coltish disease of the Stagers in the Masculine-Feminines of our times. Exprest in a brief declamation. Non omnes possumus omnes. Mistris, will you be trim'd or truss'd?²

According to this construction of the invert, same-sex desire is only one element of an inversion of the subject's gender. In a more general observation, Krafft-Ebing presents the adoption of masculine costume or pursuits as a reliable indicator of a woman's "homosexuality" or "Uranism":

Uranism may nearly always be suspected in females wearing their hair short, or who dress in the fashion of men, or pursue the sports and pastimes of their male acquaintances; also

² An extract from this text is reproduced in Secret Sexualities: A Sourcebook of 17th and 18th Century Writing, edited by Ian McCormick (177-79).

in opera singers and actresses, who appear in male attire on the stage by preference (398).³

This statement makes a direct correlation between a woman's decision to appropriate masculine cultural signs, regardless of the circumstances surrounding that decision, and her sexual preferences.

In the case studies of female inversion conducted by Krafft-Ebing, it is those women who are assigned to the third (*Viraginity*) and fourth (*Gynandry*) grades of homosexuality who can be linked most obviously to the "mannish lesbian" of modern sexual discourse and to Hall's protagonist, Stephen Gordon. The women of these studies exhibit what is interpreted both by the sexologist and often the "patient" herself as psychological and physical traits conventionally ascribed to men.

For Case 160, who is classified as "*Homo-sexuality in Transition to Viraginity*", selected passages from a suicide letter are reproduced. In the following extract, Mrs. v. T. attributes her gender inversion to a combination of congenital and social influences:

"I was born a girl, but a misdirected education forced my fiery imagination early into the wrong direction. At twelve I had a mania to pose as a boy and court the attention of ladies. I recognised this abnormal impulse

³ For a discussion of theatrical crossdressing see Terry Castle's "Matters Not Fit to be Mentioned: Fielding's *The Female Husband*" and chapters by Kristina Straub in *Body Guards* (142-166) and Emma Donoghue in *Passions Between Women* (87-108).

as a mania, but, like fate, it grew with the years . . . Nature has made a mistake in the choice of my sexuality and I must do a life-long penance for it . . .". (418)

The choice of language here is significant in what it might reveal about the invert's self-construction: words such as "mania" and "abnormal impulse" suggest either the speaker's familiarity with medico-scientific terms, or some element of prompting or editing by the sexologist. Other words evoke parallels with the abject and self-persecutory language of Stephen Gordon's tragic narrative: "misdirected" and "mistake" present the invert as a blameless victim doubly punished by her circumstances and by "Nature", an effect heightened by the martyred tone of the "life-long penance" that must be suffered. The highly subjective voice of the "object" of this case study is balanced by the pseudo-scientific observations of the "professional". Krafft-Ebing's notes include the comment: "The physical and psychical secondary sexual characteristics were partly masculine, partly feminine" (419). The "masculine" traits listed include "her gait and carriage, severe features, deep voice, robust skeleton, powerful muscles and absence of adipose layers" (419). Hall's adoption of the narratives and "data" of such case studies of inversion will become evident in my analysis of Stephen's masculinity in the next section.

Other cases under the category "*Viraginity*" may also have been drawn upon by Hall. The subjects of these studies all experience feelings of being "like a man" or "not being like a woman". Each case concludes with a commentary on the "masculine" and "feminine" qualities of the woman's external appearance. Of Miss N., who dreams "only about females with herself in the role of man", Krafft-Ebing observes: "Masculine features, deep voice, manly gait, without beard, small mammae; cropped her hair short, and made the impression of a man in woman's clothes" (420). That Krafft-Ebing finds it necessary to mention the woman's beardless state reveals the bias of his approach. In some of the cases, detailed examinations of the women's anatomies, including the genitals, are reported on so that any signs of "masculine" bone structures or secondary sexual characteristics can be offered as evidence of the subject's inversion. Miss O. is described as: "Frame quite feminine; but the feet were exceptionally large and more of masculine type" (423-424).

Although there are clear similarities at a physical level between Hall's masculine-featured protagonist and the subjects of case studies such as those described above, the most direct parallel is found under the more extreme category of "*Gynandry*". Case 166 is the only reported example of "*Gynandry*" in *Psychopathia Sexualis*. In by far the longest and most

detailed study in this section, Krafft-Ebing's case notes claim to draw on an autobiographical source ("independently confirmed") to present the history of Sarolta, Countess V., or Count Sandor (428). In contrast to the previous cases, the construction of Sandor as male is overwhelmingly consistent with the exception of the sexual organs, which are found to be "feminine" but "at the stage of development of those of a ten-year-old girl" (437). The case study offers a quite startling array of anatomical "evidence" of Sandor's "masculinity", from the obscure: "line from glabella to occiput, 30 centimetres" (437), to the trivial: "Waist wanting" (436). Less pseudo-scientific observations include the comment that Sandor successfully passes as a man and is even able to "deceive" female lovers by the use of an artificial penis. In a short piece of first-person narrative Sandor expresses "an indescribable aversion for female attire,—indeed, for everything feminine, but only in as far as it concerned me; for, on the other hand, I was all enthusiasm for the beautiful sex" (436). For Krafft-Ebing, Sandor's erotic interests and masculine identity are related symptoms of a "homo-sexual" nature. To conflate sexual desire and gender expression in this way is to deny other possible connotations of that mannishness, not least that Sandor's identification may be male and heterosexual.

The father/child relationship described in this case study introduces an element of social determinism to this primarily congenitalist theory of inversion. Krafft-Ebing informs us that the female subject was brought up by her father as a boy, called by a boy's name, Sandor, and that the father "allowed her to ride, drive and hunt, admiring her muscular energy" (42). There are obvious similarities between Sandor's childhood experiences and those of Hall's Stephen Gordon. In The Well, social factors and, specifically, parental influence are issues that need to be addressed in interpreting Hall's representation of Stephen's inversion. Stephen, like Sandor, is given a boy's name and encouraged by her father in conventionally masculine pursuits. Sir Philip, like Sandor's father, takes a pride in Stephen's "muscular energy", particularly as it is expressed in her ability to ride and hunt. Sandor's aversion for "everything feminine" except "beautiful women" who become objects of romantic and sexual love is also a prominent feature of Stephen's narrative. The social aspect of Stephen's and Sandor's constructions as invert is important; it raises a question as to how they might have developed if their masculine identifications had not been encouraged so overtly. By itself, however, it does not explain what motivates those identifications and in both instances the fathers, like the sexologists, appear to be

responding to and directing existing desires and behaviours.

There is an important distinction to be made between the narrated experiences of Sandor and Stephen Gordon. Whereas Sandor passes as a man, Stephen, although her gender is sometimes ambiguously read by others, at no time consciously attempts to pass as a man either in society or with her lovers. In this respect, her attempts to refigure her gender might be seen to derive from a masculine identification which cannot be expressed by such partial, ultimately superficial measures. Hall's moral outrage, discussed in the introduction, at what she views as the deceptive practices of Colonel Barker may be significant here. Barker, who passed as a man, served in the army, and married a woman, is condemned by Hall as "a mad pervert of the most undesirable type" (qtd. in Doan 663). As will become evident from my reading of the novel, Stephen, when she masquerades as a man, is still denied the moral and legal endorsement of the male identity she desires and, for the early part of her narrative, expects. A sense of rightful ownership is a crucial component of that identity. In Stephen's eyes merely to pass as a man only accentuates the gap between gender play, which she associates with the dressing-up games of her childhood, and gender authenticity, which from Stephen's heavily class-influenced and masculinist

position is imperative to personal happiness. What is made clear from this comparison is that Stephen as "invert" does not translate unproblematically to Stephen as "lesbian", even if the qualifier "mannish" is added. Radclyffe Hall's interest in sexology is discussed in Diana Souhami's biography, The Trials of Radclyffe Hall. Hall and her partner Una Troubridge joined the British Sexological Society in 1920. Souhami describes Hall's practice of incorporating material into The Well (originally titled "Stephen") directly from sexological texts which Troubridge read aloud to her (155). These texts include Krafft-Ebing's Psychopathia Sexualis and Havelock Ellis's Studies in the Psychology of Sex. The Well makes explicit reference to Krafft-Ebing and his mentor Karl Ulrichs; Stephen's father is secretly studying their books to try to explain his daughter's masculine identity. Stephen's discovery of the books after her father's death leads to her self-identification as an invert. Following an acrimonious exchange between Stephen and her mother over her relationship with Angela Crossby, she is irresistibly drawn to her father's study where she peruses the contents of his "special book-case". The narrator describes Stephen's selection of a book from the back of the shelf: "Krafft Ebing [sic]—she had never heard of that author before. All the same she opened the battered old book, then she looked more

closely, for there on its margins were notes in her father's small, scholarly hand and she saw that her own name appeared in those notes" (207). In this scene Sir Philip is cast in the role of amateur sexologist with Stephen as the object of his secretly conducted case study.

Although Hall identified as an invert, The Well is not an autobiographical novel. Jane Rule argues that Stephen is Hall's "idealized mirror" rather than a self-portrait (54), and there is certainly something romanticised about the tragic, martyred figure. Hall would no doubt have drawn on her own experiences for the characterisation, but its deliberate promotion of theories of congenital inversion had a specific purpose. In a letter to Gorham Munson, a friend in the States, Hall explains that she has written the novel:

To encourage inverts to face up to a hostile world in their true colours, and this with dignity and courage. To spur all classes of inverts to make good through hard work, faithful and loyal attachments and sober and useful living. To bring normal men and women of good will to a fuller and more tolerant understanding of the inverted. (qtd. in Souhami, The Trials 151)

The sentiments of this letter can be compared with a passage from The Well when Stephen has just discovered

that she is an invert. Miss Puddleton ("Puddle"), Stephen's tutor and companion, advises her to work and to "have the courage to make good" for "the sake of the others who are like you, but less strong and less gifted" (208).

Havelock Ellis wrote a preface for the first edition of The Well in which he officially approves its depiction of female inversion. Ellis writes: "So far as I know, it is the first English novel which presents, in a completely faithful and uncompromising form, one particular aspect of sexual life as it exists among us to-day" (qtd. in Brittain 53). Despite this endorsement, or perhaps because of it, Hall's argument for the naturalness of inversion and hence for the acceptance of inverts led to the novel's prosecution shortly after publication by Jonathan Cape in July 1928. Not surprisingly, in the United States book sales were greatly increased by all the publicity: twenty-five thousand copies sold in the first week and although in 1929 American authorities also tried to suppress The Well, they were unsuccessful. The ban was not lifted in Britain until 1949.⁴

At a lecture on the trial of The Well, given in January 1929 to the Southend Young Socialists, Hall

⁴ For a detailed account of the prosecution see Souhami (The Trials 167-232).

provides her own colourful account of inversion in which she adopts the roles of preacher and scientist:

Congenital inversion is caused by an actual deviation from the usual in the glandular secretions of the invert's body. Those glandular secretions influence the cells, & thus the whole human structure, physical, mental & spiritual. You can kill all the inverts but while they live you cannot make them other than inverted. They are and will always remain as God made them, and their sexual attractions will be therefore inverted as they were in the girl of whom I wrote—the unfortunate girl Stephen Gordon. (qtd. in Souhami, The Trials 155)

What is significant in Hall's description is that its reference to an inversion of the "sexual attractions" makes no mention of the accompanying gender inversion which is so apparent in the novel. Given Hall's utilisation of sexological theories and material this raises a number of questions. Does Hall construct Stephen Gordon as what some critics have called the "perfect gentleman"⁵ because the character is sexually attracted to women and sexologists construct such "perverse" desire in terms of "mannishness"? Does Hall present Stephen as "sexually inverted" because that is

⁵ See Ruehl (25) and Dollimore (50).

the only rhetoric in female sexual discourse available to describe cross-gender identification? Or does Hall's appropriation of the female invert explore cross-gender identification as an aspect of identity that may overlap with sexual desire but is, in itself, fundamentally different? My consideration later in this chapter of the different types of invert represented in the novel suggests that there is a singular quality to Stephen Gordon's difference which sets her apart from these other characters.

In the introduction, I discussed Havelock Ellis's development of a new category of "aesthetic inversion" in Volume 7 of Studies in the Psychology of Sex (1928). Ellis divides this category into two types which parallel present day distinctions between transvestism and transsexuality:

the most common kind, in which the inversion is mainly confined to the sphere of clothing and another, less common but more complete, in which . . . the subject so identifies himself with those of his physical and psychic traits which recall the opposite sex that he feels really to belong to that sex (Eonism 360).

Ellis makes a further distinction between aesthetic and sexual inversion by declaring the former a "modification of normal hetero-sexuality" (103). To what extent Hall might have been aware of this refinement of Ellis's

theories during the writing of The Well is unclear; Souhami describes Una reading this latest volume to Hall on the evening of her forty-eighth birthday, shortly after Hall's novel had been published (The Trials 174-5). Nevertheless, a question remains as to whether Stephen Gordon has turned out to be more of an aesthetic invert than a sexual one.

In order to move an analysis of The Well beyond the figure of the invert in whom desire and identification are inextricably entangled, it is necessary to tease out those aspects of Stephen Gordon's characterisation which suggest that whilst her erotic feelings may be directed towards females, she most clearly identifies as *male* and *heterosexual*. In addition, that identity as a heterosexual man must be shown to exceed what might be ascribed to the unavoidable effects of socialisation. For a transgender reading of The Well to work, the source of Stephen's rejection of the "feminine" must be seen to be more than purely a straightforward identification with the dominant beliefs of a society that favours the male. A transgender reading must also set Stephen's narrative apart from that of the "New Woman" whose appropriation of masculine signs is more usually interpreted as a politically-motivated act.⁶

⁶ See Carroll Smith-Rosenberg's chapter "The New Woman as Androgyne: Social Disorder and Gender Crisis, 1870-1936" in Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America (245-96).

For these reasons, my analysis of Stephen Gordon concentrates on issues surrounding her gendered embodiment with particular emphasis on representations of somatic unease and transformation, both of which are key features of many transgender and particularly transsexual narratives. My discussion of Stephen's body as the site of her difference includes a consideration of the character's relationships to and with other female and male characters in the novel. The literal expressions of Stephen's bodily discomfort are reinforced through the symbolism and imagery of The Well, and the relationship between gendered embodiment and physical spaces in the novel is an especially productive source for my reading of Stephen's exile from Morton, her family home. Finally, Stephen's gender incoherence is read for its potentially queer effects. My analysis begins by examining the implications of some of the highly visible examples of Stephen's masculinity.

Bodily harms

A first encounter with Stephen Gordon demonstrates how blatantly Hall directs the reader to construct the character's gender as masculine. The indelicate signposting of Stephen's gender inversion can be irritating, in that it may appear to modern readers as a crude reproduction of the most obvious signs of the

pseudo-male female invert. From the most basic physical and textual signs, the character's masculine body and male name, to those which are only slightly more subtly deployed, such as her "gentlemanly" manners and deportment, virtually everything in the representation of Stephen's gender invites the reader response: "That's a man!" Time and again, attention is drawn to the fact that Stephen feels like a man, or certainly does not feel like a woman; looks like a man, or certainly does not look like a woman; wants to be a man, or certainly does not want to be a woman; indeed would make a very good man, a far better man than a woman.

My choice of wording seeks to convey an ambiguity that informs the representation of Stephen's identity. It is a mood that emanates from a tension between the character's given identification as female and her actual identification which, in the absence of any more meaningful alternative, must construct itself as male. In the following extract, taken from a tense exchange between Stephen and her mother, that conflict between material and inner reality is forcefully articulated:

"All my life I've never felt like a woman, and you know it—you say you've always disliked me, that you've always felt a strange physical repulsion. . . . [ellipses in original] I don't know what I am; no one's ever told me

that I'm different and yet I know that I'm
different" (204)

This "absence of a feeling, rather than its presence" is something to which transgender artist Kate Bornstein refers in describing her own experience of gender in Gender Outlaw (24). For Bornstein it was her unwavering conviction that she was not a boy or a man, rather than an absolute belief that she was a girl or a woman which, in her words, "convinced me to change my gender" (24). If that change of gender is to be recognised by others it needs to be embodied and Bornstein hormonally and surgically transfigured her male body. Similarly, for Stephen Gordon the source of her sense of unbelonging, and therefore the key to achieving some kind of gendered coherence, is sited primarily in the body.

Hall's deployment of conventionally masculine characteristics in the delineation of Stephen's body is seen by Esther Newton to assign the character an illegitimate, between gender status: "Her body is not and cannot be male; yet it is not traditionally female" (289). Although Newton provides a literal interpretation of Stephen's somatic *dis-ease* as the "gender dysphoria" experienced by some lesbians, she also presents it as a symbolic representation of the "'inverted' sexuality Stephen can neither disavow nor satisfy" (289). What Newton's discussion positively resists is the possibility that Stephen's bodily ambiguity might derive

from an identification that could now be described as transsexual.

The masculinisation of Stephen's body is probably the weakest aspect of Hall's depiction of the female invert. The repeated references to Stephen's "broad shoulders", "narrow hips" and "heavy face" seem to be a clumsy and obvious statement of the physical signs of Stephen's inversion. On the other hand, perhaps it is rather too easy to attribute the more exaggerated aspects of Stephen's maleness to a lack of authorial finesse, or slavish adherence to textbook examples of female inverts. As Martha Vicinus observes in her essay on the origins of the modern lesbian identity, Radclyffe Hall is aware of multiple models of unconventional sexual and gender identities both from the social circles she frequents and from the women she chooses as lovers. Vicinus offers the examples of "Barney's hedonistic lesbianism, Vivien's self-created tragedy, Colette's theatrical affair with the marquise, and the many less colorful monogamous couples in Paris's literary world" (488). There is clear evidence in The Well that Hall has no wish to confine herself to the archetype of the "mannish invert" and her "feminine" object choice. Indeed, of the Parisian community of inverts of which Stephen becomes a reluctant member we are told: "the grades were so numerous and so fine that they often defied the most careful observation" (356).

Hall depicts a sex and gender subculture in The Well and the implications of that diversity of representation are important to a reading of Stephen Gordon seeking to emphasise the singularity of her particular experience of difference.

Consequently, despite the apparently heavy-handed approach towards Stephen's physical appearance, the visible signs of her maleness might be seen to provide a clear, if rather unsophisticated statement of the root of Stephen's problem: the incongruous relationship that is felt to exist between her sexed body and her experienced, rather than given, gender. Newton suggests that "Her body is not and cannot be male" (289), but a more accurate expression of Stephen's confusion and frustration as she grows up may lie in the fact that "her body *is not* [regarded as] and *cannot be* male".

Clearly there are other tensions operating within the novel that contribute to Stephen's sense of estrangement. One of the most obvious conflicts arises from the character's loyalty to her class origins and her unqualified veneration of the patriarchal values by which she is outlawed. Stephen's class prejudice and sense of moral superiority are related factors in her personal isolation in the novel, in that they inform the particular model of male masculinity with which she most closely identifies, that of her father, Sir Philip Gordon. Hence, Stephen's class only makes sense to her

if it is read in the context of a "masculine" gender necessarily located in a heterosexual frame. Stephen's distaste for male characters, such as Jonathan Brockett, who display effeminate behaviour and physical traits can be read in the context of this rigid notion of an authentic masculinity.

The incoherent relationship between Stephen's sexed body and her gender becomes a source of discomfort and shame, both to her and to others, from an early point in the narrative. At a very obvious level we are invited to read Stephen's lack of co-ordination and clumsiness when she is forced to perform in the feminine arena: she treads on her dress, knocks into tables, and lacks the dexterity to manage small buttons on her dresses. In pronounced contrast, we are shown Stephen's "natural" grace, strength and skills when she is involved in conventionally masculine activities such as throwing a ball, riding and fencing. We are also repeatedly made aware of the incongruous effect created by the juxtaposition of feminine clothing and Stephen's body.

The development of Stephen's awareness of her difference and the increasing association of that feeling with the body can be plotted. In childhood there is a vague sense of frustration, a consciousness of "feeling all wrong" (17). Her strongest identifications are with men, notably her father Sir Philip, and as a young child she adopts the persona of the "young Nelson"

depicted in one of the paintings in the house. Role-playing quickly loses its appeal as Stephen's desire for an "authentic" (male) gender asserts itself: "she so longed to be someone quite real, instead of just Stephen pretending to be Nelson" (17). As Stephen's social world widens, this frustration is joined by a self-persecutory fear and acute self-consciousness: she feels that others are laughing at her or talking about her. When Stephen enters puberty the tangible evidence of the biological functions of the female body brings with it increasing feelings of self-abasement and uncomprehending angst. Typically, menstruation is a particular source of torment: "To see Stephen Gordon's expression of horror if one so much as threw out a hint on the subject, was to feel that the thing must in some way be shameful, a kind of disgrace, a humiliation!" (74).

As her identification as male is subjected to increasing prohibition and contradiction from external sources her body, which seems to promise so much when she first discovers its potential strength and athleticism, becomes a visible sign of her oppression and something that she wants to punish. This self-destructive feeling is at its most violent when Stephen is obliged to adopt a feminine gender role and consequently made most keenly aware of her gendered incongruity: "She wrenched off the dress and hurled it from her, longing intensely to rend it, to hurt it,

longing to hurt herself in the process, yet filled all the while with that sense of injustice" (71-2). Jay Prosser's analysis of this sentence notes the way in which the object of Stephen's violent desires changes from the dress to "herself", and concludes that "the dress symptomizes her desire to rend or hurt her own body" (Second Skins 162). Stephen's harmful urges towards her female body, here partly displaced to the hateful feminine dress, are more clearly disclosed at a later point in the novel. In a scene frequently analysed in critiques of The Well, Stephen's ambivalent response to the mirrored image of her naked body can be read as a rare moment of narrative subtlety: "She longed to maim it, for it made her feel cruel; it was so white, so strong and so self-sufficient; yet withal so poor and unhappy a thing that her eyes filled with tears and her hate turned to pity" (188).

Teresa de Lauretis's feminist revision of Freud for her reading of the "mirror scene" subordinates Stephen's narrative of masculine identification to an interpretation of these self-destructive drives as the desire for a female body, rather than a male one. As Halberstam explains, de Lauretis's intention is to foreground the feminine lesbian who has been forgotten or inadequately accounted for by Freudian theory (102-103). Although this is an important project, Stephen

Gordon would seem to be a particularly unproductive subject for such a revision.

An unreconstructed Freudian reading might understand the conflicting impulses of Stephen's reading of her own body as a response to the loss of something that was never owned and which can never be possessed. Stephen exhibits the classic features of Freud's melancholic: dejection, self-persecution and self-revilement, a lack of self-regard, and as a culmination of these feelings, "a delusional expectation of punishment" ("Mourning" 252). In the essay "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917), Freud explains that melancholia, like mourning, may be the reaction to the loss of a "loved object", but the former is related to "an object-loss which is withdrawn from consciousness" (254). For Stephen the "loved object" is the male body, a desire represented primarily by Stephen's identification with her father and her friend, and ultimate rival, Martin Hallam. As Stephen grows up she has to relinquish her love of the male body, a process marked at a narrative level by the rift with Martin when he tries to sexualise their friendship and the sudden and tragic death of Stephen's father. Increasingly the jilted love for this object takes refuge in what Freud calls "narcissistic identification" (260) and Stephen substitutes her own female-sexed body for the male body that has been "lost". At this stage, according to Freud's essay, "the

hate comes into operation on this substitutive object, abusing it, debasing it, making it suffer and deriving sadistic satisfaction from its suffering" (260). In Stephen's case, it is her body that in psychological terms is subjected to a complex mix of self-destructive and self-loving drives.

The "mirror scene" can be read as a defining moment in the character's self-persecution. Rebecca O'Rourke identifies Stephen's paranoia, born out of her inability to "name herself or her condition" (4), as a contributing factor in that behaviour. For O'Rourke, the missing ingredient is Stephen's "lesbianism"; but if it were as simple as this, surely the feelings of paranoia would begin to subside once Stephen becomes aware of the medical explanation of her "condition" and is introduced to the inverted community in Paris. Instead, in the company of inverts Stephen's self-hatred and feelings of persecution seem to intensify. On their first meeting, Stephen's reading of Valérie Seymour's reaction to her is dominated by the language and imagery of Christ's crucifixion:

Valérie Seymour was secretly approving, not because her guest was a decent human being with a will to work, with a well-trained brain . . . but rather because she was seeing before her all the outward stigmata of the

abnormal—verily the wounds of One nailed to a cross. (247)

This passage is typical in that it presents Stephen's perception of her difference as being something that is inscribed on her body and so always there to be read by others. Earlier, when Stephen first learns about "inversion" from her father's books, she imagines herself as Cain-like with her sin marked clearly for the world to see. These signs are the chimerical materialisation of Stephen's feelings of *dis-ease* and it is significant that they are translated to the surface of her body.

At a physical level, Stephen tries to transform her female-sexed body externally through costume. For Newton, "Stephen's cross-dressing asserts a series of agonising estrangements" (289); it is a signifier of her marginalised status both with regard to the family and society. Newton explains: "She is alienated from her mother, as the New Woman often was, and as the lesbian was, increasingly, from heterosexual women" (289). These comments fail to identify another more fundamental estrangement that Stephen's cross-dressing asserts: the alienation she experiences from her female-sexed body and its assigned feminine gender. It is a personal dissonance that is apparent to other characters in the novel. As a child, Stephen's father notices "that indefinable quality in Stephen that made her look wrong

in the clothes she was wearing, as though she and they had no right to each other" (23). It is also observed by Stephen herself who, forced to adopt conventional female attire for social functions, searches for an explanation for the strange appearance that results: "'Am I queer looking or not?'" she muses uneasily as she looks in the mirror (70).⁷

According to Lacanian theory the "mirror stage" is the foundational moment in the process of individuation. As a literary device, the mirror has become a familiar and rather clichéd method of establishing a character's sense of "otherness". Mirrors often feature in transsexual life-narratives where they are seen to have a prominent place in the subject's transition. In the context of these various theoretical and literary associations, the relation between Stephen's mirrored image and her construction of a sense of "self" assumes a particular import. Those scenes in which Stephen is confronted by the material reality of her female status, reflected not only in mirrors but in the faces of the people she meets, constitute a dramatic exposure of her given identification which constantly undermines her

⁷ Although "queer" as a synonym for homosexual is more readily associated with the second half of the twentieth century, the unconscious irony of Stephen's use of the word may have been apparent to some of Hall's readers at the time of publication. The first recorded use of "queer" to mean homosexual, according to the OED, occurs in 1922 in a scientific study conducted by the U.S. Department of Labor. However, Hugh Stevens cites an instance from 1895 of "queer" used for "homosexual" (Henry James and Sexuality 12).

conception of who she *really* is.

Stephen experiences a great deal more self-confidence and self-ease once she can re-gender her clothing and appearance and the "hated soft dresses, and sashes, and ribbons" (16) of childhood can be discarded. There is a meticulous attention to every detail of the flannel suits and related accessories that she selects, and the quiet pride and pleasure that accompany this new sartorial image contrasts sharply with the anxiety and discomfort created by feminine clothing. Although the narrator acknowledges that clothes are "a form of self-expression" (71), the message of The Well seems to be that it is the prescribed relation between anatomy and clothing that ultimately determines destiny. For Stephen Gordon, unlike that other famous literary cross-dresser and gender transgressor of the period, Virginia Woolf's Orlando, costumes are not "selves" and the limitations of sex and gender cannot be transcended by simply adopting a different garment. Whilst cross-dressing brings some personal relief for Stephen, therefore, it is always only going to facilitate partial rather than complete self-expression. The clothes may change but Stephen's view of her body does not and when she is faced with the image of her naked form it remains, in her eyes, "a monstrous fetter imposed on her spirit" (187) and an object both to be despised and pitied.

In addition to the adoption of masculine clothing, Stephen uses exercise and weight-training to try to re-fashion her body. Such practices suggest parallels with present day experiences of transsexual men; Gayle Rubin's definition of transsexual subjects as "[i]ndividuals who have very powerful gender dysphoria, particularly those with strong drives to alter their bodies to conform to their preferred gender identities" (467) is particularly pertinent. The extent to which Stephen is able to change her gender is limited. She can fence and build her muscles using weights, she can cut off her hair and wear suits, but she will always be read as a woman who looks, dresses and behaves like a man. She will never be the man she thinks she is.

For Stephen gendered embodiment is the key to affecting "realness" and hence legitimacy. Judith Butler, in Bodies That Matter, states that the "approximation of realness appears to be achieved" at the point when "the body performing and the ideal performed appear indistinguishable" (129). To achieve this symbiosis a performance must work; that is, it must not be read as artifice. Stephen does not consciously attempt to pass as a man. Her masculine appearance never conceals her female sex from others. The porter at the hotel in Cornwall where Stephen stays with her mother describes her as a "'queer-looking girl'" (159), and during a shopping trip to a jewellers in London Stephen

attracts the attention and mocking comments of passers-by: "People stared at the masculine-looking girl who seemed so intent upon feminine adornments. And someone, a man, laughed and nudged his companion: 'Look at that! What is it?'" (164).

Other masculine female characters in the novel are described in similar terms. Of Wanda, whose difference is described as being as "pronounced" as Stephen's, the narrator observes: "She, poor soul, never knew how to dress for the best. If she dressed like a woman she looked like a man, if she dressed like a man she looked like a woman" (356). Part of the reason for the incongruities of Stephen's appearance must be sartorial: there are restrictions, perhaps self-imposed, to the extent of her cross-dressing; she can wear tailored suits and ties, but there does not seem to be an option for her to wear trousers.⁸ Her appearance also suggests that Stephen's gendered incoherence, or her sense of it, has been translated to the surface of her body and any attempt to conceal that disparity or disguise it only compounds the effect.

Stephen is unable to achieve "realness" in her terms: she is not male and therefore cannot be a man. This aspect of her narrative introduces a destabilising element, but it does not lead to the character's self-

⁸ It seems that trousers were worn by some women during the 1920s. Kate Summerscale's biography of the "female invert" Joe Carstairs refers to "[a] few women" who wore "Oxford Bags, with billowing trouser-legs that removed any hint of the female form" (90).

empowerment. On the contrary, it is the underlying and inescapable source of her personal dissonance. The nature of Stephen's sense of bodily alienation can be examined further in terms of her relationships with other characters in the novel.

Relative others

The gendering of Stephen's relationships with the female and male characters of The Well is constructed as "masculine", but it is the sexual dynamics of those relationships that are the more usual focus of discussion. Taken in isolation, Stephen's relationships with Angela Crossby and Mary Llewellyn are the prototype for the classic butch/femme lesbian model, but the nature of these erotic liaisons needs to be considered more closely and in the context of Stephen's other relationships in the novel.

Stephen's relationships with female characters fall into three categories. The first two categories involve those females who are traditional in their gender roles and their sexuality, or whose same-sex desire is constructed in sexological terms as being "learned" and therefore "temporary". The third category comprises other female inverts.

The first group is one in which Stephen sees other women as objects of romantic love and desire with

herself as heroic protector. In this role Stephen is like the "Miss D." of one of Havelock Ellis's case studies who imagines herself to be "always the prince or the pirate, rescuing beauty in distress, or killing the unworthy" (Sexual Inversion 239). This category includes Collins, the housemaid, who is the unwitting object of the young Stephen's affections and fantasies, and Stephen's mother, Lady Anna, who is seen always more as an object of desire and worship than as a maternal figure. Some critics have taken Stephen's desire for her mother as further evidence of the character's lesbianism. Charlotte Wolff asserts the view that "Emotional incest with the mother is indeed the very essence of lesbianism" (72). A similar sentiment is expressed by Newton who sees mother-daughter eroticism as a central component of lesbian orientation (290). Psychoanalysts such as Nancy Chodorow would disagree with this interpretation of the mother-daughter bond, seeing it as relating to the female child's gender identity, rather than her sexuality. In Freudian terms, Stephen would be regarded as occupying the position of the male child in the Oedipal triangle in her childhood identification with her father and desire for her mother. Even without this psychoanalytic frame, Stephen's position of alienation from the majority of the female characters in the novel, both "heterosexual" and "homosexual", can be

attributed more obviously to her gender identification than her sexual desire.

It is interesting to consider how the female characters who are objects of desire for Stephen relate to her. What is the nature of Angela's and Mary's attraction to Stephen? Is it female-female or female-male desire, or is it something that cannot be meaningfully expressed by the employment of binary labels? Is it perhaps the ambiguity of Stephen's sexual and gendered identity itself that draws such women to her? In the absence of any narrative perspective for these characters it is difficult to reach a definite conclusion, but it is surely significant that Stephen's rivals for their affections are men (Roger Antrim and Martin Hallam), rather than women or even "mannish women". In the mother-daughter interaction the nature of the relationship is more clearly defined. Stephen's ambiguous gender, and particularly her physical resemblance to Sir Philip, are the cause of Lady Anna's antipathy towards Stephen. However, the extreme violence of this emotion—Lady Anna describes it to Stephen as "a kind of physical repulsion, a desire not to touch or to be touched by you" (203)—suggests that beneath its surface might lie other, forbidden feelings: an eroticism that would carry the double taboo of incest and same-sex desire. Lady Anna states that she finds her "repulsion" for her daughter

"unnatural"; she describes it as "a terrible thing for a mother to feel" (203). In the reading I am suggesting, it is erotic attraction masquerading as disgust that may be the more disturbingly "unnatural" instinct for this particular mother.

The second category of females comprises those characters whose gender experiences are most intensely antithetical to Stephen's. The prime example is Violet Antrim, the enforced female companion of Stephen's childhood whose "feminine poses" (44) Stephen both despises and sees through. Another example is the young women whom Stephen meets socially, who irritate and embarrass her with their talk of menstruation and other such intimate female matters. Curiously, there is a point in the text where we are made aware of Stephen's desire to be like these girls. The secure "feminine conclaves" which they seem to inhabit represent for Stephen a conspiracy which both repels and clearly, at times, attracts with equal force: "While despising these girls, she yet longed to be like them—yes, indeed, at such moments she longed to be like them" (74).

Once again there is a narrative finesse evident in the contradictory elements of this response. This is not to be taken as expressing any serious desire to be conventionally "feminine" but, as Jane Rule suggests, represents "moments of despair when she feels rejected

in the company of men" (58). It could also be read as the articulation of a more unspecific yearning for the gendered coherence that, to Stephen, those girls seem to represent and the sense of belonging that such unambiguous identities appear to bring.

Stephen's relationships with the female characters discussed so far can never be conducted on equal terms. In both of the categories detailed above she occupies a position of otherness, because in this company she can neither identify as a woman, nor be accepted as a man.

Before considering how Stephen's estranged position influences her relationships with other female inverts in the novel, it is interesting to examine her friendship with the character Martin Hallam. Probably Stephen's strongest identifications in the novel are formed with male figures: notably her father, Sir Philip, and Martin Hallam. In Gabriele Griffin's discussion of Hall's "lesbian" images, she describes how the lesbian is frequently constructed in fiction as having a heterosexual man as her other. In a footnote, she states that "[s]uch male others inhabit the pages of The Well" (182). For Griffin, these figures symbolise patriarchal power in their attempts to keep the lesbian's sexuality under control or put it in order.

The most obvious male other to Stephen in The Well is Martin Hallam, the man with whom Stephen forms a

friendship, then rejects as a lover, and to whom finally she sacrifices her partner, Mary Llewellyn. If Stephen's relationship with Martin Hallam is read within the frame of anatomical sex and gender, rather than sexual desire, a far more complex picture emerges than that suggested by Griffin. When Stephen first meets Martin she identifies with him and perceives her relationship with him in male terms: "She said: 'You're the only real friend I've ever had, except Father—our friendship's so wonderful, somehow—we're like brothers, we enjoy all the same sort of things'" (94).

As the friendship progresses Martin becomes a mirror in which Stephen's gender difference is reflected back to her as she is forced to recognise the limits of that identification. The tension and incoherence that this revelation creates have a crisis point when Martin tries to sexualise their friendship. After the incident, Stephen attempts to rationalise her response: "What was she, what manner of curious creature, to have been so repelled by a lover like Martin? Yet she had been repelled, and even her pity for the man could not wipe out that stronger feeling. She had driven him away because something within her was intolerant of that new aspect of Martin" (98).

The conventional reading of this scene would be that the "something within her" which could not tolerate the idea of Martin as a lover is her

attraction to women, her "lesbianism". Perhaps a more likely cause of Stephen's outraged response to Martin's sexual advances is her need to believe that she is no different to Martin. Catharine R. Stimpson's essay on the lesbian novel takes up the idea of Stephen's fraternal identification with Martin, made explicit in the phrase "we're like brothers" (94) and argues that, for Stephen, Martin's behaviour towards her constitutes "a form of homosexual incest" ("Zero Degree" 305).

My own reading has some sympathies with Stimpson's analysis. When a sexual component is introduced to their relationship, Stephen's sense of her relationship with Martin as being that of two young men, not a young woman and man and, therefore, her sense of herself as in some way male is destroyed. In eroticising their relationship, Martin is not just redrawing its lines; he is explicitly signalling his perception of Stephen as a woman. Taking up Stimpson's point, in view of Stephen's perception of her relationship with Martin, the emotional violence of her response to his sexual interest might be compounded by her sense that certain sexed and familial boundaries have been transgressed. But I would argue that it is Martin's exposure or "outing" of Stephen's female identity that has the more personally devastating effect; it critically undermines any identification she has of herself as male and threatens to destroy everything that constitutes her

sense of who she is. Stephen's mental state at this point in the narrative is worth examining:

Alone—it was terrible to feel so much alone—to feel oneself different from other people. At one time she had rather enjoyed this distinction—she had rather enjoyed dressing up as young Nelson. Yet had she enjoyed it? Or had it been done as some sort of inadequate protest? But if so against what had she been protesting when she strutted about the house, masquerading? In those days she had wanted to be a boy—had that been the meaning of the pitiful young Nelson? And what about now? She had wanted Martin to treat her as a man, had expected it of him. . . . [ellipses in original] (99)

In this passage, Stephen's estrangement is conceptualised in terms of being "different from other people", rather than being linked specifically to men or women. The choice of the word "people" here seems to evoke the sexological role of a "third" or "intermediate sex", according to which Stephen is neither fully man nor woman. This intersexual state is expressed at other points in the novel in phrases such as "no-man's land of sex" (77) and "midway between the sexes" (81). Also in the passage, the adult Stephen tries to reason out her childhood experiences and in

doing so diminishes their importance. When she had dressed up as Nelson, she had been "masquerading"; she had wanted to "be" a boy, but her efforts were "pitiful". What had seemed straightforward and axiomatic during childhood—if Stephen felt like a boy and dressed as a boy then she must be a boy: "'I must be a boy, 'cause I feel exactly like one, I feel like young Nelson in the picture upstairs'" (16)—is complicated and challenged by the adult mind. Then, as Stephen perceives it, she had wanted to be a boy and the dressing-up was part of that wish-fulfilment. Now she identifies as a man and not only wants but also expects to be treated as such: "She had wanted Martin to treat her *as a man*, had expected it of him" (99) (my emphasis). This understanding of the particular degree of Stephen's identification is essential when examining her relationship with my final category of female characters: the female inverts who Stephen meets in Paris.

The Well does not confine itself to the sexological model of the "mannish congenital invert" and the "pseudo-homosexual feminine" object choice; like the case studies themselves it represents multiple models of "female inversion". In the Paris community Stephen finds a subculture peopled with genetically female characters who are performing non-traditional roles.

There are two contrasting settings in which we find the "inverts" gathered. There are the "salons" held by the pioneering Valérie Seymour to which the intellectual and artistic élite would flock; and the ghettoised subculture of the bars and nightclubs. Stephen does not feel comfortable in either setting and never actively seeks friends for herself from this community. It is only on Jonathan Brockett's advice that she encourages and supports the friendships that Mary Llewellyn makes. For herself, Stephen experiences a mistrust of Valérie Seymour and an aversion to what she sees as the ugliness and sordidness of the bars and clubs. She hopes for a day when "happier folk" will accept her relationship with Mary, but "in her fear of isolation for Mary" (360) she turns to other inverts as the only reliable source of company available.

One of the characters Stephen mixes with most regularly, despite her initial misgivings, is Valérie Seymour. Although Valérie, based on the salon hostess and writer Natalie Barney, adopts a traditional female identity she is not to be confused with the conventionally "feminine" Angela Crossby, or even Mary Llewellyn. Unlike these characters, with their "temporary" brand of homosexuality, Valérie Seymour is constructed as a confident, well-balanced, sexual being whose same-sex desire is a preference rather than a congenital or pathological condition. Valérie does not

fit the more popular notions of inversion: she is neither the "mannish" female invert nor the "pseudo-homosexual" object of desire. She is a character who intriguingly eludes definition or categorisation.

"Great men had loved her", Stephen is told by Jonathan Brockett, "but Valérie was not attracted to men" (245). She is not beautiful and yet she has a "quiet and unconscious grace" (246) and an abiding impulse towards beauty. When Stephen first meets Valérie she is "dressed all in white and a large white fox skin was clasped round her slender and shapely shoulders" (246), but here dress is no clue to sexual identity.

Valérie Seymour's lovers are similarly atypical: the enigmatic Hortense, Comtesse de Kerguelen, "a very great lady, of a calm and rather old-fashioned beauty" (354), who left her husband, family and home because her love for Valérie was "[g]reater than all these most vital things" (355); and Jeanne Maurel, an equally striking woman, but in terms of image quite different to the Comtesse: "An elegant person wearing pearls around her throat above a low cut white satin waistcoat. She was faultlessly tailed and faultlessly barbered; her dark, severe Eton crop fitted neatly" (387).

Valérie's relationship with Stephen is also hard to define. Valérie is not an object of desire for Stephen, although her sexual attraction towards Stephen

is made clear. When Stephen asks Valérie to pretend that they are lovers, as part of her plan to force Mary to leave her for Martin, the response is typically candid: "If you want to pretend that you're my lover, well, my dear, to be quite frank, I wish it were true—I feel certain you'd make a most charming lover" (443). But Stephen's objects of desire and choice of lovers are always portrayed as heterosexual women and her friendship with Valérie develops despite the character's same-sex relationships, not because of them.

Stephen also meets other masculine women in Paris. Dickie West, the American aviator, "lived her life much as a man would have lived it" (387) and yet the way that she experiences her gendered embodiment is neither tragic nor morbid. By way of explanation the narrator informs us that Dickie "belonged to the younger, and therefore more reckless, more aggressive and self-assured generation" (387). The choice of name here would seem to have more than a passing significance, both in its rather crude sexual connotation (Dickie) and its geographical reference (West). A generation which in modern terms would be deemed "out and proud", Dickie and her type seem to the narrator to be saying: "'We are as we are; what about it? We don't care a damn, in fact we're delighted!'" (387).

The difference between Stephen's experience and Dickie's might be understood as being generational. It would be easy to go along with the narrative explanation that depicts Stephen and those like her as a pre-war generation of oppressed and despairing inverts, whilst affording Dickie and her peers a post-war confidence and optimism which refuses to be silenced. Another interpretation might focus on the degrees of difference between the characters. Dickie might be seen as an alternative model of female masculinity in which the decision to appropriate masculine signs has a different source and therefore a different expression. In the absence of any internal perspective for the character, however, it is unclear whether her masculinity is more obviously an aspect of her erotic identity or her gendered one.

The question of where characters such as Valérie Seymour and Dickie West fit into the novel's representation of inverts is significant. Valérie Seymour is not a "true invert" according to sexological definition (neither, strictly speaking is Dickie), and yet she is depicted as a leading figure within the community of inverts. As stated earlier, Hall must have known from her own experience that for every woman like Stephen there was a woman like Valérie. If Hall studied the sexological case studies with enough care, she would have also been aware that the overtly "mannish"

woman was a relatively rare phenomenon within the range of types of female congenital inverts. This begs the question why Hall chose to make Stephen, rather than, say, Valérie Seymour or Dickie West, the protagonist of her novel.

By presenting us with characters like Valérie and, to a lesser degree, Dickie, Hall provides an insight into the range and diversity of women whose primary sexual attraction is towards other women. She also demonstrates that for Stephen it is neither her sexuality nor her appropriation of "masculine" signs which set her apart from other female characters, although both of these factors contribute to Stephen's sense of isolation. It is her inability to identify as a woman or with women, which goes beyond her sexual relationships, coupled with a need for a coherent gendered identity that cannot be adequately fulfilled by cross-dressing, which give Stephen her tragic singularity.

There are other female-bodied masculine characters in The Well who appear to share something of Stephen's singular experience in that they clearly perceive that difference, as Stephen does, as something tragic and morbid. The characters who most closely match this model of inversion are Wanda, the Polish painter, tortured by twin demons: her Catholicism and the alcohol which serves to obliterate the "unnatural"

lusts forbidden by the teaching of that church; and the lugubrious, splenetic Jamie who, forced into a life of poverty and ill-health in the Parisian suburbs by the intolerance of her own community in Scotland, has become "a trifle unhinged because of the music that besieged her soul and fought for expression through her stiff and scholarly compositions" (354).

Whilst Wanda and Jamie are only minor characters, the unreservedly abject complexion of their portraits allows for interesting comparisons with Stephen Gordon. Their presence in the novel also demands that differences be recognised within the community, rather than erased under the categories of "invert" or "lesbian". Together these three characters can be seen to constitute the origins of a consciousness which does not sit comfortably within the larger community of inverts.

One of the most interesting points of comparison is that all three characters experience exile at a physical level, having to leave homelands which in different ways have failed them but which never cease to call them back. Wanda's account of her life in the little Polish town speaks of the "persecution and strife" which "ravaged her most unhappy country" (379). Yet her wistful nostalgia for the home which outlawed her—Wanda's brothers, who "were men of stone and of iron" (379) seem to Stephen to be the source of the

unexplained enforced departure—is anthropomorphised in her description of the incessantly chiming bells: “the Mass bells beginning at early dawn, the Angelus bells, the Vesper bells—always calling, calling, calling, they were, said Wanda” (378-79). Jamie’s bouts of deep depression are the result of the combining emotions of hatred for “the beautiful city of her exile” and an overwhelming longing for “the dour little Highland village” with its dullness and respectability and sense of security, all of which are qualities which create a kind of double bind for the character. On the one hand, they insist on a certain way of living which Jamie values and aspires to; at the same time, they exclude potentially destabilising elements such as Jamie. Stephen, too, is never able completely to detach herself from the lure of her home; she is haunted by its absence and just as the bells of Wanda’s home town call to her and Jamie pines for the dull respectability of her Highland village, Morton is never far from Stephen’s thoughts.

Morton has been interpreted as Edenic with Stephen’s expulsion as punishment for the “sin” of “homosexuality”.⁹ This analogy applies equally to Wanda’s and Jamie’s experiences. Each of these characters have been adjudged to have transgressed

⁹ See Jean Radford’s “An Inverted Romance: The Well of Loneliness and Sexual Ideology”, and Catharine R. Stimpson’s “Zero Degree Deviancy: The Lesbian Novel in English”.

"natural" laws and as a consequence they have been cast in the role of outlaw; each has necessarily felt compelled to forfeit her "rightful" place in their homeland rather than continue to live in its hostile environment. The adult Stephen not only forfeits her right to remain at Morton but eventually decides to leave England itself. Yet the homeland continues to evoke feelings of nostalgia and loss for Stephen. This enforced exile can be used to demonstrate how Stephen's ambivalence towards her home mirrors a similar reaction to her sexed body.

Foreign parts

If we accept that Morton represents the conventionally masculine values of tradition and class, values that are personified in its owner and steward, Sir Philip Gordon, and revered by Stephen, her banishment from the estate can be read against conventional interpretations. Her strong sense of belonging can be seen to align with and at some foundational level contribute to her construction of herself as male. These sensations—the sense of belonging and the sense of being male—are both challenged as Stephen grows up and is confronted with the fact that the official classification and popular perception of her sexed body will not allow her to continue to behave as if she were a man. The increasing

strain which Stephen experiences culminates dramatically in her exile from Morton, an exile that has come about because, as this reading of the novel would suggest, Stephen cannot become the woman that her body and, therefore, society, demands she should be. It takes the threat of scandal, Stephen's relationship with an older married woman, Angela Crossby, to bring matters to a crisis point, but Stephen's position at Morton and within the community has already become that of an outcast. This illegitimate status owes as much to her gendered embodiment as to her sexuality.

When Stephen is forced to leave Morton by her mother's ultimatum, "one of us must go" (205), and her own desire to do "the manly thing", it marks her severance from a home which had, at least temporarily, offered her a sense of gendered as well as familial belonging. Stephen grieves for the loss of Morton and her nostalgic and patriotic allegiance to the home and country of her birth is reflected in the impassioned statement: "There's no country for me away from Morton" (248). Her loss is also experienced at an aesthetic level. She craves for "the curving hills, for the long green hedges and pastures of Morton" (401), but this obvious display of nostalgia can contain an additional meaning. It can be read as a craving for a period in Stephen's life when there was less demand for gendered intelligibility, and a desire to recapture those rare

moments when it was possible for Stephen, in her own words, to be "happy just being myself" (37). Always underlying Stephen's wistfulness is a realisation that the haven which Morton seemed to offer Stephen in childhood, the feeling that she had an authentic place there in its masculine domain was an illusion or, at least, a passing phase and Stephen can never be "at home" at Morton again. These conflicting emotions seem to find expression in the description of Morton as "so quietly perfect a thing, yet the thing of all others that she must fly from, that she must forget" (235). Geographical exile can be seen to be linked to the metaphysical exile which Stephen experiences.

Gabriele Griffin presents expatriation as a trope for the lesbian protagonist's "alienated condition" (11). Stephen's alien state, however, can be traced to a double difference. At a literal level, it is both her choice of sexual partner and her expression of gender which set her apart and force her to leave Morton. Symbolically, I would suggest, it is her dissociation from the sex and gender of her own body, rather than her sexual desires, which her enforced departure represents. In Prosser's essay on Leslie Feinberg's Stone Butch Blues, the transsexual woman or man is imaginatively conceived as a displaced person searching for a home. Hence, the transsexual narrative becomes a quest for what Prosser calls "gendered becoming" ("No Place Like

Home" 490), with the period of transition being seen as a "means to an end" rather than "an end in itself". In the course of this extremely difficult journey the transsexual person must, according to Prosser, occupy "uninhabitable space", during which gender must be "redone, that is, done up differently" (488).

Judith Halberstam challenges the adoption of colonial metaphors and rhetoric in narrative and critical representations of transsexual subjectivity. In particular she questions the usefulness and ethics of what she views as a largely uncritical application of metaphors of travel and border crossings. "In Chicano/a studies and postcolonial studies in particular", Halberstam observes, "the politics of migration have been fiercely debated, and what has emerged is a careful refusal of the dialectic of home and border" (170). The potential dangers of borrowing from "contradictory and competing" (165) histories and narratives in the way Halberstam suggests are clear, but it is also surely an inevitable and, to some extent, necessary feature of evolving cultural identities to make such appropriations.

There is a very real sense in which Stephen is not "at home" but is instead caught in a period of transition, an "uninhabitable space" from which, in her case, there is not even an option of escape. This position of dislocation is conceptualised in The Well as

a "no-man's land of sex" (77), and the distress that Stephen experiences as her public world widens stems not from her sexuality, but from her inability to identify as a woman or be a man.

Another contemporary transgender narrative which can be usefully introduced to my discussion at this point is Rose Tremain's novel Sacred Country, first published in 1992. The parallels between Hall's and Tremain's protagonists—the inverted Stephen Gordon and the transsexual Mary/Martin Ward—and the representations of their experiences are striking. Tremain had read Hall's novel and had intended to return to it during her research period for Sacred Country; she subsequently decided that it was no longer relevant to her own project and focused her research primarily on written and oral transgender narratives.¹⁰ Nevertheless, the plot line of Mary/Martin Ward's life has remarkable affinities with that of Stephen Gordon. It is perhaps purely coincidental, or inadvertently referential, that the respective objects of Stephen's adult sexual desire and gender identification, Mary Llewellyn and Martin Hallam, have been resurrected in the given and chosen names of Tremain's transsexual character. The interpretive potential of this allusion, whether intentional or not, is irresistible. In terms of The Well's overt narrative, it evokes the

heterosexual union of Mary and Martin with which the novel ends and which appears to brand same-sex love as inferior and doomed. At a symbolic level, it brings together the rival components of Stephen's identity—her attraction to women and her male identification—and gives it a name: transsexuality.

The narrative trajectories of Stephen Gordon's and Mary/Martin Ward's lives have certain shared features and both characters display similar identifications and desires. Throughout Mary's childhood and young adult life, as far as she is concerned, she is a boy. She is not confused by her girl's body: she knows that it is the wrong one for her boy's identity. The strength of this conviction is reflected in her belief that as she grows her body will transform itself into that of a man's: "She imagined that, as she grew, her man's skin was hardening on her" (95). When this metamorphosis does not take place and she develops a woman's anatomy, she at first tries to conceal this outward indicator of sex and then begins a process of bodily transformation, initially through binding her breasts and adopting male clothing and ultimately through male hormones and a mastectomy.

Mary's discomfort with her gender role as a child is vividly portrayed in the imagery of a smocked dress

¹⁰ I am grateful to Rose Tremain for her written response to my questions about Sacred Country.

which she is made to wear to the village fete. It is significant that Mary's mother has stitched the smocking by hand herself: in both The Well and Sacred Country mothers are represented as guardians of a strict gender division and a particular kind of feminine role.¹¹ The heat of the day and the smocking on the dress irritate Mary's skin causing her to scratch at it angrily. The "little circles of blood" which appear among the "silky stitches" (9) of the dress seem to anticipate the arrival of puberty and the onset of menstruation. The grotesque tableau it presents gives this reminder of Mary's biological sex a slightly sinister feel and the whole scene a feeling of burlesque.

For the adult Mary, male clothing is encoded with a masculine virility which almost seems to transfer itself to the character: the "hard feel of the denim in her crutch was potent" (178). However, whilst the male clothing she now wears feels "right" it does not, in itself, solve the conflict Mary experiences between her inner and outer identity and actually serves to intensify her sense of incongruity. When Mary leaves home after a particularly brutal scene with her father she imagines the life ahead of her: "If you are Martin

¹¹ The role of the fathers in the novels provides an interesting narrative distinction; Sonny Ward, like Sir Philip, wills his first-born child to be a boy. In marked contrast to Stephen's narrative, however, Sonny is depicted as a brutal and ignorant father who actively, and at times quite violently, suppresses Mary's male identification.

Ward and you have white breasts, you pack your life up in cardboard and carry it away, always away, always on and never knowing where" (118). In this extract, Mary's "white breasts" are seen to represent the reason why Martin Ward can achieve no sense of a fixed, stable identity. This reference to the female anatomy, and particularly the emphasis on its whiteness, is reminiscent of Stephen's response to her own white, female body which must accompany her through life like a "monstrous fetter imposed on her spirits" (187). When viewed alongside their female anatomies it becomes clear to Stephen and Mary that clothing can only allow them to masquerade as men; they cannot be male. Far from allowing a freedom to travel between genders, in these narratives cross-dressing only makes the boundary more rigid and leaves both characters in limbo.

Another area for comparison is the representation of Mary's sexual desire as heterosexual: "she could only love women who loved men" (225). Mary's identification with the heterosexual male role can be seen to evolve during her adolescence when she meets and falls in love with Lindsey, a girl at her school. When Lindsey describes to Mary the things that her boyfriend does to her, Mary uses this to feed masturbatory fantasies about Lindsey in which her own body becomes the feminised object of her essentially male heterosexual gaze:

I laid her underneath me. My breasts became hers. I closed my eyes. She begged me to go deeper into her, to hurt her. She said:

"Destroy me, Martin." And when I was finished, she was bruised, she was crying. I licked her tears. I whispered to the wet pillow:

"Lindsey, it's your own fault." (150)

In this fantasy, which in its mawkishness even has a stylistic resemblance to The Well, Mary is punishing Lindsey for loving Ranulf Morrit, but more significantly she is punishing her own female body which is seen as the physical barrier between herself and a male heterosexual relationship with girls like Lindsey. She wants to usurp Ranulf Morrit's position in Lindsey's life—"Mary thought one day I will be like Ranulf Morrit. I will care for her" (96)—but her female body, like Stephen's, is a constant reminder of the impossibility of fulfilling that role. In the passage quoted above, the destructive and desiring drives to which Mary's body is subjected can be compared to Stephen's ambivalent response to a body that has become an object of hatred and pity.

As we follow the stages of Mary's physical transition into Martin, we are shown that even with the aid of hormones and surgery her sense of personal antipathy can never be completely overcome. There can be no satisfying union between her experience of

herself as male and her transformed body, and a melancholic sense of loss attends the various stages of that process. As it is depicted, the invention of Martin can never be completed. At the end of the novel, living a new life as a man in the United States, Martin recognises that this process has no end and chooses to curtail it. He rejects phalloplasty, the creation of a penis out of his own flesh, resigning himself to the fact that his gender identity as Martin is already as complete as he can hope for: "I am him and he is me and that's all" (353). In making this decision, Martin recognises that he will always occupy an in-between state as far as society's definitions of sex and gender are concerned, regardless of surgical intervention.

To a degree Tremain's decision to leave Martin's transformation incomplete challenges the biological determinism which dictates that you must have a penis to be a man. It is a male psychiatrist, Dr Sterns, who links Martin's sense of being a "real" man to the need to have a penis. Martin has no desire for further surgery and no need of a penis, and his story ends on a note of self-acceptance. Conversely, Stephen's story ends with the character wracked by the burden of being the spokesperson for the legion of inverts who seek society's acceptance. Nevertheless, in their distinct ways, both novels question the sex and gender rules which force people like Stephen and Martin into the

cultural margins. In depicting Martin's transition as an incomplete project, Tremain demonstrates that there are alternatives to the limited gender options prescribed by culture and society, but they are located in an intermediate territory: a "country in between, a country that no one sees" (148). This spatial metaphor provides a particularly resonant point of comparison between Tremain's Sacred Country and Hall's The Well and returns my discussion to the shaping of Stephen Gordon's narrative.

The Well is not a "transsexual" novel anymore than it is a "lesbian" novel in any modern sense of these terms, but certain features of that narrative can be understood in terms of the tropes of transgender narratives that Prosser's critical text and Tremain's novel identify. There is a feeling throughout The Well that Stephen is trying to "re-do" her gender, but it also clear that this is a transformation that will always remain unfinished. This is certainly not the playful, seamless, optional gender fluidity enjoyed by Woolf's Orlando, and Stephen can never truly be the "perfect gentleman" which, it is her strong conviction, she was born to become.

In the final section of this chapter the gap between Stephen's identification as male and her gender performance is examined for its potentially queer effects.

Queer states

Attempts to read the transgender aspects of Stephen Gordon's character in a queer context are initially constrained by the realist narrative and melancholic tone of the novel. The shaping of Stephen's narrative is constructed as a meandering but linear narrative quest for gendered belonging. The representation of that search may be transgressive, but it is characterised by feelings of shame, confusion and bereavement. It is questionable whether an experience of gender transgression that carries with it such a profound element of suffering can be discussed meaningfully in terms of the playful rhetoric of Butler's theory of gender performativity. The construction of Stephen's masculine gender during her childhood might be understood as the repeated simulation of the signs and behaviours of the male role models who inform and guide her early development: her father; the young Nelson; and old Williams, the groom. On the other hand, this account of the text fails to address what it is in Stephen that motivates such identifications and imitations.

It also unclear whether the dissonant effects of Stephen's masculinity serve to denaturalise gender or simply reinstate gender's "natural" status. In Bodies That Matter, in response to critics who challenge the

terms of her earlier representation of drag, Butler cautions against assuming that the denaturalisation of gender will in itself be subversive, arguing that it can be "the very vehicle for a reconsolidation of hegemonic norms" (125). Significantly for my discussion, in the chapter "Gender is Burning: Questions of Appropriation and Subversion", Butler uses a preoperative transsexual woman to illustrate her point. Venus Xtravanganza, one of the main subjects of Paris is Burning (1991), Jennie Livingston's documentary film of Harlem drag balls, is described by Butler as a "Latina/preoperative transsexual, cross-dresser, prostitute, and member of the 'House of Xtravanganza'" (125). In the passage below, Butler's comments about this literal transsexual subject contrast markedly with her reading of the playful transgendered figure in Gender Trouble. In that earlier work the drag queen's figurative approach to gender has subversive potential; in Bodies That Matter, Venus's actualisation of gender—her desire to be a "whole woman"—is deemed to be almost certainly reinscriptive. Butler observes:

when Venus speaks her desire to become a whole woman, to find a man and have a house in the suburbs with a washing machine, we may well question whether the denaturalisation of gender and sexuality that she performs, and

performs well, culminates in a reworking of the normative framework of heterosexuality. The painfulness of her death at the end of the film suggests as well that there are cruel and fatal social constraints on denaturalisation. As much as she crosses gender, sexuality, and race performatively, the hegemony that reinscribes the privileges of normative femininity and whiteness wields the final power to renaturalize Venus's body and cross out that prior crossing, an erasure that is her death. (133)

The second half of this passage deals with the subject of Venus's death during the making of the film. Earlier in the chapter, Butler expresses the view that Venus was murdered by an unsuspecting "client" who had discovered her male genitals. On this basis, Butler attributes the cause of her death to "homophobic violence" (130). In using the term "homophobic", Butler is probably accurately describing what motivated the fatal attack in view of a public perception that continues to conflate and confuse transsexual and homosexual identities; if Venus's self-identification as a transsexual is to be upheld, however, this crime might be classed more accurately as transphobic.

For Butler, it is because of the contradiction between Venus's passing female identity and her pre-

surgical body that she is both a threat to the dominant order and its certain victim. Butler links the cause of Venus's death—her "remaining organs"—to the subversiveness of her phantasmatic identification which "cannot be translated into the symbolic" (131). At the same time, Butler argues that it is Venus's transgressive potential which leads to her death: "This is a killing that is performed by a symbolic that would eradicate those phenomena that require an opening up of the possibilities for the resignification of sex" (131). Butler's construction of Venus's gender and race performance as "denaturalising" on the basis of her violent death is clearly contentious. Prosser, in his critique of Butler's reading of Venus, observes:

Even in her death, because of her transsexual incoherence between penis and passing-as-a-woman, Venus holds out for Butler the promise of queer subversion, precisely as her transsexual trajectory is incomplete. In her desire to complete this trajectory (to acquire a vagina), however, Venus would cancel out this potential and succumb to the embrace of hegemonic naturalisation. (Second Skins 49)

The "literalising/deliteralising" binary which structures Butler's discussion of Venus is one of Prosser's main concerns about queer theory's appropriation of transgender. In this instance,

Butler's recuperation of Venus into a queer frame is challenged by Prosser on the grounds of its ambivalent reading of the "literal ambivalence of Venus's transsexual body" (49) at the time of her death:

That Butler figures Venus as subversive for the same reason that Butler claims she is killed, and considers indicative of hegemonic constraint the desires that, if realized might have kept Venus at least from this instance of violence, is not only strikingly ironic, it verges on critical perversity.

Butler's essay locates transgressive value in that which makes the subject's real life most unsafe. (49)

Prosser's comments present Butler's reading of Venus as ironic and critically perverse because in its queer abstractions it disregards the painful, literal embodiment of being "differently sexed" (55). In conclusion, Prosser finds that Livingston's film and Butler's theory obscure "the intractable materiality of that body in its present state and its peculiar sex" (55). Although Butler's reading of Venus Xtravaganza shows that it is possible to locate this transsexual subject in a queer frame, then, Prosser's critique of that reading would suggest that such an approach is neither appropriate nor desirable as it questions the

resignifying potential of gender performances, rather than addressing lived, embodied narratives.

Much of my discussion of Stephen Gordon has focused on the material aspects of Hall's representation of her gendered embodiment. Aspects of that representation, however, can be usefully examined from a queer perspective that has informed the emergence of transgender in cultural and political terms. Although the "debt" to queer theory and in particular Judith Butler's writing is generally acknowledged by transgender theorists, some of those theorists are now keen to sever that alliance. Prosser's distinction between queer and transgender approaches to differently sexed or gendered subjects aims to demonstrate a rationale for that break. He states that whilst queer theory sees this difference as "positive and empowering", transgender theory views it as "a source of acute discomfort, most obviously experienced as shame" (492).¹² The polarity that Prosser's definition seeks to establish is troubling in that it appears to redefine transgender according to a highly prescribed criteria. The experience that Prosser associates with this term is certainly one that is a common feature of some transgender narratives, particularly those of subjects identifying as

¹² Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has written on the subject of shame in relation to queer theory in an article, co-written with Adam Frank, "Shame in the Cybernetic Fold: Reading Silvan Tomkins".

transsexual. But in terms of those narratives, there is surely more overlap between queer and transgender theorisations of sexed and gendered difference than is allowed for by Prosser's decisive statement.

Readers of The Well will be conscious of the feelings of "acute discomfort" and "shame" which characterise Stephen Gordon's narrative. But it is also possible to interpret the character's cross-gender desires in terms similar to those applied to Venus's transsexual desires. Stephen's interests in "being a man" are presented as being non-negotiable: Stephen wants to become a "whole man" with all the conventional, domestic trappings that such an unequivocally sexed and gendered identity would bring. In respect of those desires, Stephen is not actively seeking to challenge the dominant norms and her behaviour could indeed be seen to be reinstating them. In the painful details of Stephen's life, as opposed to Venus's death, the "cruel", although in this instance not fatal, "social constraints of denaturalization" can be witnessed. Finally, the hegemony that "reinscribes the privileges" of normative "masculinity" constantly undermines Stephen's "crossing". Neither Venus nor Stephen choose to remain in between sexes: circumstances, which could not be more different, dictate that common experience. Nevertheless, the necessarily limited "realness" of Stephen's cross-

gender identification results in an incoherent relationship between her body and gender which has queer effects as well as literal consequences.

It is unclear whether Hall is consciously subverting the theories and case studies on which she so heavily draws for her characterisation of Stephen and the other inverted characters of her novel, but it is possible to read Stephen Gordon's "masculinity" as both literalising and deliteralising. The novel's central characterisation produces certain tensions. On the one hand it appears to represent a gender meaning derived from and dependent upon a hegemonic, heterosexist culture; on the other hand, its recontextualisation of that performed gender creates discordant narrative and linguistic effects. One of the key elements of that disjunction is Stephen's name.

By giving her protagonist a male name, Hall is making public what is a common practice among some of the masculine women she knew. Hall herself is known as John; her friend Toupie Lowther is addressed by Hall and Una Troubridge as "Brother"; and the English artist, Gluck, adopts the name Peter.¹³ In Hall's novel, the fact that the choice of a male name for a female character takes place within a heterosexual matrix seems significant. From Hall's conservative,

¹³ Other examples include: Mary Allen, a policewoman, who took the name Robert; and the writers Christabel Marshall, who adopted her baptismal name Christopher St. John, and Naomi Jacob who was called Micky (Hallett 52-3).

masculinist view, it may appear to give an authority and legitimacy to that nomenclature that is lacking from her and her friends' pseudonymous practices. At a narrative level, there is no suggestion of the motivating force behind the naming of Stephen being anything other than bitter disappointment in her female sex and a stubborn refusal fully to accept the situation: "He [Sir Philip] insisted on calling the infant Stephen, nay more, he would have it baptized by that name. 'We've called her Stephen so long,' he told Anna, 'that I really can't see why we shouldn't go on'" (9). Whether we are supposed to read this as social determinism or prophetic insight, it creates one of the most destabilising effects of the novel.

Sir Philip's act of bestowing a male name on his daughter demonstrates an absolute paternal authority, whilst at the same time undermining the "natural" laws of the dominant order from which such authority derives. Culturally, a male-named, masculine-gendered but female-bodied character confuses the fixed relationship between naturalised sex and gender roles through its ambiguous mix of cultural markers. As discussed earlier, that disturbance is repeatedly shown in a recognition of Stephen's incongruous appearance both by herself and other characters; the rhetorical question she addresses to her mirrored image: "'Am I queer looking or not?'" (70) acquires an additional

resonance here. The character's personal incongruity is also jarringly reproduced in the language of Stephen's narrative where a masculine proper noun opposes a feminine pronoun. The dissonant relationship between the sexed and gendered elements of Stephen's identity—her female anatomy and male identification, her assigned feminine gender and performed masculine one—reveals both "the distinctness of those aspects of gendered experience which are falsely naturalized as a unity" (Butler, Gender Trouble 137) and the cultural power of the notion of ideal, unified subjects. In this light, the conflict between Stephen Gordon's cross-gender desire and her cross-gender performance can be seen to have both subversive and reinscriptive effects.

Hall's creation of Stephen Gordon is often condemned for what is seen as its uncritical appropriation of a figure which is itself modelled on stereotypical views of sex and gender roles. A careful reading of some of the case studies of female inverts and Hall's representation of inversion has revealed diverse and subtle differences operating within and between these texts. By focusing on Stephen's masculine identification and reading it for its literal significance, as well as its denaturalising potential, a new meaning to the historical and literary complexities that surround the character's identity has been offered. It is true that Stephen wants the

advantage and protection, both for herself and her sexual partner, that being a man would ensure, but it goes further than that. Stephen is not simply the "New Woman" who wants to have the same privileges and liberties as a man. She is not the lesbian who wants to make that sexuality visible. Stephen seeks a gendered coherence and this can only be achieved, it would seem, if her conception of her "true" gender can be embodied.

My location of Stephen's singular masculinity in a queer context identified some contradictory effects, as well as highlighting a certain ambivalence in the relationship between queer and transgender theories. In the next chapter, similar tensions emerge as a major theme of visual representations of transgender masculinities.

CHAPTER 2

Peter (A Young English Girl):**Visualising transgender masculinities**

Peter was shingled, dark, handsome, dressed like a boy, and looked like a boy, and yet I was assured that Peter was "jeune fille anglaise."

—report of a private view of Romaine Brooks's work at the Alpine Club Gallery, London, in The Daily Graphic dated 3 June 1925.¹

Presenting his subjects as looking "just like men" . . . [Loren] Cameron sustains the value of gender realness.

—Jay Prosser, Second Skins: The Body Narratives of Transsexuality (230)

"To be myself . . . I need the illumination of other people's eyes, and therefore cannot be entirely sure what is my self."

—Bernard from Virginia Woolf's The Waves (78)

¹ This report can be found in the National Collection of Fine Arts research material on Romaine Brooks (1874-1969) at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington DC.

During 1992-1993 an exhibition entitled "Visualising Masculinities" was held at the Tate Gallery in London. The declared aim of the exhibition was to examine "the display and meanings of the male body in art since the mid-nineteenth century". In doing this, the brochure informs us, it "recognises the important role that visual culture has played in circulating, often in a celebratory way, images of male power and the norms of manliness". One of the assumptions upon which the exhibition had been based was the view that masculinity "is a historical construct changing from period to period, and as a category is neither 'natural' nor culturally innocent".²

This chapter focuses on two artists who from their opposite ends of the twentieth century have produced portraits that visualise and celebrate their subject's own particular styles of masculinity. The works of both artists recycle "images of male power" and could be said to reinstate "the norms of manliness". They also demonstrate that "masculinity" as a category is neither fixed nor natural. And yet Romaine Brooks's portraits of cross-dressed females (1920-1924) and Loren Cameron's photographic studies of transsexual men (1993-1998) would severely test the boundaries of an exhibition of this kind because they do not display

² These extracts are taken from a passage from the exhibition brochure "Visualising Masculinities" quoted in Joseph Kestner's Masculinities in Victorian Painting (1).

"the male body" which, unlike masculinity, continues to be viewed as a stable and constant referent. Although the masculinity being "visualised" in the Tate exhibition has seemingly unlimited possibilities, there would almost certainly have been an underlying, tacit agreement that the biological origin of the masculine subjects should be male. Such fixed interpretations reflect an approach to identity that is institutionalised. In Female Masculinity Judith Halberstam challenges academic discussions of masculinity which continue to display "absolutely no interest in masculinity without men" (13). This chapter explores ways in which Brooks's and Cameron's portraits might be said to challenge the continuing association of masculinity with biologically male subjects. It also considers the extent to which either artist's work unsettles the cultural construct of "man" which informs and sustains that relationship.

In this context, the potentially dissident visual effects of Brooks's and Cameron's portraits are apparent. The juxtaposition of a masculinity that appears "real" with a body that is not biologically male might disturb dominant views that uphold a relationship between a gender that is constructed and a sexed body that is natural. Moreover, the forms of identification and desire provoked and solicited by these images may also have a disruptive impact on

viewers. On the other hand, such familiar images of masculinity may serve simply to recall and reinforce hegemonic norms, rather than revise or transgress them. The visual impact and cultural significance of these portraits depends upon the existence of certain tensions between the gendered pose, the sexed subject, and notions of "real" gender.

A close analysis of Brooks's and Cameron's works will reveal a number of ways in which such tensions are produced and highlight areas for comparison between these two very different artists. My discussion of the gendered effects of the portraits will primarily focus on three aspects of their composition. These are: the reworking of traditional genres and poses, the employment of visual dissonances, and the organisation of space and gaze.

Collectively, these portraits appear to represent visually what Chris Straayer, in Deviant Eyes, Deviant Bodies: Sexual Re-orientations in Film and Video, calls "a postmodern collapse of male-female and body-costume" in which "transsexualism" can be seen as "a kind of transvestism" (283-4). This shift of emphasis from the sartorial to the somatic in images of transgender masculinities from either end of the twentieth century is surely not incidental.³ A consideration of the

³ My use of the term "transgender masculinities" in this context aims to reflect the visual and cultural affiliations of the female masculinities of Brooks's portraits and the transsexual masculinities of Cameron's which this chapter proposes.

relationship between the different media employed by Brooks and Cameron and the different subjects represented makes evident the important role played by developing technologies, both artistic and scientific, in the visualisation of transgender identities. It also suggests the significant contributions that both artists have made to the emergence of that process of visualisation.

In the sections that follow, the individual and combined effects of Brooks's and Cameron's portraits will be examined. First, each artist will be set in her or his historical and cultural context.

Artistic profiles

In the 1920s an American-born artist called Romaine Brooks produced a series of portraits of cross-dressed women. Renata Borgatti au Piano (c. 1920), Self-Portrait (1923), Peter (A Young English Girl) (1923-4), Una, Lady Troubridge (1924), and Elisabeth de Gramont, Duchesse de Clermont-Tonnerre (c. 1924) all feature biological females in recognisably male poses and costumes with the favoured self-representation being that of the fin-de-siècle figure of the decadent dandy.

The "androgynous" had become an increasingly popular subject for unconventional artists and writers during

the second half of the nineteenth century. Emmanuel Cooper's study The Sexual Perspective: Homosexuality and Art in the Last 100 Years in the West describes how artists belonging to the Aesthetic Movement at the end of the nineteenth century took their inspiration from the androgynous visionary figures of works by Renaissance artists such as Leonardo Da Vinci (8). In "The Androgyne In Nineteenth-Century Art and Literature", Bram Dijkstra presents this renewed interest in the ideal of the androgyne as "the central symbol of revolt" in an ideologically motivated artistic movement against the dominant values of bourgeois society (73). Other critics have interpreted the androgyne's presence in late-nineteenth-century art as expressing "a fear of women that was part of nineteenth-century culture" (Kestner, "Edward Burne-Jones" 117), and constituting a repressed misogyny in its representation of the female as a castrated and castrating figure (Benstock, Women 303).

As Cooper points out, some of the subjects of Romaine Brooks's early portraits evince the androgynous qualities favoured by the Aesthetic Movement (90). Female nudes with boyish figures are the central focus of scenes inspired by myth and heavy with symbolism in works such as The Masked Archer (1910-11) and The Crossing (Le Trajet) (c. 1911). Androgyny was also a theme Brooks returned to in her semi-abstract drawings

produced during the 1930s, but her portraits of cross-dressed females are markedly different to the epicene figures of these other works.

Brooks was not the only artist to represent the cross-dressed female in this form during the modernist period. The English artist Gluck's work on this theme is comparable to that of Brooks both in its use of a realist portrait style and its dramatic quality. Gluck's Self-Portrait with Cigarette (1925) and the unfinished portrait, Mrs Romaine Brooks (1926), of which only a photograph now exists, provide valuable contemporary counter-views to Brooks's Self-Portrait and her portrait of Gluck in Peter.⁴

In addition to painted representations of cross-dressed females from this period, there are many photographic studies including a number of quite stunning portraits of Brooks, Gluck and Radclyffe Hall.⁵ These visual texts are central to a wider survey of female cross-dressing in that they document what Laura Doan calls "the wide spectrum of female masculinities in the 1920s" (697). Doan's essay "Passing Fashions: Reading Female Masculinities in the 1920s" emphasises the multiplicity of spectatorial

⁴ Gluck's choice of a six foot canvas for a reciprocal portrait of Brooks sparked a conflict between the two artists which resulted in the work being abandoned before completion. Subsequently, Gluck recycled the canvas. For a more detailed account of this incident see Diana Souhami's Gluck: Her Biography (63).

effects that women's adoption of "boyish or mannish garb" would have produced at the time, and cautions against (mis)readings informed by current cultural assumptions (665). Doan concludes: "Without a nuanced and historically detailed reading . . . we are in danger of collapsing into narrow and limited categories (cross-dressing) and labels (mannish lesbian) a rich terrain of sartorial and sexual possibilities" (697).

While recognising the importance of that diversity and the need for historical and cultural specificity, this chapter adopts a quite different focus and aim. Doan's essay provides a historical survey of "female masculinities". It resists singular readings of this "fashion" and stands as an implicit rebuke to those critics and activists who would appropriate these women as part of any one sexual or gender identity's history. In this chapter, it is partly that relationship between visual culture, processes of identification and the construction of visible identities which underpins and inspires a discussion of particular images of cross-dressed females from the 1920s.

In this respect, Brooks's portraits offer some of the most compelling source material from the era. Despite a period of unfashionability in the post-war years it is these images that have endured. Following a

⁵ Examples can be seen in Meryle Secrest's biography of Brooks, *Between Me and Life*, Diana Souhami's *Gluck*, and Terry Castle's *Noel Coward and Radclyffe Hall: Kindred Spirits*.

retrospective exhibition in America in 1971 Brooks's life and works have been the subject of biographical and critical scrutiny. In terms of her artistic status, since being rediscovered in 1971 her place in the history of American art has been secured.

Significantly, Self-Portrait is one of two of her works currently on permanent display at The National Museum of American Art in Washington DC. The other portraits discussed in this chapter, with the exception of Elisabeth de Gramont, are either held in storage at the museum or hang in its administrative offices.⁶ The artist's unpublished memoirs, No Pleasant Memories, are lodged in the National Collection of Research Materials on Brooks in the Smithsonian Institution's Archives of American Art, together with photographs of the artist and reviews of her work and exhibitions.

The combined impact of the style and content of Brooks's work is as striking today as newspaper reports and journal articles would suggest it was when it first appeared. A photograph of Brooks from the period (c.1925), cross-dressed and posing outside an art-gallery, bears the caption: "Romaine Brooks whose remarkably forceful paintings aroused much favorable comment at her recent exposition in the Charpentier Gallery". In an article from the February 1926 edition

⁶ Elisabeth de Gramont is held in France at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris.

of International Studio, John Usher refers to "a masculine vitality that propels from the canvases of this painter" (46). Most accounts of her portraits mention the distinctiveness of her style, and a review in the Sunday Observer, dated 7 June 1925, remarks on the pronounced effects of the "almost complete elimination of definite colour" from her work.⁷

Such contemporary appraisals of her artistic importance go some way to challenge more recent critical devaluations of her work. Brooks's use of a traditional realist form to represent subjects whose masculinity does not have a biological origin has led to the labelling of her work as "derivative" and her subjects as "castrated" and "self-mutilating". Bridget Elliott and Jo-Ann Wallace in Women Artists and Writers: Modernist (Im)positionings explore the reasons for this negative appraisal of Brooks's work. In a discussion which focuses on constructions of the modernist avant-garde and the originality it so highly esteems as masculine, Elliott and Wallace conclude: "In avant-garde terms her portraits represent mere copies of subjects who are themselves 'copies' of a heterosexual 'original' or 'natural'" (36). A reading of Brooks's portraits which counters this view will be one of the outcomes of this chapter.

⁷ The photograph, article and review are part of the Research Materials on Brooks at the Smithsonian Institution's Archives of American Art.

Viewed together, the portraits create an impression of being proud and powerful statements of how each subject chooses to be seen. The reality behind the images may, in some instances, be rather more equivocal. Meryle Secrest's biography of Brooks reports that although Una Troubridge expressed approval of her portrait to the artist, with friends she questioned the verisimilitude of the likeness (291). Diana Souhami describes Gluck's feelings of antipathy towards Brooks's work and life-style: "She thought Romaine's work technically and psychologically inferior to her own and scorned the 'lesbian haute-monde' as she called Romaine's social circle" (63). Nevertheless, these "offstage" disputes do not detract from the overall dramatic impact of the portraits, or the suggestion of energy and conscious self-fashioning which characterises the subjects of the works.

Individually, there is a diversity of "look" in the portraits which frustrates attempts to read them as a coherent body of work. Although the portraits are linked thematically and temporally, they are not a collection in the way that Loren Cameron's photographic studies of transsexual men are. In my discussion of the subjects of Brooks's portraits the adjective "cross-dressed" has been applied in favour of the term "cross-dresser" to avoid the imposition of specific sexual or gender categories. As suggested by Doan in the comments

quoted earlier, the reasons for the adoption of male attire during this period are varied, and attempts to apply singular identities are therefore hazardous and unwise. Furthermore, for the purposes of this chapter the actual intent of the subject is of secondary importance to the effect that is produced in each of the portraits.

In this respect, there are clear and important differences between the portraits; in particular, the "realness" of the masculine gender portrayed varies according to the subject. This is an important distinction which critical studies of Brooks's work tend to overlook. In Una (Figure 1), for example, the ambiguous relationship between the subject's gender and sexed body has a particular quality which sets it apart from the other portraits being discussed. Here, the conjunction between the classic signs of the aristocratic dandy and highly visible feminine cultural markers produces an extraordinary effect. The presence of the monocle and the tailed coat in combination with earrings, lipstick, and bobbed hair, a feminine domestic pose (with pet dogs in an interior setting), and an unequivocal portrait title can produce a playful, even ironic, relationship between the subject and the male clothes and accessories she adopts.

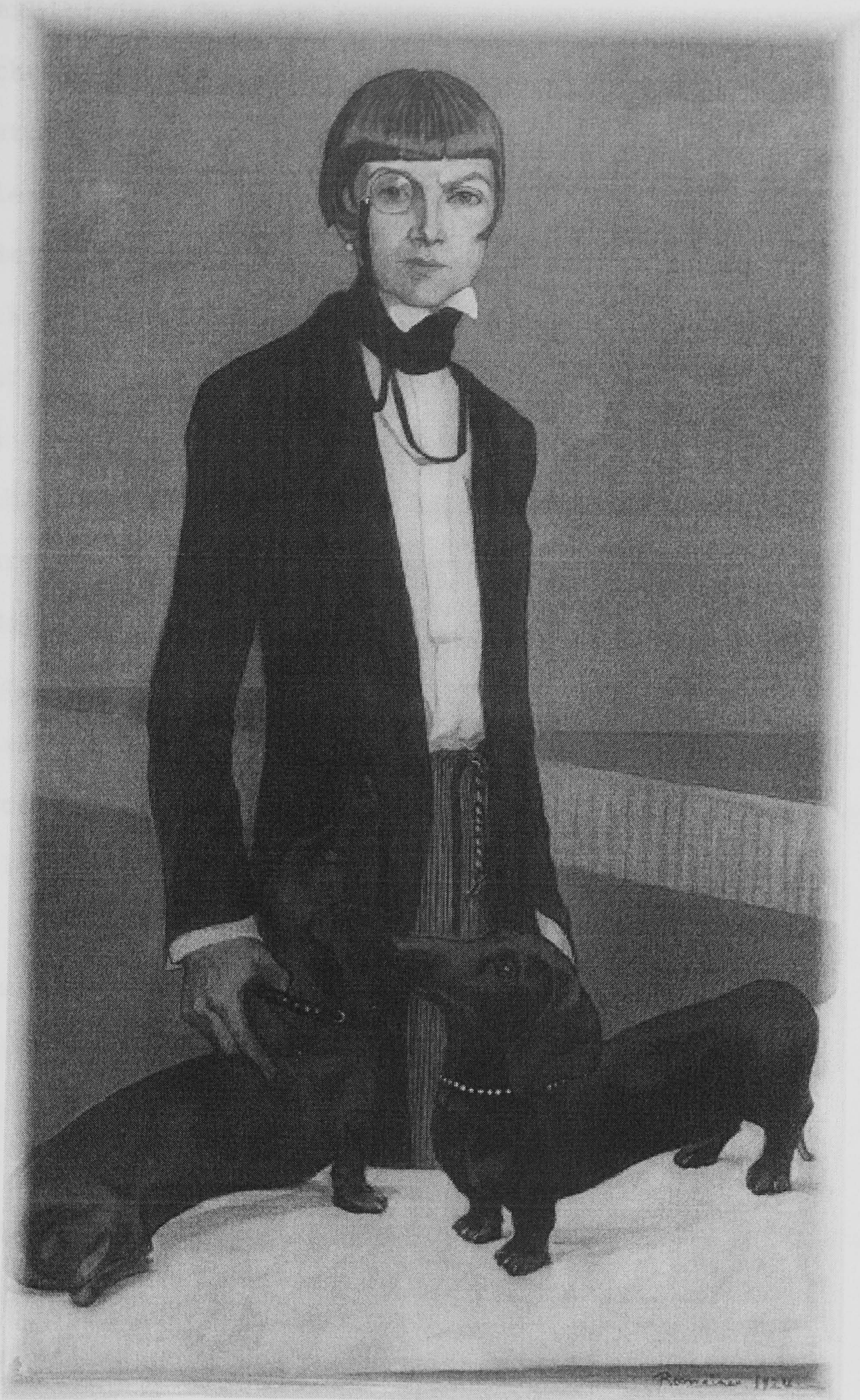


Figure 1 Romaine Brooks, Una, Lady Troubridge (1924)

By exhibiting the most extreme visual characteristics of the dandy the figure takes on a burlesque quality. Benstock expresses disquiet about the "dandy's burlesque of the female" (Women 180), but here that gender travesty appears to have become the subject of further transgressive revision. There is something about the conflicting messages of the image which gives it a double drag quality, as if the "original" subject of the masquerade were male and what we see is a man impersonating a woman cross-dressed as a man.

Marjorie Garber's discussion of the portrait in Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety argues that the masculine signs which Una Troubridge adopts are "the most recognizable and readable signs of the lesbian culture of Paris" (152). As Doan suggests, this unproblematised conflation of certain cultural signs and lesbianism may foreclose "interpretive possibilities" through its inflexible association of "accessory and identity" (679).

Other more sinister implications have been construed from critical studies of this portrait. Una's rather fierce look, accentuated by the monocle enlarging her right eye and her imperiously arched eyebrows, has been interpreted by Benstock as indicative of the divided and tortured psyche of the female cross-dresser (Women 304-305). Benstock's reading of Brooks's portraits of cross-dressed women as

being all part of "Romaine's dark vision" (304) is informed by a pre-conceived view that cross-dressing is the female invert's expression of self-hatred. Susan Gubar, whom Benstock cites, expresses similar views. In her essay, "Blessings in Disguise: Cross-dressing and Re-Dressing for Female Modernists", Gubar's discussion of the paintings of Brooks and Frida Kahlo draws a parallel between each artist's representations of female figures in male costumes:

In their different ways, both reveal how—as an erotic strategy—cross-dressing can free the woman from being a sex object for men, even as it expresses the mutilation inextricably related to inversion when it is experienced as perversion. For these two artists, the cross-dresser is . . . a self-divided, brooding Byronic figure who dominates the center of their canvases, hinting at power diminished or fallen. (486)

Gubar is referring specifically to Brooks's and Kahlo's self-portraits here, but these comments are extended inferentially to the rest of Brooks's portraits of cross-dressed females including Una. Gubar describes the "power" and "ambiguous sexuality" which characterise these paintings, and observes that "even the most powerful of these figures look lonely" (489).

Brooks's sense of estrangement is alluded to in her private memoirs, No Pleasant Memories, where she writes of a "determination to remain outside the circle of convention" and calls herself "one of 'Les Lapidés'" (145). Yet her increasingly public displays of transvestism might be seen more as a harmonisation of the dissonant elements of her identity, than as an expression of some personal disunity. With regards to the portrait of Una the subject certainly looks severe, but might this not be read as an aristocratic haughtiness that would not attract the same kind of attention if she were dressed conventionally (or if a male subject had adopted the same demeanour)? Why should it be an expression of psychological angst? Readings which construct Brooks's portraits as reflecting the "soul" of the subjects through their "amazon bodies" (Benstock, Women 304) fail to distinguish adequately between the artist's life and her work. Furthermore, they seem to be inspired by an oversimplified belief that cross-dressing purely reacts to the heterosexual norm "by aping its forms" (Benstock, Women 307). Such readings also overlook the marked differences between the visual effects of a painting such as Una, where the gender transgression is parodically figured, and those of Self-Portrait (Figure 2), and Peter (Figure 3), where the ambiguities are more subtly expressed.

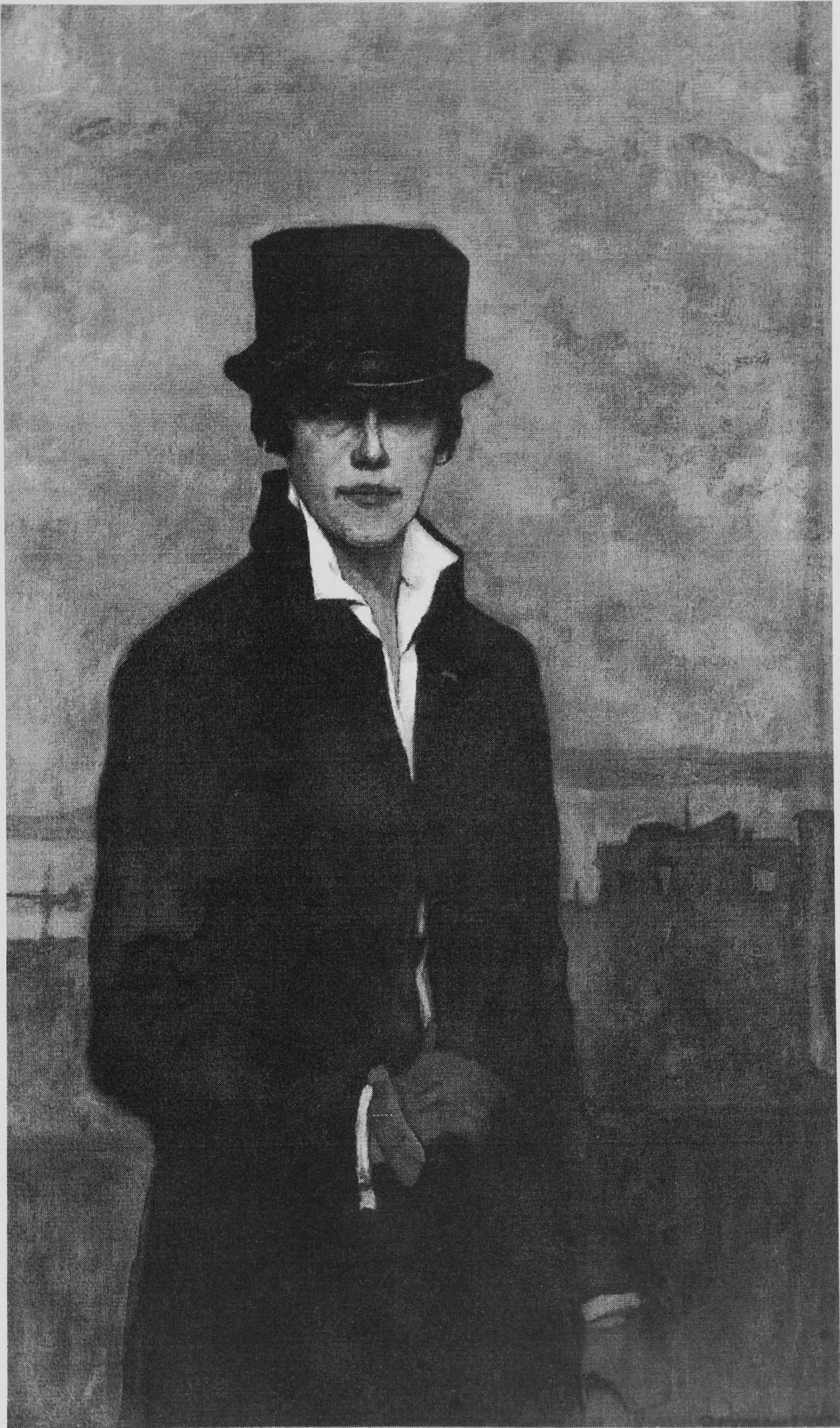


Figure 2 Romaine Brooks, Self-Portrait (1923)



Figure 3 Romaine Brooks, Peter (A Young English Girl)

(1923-4)



Figure 4 Romaine Brooks, Renatta Borgatti au Piano

(c. 1920)

The female dandy, like her male counterpart, is not a monolithic image and Brooks's portraits reflect that historical and sartorial diversity. In the process of wearing an image that has been variously reworked since its emergence in the eighteenth century, Brooks's subjects give that image a new slant; or, more precisely, a new range of slants. In each portrait we see a different version of the dandy. It is only by viewing the original works together that the variety of these self-representations and their differing effects can be fully appreciated. As already stated, the overdetermined glamour of the dandy in Una evinces a certain self-parodying incongruity in its deliberate mixing of signs. In Brooks's Self-Portrait the confidence and ease of the full-face pose and the penetrating gaze give the figure a sexy, decadent air. Peter has a quite different feel to it. This version of the dandy is reminiscent of the earlier, more sober figure epitomised by Beau Brummel at the end of the eighteenth century. Portraits of dandies from this period demonstrate the often funereal style of costume that was favoured by these men.⁸ In keeping with this earlier fashion Gluck cuts a stylish but rather austere and remote figure. She is facing away from the

⁸ Elizabeth Wilson, in her essay "Deviant Dress", explains how the early dandies introduced a style of dress for men that intensified masculinity leading, at the time, to the association of manliness with sober attire (69). The more flamboyant, so-called decadent dandy emerged at the end of the nineteenth century.

spectator apparently ignoring her or his gaze. There is a strong sense of the subject's desire to be taken seriously in her male pose. There is also something deeply attractive about the quiet intensity of this youthful, masculine figure.

The dandy of Peter underplays the theatricality which the dandy of Self-Portrait embraces and which Una positively flaunts. All three portraits, despite these apparent differences in register, suggest an affinity between their subjects which is ostensibly to do with the class and gender suggested by the sartorial codes they exhibit, but also derives from a feeling of self-containment and composure which emanates from each figure. It is a quality present in Renata Borgatti au Piano (Figure 4) and Elisabeth de Gramont. In both portraits the subjects are models of self-possession. Renata presents a figure dressed in a black cloak and white shirt, short dark hair swept away from the face, eyes closed in concentration or possibly quiet rapture, apparently in enthralled communion with the piano which occupies almost half of the framed space. The portrait of Elisabeth de Gramont foregrounds a poised and commanding figure sporting a short, foppish hair-style, brown top-coat and elaborate white neckcloth. Although the subject's body faces the spectator, the angle of the head and direction of the eyes towards a point outside the boundaries of the painting once more

suggest an unawareness or deliberate evasion of that controlling gaze. The backdrop, in typically understated fashion, depicts a house of classical but fading elegance. The resulting ensemble is imbued with masculine authority. Consequently, although all the portraits feature cross-dressed females, each subject's interpretation of dandyist style produces a distinctive masculine "look" and the degree of authenticity achieved varies according to its dissonant elements. It is in respect of this sense of the subject's agency in combination with her cross-gendered image that these paintings can be identified as quite remarkable representations of masculine self-fashioning.

Loren Cameron, like Brooks, is an American-born artist. In the course of the 1990s he too has produced a set of portraits which are quite stunning in their visualisation of unconventional masculinities. Cameron's photographic studies of himself and other transsexual men, collected together in Body Alchemy: Transsexual Portraits (1996), are described by Diane Middlebrook as "[a]n irreplaceably valued documentation of a cultural moment".⁹ The cultural climate in which these portraits have emerged, with its developing technologies in the fields of art and science, is significant. Susan Sontag's On Photography describes the translation of experience into images which the

⁹ This comment is quoted on the back cover of Body Alchemy.

"industrialization of camera technology" has enabled as the democratisation of "all experiences" (7).

Developments in medical technology have allowed transsexual subjects to translate a particular experience—an experience of gender that conflicts with their bodies—into an image. That these personal images should then be made public or, to use Sontag's term, democratised through the process of photography gives Cameron's work a particular rationale.

Cameron's portraits have appeared at a point where visual images of androgynous-looking women and men abound. From a position of marginality and, according to some readings, revolutionary symbolism in the works of a small group of late-nineteenth-century artists, the androgyne "look" has become a pervasive, domesticated presence in mainstream culture.¹⁰ To be truly androgynous is to display masculine and feminine qualities in equal measure and thus evade or defy any one fixed gender definition. By contrast, transsexual subjects more usually attain to one gender or the other.

The unequivocal masculinity of many of the subjects of Cameron's work seemingly resurrects the gender binary that recent fashions would affect to blur. For Cameron, that is its point: he wants to uphold the rights of transsexual men to have an

¹⁰ See Marjorie Garber's Vested Interests.

unambiguous gender identity.¹¹ Viewed in this context, his work invites the same types of negative comments as Brooks's portraits have provoked. Judged alongside other contemporary artist-photographers working in similar areas it is easy to lose sight of the profound impact of Cameron's contribution. Certainly his work does not have the immediate gender queerness of Del LaGrace's work; nor does it elicit the same kind of viewer responses. LaGrace's photographs have always been controversial; designed to break taboos, excite and shock. Jacqui Gabb's essay "Marginal Differences? An analysis of the imag(in)ed bodies of Del LaGrace" calls LaGrace "one of the 'kings' of queer" (298). From the dildo-wearing female models of the collection Love Bites (1990) to a more recent project "Trans-genital Landscapes", described in an exhibition catalogue as "oversize studies of genital mutations, including the photographers [sic] own", LaGrace's images continually aim to challenge normative gender identities and sexual practices.¹² Cameron's work as a transsexual artist-photographer (an adjective he hopes to shed in the future), rather than a queer one, has its own less

¹¹ I met Loren Cameron in October 1998 to discuss his role as a photographer and his work in general.

¹² Love Bites was produced when LaGrace was identifying as a lesbian and working under the name Della Grace. Currently, his full name is Del LaGrace Volcano. The exhibition Witness: Works of Trans-representation was mounted at various venues in Hoxton Square, London to coincide with the 2nd International Transgender Film and Video Festival held on 24-27 September 1998.

immediately evident transgressive effects. It also constructs a distinct visual space for his subjects. Other photographers have carved out similar areas. Nan Goldin's collection The Other Side (1991) pays personal homage to the "gender euphoria" of the transvestite and transsexual women who are her friends and openly acknowledged objects of desire; Mariette Pathy Allen's "Photographs from a Movement" presents a visual archive of the work of United States based activists Transsexual Menace, recording key moments in its history from the years 1995-96; and Cathy Opie's representations of alternative masculinities include portraits of transsexual men.¹³ Whilst recognising the value of other photographers working in this field and accepting areas of overlap, the specific nature of Cameron's relationship to his subjects, and especially to himself as subject, give his contribution an artistic and cultural distinction. As a transsexual man photographing transsexual men what Cameron is doing is, in his own words, "the first of its kind". More personally, the nature of many of the portraits included in Body Alchemy make a public performance or narrative of his own and other transsexual men's gender transitions.

¹³ "Photographs from a Movement" is included in Read My Lips by Riki Anne Wilchins; examples of Opie's work are discussed in Halberstam's Female Masculinity.

Cameron's black and white portraits are primarily concerned with showing his subjects as people and, as such, the narratives that are presented are personal rather than political ones. In discussing his work, Cameron explains that his photographs are not about constructing masculinity but are a visual means of making transsexual men's experiences of "who they are" visible and therefore "real". In this respect, the images disclose and celebrate the masculinity of their subjects, but also give the subjective "truths" of those identifications a material "reality". A new project, shot in colour, presents nude portraits of transsexual men and women with their partners. This combination of a conventional pose—the double portraiture of the standard heterosexual couple—and an unorthodox subject¹ is typical of the productive and distinctive way Cameron reworks "authentic" stock images. One of the effects of this technique may be to question naturalising concepts of masculinity and heterosexuality. Although the portraits appear to sustain binary categories, they also foreground erotic relationships between conventionally and unconventionally sexed and gendered subjects in ways which can trouble those dominant norms.

There is something of this in Romaine Brooks's work too. Brooks's portraits, like Cameron's, employ traditional genres and poses. The particular manner in

which "borrowed" images are reworked by Brooks can be seen to resist those critics who would label both the style and cross-dressed subjects of her portraits as "second hand". In less overt but similarly challenging ways to Cameron's work, Una, Self-Portrait, and Peter question original/copy models of identity. These portraits obscure gaps between the biological sex of the subject and their gendered pose; expose inconsistencies between that pose and the "reality" of the masculine aesthetic adopted; and, inferentially, question the stability and authenticity of masculinity itself.

The following sections, in which these effects are examined in detail, centre on the co-existence of a number of seemingly contradictory or conflicting positions which Brooks's and Cameron's portraits make visible. These include: a visual construction of the subject's gender which presents it as "authentic" and yet "different"; the presence of "phallic" or androgynous symbols and the absence, real or implied, of the penis; and the adoption of looks and poses which both recall and refute normative views of "manliness".

Siting difference(s)

The use of visual dissonances to register difference is an important aspect of the dislocating experience that

a first encounter with Brooks's portraits of cross-dressed females produces. Viewing Romaine Brooks's Self-Portrait for the first time is a strangely arresting moment. The handsome aristocratic figure that dominates the canvas captivates and unsettles. There is a pleasing depth and sensuality to the predominately monochromatic composition. The rich, textured blackness of the subject's hat, hair and jacket, offset by the brilliance of the white winged collar and shirt front give the figure an air of elegance and decadent glamour. A vaguely defined background comprising sky, water, hills and featureless buildings, depicted in various shades of grey, enhances the air of mystery and romance that emanates from the darkly brooding image. The greenish tinge to the skin colour gives the face a slightly ghostly pallor suggestive of effeteness and physical frailty; the chin and neck have a more robust appearance. A classic, formal pose is struck; one arm held closely to the side with a thumb hooked inside the dress jacket. In spite of the low brim of the top hat, the eyes are clearly seen as the spectator's gaze is boldly returned. There is a defiant, even arrogant bearing in both the look and the pose; a refusal to be objectified or rendered passive. But the firmly set lips are just a touch too pink, and there is something about the stray tendrils of hair that softly curl around the face that invite the discerning spectator to

look more closely at the "male" subject of this portrait. The self-referentiality of the portrait's unequivocal title might resolve any questions concerning the "actual" identity of the figure, yet the disrupting elements in the composition itself are minimised as Brooks resists the female identity which spectators might seek to impose on the figure portrayed.

Elliott and Wallace draw parallels between this sense of dislocation and the jarring note created in The Well of Loneliness by Hall's use of a female pronoun in relation to the protagonist Stephen Gordon. The masculine proper noun, Elliott and Wallace explain, disrupts the female pronoun (49). This is specifically compared to Brooks's choice of title, Peter, for her portrait of the English artist Gluck. The portrait's title, we are told, "directs the viewer to look again and to look differently" (49).

There is something linguistically playful and provocative about the title for Gluck's portrait which sets it apart from Brooks's other paintings on this theme. In semantic terms, the title is an anomaly that encapsulates the paradoxical nature of the image it represents; a paradox which only becomes fully evident once it is known. The tension between the subject's sexed body and gendered pose which the portrait only hints at is forcefully presented in the juxtaposition

of the masculine image of the portrait and the gender ambiguous name—Peter—and specific female role of its title.¹⁴ The latter seems to have little to do with the figure we see before us, for the impression created by Gluck's portrait is anything but that evoked by the designation "a young English girl" with its promise of feminine propriety. Indeed, the painting confronts the spectator with the youthful masculinity of its subject in what might seem to be an uncompromising manner. The black coat, white shirt and black tie, the short cropped hair and strong but sensitive profile, the stiff impassivity of the pose, all seem to denote a faithful and unembellished representation of a young man of a certain class and temperament. Any hint of effeminacy in the image is unlikely to be attributed to the "true" source of the subject's "difference" and it is the portrait's title which must register the gap between the masculine pose and the female sex of the subject. This has a certain rationale for it is language that will continue to construct the subject of the portrait as a woman even though she looks like a man; visually, we see Gluck as the man she and Brooks presumably want us to see. Consequently, although

¹⁴ Gluck had rejected her birth name, Hannah Gluckstein, as part of her masculine self-fashioning. By 1918, when Gluck was twenty-three, she was calling herself Peter. She was also given the names Tim and Timothy Alf by one of her lovers, Nesta Obermer (Souhami, *Gluck* 1, 35).

Brooks's painting of Gluck obscures the sitter's given identity, the portrait's title exposes it with seemingly self-conscious irony. In ways similar to some of the transsexual autobiographies discussed in the next chapter this choice of title troubles conventions. A Girl's Journey to Manhood, the subtitle of Raymond Thompson's co-written autobiography, makes explicit the paradoxical and yet "real" (because lived) experience of his identification as a man. The title Peter (A Young English Girl) becomes an important key to reading the complexities of the subject's identity and an integral part of the portrait's effect. Although the painted image of Gluck foregrounds the subject's sameness to some men, the title reveals what the visual text chooses not to foreground: the subject's difference, in biological and cultural terms, from all men.

An important aspect of the impact of all of the portraits being discussed is the sartorial style upon which they draw. The adoption of the costume and pose of the male dandy in itself registers the subject's difference. By choosing to assume a masculine aesthetic originating in the late-eighteenth century and more contemporaneously associated with male homosexuals such as Oscar Wilde, the women exhibit the cultural markers of an already recycled figure and identify themselves

with "a marginal, deviant, and illegal sexuality" (Elliott and Wallace 51). There is a degree of irony and sound reasoning in this appropriation since the women concerned are themselves very often exhibiting sexual desires and practices which, whilst they were not illegal, were being categorised by sexologists of the time as "marginal" and "deviant". If the cross-dressed images are viewed purely in the context of the development of a visible lesbian identity, then, as Elliott and Wallace argue: "Part of that process included culturally imag(in)ing themselves from a perspective that embodied their differences in a form that could be socially recognised" (52). The flamboyant persona of the dandy was certainly one that was easily identified.

There is another construction of the dandy which allows us to look beyond the figure's erotic signification and towards his or her function as a symbol of reinvention. In Gender on the Divide: The Dandy in Modernist Literature, Jessica Feldman presents the dandy as a "figure who practices and even impersonates, the fascinating acts of self-creation and presentation" (3). Feldman argues that the dandy's self-conscious costume and poses, together with his enthusiasm for presentation and performance, make him an especially instructive symbol for the

constructedness of gender identity. Indeed, this dandy declares "I am what I choose to appear to be" (13).

The primacy of a self-affirmation of identity over any other identity that might be attributed or imposed will be illustrated in my discussion of Woolf's Orlando and transsexual life-narratives in Chapter 3. It would seem to have equal, if not greater, currency in visual texts. This interpretation of the dandy gives a new meaning to Brooks's work, particularly Self-Portrait and Peter. In both paintings the subjects can be seen to have assumed not only the dandy's sartorial style but also his self-conscious construction and presentation of gender. More problematically from a feminist perspective, they might additionally be seen to have embraced the dandy's uncritical stance towards the social conventions the dandy feigns to ignore and yet intrinsically depends upon. Rhonda K. Garelick's Rising Star: Dandyism, Gender, and Performance in the Fin de Siècle identifies a weakness in Feldman's reading of dandyism as a force for change. In an endnote, Garelick argues:

While dandyism certainly questions gender role, this would not be sufficient to move it beyond patriarchy, whose essentially class-based system dandyism did little to question The dandy was never politically subversive, nor was he a feminist. (209)

Critical perceptions of the failure of Brooks and other cross-dressing females of the period to challenge either the class structure or women's oppression are clearly reinforced by their sartorial associations with the dandy. Although this is an important issue, the political implications of the cross-dressed female's recourse to male authority is not a central concern of this chapter. Nevertheless, as will become apparent, a reading of the shifting but contingent relationship between the dandy that inspired the subjects of Brooks's portraits, the dandy that is portrayed, and male authority will reveal a greater potential for disruption than is immediately evident.

There are a number of interesting comparisons to be made between Brooks's images of the dandy and Cameron's adoption of the look and poses of the bodybuilder in the triptych of black and white self-portraits, "God's Will", shot in 1995. Although both figures have misogynist associations, in terms of class and aesthetics they would seem to be the antithesis of each other. The dandy's upper-class effeteness and the bodybuilder's working-class machismo seemingly position these figures at opposite ends of a continuum of male masculinity. In Judith Halberstam's critique of male masculinity she identifies the "stereotypical constructions" which label particular classed or raced bodies as either insufficiently or excessively

masculine; in either instance this is seen as a process that reinforces the alignment between masculinity and middle-class white maleness (2). Although Brooks's nineteenth-century dandy and Cameron's twentieth-century bodybuilder express distinct versions of white masculinity, applying Halberstam's terms of lack and excess distances both figures from the white male middle-class body of dominant concepts of masculinity. The culturally enforced marginalisation of the dandy and the bodybuilder might suggest a shared potential to reflect critically upon that construction of gender normativity.

Beyond that, certain factors upon which the bodybuilder's display of masculinity relies parallel elements of the dandy's presentation. There is a theatricality about both figures: an emphasis on show and surface, and a certain "drag" quality to that performance. The bodybuilder like the dandy can be seen as what Feldman describes as "nothing but the sum total of powerful, premeditated, costumed poses" (12). For the bodybuilder it is the sculpted body, rather than stylish attire, which clothes those poses and the muscles themselves that become a form of costume.¹⁵

Marcia Ian's essay "How Do You Wear Your Body:

Bodybuilding and the Sublimity of Drag" interprets the

¹⁵ The idea of muscles as costume is not a new one. See Chris Holmlund's "Masculinity as Multiple Masquerade: The 'Mature' Stallone and the Stallone Clone", and Laurie Schulze's discussion of female bodybuilding, "On the Muscle".

act of bodybuilding as "the desire to abolish any separation between mind and body, wearer and wear-ee, and become one with the tightest fitting bodysuit imaginable, a suit made of veins and translucent skin that looks like the inside worn on the outside" (83). Ian's description recalls the postmodern blurring of body and costume discussed earlier, and can be seen to cast bodybuilding as a another "kind of transvestism" (Straayer 284). The extent to which bodybuilders might also be said to display an androgynous mix of sexed and gendered signs, and thus suggest a further link to transgendered subjects, will be explored later.

In Brooks's portraits of cross-dressed females the relationship between the male costume and poses of the dandy and the relative gender realness or gender ambiguity of the subjects depends on the manner and tone in which they are adopted. In Cameron's self-portraits the site of meaning is relocated to the hypermasculine physique and postures of the bodybuilder, and the particular way in which he has chosen to present that body is in direct relation to the realness of the masculinity that is disclosed. These studies also register a difference that other self-portraits in Body Alchemy, where he might adopt the work clothes and pose of the professional man or the labourer, neither reveal nor suggest.

Each of the three shots in "God's Will" exhibits a potent display of hypermasculinity as well toned muscles, suitably "pumped up" for the occasion, and flame-like tattoos are complemented by the classic bodybuilder pose that Cameron adopts. These familiar, recycled images which could be so trite and uninspiring are rendered new and extraordinary by the visual dissonances that surround and inhabit the subject's body. In one of the three shots (Figure 6), Cameron wields a dumb bell; in the other two poses an image which is a familiar and legitimate means to acquired muscularity is replaced, to ironic effect, by other more culturally burdened signs: the scalpel (Figure 5) and the syringe (Figure 7). In disclosing his naked body Cameron is laying bare quite literally what it has taken to embody his particular experience of masculinity; surgery and regular injections of testosterone have contributed to the powerfully built, sculpted form that we see.

In this context the scalpel and syringe might be read as just another part of the artistic process: intrinsic elements of the final product and for the purposes of these photographs no more or less important than the dumb bell or the camera that captures the images. But such images, however playfully employed, cannot be so readily distanced from their literal and symbolic associations: a bodily transformation which



Figure 5 Loren Cameron, "God's Will" (1995)



Figure 6 Loren Cameron, "God's Will" (1995)

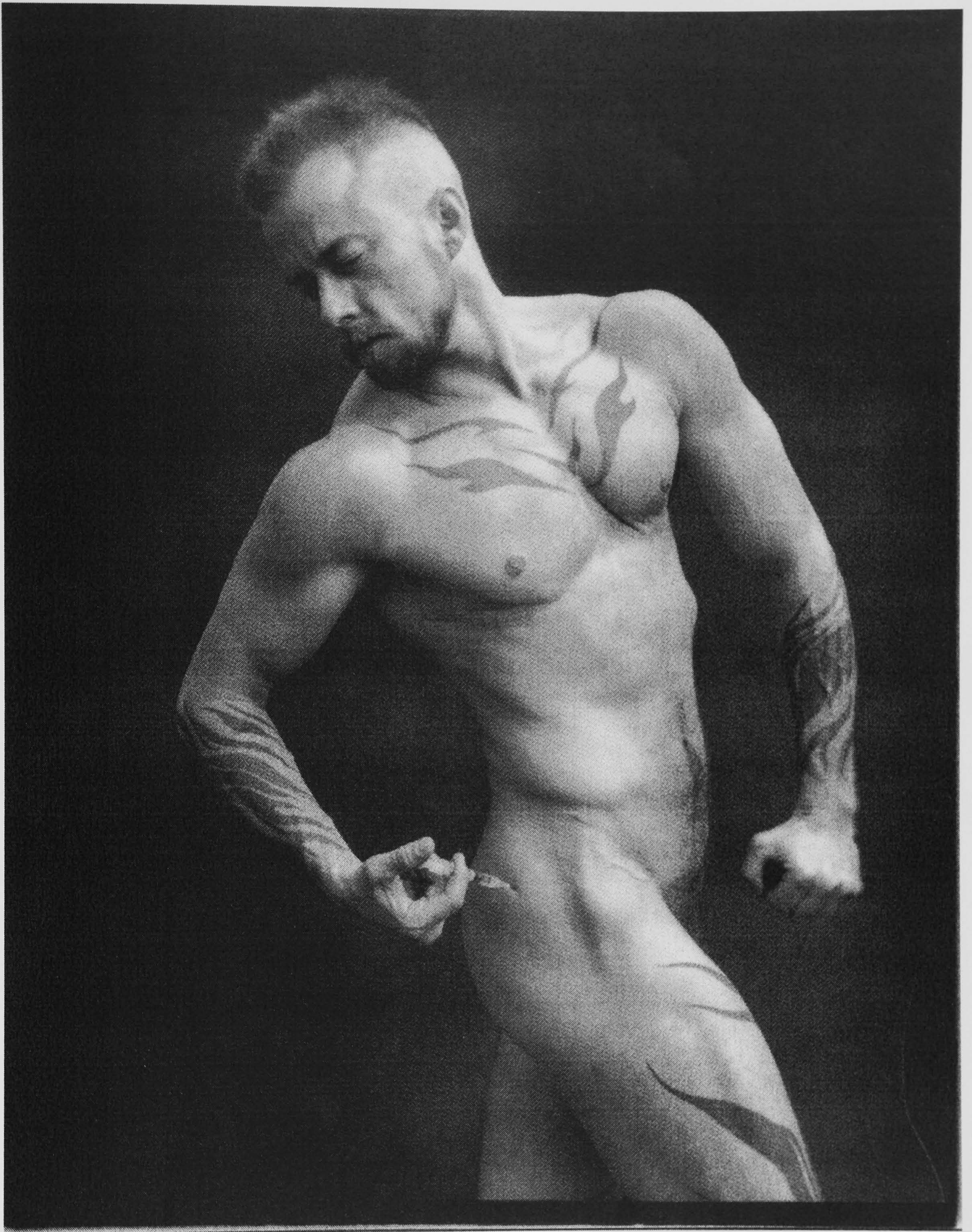


Figure 7 Loren Cameron, "God's Will" (1995)

requires the use of a scalpel and a syringe must involve pain; a naked, ambiguously sexed subject wielding a scalpel may invoke "castration" models.

In these shots nothing is hidden from view. In speaking about "coming out" to people as a transsexual man, Cameron says: "By revealing myself, I have consensually invited their voyeurism; they can't help but watch as I make a spectacle of myself" (15). The photographing of his naked body, together with the various props that have helped to refigure it, take that "spectacle" to its furthest and most literal point. The portraits also have another important effect in that they draw attention to the constructedness of "natural" signs of masculinity of which the bodybuilder's muscles would seem to be a particularly hyperbolic instance. In this light, the syringe as a means, albeit illegitimate, to excessive muscularity and the scalpel as a means to a surgically altered body shape assume a more general significance. It is not only transsexual men who inject themselves with male hormones or resort to surgery in their quest to embody an ideal of physical perfection. Nevertheless, the evidence of Cameron's naked body and the props he displays distinguishes his relation to that ideal from that of other bodybuilders. The scalpel and the syringe, viewed in conjunction with the mastectomy scars on Cameron's chest and his female genitalia,

indicate the highly particular nature of this subject's life-narrative.

Such images produce differing effects according to the spectator. Undoubtedly they have a "surprise" or "shock" value for some audiences, particularly those unfamiliar with the "differences" of transsexual bodies. During my presentation of a research paper, a number of the academic staff and students viewing the portraits for the first time responded in ways which emphasised the pain of the images.¹⁶ Critical discussions hostile to transsexual subjects often utilise the term "self-mutilating" in pejorative ways, and for some spectators an ideological or physical squeamishness can predetermine a negative or hostile reaction to Cameron's self-studies.

More affirmative responses may read the portraits as an absolute and unapologetic statement of who Cameron is: a man whose masculinity does not depend upon the possession of a penis, or as Stephen Whittle argues in his discussion of one of Cameron's self-portraits, "a man who is proud to be without, because his masculinity does not come from a penis but from himself" (214). According to this reading, Cameron's uncompromising disclosure of his masculine identity, including the elements of that identity that mark him

¹⁶ The paper, "Peter, A Young English Girl: Visualising Transgender Masculinities", was presented at a Modern School Research Seminar at the University of York on 27 May 1999.

as "different" or "other"—the presence of a vagina rather than a penis, the faint but discernible scarring from chest surgery—may serve to demystify transsexual masculinity. His self-portraits invite us to witness his sameness to some men, whilst frankly acknowledging his difference.

Another reading of the self-portraits might embrace the ambivalence suggested by the responses discussed above. This approach could see the "pain" of those images as an intrinsic stage in the subject's journey towards the proud man he now presents himself as. It could read both irony and reverence in the manner in which Cameron has chosen to inhabit and perform his gender.

There is, of course, a great deal more to Cameron's self-presentation than the stylised poses he strikes and props he adopts; at a personal level the way in which he embodies his masculinity has important personal significance. In Body Alchemy Cameron explains the inherent relation between the development of his muscular physique and the visible emergence of his identification as a man:

So much about my coming to manhood has been about a quest for size. I mean, I really need to be a big man. All of the men I've looked to as role models have been body-builders and athletes. They seem like gods and great beasts

to me in their huge and beautiful bodies. I envy them. I want to be like them. They look so virile and invincible. (85)

This passage might be taken as more than the earnestly expressed, personal desires of a transsexual man for a particular gendered embodiment; this could just as easily be the fantasy of a non-transgender male. More generally, it could say something about the ambivalent relation between all subjects and the gender ideals to which they try to attain. Butler's analysis of the Jennie Livingston film Paris is Burning, discussed in the previous chapter, emphasises the power of those ideals and the pain of only ever being able to approximate them (Bodies 128-33). If there is any melancholic dimension to Cameron's self-portraits (or, as critics have suggested, to Brooks's portraits) it might be read in terms of representing a more general human experience, rather than something specific to gender variant subjects.

In his photographic self-portraits Cameron can be that "big man"; he can embody that physical ideal. In person and fully clothed he is surprisingly slight. Part of the process of making real that bodily aspect of his manhood necessitates his nakedness; it is only through literally making a spectacle of his body that we see Cameron the way he wishes us to see him. Like

Feldman's dandy, in art if not in life, Cameron is what he chooses to appear to be.

A key element in this process of self-presentation is the absolute control Cameron exerts over the translation of his experience of masculinity into an image. The presence in the self-portraits of the shutter-release bulb, clearly visible in all three shots, links and makes explicit the artist's and subject's role in constructing the photograph and, by implication, its referent: the "big" male body he so proudly displays. Like Brooks's title Peter (A Young English Girl), this visual dissonance is a vital part of the meaning of the triptych of shots, being one of the more understated ways in which the self-portraits disclose a difference between this image of a bodybuilder and countless other conventional versions. At first, the wire which leads to the bulb partially concealed in Cameron's clenched fist may not be detected; once aware of its presence spectators might experience surprise at this deliberate exposure of the process behind the final product. Ultimately, a connection can be established between this technology, the act of self-creation and the subject of the image it produces: a transsexual man. If the association is missed, however, Cameron's introduction to Body Alchemy outlines both the practical reasons for the visibility of the bulb (he does not have a shutter timer or, being

naked, anywhere to conceal the device) and the appropriateness of its presence metaphorically: "I am creating my own image alone, an act that reflects the transsexual experience as well" (11). The title of the triptych, "God's Will", has an ironic appeal in light of these self-styled acts of reinvention.

The muscular physique revealed in "God's Will" is just one of a range of "costumes" that Cameron displays in disclosing the many and varied aspects of his masculine identification. Brooks's portraits do not have the same collective impact and meaning. Collectively, Cameron's images present a personal narrative which allows us to see material differences in his male body, whilst showing us just how like some men, and unlike other men, he is in all other respects. This is an important part of Cameron's intention in photographing transsexual men. He wants to emphasise the sameness of his subjects to biological men; at the same time, he does not want to hide their differences. The context in which the photographs appear clearly identifies the subjects as transsexual men. The book is subtitled "Transsexual Portraits" and the introduction makes clear its project: Cameron describes it as "the first photodocumentation of transsexual men from within our community" (12). A section titled "Emergence" presents photographs of the subjects prior to transition alongside current photographs of the men; in

"Our Bodies" images of genital and chest reconstructions disclose the surgical procedures that embody that transition. The combined effect of these images is to expose a difference which the section titled "Fellas" does not register. In these photographs the men have chosen settings that reflect their lives and interests; as such, they have a personalising effect, placing the emphasis on who the men are rather than what they are.

The contextualisation of Cameron's subjects and its effects are discussed by Jay Prosser in Second Sex: "Presenting his subjects as looking 'just like men' against the backdrop of their real-life situations . . . Cameron sustains the value of gender realness" (230). But, in also allowing us to see "the material differences" of transsexual men's bodies, Prosser argues, Cameron "lets us look at this referential difference" (230). Thus gaps between the assigned sex of the subjects, their masculine identifications and other masculinities are subtly deployed. Undetectable in straightforward portraits of Cameron's subjects, these are differences that must be highlighted to be seen and, in many cases, must be seen to be believed. The act of making transsexual bodies visible enacts a process of familiarisation, presenting its subjects as commonplace and unremarkable rather than something either exotic or freakish.

One of the potential effects of Cameron's nude self-portraits is to suggest that the relationship between possessing a penis and masculinity may be both arbitrary and negotiable. Although in the images we see here Cameron does not have a penis, he could opt to have one constructed at a future date, or wear one made of rubber or latex any time he chooses, or continue to do without one. The use of phallic surrogates for the inadequate penis is a recurring theme in discussions of constructions of masculinity through visual media. Joseph Kestner's Masculinities in Victorian Painting describes the tendency in studies of male nudes for artists to conceal the male organ, whilst the presence of certain weapons or armour assures the commensurability of the penis "with the demands of the phallus/Law of the Father and its aggregation of superiority, power and authority" (35). In the case of visual constructions of masculinity which have no male organ to conceal or augment the imagery may produce a more ambiguous range of effects than is at first evident.

Images in Cameron's and Brooks's portraits can be read for their individual "phallic" symbolism, but also for their potential effects as "androgynous" symbols.

Re-presenting the phallus

It is the clothing and accessories of the aristocratic dandy in Brook's portraits that invest the subject with male authority, most notably exemplified in the top hat of Self-Portrait and the monocle of Una. The relation to male authority that these images recall is a culturally and historically contradictory one. As Rhonda Garelick points out, "whilst dandyist charisma appears to flout social institutions, it is, nevertheless, entirely bound up with them" (164). In their immediate effects, there is something of this ambivalence in the images that Brooks's portraits present. Marjorie Garber observes that in its adaptation of the costume of the male dandy, the "transvestite high style" displayed by Brooks's subjects "declared at once its difference from, and its alliance with, masculine social and economic power" (Vested Interests 153). The most obvious sign of the equivocal nature of the dandy's social, cultural and sexual standing is the monocle.

The sense of empowerment suggested by some of Brooks's portraits has a quite different force in Una where the already uncertain male authority of the dandy is thrown into almost caricatured relief. A key element of that effect is the presence of a monocle worn to startling effect in Una's right eye-socket. Domna C.

Stanton's study of constructions of the dandy from seventeenth- and nineteenth-century French literature demonstrates the way that the dandy's eyes are frequently depicted as the site of his "enormous power". Stanton calls this the "phallic eye" (151). The visual effects of the monocle so evident in Una—magnifying the eye and intensifying its gaze—would seem to harness and exaggerate that ocular force and phallic authority.

Critics such as Marjorie Garber and Laura Doan consider the monocle's cultural significance as a sign of the wearer's social and sexual difference. Doan's discussion of the monocle-wearing female is keen to stress its multiple associations, citing class and sexual difference as just two of a range of symbolic meanings which include: "class, Englishness, daring, decay, rebellion, affectation, eccentricity—and possibly, but not necessarily, sexual identity" (681). Garber's interpretation has a narrower focus. She argues that the monocle may represent a "displacement upward of the single and singular male organ" (153) and reads it as a marker of the male and female subject's gendered ambiguity:

just as a man with a monocle was coming to be thought of as effete, a woman with a monocle was regarded as a sign of defiant pathos.

Through this addition both declared, indeed

flaunted, both what they 'had' and what they lacked. (Vested Interests 154)

The "effeminacy" of the male dandy and "pseudo-masculinity" of the female dandy position both of these figures as other to a masculinity that is biologically male and heterosexual. According to Garber's reading, the wearing of a monocle is seen to denaturalise the anatomical penis and parodically comment on the male authority it invokes:

Simultaneously a signifier of castration (detachable, artifactual, made to be put on and taken off) and of empowerment, the monocle when worn by a woman emphasizes, indeed parodies, the contingent nature of the power conferred by this instrumental "affectation."
(Vested Interests 154)

The playful qualities of the monocle suggested by Garber and its associations with both castration and empowerment invite comparisons visually to the strap-on latex dildos of some of Del LaGrace's lesbian and transgender images.¹⁷ Similar effects might be found in Brooks's portrait and LaGrace's photographs, for in both instances the thing worn may reflect ironically on what it stands in for and suggest a masculinity that

¹⁷ See Love Bites and The Drag King Book (1999), a text jointly produced with Judith "Jack" Halberstam.

does not require a biological origin and a phallic authority that does not require a biological penis.

An important difference lies, of course, in the dildo's penis-like appearance and erotic function both of which graphically recall its physical equivalent.¹⁸ This is where a different reading of the monocle might set it apart from those images which are unmistakably phallic and which evoke, even if they playfully revise, crude male/female oppositions and psychoanalytic models of castration. In symbolic terms the monocle might be seen to suggest both masculine and feminine properties. On the one hand, as already discussed, its function as an appendage has phallic connotations; on the other hand, its physical appearance is more obviously associated with the vagina. As a fashion accessory the monocle has a certain gender ambiguity or unisex quality. It cannot be defined clearly as either masculine or feminine and has the paradoxical visual effect of making a male dandy seem less of a man and a female dandy more of one. In Una the monocle epitomises the exaggerated nature of the gendered pose adopted. It also contributes to a mixing of signs which makes it difficult to ascribe any one sexed identity to the subject portrayed. It is perhaps significant that this ostentatious marker of the subject's difference is

¹⁸ Chris Straayer blurs this flesh/latex divide conceptualising the penis as a male costume and the dildo as a "deconstruction/reconstruction" of that costume (282).

absent from Brooks's other portraits where masculine signs are adopted in less ambiguous ways. Even in these portraits, certain cues—a tendril of hair, a delicacy of features—exert a curious influence on the more dominant masculine elements giving all of the subjects, to varying degrees, mildly androgynous effects.

A less obvious ambiguity is also at work in the bodybuilder poses of Cameron's self-portraits. On the surface, the bodybuilder's excessive display of masculinity suggests an uncritical relationship to male authority, but as has already been suggested that very need for excess conceals a distinctly uneasy association. Richard Dyer's essay "Don't Look Now: The Male Pin-Up" discusses the importance of muscularity to naturalising definitions of masculinity: "Muscularity is the *sign* of power—natural, achieved, phallic" (273). Dyer describes how the potential for muscularity has been constructed as a biological and therefore "natural" effect of being a man. As a consequence, Dyer argues, "[t]he 'naturalness' of muscles legitimizes male power and domination" (274). Yet in considering the male bodybuilder Dyer finds a contradiction: "Muscles that *show*" are not natural, but achieved (274). In these terms, the male and female bodybuilder's muscular physiques can be seen to hyperbolise the constructedness of masculinity.

Dyer's discussion of the bodybuilder projects this figure into a representational and discursive space where theories of biologically determined gender are seen to be displaced by visible enactments of self-construction and reinvention. To return to an earlier theme, the bodybuilder might be viewed as the dandy of the late-twentieth century. The potential challenge which such acts of self-fashioning might constitute to normative gender identities has been noted in relation to female bodybuilding. Laurie Schulze's essay "On the Muscle" describes female bodybuilding as "a direct, threatening resistance to patriarchy at its most biologist foundations", in that it visibly challenges the assumption that men are "naturally" physically superior (71). Schulze argues that there is "something irretrievably 'male'" about the excessive muscularity of female bodybuilders (77). In this respect, there is a material sense in which the act of bodybuilding allows the female subject and transsexual man to transcend biological sex to differing effects. However, more needs to be said about the binary oppositions which the bodybuilder would seem to question, for if the excessive muscularity of the female bodybuilder marks that body as "irretrievably male", then the shapeliness of the male bodybuilder—the well-developed pectoral muscles; the nipped in waist; the small, firm buttocks—might be read as the more usual signs of the

late-twentieth-century "ideal" female physique. A feminising effect is often further enhanced by the depilated, well-oiled appearance of the skin and the manner in which that body presents itself as spectacle to the controlling gaze.

Dyer's analysis of the differences between the female and the male pin-up discusses the ways in which images of men must be seen to resist the "element of passivity" that being an object of the gaze necessarily imposes ("Don't Look" 269). Although Dyer wants to challenge dominant notions of looking as active and being looked at as passive, he observes that most images of men show them either doing something active or exhibiting "the body's potential for action" (269). Dyer argues that although the visibility of muscles is one of the key signs of this capacity to act, the employment of this type of phallic symbol has another function which is to conceal the instability of the masculine identity on display. Describing the typical pose and look of the bodybuilder—"The clenched fists, the bulging muscles, the hardened jaws"—Dyer argues that the visible presence of these phallic symbols attempts to compensate for the failure of the penis, "whether limp or erect", to match the mystique of the phallus (275). Hence in images of bodybuilders specific body parts act as the lances and spears of nineteenth-

century portraits of male nudes, discussed earlier, and the "built body" itself becomes a type of armour.¹⁹

Marcia Ian's discussion of bodybuilding and subjectivity constructs the entire bodybuilder's physique as the surrogate male organ; the bodybuilder's aim is "to look as much like a giant erection as possible . . ." (79). Taken on these terms the built physique, whatever its biological origin, and bodybuilder pose become symbols of masculine crisis. In the case of the male bodybuilder, the continual drive towards greater bulk and definition of muscle can be seen as an obsessive and ultimately doomed striving for a masculine identity which can be experienced as stable and inviolable. This reading of the bodybuilder's troubled relationship to male authority invites rather different interpretations when the bodybuilder is a woman or, in the case of Cameron, a transsexual man.

Laurie Schulze's consideration of the disruptive potential of the professional female bodybuilder proposes an interesting connection between bodybuilding and Bakhtinian theory:

Bodybuilding's materiality, its emphasis on the spectacular, on the sheer presence of the body and the pleasures of looking at muscle made visible . . . its slippage between play

¹⁹ Dyer compares the appearance of the "built body" with its hard surfaces and contours to armour in his book White (152).

and display, sport and art, art and life, all seen to connect it strongly with Bakhtin's analysis of the carnivalesque. (69)

In light of this comparison, she concludes that female bodybuilding can be viewed as "a 'resistance to' and 'refusal of' social control" (69). Schulze also recognises that a counter argument might construct female bodybuilding as the converse of the physical excess of carnival in its exemplification of "the perfected body beautiful" (69). This would then be seen to conform to, rather than escape from, a social ideology which relies on discipline and demonises excess.

Cameron's visualisations of himself as bodybuilder have a potential for similarly ambivalent readings. The extent to which his self-portraits reveal the differences between his version of masculinity and the cultural "ideal", and the extent to which that disclosure can be seen as playful rather than shameful, may determine whether he is deemed to be resisting and refusing social control, or reinstating it. As the gaps narrow between the gender of the pose adopted, the gender that is experienced by the subject, and notions of "real" gender, the capacity to trouble conceptions of normative identities is adjudged to diminish. Cameron's decision to reveal the dissonant elements of his gender performance, appearing naked rather than

adopting the conventional posing pouch of bodybuilder images, is crucial here. The already far from secure expression of masculine identity that the bodybuilder represents can be seen to be further burdened by images which show a man who does not have a penis.

The type of phallic symbols Dyer details—the “clenched fists, the bulging muscles, the hardened jaws” (“Don’t Look Now” 275)—are certainly in evidence in Cameron’s self-portraits. Although Cameron’s fists are clenched for practical reasons (they are holding a scalpel or the shutter-release bulb), the combined presence of these symbols might still give the impression that this is just another “male” bodybuilder if it were not for the unequivocal absence of male genitals. Is Cameron’s overtly masculinised image an attempt doubly to compensate for that “lack” or, as Whittle argues, is the meaning of “lack” in his case rendered insignificant? Adopting and extending Marcia Ian’s body-as-erection analogy, Whittle presents his view that:

Cameron becomes the human fucking penis. He is what he does not apparently possess, and which by default we would assume he desires. Yet does he desire the penis? . . . We see in him the female signifier of “lack”, yet in his case the meaning of “lack” is meaningless: he chooses not to wear a phallus because that

would not be him, he is without "lack". He has gender through himself and because of himself.

(214)

On the one hand, using Dyer's formulation, Cameron's body and pose exhibit the classic symptoms of a phallogentric male neurosis; on the other hand, the fact that the body that we see clearly does not have a penis, and indeed clearly never has had one, may be the mark of a man who is free from the cultural and ideological burdens of the male organ. As Whittle argues, in Cameron's case theories of "having" and "lack" seem redundant, or certainly irrelevant. From this perspective, the masculine identity disclosed in Cameron's self-portraits could constitute a strong visual challenge to the alignment of phallus and penis that underpins the governing fiction of masculinity.

The danger of bringing psychoanalytic theory into a discussion of transgender masculinity is that its phallogentric logic may be used to explain that identification simply in terms of "penis envy" or "lack". Unreconstructed theories of sexual difference may provide us with a vocabulary for exploring cross-gender identification, but they are in danger of returning all discussions of masculine-identified females to the literal or symbolic significance of the phallus. For Cameron, the photographic disclosure of that identity does not rely on a flesh or latex

simulacrum of the male organ; indeed, the poses he adopts literally draw attention to his female genitals. On a more general note, "penis envy" is not the sole preserve of female-bodied subjects, and it might be interesting to speculate who would be the first in line for surgery if a fully functional, custom-made penis were ever to be genetically engineered.

So far, my discussion of Brooks's and Cameron's portraits has been directed primarily at the subject's costume, whether that be clothing or flesh, and her or his pose. There are other elements outside the subject's body that contribute to the visual construction of gender; the organisation of the space of each portrait and its influence on the spectator's gaze can also be read as markers of the subject's difference.

Singular locations

Griselda Pollock's Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art discusses the delineation of "spaces of masculinity and of femininity" (62) and the way that the spectatorial gaze is partly determined by the "space of the look at the point of production" (66). Pollock's analysis of paintings by male and female artists genders the spatial dimensions of the works in several ways. She

looks at "spaces as locations" (56), that is whether they are private or domestic, or in the public domain. She considers the "spatial order within paintings" (62), by which she means the accessibility to and positionality within certain spaces for male and female subjects. Finally, she examines the "location of the spectator" (63) or the distance between the spectator and the text. Although Pollock's treatment of space is concerned primarily with spaces of femininity, it is an approach that can be usefully adapted to my discussion of Brooks's and Cameron's work.

In Brooks's portraits the backgrounds against which each subject is presented are central to the overall effect of the painting. Either delineated in abstract form or featureless, the backgrounds emphasise the singularity of their subjects by seemingly enclosing them in their own personal space. The locations for Self-Portrait, Peter, and Renata cannot be gendered in the way that Pollock describes because they are stripped of the signs that would clearly define them as feminine (private or domestic) or masculine (public). The stark impersonality of the settings seems to suspend the subjects in a space that escapes or certainly resists gendered meaning. It is tempting to speak of this location as a "third" space, although the term's culturally pejorative connotations limit the productiveness of its use.

In Peter and Renata the spaces that the subjects occupy are undefined. Meaning is concentrated solely in the subject's pose; that is, the manner in which she possesses that space and her clothing. In other words, the authority of each figure is situated in the person and what she is doing rather than her surroundings. Even in Self-Portrait and, to a lesser extent, Elisabeth de Gramont, where an exterior location is suggested the positioning of the subject focuses empowerment in the subject's self rather than her environment: her back is turned to the landscape and her body blocks out much of what might have been seen.

The positioning of the spectator in relation to these subjects is influenced by the lack of specificity in their locations. Pollock's description of the reworking of femininity by female artists Berthe Morisot and Mary Cassatt refers to the depiction of "highly specified locations of which the [female] viewer becomes a part" (87). In Brooks's paintings there is no defined location for the spectator to enter and we are instead forced to engage directly with the subject to varying effects. As discussed earlier, in Renata, Peter and Elisabeth the spectator is shut out by the subject's apparent unawareness of her or his presence. In Renata the eyes are hidden behind closed lids; in Peter and Elisabeth the subjects gaze out beyond the boundaries of the canvas to something we

cannot see. In each case the subject evades the spectator's controlling gaze and frustrates traditional viewing positions. The subject of Self-Portrait stares back at the spectator, returning and reversing her or his objectifying look. Thus, an apparent passivity that would construct the subject as object is disavowed by the active gaze that meets our own. We cannot be the unobserved observer of this subject: the looked-at becomes the look-er and the spectator feels the force of that critical regard.

The way Loren Cameron positions himself in the "God's Will" portraits focuses his masculinity in the body's surfaces and pose and certain "props", rather than his environment. There is a sense in which his muscled body becomes the landscape for these images. The plain backdrops of the "God's Will" images have two noticeable effects. First, they enhance the muscle definition of the body and sharpen up the lines and contours of its overall shape. The second effect is similar to that produced by Brooks's use of space. By appearing to suspend Cameron's body in an undefined, gender-free location, the singularity of his masculinity is visually asserted.

This effect might be compared to that of another nude shot of Cameron from the "Self-Portraits" section of Body Alchemy. The portrait, titled "Carney", shows Cameron wearing a jester's cap and reclining languidly

on a bed or sofa, his body turned towards us with conventionally feminine passivity. The background is a bold geometric design of diamonds which complements the luxurious feeling of the whole image. There is a certain campness to the pose and setting that Cameron adopts which homoeroticises the masculinity that is displayed. The arrangement of Cameron's body—the slackness of the pose, the drooping right hand and relaxed muscles—is suggestive of a post-orgasmic state. The dreamy expression on Cameron's face as he looks away from the spectator (perhaps towards a lover) reinforces the heavy sensuality of the portrait.

The combination of feminine and masculine signs in "Carney" is in marked contrast to the "God's Will" shots with their proud, almost aggressive display of muscular masculinity. In the first and third shots (Figures 5 and 7), Cameron's eyes are fixed on the implements that he holds: the scalpel and the syringe. He seems unaware of our presence, apparently absorbed by the acts of self-creation that he theatrically re-enacts for the camera. In both shots his lower body is turned slightly away from the spectator's prying gaze. These poses seem neither coy nor provocative, but instead create a feeling of what Dyer calls the male body's "potential for action" ("Don't Look" 269). Cameron adopts a full frontal pose for the central image of the triptych (Figure 6) and returns the

spectator's gaze with his own fierce stare. In some ways it is this image of the three that has the most profound impact on the spectator, for it combines Cameron's masculine physique at its most enhanced with the clearest exposure of the absent male genitals. In this context, the intensity and directness of Cameron's gaze is a crucial part of the portrait's meaning and effect.

Halberstam's discussion of photographer Cathy Opie's portraits of "bearded, pierced, and tattooed dykes and transgender men" (35) describes the spectatorial effects of the model's returned gaze:

The power of the gaze in an Opie portrait always and literally rests with the image: the perpetual stare challenges the spectator's own sense of gender congruity, and even self, and it does indeed replicate with a difference the hostile stares that the model probably faces every day in the street. (35)

Halberstam's comments are also clearly relevant to Cameron's self-portrait. His fierce gaze seems to demand admiration and appreciation for the hypermasculinity of his body.²⁰ It also appears to challenge the spectator to read that body as anything

²⁰ Halberstam proposes a similar effect in Opie's portraits where it is the subject's tattoos and body markings which force the spectator to be "admiring and appreciative rather than simply objectifying and voyeuristic" (35).

other than male and forces the spectator's gaze back on her or himself in a self-referential manner.

This relationship between spectator and image can be opened out into a broader consideration of how Brooks's and Cameron's portraits challenge and revise traditional ways of looking. In addressing this aspect of the works a series of engrossing questions arise. How is the spectator to look when s/he views these images? In what ways is this process of looking affected by the spectator's existing identifications and desires? To what extent can psychoanalytic theories of visual pleasure—the voyeuristic gaze and narcissistic identification—account for the multiple viewing possibilities that such images allow? If there can be "trans-sex identification", as Laura Mulvey argues, whereby a female spectator adopts the "male" gaze which informs and constructs mainstream cinema, and if lesbian images "force us to theorize a lesbian gaze" ("Dis-Graceful Images" 86) as Reina Lewis has urged, to what extent do Brooks's and Cameron's visual texts demand the conceptualisation of a transgender gaze?

How do I look?

The visual aesthetic to which Brooks and Cameron contribute is a highly productive element in the

formation of transgender identifications and desires. The archive materials of transsexual gay man and activist Louis Sullivan, who died from an Aids-related illness in 1991, include a large number of transgender images taken from newspapers and journals, some reproducing photographs from the 1920s and earlier. There are also many personal photographs which, together with his unpublished journals and letters, document and celebrate Sullivan's physical transition. His journals are especially instructive. At fifteen, Sullivan wrote: "I want to look like what I am but don't know what some one like me looks like" (unpublished journals, 6 June 1966).²¹ It is in the context of comments such as these that the personal force of viewing Brooks's and Cameron's work is revealed.

For a self-identified transsexual man such as Sullivan images of transgender masculinities might result in an increased feeling of gender congruity, but it would be reductive and erroneous to suggest that all transsexual men would respond in this way. The particular masculinity visualised might conflict with the transsexual spectator's experience or expression of gender. It is not a case, then, of a neat divide between "gender normative" and "gender variant"

²¹ Sullivan's unpublished journals are part of the Louis Sullivan Collection held by the Gay and Lesbian Historical Society of Northern California.

spectators, but more to do with the individual spectator's specific interaction with the visual text, which may differ each time that encounter occurs. The various dissonances that inhabit the gendered subjects of Brooks's and Cameron's images are likely to impact on the spectator's experience of identity, whatever that may be. The consequence of this encounter may be pleasurable or threatening, or a mixture of the two, depending on the extent to which the embodiment of gender displayed is felt to speak to and for the spectator's own identifications and desires. As Chris Holmlund argues in his discussion of masculinity as masquerade, so much depends on "who is looking, how, why, at whom" (216). The context in which the image is viewed—alone, with friends, with strangers, in private, in the street, in a public gallery—should be added to this list of variables.

Having acknowledged that element of variability, the manner in which the tensions and contradictions identified in Brooks's and Cameron's portraits have been shown to question conventional narratives of spectatorship has a certain consistency. Given that unsettling quality, a common spectatorial effect might be the production of an "uneasy gaze". This phrase is borrowed from Laura Mulvey's influential essay "Visual Pleasures and Narrative Cinema" and although there it is employed in a discussion of the patriarchal

conventions of film, parallels can be drawn between the male spectator of that medium and the self-identified "gender normative" spectator of transgender images.

Mulvey's discussion of the films of Alfred Hitchcock describes the "uneasy gaze" of the apparently respectable male heroes as representing the (male) spectator's own experience of inner conflict. What has unsettled that gaze in the case of films such as Marnie and Vertigo, Mulvey explains, is the opposition between the hero's (and spectator's) perceived moral correctness and his erotic drive to subject the female lead to his will and gaze by sadistic and voyeuristic means (66).

In the case of Brooks's and Cameron's portraits, what could unsettle the gaze for the so-called gender normative spectator are the inconsistencies and disparities underpinning that stable experience of identity, which the artist's vision and the subject's gaze potentially invoke. Thus these and other transgender images may induce unease in a spectator where they are felt to challenge the coherence and "naturalness" of her or his identifications and desires.

Anne Friedberg's "A Denial of Difference: Theories of Cinematic Identification" argues that because identification "can only be made through recognition" (45) it constantly confirms the normative values of

dominant culture. Friedberg, adopting a theme from Mulvey's essay, argues:

The institutional sanction of stars as ego ideals establishes normative figures, authenticates gender norms

Identification enforces a collapse of the subject onto the normative, a compulsion for sameness, which, under patriarchy, demands critique. (45)

In their fusion of dissimilitude and likeness, the real subjects of Brooks's and Cameron's portraits may interrupt those signifying processes which serve to naturalise and consolidate gender. As argued in earlier sections of this chapter, these images of transgender masculinity can trigger an array of responses which rely upon recognisable gender norms. Yet in their recasting of those norms they may also undermine that authenticity. To varying degrees, then, the subjects portrayed appear to exceed the conventional sexed and gendered boundaries which they represent. They also display incongruities which mean that they cannot be comfortably read according to the usual binary oppositions.

This aspect of some transgender images highlights the problem of finding a language with which to read (and write about) these unconventional visual narratives. The multiple effects that such texts

produce cannot be accounted for adequately using the binary codes around which Mulvey's theory of visual pleasure is constructed. Halberstam's discussion of gaze as "queer" or multidimensional explains that:

Most rewritings of this formulation of visual pleasure . . . comment on the ways in which spectatorship is necessarily more heterogeneous than psychoanalysis allows and also less neatly organized around identity categories. (179)

She suggests a way forward is to avoid psychoanalytic theories and devise a "new cinematic vocabulary" (179). But how might the "creative reinvention of ways of seeing" (179) which Halberstam finds in queer cinema be applied to the still images of transgender masculinities discussed in this chapter?

Reina Lewis's conceptualisation of a "lesbian gaze" might be helpful here. In an essay co-written with Katrina Rolley, Lewis proposes that it is possible for the female viewer to "look as a lesbian whether or not she actually is/considers herself to be lesbian" ("Ad(dressing) the Dyke" 183). In this formulation "lesbian" becomes one of a range of viewing positions that may be accessed by, in this instance, a female spectator. Valerie Traub's essay, "The Ambiguities of 'Lesbian' Viewing Pleasure", adopts a similar approach to visual pleasure in her critique of the film Black

Widow (1987). Traub suggests that "lesbian" should be recognised as "a position taken in relation to desire" rather than as a person or even an activity (324). Halberstam also cites Traub's queer reading of this mainstream heterosexual film, describing it as an especially productive example of an "attempt to pressure the notion of 'lesbian spectatorship'" (178). Halberstam explains: "By making visible the ambiguity that structures both viewing pleasure and narrative pleasure in this film, Traub is able to imagine access to a plenitude of spectator positions rather than binary codes of gazing" (178). It is interesting to consider what might be achieved by a similar recasting of "transsexual"? Unlike the term "lesbian", there is already a growing insistence from within the community and its supporters that "transsexual" be used as an adjective rather than a noun. Adopting Traub's formula, the word "transsexual" might be similarly redefined: it does not denote a person or an activity, but, in broad terms, describes a (usually constant) position taken in relation to identification. Transgender, in the context of many theorists' use of the term, could be understood as indicating a range of variant and quite possibly varying identifications. Hence "transgender" might be used to describe the heterogeneity of the gaze in a similar, although not identical, way to that suggested by the term "queer". A "transsexual gaze", however,

like Lewis's "lesbian gaze", implies a more specific mode of viewing which, in this instance, will tend to centre more exclusively on the materiality of the body.

This point can be illustrated specifically by looking at Prosser's critique of the relationship between the transsexual subject and the photographic field. Prosser argues, "We can only look at the transsexual . . . if we look at how we look" (230). The ambiguity of meaning in Prosser's statement is echoed by my choice of section heading, "How do I look?". Its immediate connotation in Prosser's discussion is in reference to the act of looking, the way in which the gaze is constructed by images of transsexual subjects: "that look of fascination, objectification and desire s/he may cast" (230). His discussion is also concerned to identify the self-referential impact of these images: the ways in which transsexual bodies force the spectator to view the "look" of her or his own body.

Prosser's analysis of Del LaGrace's close-up shots of a "clitoris-turning-penis", explains how the bodily difference of the transsexual subject returns the spectator to the familiarity of her or his own body in search of meaning: "envisioning how you look; how you look next to [the subject] Nataf's body, alongside his body, even as his body" (234). Thus the spectator's gaze is redirected to the material differences of its own embodiment:

Arresting your look—that is, not only holding your look but rooting it (locating it), it demands from *your* body a narrative: How do you look? What do you see here? And what does what you see here reveal about you? (234)

A quote from Halberstam given earlier describes the subject's gaze of Catherine Opie's photographic models as questioning the spectator's sense of her or his own gender congruity. Here, it is the transsexual subject's body parts which are seen to resist the controlling gaze and invoke self-referential anxieties in the spectator. The "absolute focus on the genitals" (233) quite literally breaks down the distance between the spectator and the subject of the image. Prosser distinguishes the apparent fetishism of this disembodiment of the genitals from the pervasive cultural fetishisation of transsexual bodies, redefining it as a "provocative affirmation of the transsexual's bodily difference" (233). The extreme close-up shot of Nataf's genitals is intrinsic to its effect on the spectator, producing a "dynamic of intimate looking [which] is immediate and unmediated" (234). In conclusion, Prosser stresses the importance of foregrounding the material reality of transsexual subjectivity, or what he calls "the embodied specificity of the point of regard" (234), in theorisations of transsexuality.

According to Prosser's argument the act of looking at transsexual bodies can alert all spectators, not just transgender ones, to aspects of their own sexed and gendered identities which might be deemed to be variant rather than normative. In similar ways, spectators witnessing the immediate material realness and difference of the subjects' masculinities in Brooks's and Cameron's portraits might experience certain gaps and slippages between their own biological sexes, gendered poses and notions of "real" gender. What is less clear is how such potentially disruptive effects might change dominant ideas about identity. As Halberstam, drawing on Butler, observes: "the revelation that gender is a social construct does not in any way relieve the effects of that construction to the point where we can manipulate at will the terms of our gendering" (119).²²

To explore this point in more detail and conclude the chapter my discussion returns to the dandy and the bodybuilder. Brooks's and Cameron's utilisation of these "looks" in their portraits has been read as a sign of the subject's difference. Both images are culturally prescribed in distinct ways, but the relationships to male authority which they evoke have been shown to have a corresponding ambivalence. An

²² As I will discuss in Chapter 4, Kosofsky Sedgwick makes a similar point in Epistemology of the Closet (10).

aspect of this ambivalence which has not yet been closely addressed is the parodic potential of Brooks's and Cameron's visual aesthetics in the context of discourses of original/copy binaries.

Appropriate images

The dandy's appropriation of conventionally feminine elements has resulted in a construction of dandyism as misogynist and a "burlesque of the female" (Benstock, Women 180). Parallels can be drawn to feminist criticisms of other "parodic identities" deemed to be "degrading to women" such as drag queens and male cross-dressers which Judith Butler discusses in Gender Trouble (137). Butler suggests that the binary model of original/imitation which informs this view is more complicated than such critics would allow. By way of illustration, she uses the male drag act to conduct a recasting of the relationship between "primary identification—that is, the original meanings accorded to gender—and subsequent gender experience" (137). Although Butler's claims for the absolute subversiveness of drag have been legitimately questioned and she has revised her comments in Bodies That Matter, the notion of gender parody offered in Gender Trouble continues to influence current sexual and gender discourses. In the following passage, Butler

uses the various anatomical and gender disjunctions at work in a drag performance to exemplify the discrete elements of gendered experience:

The performance of drag plays upon the distinction between the anatomy of the performer and the gender that is being performed. But we are actually in the presence of three contingent dimensions of significant corporeality: anatomical sex, gender identity, and gender performance. If the anatomy of the performer is already distinct from the gender of the performer, and both of those are distinct from the gender of the performance, then the performance suggests a dissonance not only between sex and performance, but sex and gender, and gender and performance. (137)

The gaps and slippages that Butler identifies in drag provide the basis for a concept of gender as imitative and contingent. Thus, although on the surface male drag presents "woman" as if she were a unified entity, at a covert level it exposes the false and illusory nature of that unity. According to this theory, whether a drag performance dismantles gender ideals or simply reinforces them must depend on the manner and context in which that gender dissonance is revealed (if it is).

What makes Brooks's portraits and Cameron's self-portraits interesting is the particular ways in which

each image orchestrates a performance of certain disjunctions between its version of masculinity and a normative model. In Brooks's Peter a combination of consistent, familiar signs suggests that the subject of this portrait is a young male and appears to support an idea of "man" as a coherently sexed and gendered being. Employing Butler's framework, that sense of wholeness is fractured once the disunities between the anatomy of the subject (female), the gender of the subject (feminine) and the gender that is being "performed" (masculine) are understood. As discussed in an earlier section, the portrait's title makes explicit anomalous elements at which the gendered image only hints. Butler's concept of gender parody as "the parody . . . of the very notion of an original" (Gender Trouble 138) has some relevance here. Butler explains:

just as the psychoanalytic notion of gender identification is constituted by a fantasy of a fantasy, the transfiguration of an Other who is always already a "figure" in that double sense, so gender parody reveals that the original identity after which gender fashions itself is an imitation without an origin.

(Gender Trouble 138)

Butler conceptualises gender as neither a natural effect nor a cultural construction, but as a performative force and hence a condition of

subjectivity, rather than its outcome. According to this theory male and female subjects are performatively constructed through the compulsory repetition of gender norms. For Butler, subversive possibilities lie in the variations or discontinuities which will necessarily occur "*within* the practices of repetitive signifying" (145), since the gender ideals it approximates have only a phantasmic existence.

For some spectators, the "realness" of the gendered performance in Peter—its capacity to conceal its contradictions—will be attributed to its subject's sexual inversion or talent for impersonation, rather than to gender's own skills of mimicry. The disclosure of difference in that representation of masculinity suggests an arbitrary relation between the image and the ideal it supposedly resembles which extends beyond the subject of this portrait.

The disjunctions between image and ideal in Brooks's Self-Portrait also have potentially subversive effects on original/copy models of identity. Brooks's adoption of an image of the dandy that is itself deemed to parody the female introduces a further layer of imitation. Far from simply "aping male heterosexuality", as suggested by Benstock, the masculine style that is favoured by Brooks is itself derived from elements of female heterosexuality and has a cultural signification that is primarily read as

homosexual. In such a confusion of signs, the notion of there being one original identity around which this parodic identity has formed becomes strained.

In the instance of the bodybuilder, masculine gender is effectively parodied through an exaggerated display of masculinity. Holmlund's essay "Masculinity as Multiple Masquerade: The 'Mature' Stallone and the Stallone Clone" describes Sylvester Stallone's muscular "tough guy" image as "a masquerade of proletarian masculinity" (214). Holmlund is primarily concerned with those dissident figures whose differences are not visible: "the gay butch clone, the lesbian femme, or the passing black" (214). Of these identities, it is the butch clone's masquerade of masculinity which Holmlund explores through his queer reading of two Stallone films. Holmlund concludes:

The butch clone's muscles and macho attire, in particular, ensure he looks "like a man", and a working-class man at that. He is living proof that, as Lacan hints, masculinity, not just femininity, is a masquerade. Yet for those who know where and when to look, his homosexuality, seemingly so invisible, is unmistakable. (219)

Visually, Holmlund's "butch clone" and the muscular transsexual man may activate similar identifications and desires. When Cameron adopts the "look" of the

bodybuilder he ensures that he looks like a working-class man. It is possible that he may also be read as a gay man initially, rather than a transsexual one. In either case, masculinity is shown to be as much of an "act" as femininity.

Holmlund's essay uses a specific gay identity to reveal the ways in which masculinity is a kind of drag which all men "do" to varying degrees. LaGrace's choice of female models to perform gay male identities in his photographs from the series "Dyke Daddies" (1994)²³ appears to exploit this cultural association. Gabb explains: "the characters in the images are women, who are acting as 'real' gay men, who are in turn parodying the *performance* of masculinity" (298-99). The perceived dynamics of these images are reminiscent of the effects described in Brooks's portraits where female subjects act as "real" male dandies who are themselves parodic identities. Cameron's self-portraits, in their apparent realignment of maleness and masculinity, enact a further exposure of the parodic nature of heterosexual white masculinity in their particular enactment of the disunities between subject, gendered pose and "real" gender.

Where the mode of masculinity adopted by Brooks's dandy in Self-Portrait imitates female heterosexuality but signifies male homosexuality, Cameron's masculine

self-representation recalls a particular version of male heterosexuality which is a predominant image of gay male visual culture. In this respect, both the dandy and the bodybuilder represent styles of masculinity which have the potential to confound binary oppositions of sex, gender and sexuality. It is this capacity to mix signs which makes them such productive images in visualisations of transgender masculinities.

The displacement of gender meaning in Brooks's and Cameron's portraits can be used to show how these images may undermine the male authority they evoke and apparently endorse. For Butler, context is the key: "Although the gender meanings taken up in . . . parodic styles are clearly part of hegemonic, misogynist culture, they are nevertheless denaturalized and mobilized through their parodic recontextualization" (138). Where "styles" evoke dominant images from heterosexist culture there is always a need to "read against the grain", and attempts to present absolute readings will be constantly threatened.

Leo Bersani's critique of Paris is Burning is scathing about suggestions that resignification can be anything other than an act of "politically impotent disrespect" (51). Bersani's cynicism is hard to counter; it is, as Bersani argues, difficult to imagine

²³ For examples from this series see Lily Roxxie Burana and Linea Due's Dagger: On Butch Women (199, 210).

that any form of mimetic transgression which recalls hegemonic norms will "ever overthrow anything" (51). On the other hand, it is also hard to imagine transgressive representations of any kind, mimetic or otherwise, having that amount of cultural and political force. The weakness of Bersani's argument is that it perhaps takes critics' liberal use of the words "subvert" and "subversion" too seriously. In its determination to expose the ill-conceived and irresponsible theorising of "middle-class academic analysts" it appears unwilling to consider that anything short of revolution could be valid and significant personal and political acts. The visual images discussed in this chapter will almost certainly not change dominant cultural practices, but they may begin to change minds.

If the publication of a collection like Cameron's Body Alchemy reflects the increasing visibility of transsexual masculinities, Brooks's portraits can be seen to mark an important foundational stage in the evolving transgender consciousness which has constructed those identities. A comparison of the transgender masculinities visualised by Brooks's and Cameron's portraits has demonstrated some unusual affinities shared by these visual texts. The multiple ways in which these images have been shown to dislocate conventional ways of viewing and the creative

manoeuvres demanded of the spectator give them a shared, although not identical force. Productive and, at times, quite unexpected areas of commonality have been identified by my pairing of the dandy and the bodybuilder. The identifications which the dandy and the bodybuilder make visible, and thereby "real", have depended upon a capacity for change and reinterpretation evident in theorisations of both figures. In discussing representations of white muscular masculinity, Dyer argues that "building bodies is the most literal triumph of mind over matter, imagination over flesh" (White 153). The personal significance for some transsexual men of such material acts of self-creation is clear. Viewed in this context, the dandification of the female body might be seen to demonstrate a feat of corresponding consequence given the more limited and temporary possibilities for self-gendering of the period. In this respect, the movement from costume to body as the site of difference mirrors the historical development of transgender identities and, more specifically, the emergence of transsexual bodies. The development of photography as the primary means of representing reality has a related function in this process of materialisation.

The nature of portraiture suggests that the subject depicted is "real" and that all self-portraits, regardless of medium, are enacting an assertion of

identity. However, as Roland Barthes observes in Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography: "Painting can feign reality without having seen it", whereas "in Photography I can never deny that *the thing has been there*" (76). Paintings such as Brooks's Self-Portrait convey a sense of the subject's unconventional self-fashioning in their sartorial codes and choice of pose and setting, but they lack the photograph's capacity to prove existence; that fusion of image and object at a given moment which leads Barthes to describe the photograph as "literally an emanation of the referent" (80).

Of course, although Cameron's photographic portraits could be said to provide a more literal proof of existence than Brooks's painted portraits, like any art form, visual or written, they still have an uncertain relationship to "truth". That the subjects of Cameron's portraits are men seems hard to deny (for those who would want to) once the spectator is faced with the photographic documentation of their masculine identifications. However, the decisions made by the photographer and subject concerning what images are produced and which are finally selected exert an influence that, using Susan Sontag's words, makes photographs "as much an interpretation of the world as paintings and drawings are" (6).

What is perhaps more relevant to my discussion is not whether the portrait is a photograph or a painting, but *how* the interpretative process is managed and, more crucially, *who* has managed it. This relationship between representation and authorship is identified by Prosser as being "of massive general significance" to transsexual subjects in view of the emergence of transgender studies as an academic discipline (Second Skins 230). The visual effects that have been identified in my discussion of Brooks's and Cameron's portraits imply a relationship between artist, subject and image that is primarily structured around personal, rather than political, concerns. The subjects' apparent self-containment and agency and the empowering quality of their self-representations give all of the images, not just the self-portraits, a certain autobiographical quality. Brooks's portraits appear to authenticate the transgender masculinities they represent whilst sustaining their "inauthentic" elements. The masculine "look" of her subjects is, of course, markedly different to that of the transsexual men of Cameron's photographs and although it has a certain diversity there are necessary limits to its range of expression. Moreover, Brooks's subjects do not necessarily share the varied but mutual experiences of gender that inform the masculinities disclosed in Cameron's portraits. Nevertheless, in visual terms, Brooks's and Cameron's

portraits have been shown to address similar issues and have the potential to activate similar responses.

Although this chapter recognises the complex personal narratives which inform the portraits discussed, its main concerns have been to identify some of the wider, cultural implications of reading those narratives. In considering these implications, three related outcomes are central to several of the overarching themes of this thesis. First, the masculine looks and poses displayed in Brooks's and Cameron's portraits create a site for constructing transgender masculinities as "real". Second, that construction of gender realness provides models of masculinity which both recall and depart from conventional concepts of "maleness" and "manliness". Third, and perhaps most significantly, the dissonance that is performed by these visual representations of transgender masculinities may call into question the stability and coherence of all masculinities and, by extension, all sexed and gendered identities.

In the next chapter, narrative representations of sex- and gender-crossings, both fictional and lived, are examined for their revisionary impact on notions of "true" identities.

CHAPTER 3

**True Stories: Orlando, life-writing, and transgender
narratives**

My life was one long protest against the separation of fact from fantasy: fantasy was fact, I reasoned, just as mind was body, or imagination truth.

—Jan Morris, Conundrum (110)

when a subject is highly controversial—and any question about sex is that—one cannot hope to tell the truth. One can only show how one came to hold whatever opinion one does hold. . . . Fiction here is likely to contain more truth than fact.

—Virginia Woolf, A Room of One's Own (6)

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.

—Virginia Woolf, Orlando (132)

Surely no sex change has ever been quite so easy. No therapy, no "life test", no hormones, no surgery.¹ Instead just several days of deep sleep, a few trumpet flourishes and the protagonist rises from his bed a perfectly formed woman. In its depiction of a seamless, pain-free and absolute transition from male to female, this passage provides the climax to what is unquestionably the most theatrical and most memorable scene in Virginia Woolf's Orlando (1928): the main character's transformation at the age of thirty from a man to a woman.²

By devising this narrative twist it could be argued that Woolf constructs an ultimate transsexual vision. In this fantasy of perfection the author emerges as the ideal gender reassignment surgeon, not only refashioning existing materials into new although reassuringly familiar shapes, but effecting complete biological authenticity. As the narrator so emphatically states: "Orlando had become a woman—there is no denying it" (133). This biographical endorsement of the legitimacy of Orlando's change of sex constitutes a representation of truth which provides a

¹ Prior to surgery, a transsexual person is usually required to live full-time in her or his "chosen" gender role for a period of between one and two years. This is generally referred to as a "life test".

² Marjorie Garber describes Orlando's transformation as a non-surgical "transsexual procedure" that is "in effect a pronoun transplant" (Vested Interests 134).

compelling link to a particular form of transgender narrative: transsexual autobiography.

A striking aspect of Woolf's Orlando is what one critic describes as "the tensions between inner and outer realities" (Schlack 80) that it demonstrates. Analogous tensions inform and construct many transsexual narratives, in which the truth of the sex and gender experienced denies the truth of the sex and gender assigned at birth. The following statements, drawn from autobiographies by transsexual women, stand as bold challenges to conventional understandings of "physical" and "material" evidence that would disavow the legitimacy of those experiences. In Conundrum Jan Morris observes: "To myself I had been woman all along, and I was not going to change the truth of me, only discard the falsity" (101). Claudine Griggs's Passage Through Trinidad: Journal of a Surgical Sex Change records her feelings on receiving official confirmation of the surgical reassignment of her sex: "I am pleased . . . that a doctor finally states that I am specifically *female*. This will be convenient, since I have been a girl or woman all my life" (76). Finally, in an extract from a letter written on 8th June 1952, Christine Jorgenson explains to her family: "Nature made a mistake, which I have corrected, and I am now your daughter" (125).

By identifying this common theme I am not suggesting that Orlando, the character, is a transsexual woman; to do so would be damagingly reductive to both Woolf's text and transsexual subjectivities. My decision to compare a fictionalised and fantastic biography from the 1920s with transsexual autobiographies drawn from the latter part of the century acknowledges the many important differences between these texts and, indeed, within the wider genre of transgender life-writing itself.³

At a narrative level there is no indication that Orlando is unhappy with his body or its designated gender prior to the transformation and although there are hints of precognition, there is no real suggestion of agency in that process. Furthermore, the presence of other types of sex- and gender-crossing in Orlando—primarily centred around notions of drag—contrives to maintain a fluidity of gender which aligns its protagonist more obviously with the transgendered figure allegorised in queer theory's constructionist account of gender.

In terms of genre, although Orlando is clearly a fictional rather than non-fictional narrative, it is very much a hybrid text. Its use of the genres of biography and fantasy, together with photographs of the

³ The distinction that is being made here between transgender and transsexual narratives is predicated on the basis of the subject's self-identification.

protagonist's living model, Vita Sackville-West, give the novel a heterogeneity which fittingly reflects its primary concern with notions of androgyny.

The reasons why Woolf chose to present this particular novel in this particular form have been debated at length. There are clear biographical and autobiographical influences, as will be discussed shortly. That in itself, however, seems hardly sufficient explanation given the acknowledged personal sources of inspiration for characters in her other novels; the central figure of Mrs Ramsay in To the Lighthouse, for example, is based on Woolf's mother. Woolf's playful adoption of different genres for Orlando sets this novel firmly apart from the rest of her oeuvre both formally and stylistically. And although questions of identity inform most of Woolf's writing, both fictional and non-fictional, the full title Orlando: A Biography signals that this novel's concerns have as much to do with genre as with gender.

This chapter proposes that the similarities between Orlando and transsexual autobiographies lie in two related areas. First, issues around fixed notions of identity and their relationship to different kinds of truths, including auto/biographical truths, are explored both by Woolf through the literary device of sex change and by transsexual autobiographers through the stories of their own transitions. Second, the

relationship between life-writing and the processes of identity construction that is a constitutive element of transsexual subjectivity is also evident in the auto/biographical roots of Orlando and its narrative form. This aspect of Woolf's novel can be considered through reviewing some events from her life which instance an enduring and, at times, seemingly obsessive fascination with notions of gender difference.

Woolf's hidden [a]gender⁴

In what is thought to be possibly Woolf's first attempt at writing, a letter to her half-brother George Duckworth, she declares: "I AM A LITTLE BOY AND ADRIAN IS A GIRL" (Congenial Spirits 2). An editorial footnote suggests that Woolf would have been six or maybe younger when she wrote this letter. Clearly this statement is not to be conflated with autobiographical accounts of the transsexual subject's earliest recollections of being gendered differently. The young Woolf is using language playfully to invert gender; the transsexual autobiographer uses it to describe, retrospectively, the inversion of gender she or he experienced as a child. The following extract from Morris's Conundrum is fairly typical in its epiphanic

⁴ This section heading is derived from the title of Kate Bornstein's play, Hidden: A Gender. The script is included in Gender Outlaw (169-223).

tone, although by no means definitive: "I was three or perhaps four years old when I realized that I had been born into the wrong body and should really be a girl. I remember the moment well, and it is the earliest memory of my life" (11). In this scene, Morris is able to take a specific moment from her early life and interpret it as what Jay Prosser calls an "origin story for the transsexual self" (Second Skins 118).

Woolf's spirited challenge to accepted truths at such an early stage in her development might also be taken as a starting point, since in that moment of presumably wilful misrecognition lie the seeds of what is to become increasingly a personal preoccupation. Her desire to explore what Stephen Whittle in his discussion of transgender artists calls different "ways of 'thinking gender'" (214) pervades much of her writing, both autobiographical and fictional. Sue Roe's study of the relationship between Woolf's writing and gender claims that her writing practice concerns itself with "the struggle to create a gendered identity" (3). The aim of that struggle might equally be to imagine ways to escape particular forms of gendered identity. In either case, a kind of alliance exists between Woolf's writing practice and the writing practices of transsexual autobiographers who shape and re-present narratives that dispute dominant concepts of identity.

Readers of Woolf will be familiar with her "plan of the soul" proposed in her essay A Room of One's Own (1929), according to which "in each of us two powers preside, one male, one female", but Orlando is surely her most comprehensive and radical exploration of gender. In her personal life Woolf's experiments with cross-gendering were fairly limited and, by comparison with more flamboyant and exhibitionist figures from the period such as her lover Vita Sackville-West, seem relatively tame. There is Woolf's notorious impersonation of an Abyssinian prince when she crosses gender and racial boundaries to take part in the well-documented "Dreadnought Hoax", a practical joke organised by her brother, Adrian, and his friend.⁵ More tellingly, Woolf's adoption of masculine or gender neutral personae—the "Billy" (a diminutive of "Billy Goat") and "Potto" of letters exchanged with her sister, Vanessa Bell, and Vita—suggests that it is in and through her writing, rather than any public displays, that a type of self-fashioning is enacted.

A biographical anecdote offers a possible source for the change of sex around which the narrative of Orlando pivots. The incident occurs at the beginning of September 1927, the same month Woolf decided that Vita Sackville-West, an aristocrat with a penchant for

⁵ Hermione Lee provides a detailed account of this extraordinary incident in Virginia Woolf (282-286).

cross-dressing, should provide the model for "Orlando, a young nobleman" (Diary 3 157). Woolf was at a party held by Lydia and Maynard Keynes. Quentin Bell tells us: "Someone had brought a newspaper cutting with them; it reproduced the photograph of a pretty young woman who had become a man, and this for the rest of the evening became Virginia's main topic of conversation" (Biography 2 132).

Although this story demonstrates Woolf's awareness of transgender non-fiction narratives, no reference to the episode can be found in her diaries and letters. Woolf's correspondence with Lytton Strachey describes the events of the evening but only records the gender-crossing antics of Jack Sheppard, the Cambridge classicist, who "half naked, tightly swathed in red silk, shingled as to his head, with coloured garters, was Miss T. . . . to perfection" (Letters 3 418).⁶ The extent to which Woolf was directly influenced by these personal encounters with sex and gender changes remains a matter of speculation, but in a diary entry of 5 October 1927 she wrote: "And instantly the usual exciting devices enter my mind: a biography beginning in the year 1500 & continuing to the present day, called Orlando: Vita; only with a change about from one

⁶ The Miss T. referred to is Dorothy Todd, editor of Vogue between 1922 and 1926 (Lee 470). Bell's account of the evening has a slightly different interpretation of Sheppard's performance stating that he "enacted the part of an Italian *prima donna*" (Biography 2 132).

sex to another" (Diary 3 161).

Woolf's personal history should not be relied upon too heavily for readings of Orlando, but it might sanction some conjecture as to other motivating forces behind what has been called the "longest and most charming love letter in literature" (Nicolson 186). How much is this fictional biography a means for Woolf to explore her own identity under the guise of exploring another's? Woolf self-consciously parades the fact that Vita Sackville-West, whose female sex precluded her from inheriting the ancestral home, is the biographical source for Orlando. The dedication "To V. Sackville-West" and photographs of Vita posing as Orlando ensure that the reader is aware of the living inspiration for Woolf's imagined subject. In the fantasised form of Orlando Vita can elude the limits of human existence, shape-shifting at will and living forever; but what if this far from subtly coded tale has also been constructed to conceal and facilitate Woolf's own wish to push back the boundaries that confine her self?

Woolf's preference for a vicarious engagement with the more intimate areas of her life is evident both in her letters and diaries, and her fiction. Jean O. Love observes that in writing Orlando Woolf was "demonstrating that she preferred the role of the artist, of the truly fascinated observer and commentator, to the role of participant-in sexual as in

other relationships" (213). A letter to Woolf from Vita during a trip to Berlin, dated 12 January 1929, is revealing in this respect:

We [herself and Harold Nicolson] went to the sodomites' ball. A lot of them were dressed as women, but I fancy I was the only genuine article in the room There are certainly very queer things to be seen in Berlin and I think Potto [Woolf] will enjoy himself. (Letters of Vita Sackville West 324)

Although this letter post-dates Orlando's publication, Vita's confident assertion that the gender-crossing typical of social gatherings in some parts of 1920s Berlin will appeal to Woolf is telling. It adds to a growing picture of Woolf as something of a voyeur. Writing Orlando as a biography and fantasy allows her to traverse gender boundaries imaginatively and through the experiences of others. Furthermore, Sackville-West's sense of herself as gender normative or, as she puts it, the "genuine article" can be compared with Woolf's private, self-mocking expressions of gender inauthenticity. A letter to Vita, dated 31 January 1927, includes the comment: "D'you know it's a great thing being a eunuch as I am: that is not knowing what's the right side of a skirt" (Letters 3 320). Writing to Vanessa Bell in the same year, Woolf laments: "poor Billy [Woolf] isn't one thing or

another, not a man nor a woman, so what's he to do?"

(Letters 3 401).

Orlando's status as fiction enables Woolf to bring personal matters of selfhood into a public dimension, whilst enabling her to explore the truth of identity and question what the relationship of that truth might be to gender from a safe distance. Representations of truth in transsexual autobiographies address similar issues but as part of life-narratives those representations expose their authors to a different type of critical scrutiny.

Forging truths

Popular notions of the nature of truth are always in dispute in autobiographical narratives. This is in part a structural effect; the linear form imposes an artificial order on the life story told. As Prosser observes, autobiographical writing "endows the life with a formal structure that life does not indeed have" (Second Skins 116). What is especially compelling about the representation of truth in transsexual autobiography is its ambivalent relationship to official truths and so-called natural laws.

Some historical context for the forging of this alliance of uneasy opposites is useful. In The Will to Knowledge, Volume 1 of The History of Sexuality, Michel

Foucault examines the role of the ancient Western ritual of confession in the production of a discourse of truth. In particular he identifies the nineteenth century as a period when a new kind of scientific discourse was pioneered through the ordering and classification of an "archive of the pleasures of sex" which had been constituted over many centuries by means of the "procedures of confession" (63). Foucault describes how through the work of sexologists such as Richard von Krafft-Ebing and Havelock Ellis the personal narratives of men, initially, and then women, came to be recognised as valid scientific data. This conjunction of personal experience and scientific theory is evident in my discussion of sexological case studies in Chapter 1. It is also particularly notable in transsexual narratives where what Foucault calls "lived experience as evidence" (64) is scientifically and medically validated.

In some transsexual autobiographies it takes the form of "expert" testimonies incorporated into the texts. Christine Jorgensen's autobiography, for example, includes an introduction by Harry Benjamin, an endocrinologist and the author of The Transsexual Phenomenon. In the following extract, Benjamin offers unequivocal support for Christine Jorgensen's perception of herself as a female inside a male body:

Medically, Christine presents an almost classic case of the transsexual phenomenon, or in other words, a striking example of a disturbed gender role orientation.

But was this female gender role really new? The vivid description of her early life supplies a negative answer. This was a little girl, not a boy (in spite of the anatomy) who grew up in this remarkably sound and normal family. There was no broken home, no weak or absent father with whom the little boy could not identify. (vii)⁷

In other transsexual autobiographies, the availability of hormonal and surgical treatment in itself becomes an implicit endorsement of the authenticity of the subject's self-identification. Jan Morris's pragmatic statement that by undergoing sex reassignment surgery she was "not going to change the truth of me, only discard the falsity" (101) illustrates this effect.

The role of medical technology in the construction of transsexual subjectivities is a contentious issue. It has been argued, primarily by non-transgender critics, that the invidious but obligatory position in which transsexual subjects often find themselves in relation to medical practitioners may also have a

⁷ This official endorsement is reminiscent of Havelock Ellis's prefatory support for Radclyffe Hall's depiction of the invert in The Well of Loneliness, discussed in my opening chapter.

direct bearing on the life stories that are told. Judith Shapiro's essay "Transsexualism: Reflections on the Persistence of Gender and the Mutability of Sex" argues that "transsexuals' own accounts of a fixed and unchanging (albeit sex-crossed) gender identity" cannot be taken at face value "given the immense pressure on them to produce the kinds of life histories that will get them what they want from the medico-psychiatric establishment" (251). Pat Califia is also concerned about the extent to which the personal history of a transsexual person is shaped by science:

None of the gender scientists seem to realize that they, themselves, are responsible for creating a situation where transsexual people must describe a fixed set of symptoms and recite a history that has been edited in clearly prescribed ways in order to get a doctor's approval for what should be their inalienable right. (68)

Where Shapiro's comments highlight the unreliability of transsexual narratives, the passage from Califia identifies that body of "professionals" who, in her eyes, are to blame for the false nature of those narratives. Although Califia's stance is clearly transgender-affirmative, it is also uncompromisingly polemical and some of the terms of her argument should be questioned. It is easy to assert the "inalienable

right" of a transsexual person to receive hormones and surgery; it is perhaps more difficult to imagine a situation where such things would be freely administered without reference to some already established criteria. Although the type of criteria medical institutions apply in their responses to transsexual subjects is open to criticism, it is understandable that some degree of consultation and diagnosis is required if surgical and medical procedures are to meet individual needs.

Both Shapiro and Califia highlight a situation in which dependence on medical validation has resulted in the need to compromise personal truth. What is important in terms of this chapter is the extent to which this pressure to conform to medically prescribed criteria influences the truth of the published autobiography, as opposed to the "patient's" narrative. In "The *Empire Strikes Back*: a Posttranssexual Manifesto" Sandy Stone discusses the official mistrust with which transsexual life-narratives have been treated: "Transsexuals . . . collect autobiographical literature. According to the Stanford gender dysphoria program, the medical clinics do not, because they consider autobiographical accounts thoroughly unreliable" (285). Stone, who like Shapiro believes that many transsexual people have been telling the story the doctors want to hear, is concerned how this

affects the story eventually narrated in autobiographies. How, queries Stone, do "the storytellers differentiate between the story they tell and the story they hear?" (291). Her answer is that "they differentiate with great difficulty" (291). "Purity" and "denial of mixture" are cited as recurring problems of the genre and Stone concludes: "They go from being unambiguous men . . . to unambiguous women. There is no territory between" (286). Having made that transition, Stone observes, there is a need to erase the past in favour of what she refers to as a "plausible history" (295). In making these observations, Stone is writing from a transsexual subject position. She has personal experience of the clinical imperative in this process and describes the medical establishment as the "body police" (293).

A failure to distinguish clearly between the "official truth" and the truth of the individual's lived experience is less apparent in more recently produced life-writing. In Kate Bornstein's Gender Outlaw there is a determination to draw a distinction between "the story told and the story heard". Bornstein is typically uncompromising in her view:

Transsexuality is the only condition for which the therapy is to lie. This therapeutic lie is one reason we haven't been saying too much about ourselves and our lives and our

experience of gender; we're not allowed, in therapy, the right to think of ourselves as transsexual. (62)

Bornstein is keen to expose the pressure she found herself subjected to by counsellors to conceal her transsexual identity through learning to re-invent her given identification as female. Bornstein explains "Here I was, taking a giant step toward personal integrity by entering therapy with the truth and self-acknowledgment that I was a transsexual, and I was told, 'Don't **tell** anyone you're transsexual'" (62).

Woolf's brand of gender reassignment requires no human mediation. It just happens and there, as far as the narrator is concerned, is an end to it; but the opportunity is not missed to thumb a nose at the establishment's concern to uphold "official truths". In the following passage, scientific and medical intervention into the sexual identity of the individual is alluded to and thoroughly undermined by Woolf's narrator. In this wilfully pragmatic statement of the facts we are told:

Many people . . . holding that such a change of sex is against nature, have been at great pains to prove (1) that Orlando has 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. (133-34)

The adoption here of a judicial tone and style of address serves to mock those "experts" who would approach the subject of human identity armed only with scientific theories of what is natural. In a wonderful combination of blissful ignorance and superior knowledge, the narrator is allowed to gloss over the truth of the very thing that we desire to know most: how can someone who is born male suddenly and apparently involuntarily become female? Woolf is not concerned with whether it is technically possible to change sex. The narrator's dismissive tone renders this question irrelevant. The story of Orlando's life is not a scientific study or medical treatise and it does not have to answer to the given truths of such disciplines. It is also, of course, not an autobiography or even an authentic biography. Thus, having distanced her subject from the usual constraints of the laws of gender and genre, Woolf can focus on and explore other more personally significant issues. What seems to interest Woolf about her character's change of sex is how it alters that life and how the chronicling of that life challenges representational and biographical truths.

Transsexual autobiographies pose questions that have shared interests with Woolf's concerns, but that

are also highly specific to their subjects. What happens to the already complex relationship between life-writing and a life when much of that life has been felt to have been lived in the "wrong body"? What happens when that erroneous body is altered to match the experience of gender? How are memories synthesised? How are kinship ties rendered meaningful? In what terms is desire articulated? And how does the handling of these singular difficulties impact, as a whole, on the autobiographical truth of the narrative?

Transsexual autobiographies often describe a conscious drive towards bodily change and a pre-operative existence always troubled by the true sex and gender that the writer feels her or himself to be. Orlando does not experience that disjunction. His transformation is performed in a moment and is presented as something that happens to him, rather than something he actively seeks. Orlando's life as a man is primarily one of gendered coherence. It is only as a woman that she feels the need to lead a double life in which both selves, female and male, are allowed equal expression. Whilst this comments on the limitations of the conventional female role, it also promotes Woolf's model of androgyny. In changing Orlando from a man to a woman and creating a disparity between the character's sexed body and gender, Woolf is able to reveal her belief in an essential identity, an "inner reality"

that is untouched by such material differences. The narrator explains:

The change of sex, though it altered their future, did nothing whatever to alter their identity. Their faces remained, as their portraits prove, practically the same. His memory—but in future we must, for convention's sake, say "her" for "his", and "she" for "he"—her memory then, went back through all the events of her past life without encountering any obstacle. Some slight haziness there may have been, as if a few dark drops had fallen into the clear pool of memory; certain things had become a little dimmed; but that was all.

(133)

It was not that "she" had always been a woman in a man's body, but rather that Orlando had always been Orlando and would continue to be so regardless of somatic or gendered alteration. This continuity is reflected in the unchanged name. In Woolf's first draft, edited and published by S. N. Clarke, she considers feminising "Orlando" to "Orlanda" following the transformation from male to female (110). Her decision to render the name gender neutral seems important to Woolf's message about the androgynous nature of identity.

There is a suggestion of an inner integrity in the characterisation of Orlando which seems antithetical to the dysphoric experience that often epitomises transsexual narratives. And yet in many of these accounts, as witnessed earlier, the person's sense of a core identity is unwavering even if the name, the clothing and eventually the body have to be altered. To take one example here, Christine Jorgensen explains: "Though, indeed, my outward appearance was changed, I think I'm basically one and the same person I was in the earlier part of my life—perhaps calmer, more accepting, and certainly happier" (329). Like Orlando, then, Christine has always been Christine; bodily change was only necessary for other people to see her as Christine. The narration of this bodily transition, however, creates a central paradox in transsexual autobiographies.

Bernice L. Hausman's Changing Sex: Transsexualism, Technology, and the Idea of Gender claims to find a fatal flaw in transsexual autobiographers' stories. She identifies certain "discursive discontinuities" to support her book's central argument that transsexualism is a technological construct (141). The contradictory relationship between a narrative which depicts transition and a narrator who is claiming already to be the gender to which she or he is transitioning is presented as a key piece of evidence: "The tension

between the two stories—the story of the subject as the other sex and the story of the methods used to make the subject represent the other sex—constitutes one central disjunction in transsexual autobiographical narratives” (148).

Hausman’s reading of this apparent anomaly has been brilliantly countered by Jay Prosser’s critique of the structuring principles common to both autobiography and transsexuality:

The autobiographical self, as is its wont, suggests itself from the beginning as already there. The transsexual self simply follows form. Autobiography produces identity (sameness, singularity); transsexual autobiography, we should not be surprised, produces gender identity. (Second Skins 120)

What Hausman sees as a “central disjunction”, Prosser interprets as “not a disruptive paradox but a founding dynamic: a dynamic that in turn, as transsexuality is reliant on the autobiographical form, founds transsexuality” (119).

Prosser’s model of the narrative origins of transsexual subjects is alert to the historical and cultural complexities of that subjectivity. Hausman’s argument lacks flexibility in its approach. Her assertion that transsexuality did not exist prior to the sex reassignment technology of the late 1940s does

not adequately address a transsexual desire that, as seen in my opening chapter, was being disclosed in narratives from sexological case studies of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, and novels such as Hall's The Well of Loneliness.

The story of Orlando's bodily transition creates its own "discontinuities". Following Orlando's change of sex, known truths about that character are subverted and rendered unintelligible. Various manoeuvres must be undertaken in order to resolve the conflict between the somatic truth of Orlando's new status as a woman and the truth of her previous existence as a man. Orlando's past life includes the material evidence of property, a wife and children, and an ambassadorial role overseas (all of which given the historical period were undeniably the trappings of manhood). Other "people" are required to recognise Orlando as the same person. Legal practitioners, servants, former admirers all have to reconcile themselves to a new truth: Orlando, who has lived as a man for thirty years, has been married and fathered children, is now a woman.

As far as the law is concerned, Orlando must have an unequivocal gender identity, regardless of her history. The scientific and legal enforcement of a dual system of sex and gender is given a typically playful and ironic treatment by Woolf's narrator:

[Orlando] was a party to three major suits which had been preferred against her during her absence, as well as innumerable minor litigations The chief charges against her were (1) that she was dead, and therefore could not hold any property whatsoever; (2) that she was a woman, which amounts to much the same thing; (3) that she was an English Duke who had married one Rosina Pepita, a dancer; and had had by her three sons, which sons now declaring that their father was deceased, claimed that all his property descended to them. . . . All her estates were put in Chancery and her titles pronounced in abeyance while the suits were under litigation. Thus it was in a highly ambiguous condition, uncertain whether she was alive or dead, man or woman, Duke or nonentity, that she posted down to her country seat, where, pending the legal judgement, she had the Law's permission to reside in a state of incognito or incognita, as the case might turn out to be. (161)

Once more a pompous legalistic style and tone are affected in order to ridicule a system patently unfit to deal with anomalies and so unable to recognise its own shortcomings. One of the things demonstrated in

this passage is that as far as the legal authorities are concerned, if you begin life as a man you cannot end it as a woman. Having implicitly stated this incontrovertible fact, Woolf takes great delight in disproving it when, despite all the historical evidence to the contrary, Lord Palmerston decrees that Orlando is "beyond the shadow of a doubt" female (243). The fact that Orlando, now a woman, has in the recent past been a duke, a husband and a father is overlooked by the authorities. It seems that it is possible in Woolf's fantasised biography to be both a man and a woman in the same lifetime. Whilst Lord Palmerston's judgement reinforces the primacy of biological truth in the determining of identity, then, this whole incident exposes the prescriptive and limiting nature of those fixed notions of identity and the oversights that are permissible where the upholding of sexual and social order is concerned.

Until the courts have given their verdict on the matter, Orlando is caught in what the novel calls (in the passage quoted above) "a highly ambiguous condition": a sex and gender limbo, a position of non-existence. Her transformation has designated her as a non-person and her return to "reality" relies upon the pronouncements of others. As far as the official declaration of Orlando's sex is concerned, if that identity is to be realised in a social context then

androgyny, it seems, is not an option. A psychoanalytic reading of Orlando's position, post-transformation, might cast her as the invisible androgyne, the "impossible referent" of the title of Francette Pacteau's essay. Such a reading would explain why Orlando, using Pacteau's terms, must be "unveiled" as a "woman or man" (78), or remain in the domain of the imaginary, forever situated outside systems of signification. Rachel Bowlby's essay "Orlando: An Introduction" offers a neat summary of the situation:

In order for Orlando to continue with her life, she has to be granted an agreed identity, and in this sense to have a sex, one sex or the other and only one, is (literally) vital: if you are not unequivocally male or female, you cannot be accorded the other attributes of a person.

(166-67)

Through subjecting Orlando to intense legal scrutiny, Woolf exposes the woeful inadequacy of existing constructions of sex and gender to deal with the complexities of individual lived experience. Whilst at a practical level those constructions are recognised as a convenient and even necessary means of ordering society, in human terms they are presented as arbitrary and a barrier to individual expression. Furthermore, in isolating the truth of Orlando's identity from its

corporeality, and yet at the same time recognising the social imperative for gendered embodiment, Woolf represents a dilemma that is specific to transsexual narratives.

Claudine Griggs explains in S/he: Changing Sex and Changing Clothes: "I altered shape from 'male' to 'femaleness' which is a form that I can compatibly wear and allows others to have a glimpse of me" (134). The choice of the word "glimpse" is revealing. It acknowledges the importance of the surgically altered body as a palpable, avowed expression of identity, as well as the "self's inevitable reflection" (125). It also endeavours to see the body for what it is: to the majority of society the most concrete and irrefutable evidence of authentic identity there is; to Griggs little more than a label or proof of ownership. In this context, the body is just one rather unsubtle but necessary representation of who the real Claudine Griggs is.

In Orlando, various discourses in the text—legal, social, sexual—join forces to give Orlando's new female identity the semblance of being fixed, stable and singular. At the same time, in a playful aside, the narrator informs us of the ambiguous nature of identity:

In every human being a vacillation from one sex to the other takes place, and often it is

only the clothes that keep the male or female likeness, while underneath the sex is the very opposite of what it is above. Of the complications and confusions which thus result everyone has had experience. (181)

It is Woolf's notion of androgyny that is expressed here, but there is a more generally applicable point concerning representation. Suzanne Raitt's study of the relationship between Sackville-West and Woolf suggests that the reason Orlando develops as fantasy is because of Woolf's awareness of the "impossibility of representation" (37). By using costume as a metaphor for Orlando's multiple "selves", Woolf gives a colourful articulation of her belief that attempts to represent an identity which is natural and fluid will always be necessarily contrived and fashioned according to societal and cultural dictates. The figure of Orlando is described by Raitt as an "approximation" rather than an identity (37). These comments offer a useful paradigm for issues of identification and representation in transsexual autobiographies.

Inadequate genders

One of the consequences of Orlando's transition is the creation of a dual perspective, something that Stone, in her discussion of transsexual autobiography, terms

"subjective intertextuality" (298). Because, according to Woolf, nothing essential has changed, it is possible for Orlando's memories to remain untouched by the change of sex. This allows for a synthesising of Orlando's lives as a man and as a woman. There is "some ambiguity in her terms", we are told; "she seemed to vacillate; she was man; she was woman; she knew the secrets, shared the weaknesses of each" (152). The celebration of this fluidity between the two genders—a fluidity that is at its height when, as a woman, Orlando continues to experience life as a man by means of drag—would seem to be the inverse of the linear trajectory from "male to female" or "female to male" that is commonly depicted in transsexual autobiographies.

There are good reasons for the unequivocal elements of many transsexual narratives. One is personal: there is a marked difference between living in society and living in someone's imagination or theories. The transsexual subject needs to present her or his gendered identity as coherent and whole. Another lies with the genre itself, which supplies what Prosser calls "narrative coherence" (Second Skins 116). Prosser argues: "Before critiquing transsexual autobiographies for conforming to a specific gendered plot, for writing narratives in which gendered meanings are 'unilinear,'

we need to grasp the ways in which the genre of autobiography *is* conformist and unilinear" (115).

Prosser's point is important, but there is also a need to look more carefully for instances in transsexual autobiographies where the conformity of those gendered plots wavers or breaks down. A large part of Renée Richards's life is constructed in terms of an habitual fluctuation between her male persona and her female one. Her attempts to maintain her identity as a man whilst also giving expression to her identification as a woman only seem to emphasise the possibilities that must be forfeited if either state is to be rendered endurable. The distinction that Jan Morris presents between her life as a man and her life as a woman is clearer, yet she specifies a period when she identifies as neither male nor female: "Thirty-five years as a male, I thought, ten in between, and the rest of my life as me" (138). The choice of the word "me", rather than "a woman" or "female" for her current identity, suggests an awareness of the inconsistent relation between her self-identification and gender that perhaps other parts of the autobiography, with their depiction of stereotypical feminine traits, tend to smooth over. At another point in the narrative Morris admits that there are problems in reconciling those "years as a male" with her current life:

It is hard for me now to remember what everyday life was like as a man—unequivocally as a man, I mean, before my change began at all. Sometimes, though, by a conscious effort I try to recapture the sensation, and realize the contrast in my condition now. (141)

In general terms this comment reflects the difficulties that are a common experience for most people looking back to previous stages in their lives: what did it *feel* like to be a child, a young adult, a twenty-something? Renée Richards says of her childhood, "it is like remembering what happened to a little boy I knew very well, perhaps a nephew" (5). The sense of detachment she describes could equally be claimed by non-transsexual people, but for both Morris and Richards the comments also represent experiences that are specific to transsexual subjects who have lived both as men and women. In this respect, such comments may not be simply attempts to deny the past; they may represent attempts to articulate genuinely felt experiences.

Whilst Stone sees the female status of transsexual women like Morris as being presented as unambiguous, Morris herself describes what she perceives to be her "continuing ambiguity": "I have lived the life of a man, I live now the life of a woman, and one day perhaps I shall transcend both—if not in person, then

perhaps in art, if not here, then somewhere else" (157). There is an important choice of words again here in terms of Morris's self-identification. She does not claim to have been a man or a woman, but instead states that she has "lived the life" of both. In this statement, there is once more a sense of some core self, a "me", that is distinct from the "man" and "woman" that have been the embodiment of that identity.

Morris's reference to art as a medium through which the constraints of gender might be surmounted is productive. It articulates a desire to transcend a binary opposition that in corporeal and, for much of her autobiography, narrative terms Morris maintains. It also recognises an association between self-definition and creativity which has been identified, earlier in this chapter, as an inspiring and informing force in Woolf's writing of Orlando. This connection has further resonance in view of an explicit reference to Orlando at the start of Conundrum. As Morris contemplates what might have happened had she revealed her "self-discovery beneath the piano" to her family, she concludes that they might not have been shocked, adding parenthetically "(Virginia Woolf's androgynous Orlando was already in the house)" (12). This intertextual link might suggest that for Morris, at least, Orlando (and Orlando) provides a model for the ideal existence: the "fantasy of perfection" and "ultimate transsexual

vision" proposed in my opening comments. In a typical flourish of hyperbole, Morris describes her whole life as "one long protest against the separation of fact from fantasy", explaining that for her, "fantasy was fact, just as mind was body, or imagination truth" (110).

Orlando exists in a literary realm where anything can happen; in everyday life, gender must be embodied in certain ways if it is to signify, and it cannot simply be changed as though it were a mere costume. In narrating the story of that life, transsexual subjects can also enter a sphere where boundaries between what are conventionally recognised as fact and fantasy can be tested. In life-writing, Stephen Whittle argues, "the very binary structure of the complacent world in which gender was invented" (210) can be challenged. In transsexual autobiographies such as Morris's Conundrum that challenge appears to be masked by the acceptable face of convention; but in Woolf's Orlando, too, the more culturally determined aspects of "becoming a woman" are also in evidence.

A woman of substance

Stone may be right when she suggests that in the portrayal of their transition from male to female, the transsexual women she discusses appear to be

"adventurers" who pass "directly from one pole of sexual experience to the other" (289). On the other hand, as Claudine Griggs explains and as Stone herself acknowledges, there are obvious reasons why this aspect of the transition must be undertaken in a clear and unmistakable way:

A transsexual cannot gradually transfigure life from man to woman or woman to man, because s/he cannot be perceived as anything between male and female. During transitional stages, for example, a man may be viewed as a man acting like a woman or trying to be a woman, until at some precise moment, almost as a surprise to the individual undergoing the reassignment, he becomes a woman to those around him. If one is not clearly identified as male or female, that, itself, is conspicuous. (S/he 1)

As discussed earlier, in terms of one's public identity, for the majority of people it is not possible to be truly gender ambiguous.⁸ There is in Western society a social imperative, informed and enforced by cultural and legal practices, to be either a man or a woman. To be anything other is to be outside the regulatory matrix of sex and gender and thus

⁸ At a personal level, it must be equally debatable whether it is possible to be truly "gender unambiguous". In this context, gender dysphoria can be seen as a human, rather than medical, condition.

marginalised and dispossessed. A fluidity of identity may be practised by some; Bornstein, for example, constructs her self-expression with Orlando-like panache using "accessories" to, as she puts it, "shift from one phase of my life to the next" (4). However, this approach to identity is not a common one for individuals who identify specifically as transsexual, rather than transgender.

For Griggs, non-expression of her female identity meant "non-existence" and it was this that, in her words, finally "drove me to a sex change" (S/he 53). In itself, she accepts, surgery will not make her "a full-term woman" (134). What it will enable her to do is "to display gender acceptably to society and myself" (53). Christine Jorgensen demonstrates a similar attitude. She accepts that whilst she was "never an absolute male", she will also "never be an absolute female", although she argues that in all human beings "there are no absolutes" (207). Whilst there is an element of indeterminacy in the physical and biological make-up of individual people, however, in social and legal terms it is absolutes that matter. Jorgensen recounts how her highly public profile (she chose to enter the entertainment business following her transition) turned the issue of her "true" identity into a matter of national concern. One newspaper article, quoted in her

autobiography, claims that "an early, responsible determination of the true status of George-Christine is urgently needed" (211). A letter from a hotel booking agent, which finds its way into the newspaper columns, includes the following condition for her employment:

Before I let Christine Jorgensen mingle with women I want proof that she's a she! . . . I won't give them a man dressed in woman's clothing. I bought a "she." If the party can prove that she's a woman, I'm willing to pay her \$25,000 for two weeks. (225)

Jorgensen meets further problems in Boston where, she tells us, "[t]he action of the officials was to bar me from performing until I had proven myself a female" (246). Only a satisfactory physical examination would enable this ban to be lifted.

By contrast with transsexual subjects, Orlando has been biologically male and female during the course of his and her lives. In that incredible moment of transformation Orlando literally goes from being an unambiguous man to an unambiguous woman. This is an obvious and significant difference. As Jan Morris argues: "Nobody in the history of human kind has changed from a true man to a true woman, if we class a man or a woman purely by physical concepts.

Hermaphrodites may have shifted the balance of their ambiguity, but nobody has been born with one complete

body and died with the other" (100). In offering us the proviso "if we class a man or a woman purely by physical concepts", Morris identifies the main thing that distinguishes a transsexual subject's truth about her or himself from the truth that society might seek to impose.

Whilst varying interpretations of facts affect the outcome of all life-writing, this has a specific impact in transgender narratives where physical concepts of sex and gender—women don't have penises and men do—are patently contradicted. In Orlando Woolf is doing something different: it is the physical evidence of Orlando's transformation that informs the narrator's observation that he is now a woman. It is, we are told, the only aspect of Orlando that has changed and yet, in spite of all the evidence to the contrary, it is the determining factor in defining her female status. Woolf might not contradict the fact that if you have a female body you are automatically assigned a feminine gender, but by exposing her protagonist to this life-altering experience she certainly questions that conjunction of anatomy and destiny. In itself this effect is unremarkable; Susan Gilbert and Sandra Gubar note that many female modernists seek to disentangle identity from biology (326-27). It is, once again, the manner in which Woolf questions that link which makes Orlando so relevant to transsexual autobiography.

In Woolf's version of events, as my opening comments observe, Orlando's bodily transformation is performed in a moment. In the transsexual autobiographies that are being discussed, the transition to the "chosen" gender also has a point of culmination in the text—a moment when the writer feels that she finally becomes the woman she is—and this point is frequently marked by the physical embodiment of that gender. The route to that point of realisation could not be more different. There are one or two hints along the way that there is an element of ambiguity surrounding Orlando's gender. In the opening line of the text doubt is implied: "He—for there could be no doubt of his sex, though the fashion of the time did something to disguise it" (13). Bowlby argues that the note of hesitation in this initial introduction to Orlando troubles "that fundamental paradigm according to which 'we' make sense of other people" ("Orlando's Vacillation" 44). It is this "fundamental paradigm" that is so profoundly disturbed by transsexual subjects. Orlando's total composure following the transformation, and the preparations that have already been made for her departure suggest, as the narrator notes, a curious degree of foreknowledge. Orlando, we are told, on waking to find that he was now a young woman "showed no . . . signs of perturbation" and "[a]ll her actions were deliberate in the extreme, and

might indeed have been thought to show tokens of premeditation" (134). This apparent preparedness for her new life is seemingly confirmed by the presence of a gypsy waiting in the courtyard outside Orlando's room with a donkey for her immediate departure from Constantinople (135).

Notwithstanding these hints of precognition, Orlando's transformation is still presented as something that happens to him with very little or no consciousness of its approach prior to the event. This cannot be compared with the intense awareness of the need for hormonal and, in most cases, surgical reconstruction described in transsexual autobiographies. Even in those instances where transsexual women have spent significant parts of their lives living successfully as men, that existence is always troubled by the woman that they feel themselves to be. Orlando's life as a man is primarily free of such complications, and the difficulties she experiences as a woman perhaps say more about the limitations that Woolf finds with the conventional female role, and her wish to promote a model of androgyny in which "in each of us two powers preside, one male, one female" ("A Room" 93), than anything that might be found in a transsexual autobiography.

Despite these unquestionable and important distinctions, in both Orlando and the transsexual autobiographies being discussed, although the transition is marked in the text by a physical change, that newly acquired identity has a more complex and ambiguous private dimension. What Orlando and a transsexual woman share in this respect is that, regardless of self-definition, they have both been socially conditioned as males. Life as a woman will, therefore, in some of its details create comparable experiences. If Morris's Conundrum is placed alongside Orlando at this point these corresponding features become evident. In both texts the absolute nature of the transformation from male to female is recorded in terms of bodily change. Orlando's female form displayed in "complete nakedness" forces the narrator to confess that he is now "a woman" (132). For Morris, it is the surgical reconstruction of her male body that denotes the start of her wider existence as a woman. Morris employs the imagery of myth and fable to present her trip to Casablanca:

The experience I was to have there . . .
 struck me then as it strikes me now as
 romantic to a degree. It really was like a
 visit to a wizard. I saw myself, as I walked
 that evening through those garish streets, as
 a figure of fairy tale, about to be

transformed. Duck into swan? Scullion into bridge? More magical than any such transformation, I answered myself: man into woman. (128-29)

Whilst she believes that she had been a "woman all along" (101), in transforming her external reality to match her inner one Morris sees herself as about to enter the public arena for the first time as a fully-fledged woman. The manner in which she envisions her new life demonstrates an approach to gender that is heavily influenced by essentialist notions of what it is to be female:

I was about to change my form and apparency—my status too, perhaps my place among my peers, my attitudes no doubt, the reactions I would evoke, my reputation, my manner of life, my prospects, my emotions, possibly my abilities. I was about to adapt my body from a male conformation to a female, and I would shift my public role altogether, from the role of a man to the role of a woman. (101)

It is this kind of approach to transsexual womanhood, with its apparently wholesale adoption of all things conventionally female, that Stone questions. Whilst accepting the legitimacy of Stone's concerns, my interest lies in the parallels between Morris's self-representation as a post-operative transsexual woman

and Woolf's representation of Orlando's new life as a woman.

Morris's depiction of her female identity presents gender as "natural", but there are also references to the role of social conditioning in that appearance of naturalness. Morris is aware of "the effects of custom and environment" in the formation of gender identity and also the way that it "soon all came to feel only natural" (141). A page later, she blurs the distinction between gender seeming to be and actually being natural when she explains: "there were inner changes in me, too, more subtle, more important. Some were simply the psychological effects of fulfilment, but some sprang from the end of maleness, and were more truly the symptoms of womanhood" (142).

The essentialising of gender that is found in Morris's representation of the truth of becoming a woman is important. To claim the existence of an inherently female identity which is independent of bodily difference allows her to construct her experience of gender in a way that is meaningful to herself and others. A far more extreme notion of the naturalising effects of "womanhood" is evident in the transgender narrative Man into Woman: An Authentic Record of a Change of Sex, edited by Niels Hoyer. Man Into Woman is the part autobiographical, part biographical account of Einer Wegener/Lili Elbe's

sexual reassignment surgery in the early 1930s.⁹ The transformative effects of Elbe's lower body surgery include the "fact" that both her voice and handwriting assume a "female" quality following the removal of her male genitals. Man into Woman offers material evidence of the "inner reality" of Elbe's female identity. The exaggerated nature of that account can be understood given the historical and social context of the book. At a time when a specific transsexual identity had not been recognised and notions of sexual and gender inversion were still prevalent, it was one way to present an experience of gender difference in a form that was both comprehensible and socially acceptable. Sandy Stone's critique of the narrative accepts that it was necessary for Wegener/Elbe to be presented, both by herself and Hoyer, as a heterosexual man prior to surgery and a heterosexual woman following it with an unequivocal line being drawn between those two lives (288).

In the Introduction to Man into Woman, the sexologist Norman Haire offers a defence of the book's more far-fetched elements. Haire acknowledges the gap that exists between the facts of Elbe's story and the way in which those facts have been interpreted and explains:

⁹ Elbe's story is also the inspiration for a novel, The Danish Girl by David Ebershoff.

To the reader unfamiliar with the unhappy byways of sexual pathology, the story told in this book must seem incredibly fantastic. Incredible as it may seem, it is true. Or, rather, the facts are true, though I think there is room for differences of opinion about the interpretation of the facts. (v)

Haire seems to want us to accept that the events described in Man Into Woman actually took place: Lili Elbe's handwriting really did alter following castration; her voice did become that of a soprano. It is how or why these changes took place, according to Haire, that is open to interpretation, not whether or not they happened.

In Orlando a similar stance towards the facts of Orlando's transformation is adopted. The narrator assures us that "Orlando had become a woman—there is no denying it" (133). Alternative interpretations of that change of sex are recognised as possible, but are left to others to pursue. The manner in which Orlando's perceptions of her development as a woman is represented, however, distances Woolf's novel from this contemporaneous transgender narrative.

At one point in the text Orlando is allowed to reflect on the need for her to be "obedient, chaste, scented, and exquisitely apparelled" (150). She decides that since these qualities are not supplied by natural

sources, she must resign herself to the fact that they can only be attained "by the most tedious discipline" (150). Several pages later, Orlando discovers that something undetermined has given her "a push towards the female sex, for she was speaking more as a woman speaks than as a man, yet with a sort of content after all . . ." (153). Further on, the narrator at first advances the theory that clothes "change our view of the world and the world's view of us" (179), then supersedes that comment with the personally held belief that "[c]lothes are but a symbol of something hid deep beneath. It was a change in Orlando herself that dictated her choice of a woman's dress and of a woman's sex" (180-81).

These narrative tensions can be seen as productive in that they allow the text to take up contrary viewpoints on questions of identity and gender. Hence, whilst there is a degree of essentialism suggested in the process by which Orlando "becomes a woman", at the same time, a space is opened up for that construction of femininity to be examined. This critical distance is often seen to be missing from transsexual narratives, where to question the social position, difficulties and contradictions of a particular gender identity might not be in the writer's interests. Even Woolf's androgynous fantasy, though, has its limits: when Orlando looks like a woman she mostly behaves like a

woman, when she looks like a man she mostly behaves like a man. Nonetheless, Woolf's narration of Orlando's life story and Morris's narration of her own represent, in different ways, creative acts of resistance.

Imagined identifications

In Vita and Virginia: The Work and Friendship of V. Sackville-West and Virginia Woolf Suzanne Raitt remarks: "Telling other people's stories—writing biographies—is an engagement with the limits of the self. Story-telling alleviates frustration, apparently extending the boundaries of who we are, and of who we might be" (146). Narrative as an imaginative means to re-fashion gender has already been suggested in relation to Woolf's life-writing, and in particular to Orlando, but what might Woolf's decision to locate a fantasy of gender in a pseudo-biographical frame suggest? In its bringing together of diametrically opposed genres, Orlando conducts a parodic demonstration of a movement in biographical writing of the period away from the material reality of a person's life as a way of defining them. Woolf had noted this shift in literary style and taste in "The New Biography", first published in October 1927:

Truth of fact and truth of fiction are
incompatible; yet he [the biographer] is now

more that ever urged to combine them. For it would seem that the life which is increasingly real to us is the fictitious life; it dwells in the personality rather than in the act.

(55)

The fantastical elements of Orlando's personal history—changing from a man to a woman, living for over three hundred years—take Woolf's idea of the "truth of fiction" to absurd extremes. A comment from Jan Morris, already quoted, provides an interesting comparison here. For Morris "fantasy was fact . . . just as mind was body, or imagination truth" (110). This apparent collapsing of binarisms can be detected in Woolf's observation that it is the "fictitious life" which is perceived to be most "real" about the life that is being narrated. That revised concept of reality seems to have especial significance for writers like Morris whose life story might be seen as a testament to the triumph of fiction or, to use Morris's word, fantasy over fact.

Whatever word is used to represent the inner life—fiction, fantasy, imagination—fairly obvious concerns arise when it is applied to transsexual autobiography. Traditionally, sex changes have a prominent place in classical mythology: Hermaphroditus, in Ovid's Metamorphoses, who becomes "a single form, possessed of a dual nature, which could not be called male or

female, but seemed to be at once both and neither" (104); Tiresius (or Teiresias), the Theban prophet, who is transformed into a woman as punishment for killing a female serpent. In discussions of transsexual autobiography, it is more difficult to speak about fantasy in relation to the self-identification that is offered. Semantically, the word often evokes explicitly sexual associations and many of the synonyms listed in the Chambers Thesaurus—delusion, hallucination, whimsy—have distinctly negative implications.

So what exactly does Morris mean by "fantasy" here, and how does her collapsing of known binaries—fact/fantasy, mind/body, imagination/truth—fare when subjected to the conventional demands of autobiography? She is clearly not wishing to suggest that her identification as a woman is imaginary; that is false or made up. She presumably is not meaning fantasy (or phantasy) in the Freudian sense either; Morris does not appear to be intimating that her transsexual identity is the result of fantasies fuelled by the unconscious. What Morris draws attention to in the statement "fantasy was fact" is the inversion of known truths that must take place in order for her identification as a woman to be accepted. In this topsy-turvy world it is Morris's fantasised identity which is presented as the real one, while her given identity is no more than an illusion.

In Orlando fantasy enables a privileging of a particular concept of identity over traditional polar models of sex and gender. That fantasised identity—trans-sex, trans-gender and trans-historical—provides the framework through which the events of Orlando's life are read. Where fantasy happens to collide with material reality, in the legal dispute over Orlando's status for example, (curled) lip-service is paid to the need for a socially recognised and endorsed identity. Meanwhile, Orlando's multiple lives, or more specifically the story of those existences, continue to evade attempts to define and thereby limit her. In describing Orlando's numerous costume changes the narrator explains: "She had, it seems, no difficulty in sustaining the different parts, for her sex changed far more frequently than those who have worn only one set of clothing can conceive" (211). By means of these magical and infinite transformations Orlando passes with equal success as a man and as a woman, and thus a fantasised identity, in which "sex" is no more than an outfit to be swapped at will, constantly undermines the given identity with its insistence on one unified sex and gender.

The frequent sex changes to which Woolf's narrator alludes have strategic importance in negotiating barriers to individual fulfilment created by fixed notions of identity. Having crossed genders

anatomically and so allowed new or previously forbidden possibilities both in social and erotic terms, Orlando is quickly made aware of the foreclosure of certain acts and experiences that her status as "woman" enacts. On board ship, shortly after the transformation, Orlando reflects ruefully on the impracticalities of the female clothing that she must wear, realising that she would have to "trust to the protection of a blue-jacket" (148) if the ship capsized. Such irritations are accentuated by recent memories of the freedom and comfort of male attire. Erotically and emotionally, Orlando's feelings for a former lover, Sasha, the beautiful Russian Princess, are intensified by the transition. Part of the allure of Orlando's libidinous history is that she knows what it is like to have loved a woman as a man and that past experience, we are told, only serves to heighten her present response: "though she herself was a woman, it was still a woman she loved; and if the consciousness of being of the same sex had any effect at all, it was to quicken and deepen those feelings which she had had as a man" (154). Woolf's intention is surely unmistakable. Having enabled her protagonist to experience life as a heterosexual man prior to becoming a woman, Woolf has cleverly legitimised what, in all but name, amounts to Orlando's same-sex desire for women. In disassociating sexuality from gender in this way, Woolf is able to

present lesbian desire in a manner that is covert, yet easily read. Thus she is able to explore same-sex eroticism—Orlando's, Vita's, her own—without the threat of censure. At a narrative level it is recognised that these instincts cannot be pursued whilst Orlando is a woman. In order to access those desires and identifications which Orlando's sex, whether that be male or female, would deny, other modes of gender-crossing must be employed.

Hence, whilst the change of anatomical sex is given a central and especially theatrical position in the text, Orlando and the characters with whom she is most intimately involved repeatedly transgress conventional sex and gender divisions. As Rachel Bowlby observes:

Orlando's switch of sex from man to woman is only the most blatant instance among the novel's many comparable cases of sexual indeterminacy—as with the peculiar Archduke who reveals herself a disguised Archduchess, or with Orlando and her eventual husband identifying one another cross-sexually. These are highlighted throughout in relation to what seems to be indicated as some basic arbitrariness about any assignment of one or other sex to someone. ("Orlando: An Introduction" 165)

Woolf is certainly concerned to question the efficacy of a binary model of gender constructions, and her playful and imaginative inversion of its rules seems designed to expose the basic frailties of its structure. Once again there is a sense in which Woolf's personal frustrations at the limitations and constraints imposed by gender are exercised (and exorcised) through this process.

Amongst the various modes of gender crossing presented in the text, the notion of drag is central to the preservation of Orlando's fluid identity. The facility to fluctuate between the sexes, undetected, enables Orlando to escape the constraints of a conventional existence which, as Woolf puts it, allows the wearing of "only one set of clothing" (211). The following extract attempts to recreate that perpetual motion, both in its depiction of a series of seamless costume changes and its extended syntax:

So then one may sketch her spending her morning in a China robe of ambiguous gender among her books; then receiving a client or two . . . in the same garment; then she would take a turn in the garden and clip the nut trees—for which knee-breeches were convenient; then she would change into a flowered taffeta which best suited a drive to Richmond and a proposal of marriage from some great nobleman;

and so back again to town, where she would don a snuff-coloured gown like a lawyer's and visit the courts to hear how her cases were doing (211-212)

The "sexual indeterminacy" referred to by Bowlby is clearly suggested in this passage. For Orlando, Woolf seems to be saying, there is no one "true" gender since she can pass as a man or a woman with equal ease. Woolf's representation of gender-crossing suggests a link to Judith Butler's definition of drag in her essay "Imitation and Gender Insubordination":

Drag is not the putting on of a gender that belongs properly to some other group, i.e. an act of expropriation or appropriation that assumes that gender is the rightful property of sex, that "masculine" belongs to "male" and "feminine" belongs to "female." There is no "proper" gender, a gender proper to one sex rather than another, which is in some sense that sex's cultural property. (21)

There is something of this effect at work in those sections of the narrative where readers are encouraged to think of Orlando not as a woman masquerading as a man, but as Orlando masquerading sometimes as a man, sometimes as a woman, and at other times as a mixture of the two.

In this area of the text, an unexpected parallel emerges between Orlando and Renée Richards's Second Serve. There is no immediately obvious comparison to be made between Orlando's experience and that of Richards. Whilst Orlando's gender-crossing is optional, Richards finds herself forced to lead a dual existence prior to surgery and even, for a time, after it and much of her autobiography relates the difficulties of managing the lives of two "personalities". One has an official status in the world: the eminent eye surgeon, tennis player and heterosexual man, Dr Richard Raskind; the other, Renée Richards, enjoys only a private existence as a heterosexual woman who, at various points in her travels, is forced to pose as a divorcee recovering from a recent abortion and even as her own (Dr Richard Raskind's) wife. For Orlando, we are told, living as a man and a woman "reaped a twofold harvest . . . the pleasures of life were increased and its experiences multiplied" (211). For Richards, whilst the tensions involved in leading a double life at times produce a certain frisson, the pressure of having to maintain a male identity publicly also lead frequently to self-harm of her male genitals and recurring thoughts of suicide.

Yet the playful exuberance characterising those sections of Orlando's narrative where sex and gender roles may be switched at will is replaced by a

distinctly mournful tone as the character finds herself forced to conform to historically dictated cultural changes. A new century and fashion—the arrival of the Victorian period and the crinoline—bring a noticeable shift of mood both in the oppressive atmosphere of the prose (and the cold, damp weather it describes) and in Orlando's state of mind. The increasing demands on Orlando to adhere to a strictly coded feminine role result in feelings of despair and loss. In the following extract, her melancholic disposition is reflected in a description of the impractical and imprisoning clothes that she must now adopt:

So she stood mournfully at the drawing-room window . . . dragged down by the weight of the crinoline which she had submissively adopted. It was heavier and more drab than any dress she had yet worn. None had ever so impeded her movements. No longer could she stride through the garden with her dogs, or run lightly to the high mound and fling herself beneath the oak tree. Her skirts collected damp leaves and straw. The plumed hat tossed on the breeze. The thin shoes were quickly soaked and mud-caked. Her muscles had lost their pliancy.

(233-34)

Butler's writing on melancholia and gender identification in Gender Trouble offers a useful

approach to this aspect of both Woolf's and Renée Richards's accounts of gender. Drawing upon Freud's theory of melancholia, Butler describes how the enactment of a socially prescribed single gendered identity necessarily involves a melancholic response to the prescribed loss of the same-sexed object:

As a set of sanctions and taboos, the ego ideal regulates and determines masculine and feminine identification. Because identifications substitute for object relations, and identifications are the consequence of loss, gender identification is a kind of melancholia in which the sex of the prohibited object is internalized as a prohibition. This prohibition sanctions and regulates discrete gendered identity and the law of heterosexual desire. (63)

In Richards's transsexual narrative her attempt to maintain her male identity whilst also giving expression to her female identification only seems to emphasise the possibilities that must be forfeited if either state is to be rendered endurable. Using Butler's psychoanalytic formula, Richards's melancholia can be seen to arise not from her belief that she is a woman in a male body, but from the constant psychic and social imperatives to occupy a singular gendered and eroticised position. Richards's unwillingness to

surrender her male role and have the clinical treatment that would enable her to live openly as a woman supports this reading of a more likely cause of her distress. According to this interpretation, when Richards assaults her penis it is the male cultural authority that it represents, and the "discrete gendered identity" such power upholds, against which she is raging.

In Woolf's fantasised account of gender no such angst is immediately evident. Following Orlando's transformation, a single gendered identity is shrugged off and for a period of the narrative there is no identification or desire which Orlando cannot access. In Butler's terms, the exuberance that Orlando is said to experience at this time can be understood as the flipside to Richards's melancholia in that it arises out of the character's ability to elude the social and psychic demands to which Richards is subjected. But this phase of Orlando's life is short-lived and a melancholia that, at first, the text does not admit forces its way into the narrative. Woolf's choice of the nineteenth century to induce Orlando's melancholic mood is a nice detail. As a century historically associated with a greater insistence on singular identities, it is apt that this period should announce a foreclosure of those pleasures that a dual existence had formerly enabled. It is also appropriate that Woolf

links Orlando's change of mood to costume, since it is clothes that have previously been the means to her freedom. Orlando's only chance to regain some of her former liberty now lies in marriage and, once she has secured a suitable partner, a successful career in writing. In another pleasing narrative touch, Woolf rescues Orlando from the confines of her gender in precisely the way she has realised her own escape—through social and economic independence, and creativity.

When Orlando meets her future husband, Shelmerdine, another type of gender crossing is experienced. On the morning following their first meeting (and engagement to marry) Orlando declares her passionate love for Shelmerdine:

No sooner had the words left her mouth than an awful suspicion rushed into both their minds simultaneously.

"You're a woman, Shel!" she cried.

"You're a man, Orlando!" he cried.

Never was there such a scene of protestation and demonstration as then took place since the world began. (240)

Shortly after this scene, Orlando is reduced to sentimental tears by Shelmerdine's account of his adventures at sea. The tears, which Orlando notes were "of a finer flavour than any she had cried before", are

quickly followed by the realisation that she has finally become a "real" woman (241).

The style and tone of the prose used to describe these events have a typical irreverence. The close proximity in the narrative of the moment of cross-sexual identification and Orlando's entry into genuine womanhood, however, invites further comment. If there is a relation between these two occurrences, it is perhaps to be found in a psychic dimension. Butler's theory on the melancholia of gender is again relevant. Following the punitive curtailment of Orlando's gender-crossing that the arrival of the nineteenth century enacts, the character becomes a victim to moods of dejection and self-doubt. Here, the reinforcement of a single and stable gender identity within a heterosexual matrix of desire can be seen to have evoked a melancholic response. In Butler's discussion of loss and melancholia as intrinsic elements in the formation of identifications, she observes "the stricter and more stable the gender affinity, the less resolved the original loss, so that rigid gender boundaries inevitably work to conceal the loss of an original love that, unacknowledged, fails to be resolved" (Gender Trouble 63).

Orlando's attempts to transcend the boundaries that would deny her access to, and so resolution of, that original loss must take a range of forms. However,

the goal—in psychoanalytic terms the “primal wish for union” (Pacteau 82)—remains the same. That desire for union in this section of the story is given actual expression in Orlando’s compulsion to find a life partner. Woolf cleverly draws together the narrative and symbolic levels of the story as the successful outcome of Orlando’s search for a soul-mate becomes a direct means to achieving psychic union. When Orlando and Shelmerdine make their pronouncements both characters immediately refute such apparently absurd and personally threatening assertions. However, that reciprocal act of recognition and the loss it acknowledges represents a crucial affirmation of those identifications and desires which external forces would prohibit. Thus, behind the cover of conventional displays of gender and sexuality, a psychic drama is enacted in which alternative possibilities and pleasures are realised.

Orlando’s belief that she is at last a “real woman” is linked ostensibly to the formation of a heterosexual alliance: she has met a man who makes her feel like a “natural” woman. Butler’s discussion of the processes by which heterosexuality naturalises itself draws upon an Aretha Franklin song with the title and repeated refrain “you make me feel like a natural woman”. Butler observes:

Although Aretha appears to be all too glad to have her naturalness confirmed, she also seems fully and paradoxically mindful that that confirmation is never guaranteed, that the effect of naturalness is only achieved as a consequence of that moment of heterosexual recognition. ("Imitation" 27)

There is a degree of this paradoxical self-consciousness in the way in which Orlando's experience of authentic (heterosexual) womanhood is represented. Whilst Orlando is shown to experience gratitude and pleasure towards the man apparently responsible for this development, the naturalness of that identification is severely questioned by the exchange that precedes it and, indeed, follows it several pages later:

"Are you positive you aren't a man?" he would ask anxiously, and she would echo,

"Can it be possible you're not a woman?" and then they must put it to the proof without more ado. For each was so surprised at the quickness of the other's sympathy, and it was to each such a revelation that a woman could be as tolerant and free-spoken as a man, and a man as strange and subtle as a woman, that they had to put the matter to the proof at once. (246)

In this superbly mock-serious account, masculinity and femininity are presented as fluid and interchangeable states whilst heterosexual desire emerges as the ultimate arbiter of normative gender roles.

The implications of what has been discussed above are important to debates surrounding transsexual narratives. The unequivocal change of sex which Orlando undergoes represents a desire which could be termed "transsexual". In the context of other notions of gender-crossing considered here, that ability to change sex completely and without contradiction can be read as being as arbitrary and ultimately as inadequate as any original determination of sex would have been. Whilst at a practical level the usefulness of gender constructions is recognised as a convenient means of ordering society—the problems that arise in the absence of clearly defined roles is made evident in the legal actions surrounding Orlando's person and estate—in human terms those constructions are presented as insufficient and requiring a range of strategies to manage the problems they present.

In the past, transsexual narratives have tended to neglect or completely avoid questions surrounding the adequacy of accepted gender categories. Increasingly, transsexual narratives and representations question the essentialism ascribed to that identity and some transgender critics and artists have allied themselves

with queer theorisations of gender. Yet whilst naturalising concepts of biological sex and gender form the basis of the identifications presented by Jorgensen, Morris, and Richards, all three life-narratives exhibit certain tensions around the idea of the "true gender" that is claimed. Morris's Conundrum reveals these contradictions most consciously. Towards the end of the book she talks of a "continuing ambiguity" (157), and in the epilogue to the 1997 edition of Conundrum she directly links what she perceives to be a weakening of a "specifically transsexual urge" to "the slow overlapping of the genders" which has occurred since her own transition (160). The perpetual gender-crossings necessary to sustain Orlando's fluid identity are presented by some transgender theorists as desirable both in personal and political terms. Kate Bornstein conceptualises this approach to identity as a third space. She explains: "It's when we put gender into play, it's when we question the binary, it's when we break the rules and keep calling attention to the fact that the rules are breakable: that's when we create a Third Space" (140).

When it comes to most transsexual identities the playful and imaginative notions of gender that both Woolf and Bornstein suggest seem inappropriate and improbable. Such consummate and boundless feats of transmogrification are not possible (even if they are

desirable). Even if the body is changed, as Griggs states in an apparently unconscious challenge to Woolf, it is "not an article of clothing" and therefore cannot be exchanged for "one that is genetically female" (S/he 134).

The approximate relation between the gender identity achieved and its ideal was a concern of my previous chapter. Here, as in the Brooks and Cameron portraits, that slippage is enacted through the presence of certain dissonant effects both in Orlando and transsexual autobiographies. This aspect of the texts can be explored through the visual images and cues which serve to construct them as "true" stories, but at the same time severely test abiding concepts of truth.

Real lives

Rachel Bowlby observes: "Orlando is wearing its sources and inspiration on its sleeve: it is straightaway a tease to the conventions which ought to be keeping fiction and real lives officially separate" ("Orlando: An Introduction" 153). Autobiographies by transsexual women and men also challenge the recognised boundaries between "fiction" and "real lives". For some, this confrontation is expressed in the choice of title: Mark Rees's Dear Sir or Madam: The Autobiography of a

Female-to-Male Transsexual and Raymond Thompson's co-written What Took You So Long? A Girl's Journey to Manhood are more than a "tease to conventions", they are a clear provocation. Such titles would also seem to locate the books in the genres of myth or fantasy or science fiction, where such transformations are possible. Yet there are photographs of the author and other cues that designate them as true life-stories. This blurring of distinctions between so-called imagined and real identities probably has its most striking realisation in the selection of photographs that allow us to trace stages in the transition from one sex to the other.

The photographs which appear in the original edition of Orlando have a corresponding effect. Talia Schaffer's essay "Posing Orlando" argues that the photographs enact a "counterdiscourse to the novel's text" (26) and as such constitute a vital component of any reading of the book. "No reading of Orlando", asserts Schaffer, "can be viable unless it interprets the illustrations, for Orlando gets its meaning from precisely the conflicted, complex relation between image and narrative" (27). There is a particular sense in which this idea might be applied equally to Renée Richards's Second Serve or Kate Bornstein's Gender Outlaw. The photographs that have been selected to represent Orlando and various other "characters"

alluded to in the text are a strange hotchpotch of forms and styles and, as Schaffer argues, they "indulge in artifice, satire, masquerade, and self-contradiction" in much the way that the text does (31). Some images, those featuring Vita Sackville-West and Woolf's niece, Angelica, seem designed deliberately to draw attention to their fictitious quality even though or perhaps because they feature, certainly in the case of Vita, clearly identifiable living subjects. In addition there are incongruities in the visual and textual signs. In the case of the photograph of Angelica, titled "The Russian Princess as a Child", Schaffer points to a "series of deliberate mistakes, misstatements, and misrepresentations" (34). Other images, which merely reproduce paintings, seem to have a more intrinsic authenticity in relation to the life-story which they supposedly corroborate.¹⁰ However, as Schaffer identifies, they too are "ambiguously captioned" and in being "photographic interpretations of preexisting artistic interpretations" (40) achieve that appearance of veracity through imitation and artifice.

¹⁰ My response to these photographs considers their relative authenticity as a biographical device. Schaffer's interpretation focuses on the way the photographs represent women and men. She argues that, in a strategic contradiction of the text, the photographs show women to be real because they are illustrated through "photographs of their living bodies", whilst men, who are depicted through "photographs of statues or paintings", are masquerading (40).

In developing her theme, Schaffer establishes a link between the interaction of text and visual image in Orlando and Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity. Schaffer explains:

The text produces itself in the spaces between photographs, always trying to achieve the reality of those photographs. The text chases the photographs, just as gender performance chases the ideas of real gender. Furthermore, by appearing to repeat each other, text and photograph only emphasize their failure to reproduce each other exactly. (57)

If this parallel is teased out, the photographs that Woolf uses in the book do not express an original or real identity which can be imitated by the text; neither are they parodic representations of an original. Instead the combined effect of the photographs appears, in Butler's terms, to parody "the very notion of an original" (Gender Trouble 138). If the photographs are offered as evidence of an authentic identity, it is the text that gives them that appearance of authenticity through its constant but ultimately fruitless attempt to represent what is, in fact, itself only a likeness for which there is no genuine article. Hence, photographs and text come together to orchestrate an identification which has no base in reality. "Never able to attain the authenticity

its own photographs seem to guarantee", Schaffer explains, "Orlando strives endlessly to reach the reality of gender, enjoying itself mightily in the impossible journey to reach the ever-receding goal" (58-9).

The interpretation that Schaffer presents projects Orlando into a theoretical space where, as Butler would have it, there is "no true or false, real or distorted acts of gender", but only a "regulatory fiction" (Gender Trouble 141). Schaffer's interrogation of a previously neglected area adopts a critical approach similar to my own in an earlier discussion of Woolf's representation of drag. Here, it provides a useful departure point for my enquiry.

When we see Vita posing as Orlando we know that she both is and is not this character. At a fantasised level Vita is Orlando: Woolf wants us to be aware of the living inspiration for her imagined subject. Of course, in reality Vita cannot possibly be the shape-shifting, time-travelling Orlando, but the boundaries between the two identities—one "real" the other "fantasised"—are unsettled by these photographic images. Rachel Bowlby persuasively interprets the tension created by Vita's photographed presence in Orlando:

There is Vita herself, in the photographs, on the dedication page, for all the world to see

and read: the fiction ties in to a real person. But the photographs show the "real" Vita posing, taking on parts from her own life and her ancestors', so that real life itself is shown to be made up of imaginary identifications. ("Orlando: An Introduction" 153)

These remarks must be taken in the context of an ambiguity that already inheres in photographic portraits, regardless of any changes in the gender identity of the subject. Bowlby observes that family album photographs are "both factual records—how it was, really, then—and also poses, self-consciously constructing an image, both at the time of taking and in the mode of preservation and display" (154). The idea of "posing" acquires a further level of meaning in discussions of texts where photographs show the subject as both male and female.

Bowlby's analogy between "real life" and "imaginary identifications" can be applied to Renée Richards's autobiography. On the front and back covers of Second Serve are photographs of the author as Richard Raskind and Renée Richards. The photographs on the back are both of identity cards: one has been issued by the Armed Forces of the United States Naval Reserve in the name of Lieutenant Commander Richard H. Raskind; the other is proof of Renée Richards's

membership of the Women's Tennis Association. The explicitly gendered nature of this juxtaposition of "official" images might raise some searching questions in respect of Richards's identity, not least—How could this male naval officer actually be a woman? followed swiftly by—How could this woman tennis player ever have lived as a man? To borrow some of Schaffer's terms, can we talk about these self-representations without using the words artifice, masquerade and self-contradiction? If these photographs and the other "before, during and after" shots are viewed alongside the text of Richards's life-story a complex identification is presented that has no trace in the photographs that track her progress from a three year old boy to a man who successfully completes a medical degree and enters the US Navy. The photographs that complete this pictorial history chart a movement towards that identification which allows Richards to pass as the woman she feels she is. What seems to be illustrated by these later photographs is something which Emma Wilson, in her discussion of what she terms "[t]rans-sex identification", refers to as a transsexual person's compulsion to enact "a fiction of singular and unified gender identification" (53). What I want to consider is how the positioning of these visual self-representations alongside the written text constitutes a coming out process that both enacts that "fiction"

and blows its cover. In the same way that the photographs of Vita can be seen to challenge notions of the "real", the question might be asked—Do any of the photographs of Renée Richards show the "real" Renée? And to what extent can Bowlby's comments about Sackville-West, quoted above, be applied to the photographs of Richards? The photographs of Richard Raskind exist in a peculiar tension to the author in that they both are and are not the person who is narrating the story. But how far could it be argued that Richards is in fact "posing" in all of these shots, not purely those in which she is represented as a man? Indeed, might it not be said that in these photographs Richards, like Sackville-West in Orlando, is "taking on parts from her own life" which is a life itself comprised of "imaginary identifications" (153).

This is perhaps taking the transsexual narrative too far along the route to queer theory, epitomised by Butler's notion of a true gender identity as nothing more (or less) than a "regulatory fiction" (Gender Trouble 141). The images of Richard and Renée in Second Serve, of course, represent a "real person" in a way that the photographs of Vita in Orlando do not. The parallel cannot be stretched too far. Having read Richards's story it is clear that for her the photographs in which she poses as a woman are a more accurate expression of her identity. Conversely, it is

after the transformation that Orlando's gender mobility begins and it is this fluidity as opposed to a stable identification which allows her to experience life to the full. However, for Richards, as for other transsexual women, the transition from a male identity to a female one was never a straightforward, unambiguous process. Whilst the photographs and text in Second Serve may depict a desire for a "singular and unified gender identification", they also reveal a "real life" that is constructed through multiple poses and identifications.

A comment from Suzanne Raitt, quoted earlier, makes the point that story-telling—whether it is telling someone else's story or our own— "alleviates frustration, apparently extending the boundaries of who we are, and of who we might be" (146) That word "apparently", in both its senses—that is, seeming to be and making clear—has particular significance if it is applied to transsexual autobiographies where an identity that disputes the boundaries of "who we have been told we are" is represented through the act of story-telling.

In narrating the life-story of a character who anatomically changes sex, Woolf also challenges the prescriptive and limiting nature of conventional sex and gender identities. Bowlby calls Orlando "a serious fantasy which imagines what femininity (or, for that

matter, another masculinity) might be in quite different conditions—if anything was possible" (Orlando: An Introduction 172). Transsexual autobiographies such as Conundrum and Second Serve are, in the specific ways discussed in this chapter, real-life enactments of that fantasy. The conditions are quite different from those in which Orlando was conceived. If not quite anything is possible, technological advances have certainly made it viable not only to imagine identifications that contradict those assigned at birth, but to give them meaningful embodiment too. Unlike Orlando, Morris and Richards tell their own stories. That agency is clearly a crucial part of constructing transsexual subject positions. Nevertheless, the stories which are told display extraordinary affinities. By creating a false biography around a real person and by presenting a fantasised identity as true and a given identity as constructed, Woolf confuses categories of genre and gender in a way that strikes at the core of normative values, both literary and social. That convergence of fantasy, life-writing and identity construction creates a literary paradigm that is evident in many of the transsexual autobiographies discussed in this chapter. More specifically, over seventy years after its publication, one of the pivotal questions that Orlando poses can be seen to lie at the very heart of those

narratives—a question that is best framed by Woolf herself when she asks in her other parodic life-writing narrative, Flush: A Biography, “But what is ‘oneself’? Is it the thing people see? Or is it the thing one is?” (46). As a postscript to this timeless conundrum it might be pertinent to enquire “Or is it the thing one writes?”

My final chapter considers a text in which the relationship between writing and identity is explored at the level of language itself.

Chapter 4

A poetics of difference:

The Making of Americans and unreadable subjects

The limits of my language mean the limits of my world.

–Ludwig Wittgenstein, Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus (5.6)

it's the fault of the pronouns, there is no name for me, no pronoun for me, all the trouble comes from that, that, it's a kind of pronoun too, it isn't that either, I'm not that either

–Samuel Beckett, The Unnamable (132)

I mean, I mean and that is not what I mean, I mean that not any one is saying what they are meaning, I mean that I am feeling something, I mean that I mean something . . . I mean, I mean, I know what I mean.

- Gertrude Stein, The Making of Americans
(782)

Where Hall's The Well of Loneliness and Brooks's portraits contradict the conventions of gender and Woolf's Orlando confounds both gendered and literary codes, experimental writing, as Marianne DeKoven observes, strikes at and transforms "the conventions of language itself" (xiii). A potential effect of such writing strategies may be to question the linguistic codes that organise modern identities. This final chapter moves away from narrative representations of gender transformations and focuses on a text which reshapes narrative itself. In making this transition a number of new, related questions are broached. These are: to what extent can experimentation with the conventions of language transgress the binarisms and hierarchies of identity? How might these linguistic practices be constructed as expressive of a transgender consciousness? Equally, how might they be read as fundamentally counter to the narrative construction of coherent, integrated transgender identities?

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, transgender subjects often write themselves into cultural discourse through the adoption of an unequivocally single sexed position. In this respect, conventional narratives such as autobiographies have a productive function. Jay Prosser describes the way in which a mirror scene in Jan Morris's autobiography, Conundrum, operates as a transitional point in both the

transsexual trajectory and the autobiographical narrative:

For from this point on in the narrative, the "me" written about (James Morris) and the "I" that writes (Jan Morris)—so far separated by sex—are fused into a singly sexed autobiographical subject, an integral "I." In joining the split gendered subject, autobiography transmits—in narrative—the integrating trajectory of transsexuality.

(100)

Despite the presence of disjunctive and ambivalent elements in Morris's narrative, the overall effect of her autobiography can appear to present transsexuality as the transition to a coherent and unified (because "singly sexed") subject position. But what of those transgender subjects who reject conventional gender distinctions? How can they adapt existing constructions to their purposes? How can they be spoken of or written about? How do they become legible? As Sandy Stone observes: "To attempt to occupy a place as speaking subject within the traditional gender frame is to become complicit in the discourse which one wishes to deconstruct" (295).

The fictional and autobiographical transgender narratives I have discussed so far challenge customary notions of identity through sartorial and somatic

gender transformations. As such they rely upon established notions of meaning in their language use (as does my own critical writing). Even in Woolf's Orlando, although the narrator mocks grammatical rules—"His memory—but in future we must, for convention's sake, say 'her' for 'his', and 'she' for 'he'" (133)—and exposes the use of gendered pronouns as convention, ultimately the usefulness of such devices is accepted. Post-transformation, Orlando is referred to as "she" in the absence of a meaningful pronominal alternative. Some texts with transgender narrators and/or themes have adopted compound nouns ("he-she") and gender neutral pronouns ("per" and "hir"),¹ but such neologisms have no impact on dominant language use.

In the literary text on which this chapter focuses, Gertrude Stein's The Making of Americans: Being a History of a Family's Progress (1925), conventional notions of identity are disrupted at a stylistic level and through the materiality of language itself. Stein's text, written between 1903-1911, is one of a number of experimental prose fictions by women around this time: Dorothy Richardson, Virginia Woolf, Djuna Barnes, H.D., and Natalie Barney are some of the key female modernists from the period to produce works

¹ See Leslie Feinberg's Stone Butch Blues and Transgender Warriors; and Marge Piercy's Woman on the Edge of Time. Use of the term "per" has also been advocated by Third Gender activist Christie Elan-Cane in the unpublished conference paper "A World Without Gender".

which experiment with form and remodel traditional narratives of identity. In Richardson's Pilgrimage, a cycle of thirteen novels beginning with Pointed Roofs (1915), and Woolf's To the Lighthouse (1927) and Mrs. Dalloway (1927) a narrative interiority reproduces the workings of the female protagonist's consciousness. This literary device derives from innovative notions of identity as the product of intrasubjective forces, or what David Trotter in "The Modernist Novel" calls a "difference-within" as opposed to a "difference-between" (90-1). The Waves (1931), perhaps Woolf's most experimental work, extends this technique to an exploration of the nature of selfhood through the disembodied articulations of its six characters. In Djuna Barnes's Ladies Almanack (1928) and Ryder (1929) the revisioning of myth and exuberant deployment of pastiche and parody combine to produce identity as multiple and derivative. H.D.'s Hermione (written in 1927, but not published until 1981) and Barney's The One Who is Legion (1930) highlight the frailties and perversities of binary constructions of identity, utilising and refashioning gender-inflected words in ways which interrupt narrative and semantic flow. The Making of Americans, both in terms of the dates of its composition and its textual qualities, emerges from this diverse body of texts as a pioneering and radical,

if somewhat flawed, break with literary and linguistic conventions.

Individually, the writing practices deployed by these women writers and the gender "play" which their formal and narrative experimentation enables appear to reach towards alternative models of identity at linguistic and literary levels. Collectively, those practices might be seen to constitute a poetics of difference which, in terms of its specific revisionary effects, has potential significance for transgender representations.

The transgressive possibilities of experimental writing, of course, have limits. DeKoven remarks: "it need not replace, or even threaten conventional writing. Making conscious the unconscious need not destroy the already-conscious; rather, the area of the conscious can be both enlarged and restored to wholeness" (23). Just as some modernist representations of gender transgression as dysfunctional or monstrous can have the effect of illustrating the "natural" and infinitely more desirable qualities of normative gender, so an incoherent, unreadable text may only confirm the "natural" authority of the Word.² The likelihood that challenges to normative models, whether they be models of identity or language, will be

² Shari Benstock discusses Stein's experimental writing in the context of a modernist preoccupation with linguistic meaning (Women 158-61).

counter-reformist is testament to the intransigence of existing structures of power. Catharine R. Stimpson, in her discussion of the subversive potential of experimental writing practices, argues: "to destabilize is not to eradicate; to dislodge is not to demolish" ("Gertrude Stein" 11). Accepting these constraints, it is the potential to "dislodge" existing writing and reading practices and "destabilize" customary notions of meaning, and the extent to which these acts can impact on naturalising concepts of gender that are the primary concerns of this chapter.

In The Making of Americans the text's stylistic and ideological self-contradictions represent its most obvious challenge to dominant norms: its juxtaposition of the grammatical with the ungrammatical; its presentation of the meaningless as meaningful; and what Stimpson, with reference to Stein's work more generally, describes as an opposition of shifting intensity between the "reconstitution of patriarchal ideas about gender binaries" and "the repudiation of those ideas" (10). In this last respect, similar tensions have been found in the other texts discussed in this thesis and have also been the source of some critics' attacks on transgender, and more specifically transsexual, identities. My discussion has previously addressed the contradictory effects of appropriating identifications and desires from within existing sex

and gender binaries. In this chapter the critical focus shifts to the more fundamental conflict of representing unconventional identities according to a conventional linguistic model.

The stylistic eccentricities of The Making of Americans demonstrate the difficulties of reading a text which constantly subverts that model. In breaching grammatical conventions Stein's experimental writing may circumvent the delimiting practices of customary language use, but unfamiliar prose techniques create their own problems. How do we read texts which so resolutely resist interpretation? Indeed, to what extent does such writing escape the constraints of symbolic language use only to fall into a trap of illegibility?

The loss of meaning is one of modernism's greatest preoccupations in the post-War world. It is given stark expression in T. S. Eliot's "The Waste Land", where a dislocated narrative voice articulates a state of profound disconnectedness in the lines: "I can connect/Nothing with nothing" (62). There is something of that unintelligibility in the verbal and syntactical vagaries of The Making of Americans. If Stein's readers can "connect nothing with nothing" her response might well be that they are not reading as she writes. A popular anecdote relates an exchange between Stein and a journalist during a lecture tour in 1934. In response

to the question, "Why don't you write the way you talk?" Stein is reported to have replied, "Why don't you read the way I write?" (Look at Me Now 9). For the purposes of this chapter, that changed sense of meaning will be read as a part of the text's critique of symbolic representations of identity.

In the context of a study of transgender identities, the issue of legibility suggests a parallel question: how does one "read" a person who, in gendered terms, refuses to be read? The inscription of difference on the textual surfaces of Stein's experimental writing and on the "embodied texts" of some transgender subjects may offer significant areas of correspondence in terms of their incoherent effects. James R. Mellow describes The Making of Americans as "a work fixed permanently . . . in a state of awkward transition" (122). Interestingly, this idea of Stein's text as in some way caught in a disjunctive, intermediate position recalls some of the texts and subjects of my other chapters: sexological theories of an "intermediate sex" and "transitional types"; the positioning of Radclyffe Hall's Stephen Gordon in "the no man's land of sex"; the dissonant elements of Romaine Brooks's and Loren Cameron's visual representations of masculinity; Jan Morris's awareness of her "continuing ambiguity"; Woolf's awareness of the

impediments to "becoming a woman" both for herself and her literary creation, Orlando.

Sandy Stone proposes that transsexuals be constituted as a genre: "a set of embodied texts whose potential for *productive* disruption of structured sexualities and spectra of desire has yet to be explored" (296). Increasingly, the subjects of transgender representations display and, in particular instances, consciously emphasise incongruities in their sexed and/or gendered identities. In The Making of Americans a transfigured and divergent grammar has a similarly disruptive impact in its production of gaps in conventional meaning.

These shared practices are hardly surprising. The tensions and ambiguities of gender, given palpable expression in transgender narratives and through transsexual bodies, are the contradictory effects of the language which produces it. Hence, in so far as experimental writing reveals stresses and frailties in language and its relationship to meaning, it demonstrates related qualities in gender. When cultural or linguistic rules are broken the subject becomes hard to read. The resulting sense of disorder will lead some people to question the validity and constraints of those rules, whilst for others it will only reaffirm their "natural" logic.

A fundamental paradox of my discussion of The Making of Americans is that although by comparison with my other selected texts it could be seen to have the most radical transformative capabilities, it also offers the most resistance to interpretation at anything more than a stylistic level. In "The Word-Play of Gertrude Stein" Laura Riding Jackson argues that Stein's works "did not provide prototypes of constructive revolutionary innovation in linguistic practice" but were instead "early products of a pathological condition" which has pervaded modern writing, thinking and speaking. As such, Jackson observes, Stein's writing practice illustrates how language can be "dehumanized by the ignoring of the standards of rational coherence that are, in intellectual actuality, inseparable from it" (242). In other words, although Stein's experimental writing radically reconstructs language use, the resulting confusion illustrates both the enduring bond between word and meaning and the impossibility of effecting an intelligible transformation of language. Where transgender subjects position themselves outside "the standards of rational coherence" through radical reconstructions of identity, similarly reinstating effects can result.

The banal, frequently absurd qualities of the writing which characterise The Making of Americans as a

whole could be attributed to an experimental project that defeats its own purposes. To an extent this view is valid. The Making of Americans is somewhat of a literary "white elephant" and a close reading of its nine hundred and twenty-five pages can be a mind-numbing and frustrating experience. For some readers and critics the apparent deficiencies of the writing will be traced purely to the perversities or failings of the author. A more productive approach to Stein's text (and by extension other "unreadable" texts) is possible but it is a project, like Stein's, fraught with ambiguities: a potential "mare's nest" of an investigation. For in attempting to interpret the "unreadable", I am, according to DeKoven, defeating "experimental writing (since it has no Meaning, no unitary coherence)" (xv); and in constructing a reading which, in spirit only, is experimental I am vulnerable to the logic of my own argument.

On the other hand, although there are eccentricities in the writing of The Making of Americans, there is seemingly a method in the grammatical and verbal rhythms and patterns, and a kind of meaning in the irregularities of the prose. Richard Bridgman's Gertrude Stein in Pieces, argues that for Stein "True confusion was superior to false order" (71). My reading of The Making of Americans would suggest that in much of the "confusion" that

characterises the text there is still a kind of "order".

This different type of meaning might be read in the context of French feminist theories of language which oppose a (feminine) semiotic order to a (masculine) symbolic one. Such theories have been used to construct Stein's experimental writing as "feminine" or antipatriarchal. DeKoven argues that Stein's writing is "already deconstructed" in that it "is the indeterminate, anti-patriarchal (anti-logocentric, anti-phallogocentric, presymbolic, pluridimensional) writing which . . . Julia Kristeva proposes as an antidote to patriarchy" (xvii). The link to Kristeva is made more explicitly by Lisa Ruddick in Reading Gertrude Stein: Body, Text, Gnosis. In her discussion of The Making of Americans Ruddick states: "Stein foreshadows Kristeva; she not only performs the modernist irruption of drive in language (as other modernists do) but also reflects on it, in quasi-theoretical moments like the section on loving repeating" (127).

Although the disordered effects of Stein's writing in The Making of Americans might be read as a disruption of the symbolic by repressed, pre-Oedipal drives, there is something in the deployment of those effects which exceeds this interpretation. The capricious grammatical and verbal impulses do not fit

so neatly into any one theoretical frame. Equally, the narrator's "quasi-theoretical" stance suggests an ironic distance from the text and a self-parodying quality which appears to consciously highlight the potential reductiveness of such readings. Alison Tate's comparison of Kristeva's and Stein's analysis of language also finds a difference of emphasis in their writing. Tate suggests that Stein "seems much more conscious of the meaningfulness of the textual, discursive, interactional features of different discourses" (340). She finds this greater awareness translated into a textual playfulness: "rather than accepting the inherited ('written') force of formal features of language within particular genres and discourses", Stein "seems to tease and play with them, testing out the extent to which their presence can guarantee the effects that are traditionally promised" (340).

This verbal and grammatical playfulness is typical of large sections of The Making of Americans. In the course of Stein's epic presentation of "a history of a family's progress" (the book's sub-title), any semblance of conventional writing or linear narrative gives way to modernist and postmodernist "anti-narrative" effects. Textual codes and conventions are exposed in a perfunctory manner. An increasingly self-referential narrator signals her position as both

subject of and in the writing through interjections, in the form of gossipy colloquialisms such as "as I was saying", digressions into self-analysis and, at times, what appear to be moments of existential angst. A series of "mood swings" towards the end of the text includes the following outburst:

I am in desolation and my eyes are large with
needing weeping and I have a flush from
feverish feeling and I am not knowing what
way each one is experiencing in being living
. . . . I tell you I cannot bear it this
thing that I cannot be realising experiencing
in each one being living (729)

New reading practices must be adopted if the text's abstruse surfaces, tortuous grammar, and obsessive and intrusive self-referential commentary are to be successfully negotiated. An openness to the repetitive and often monotonous rhythms and patterns in the writing is vital to the processing of a text in which any enduring mimetic sense derived from individual words is limited. Charles Bernstein observes in a more general discussion of Stein's experimental texts:

the meaning is no longer to be found in what
the words represent, or stand for, but in
their texture: the repetition, juxtaposition
and structure of phrases, sentences, and
paragraphs. One might say the words refer

only to themselves, that there is no disjunction between what the prose refers to and the prose itself. (58)

In The Making of Americans a semblance of conventional meaning exists in the words, but the overriding force of the text derives from its material rather than symbolic effects. More specifically, my analysis will demonstrate ways in which the material workings of the prose can be seen to critique and dismantle the text's own narrative attempts to represent identity. The degree of self-reflexivity evident in this process distinguishes The Making of Americans from the other literary and visual texts discussed in this thesis.

In light of the narrator's stated aim—to identify every type of "men and women" that is "being living"—the marked prosaicness of the recycled vocabulary and ideas can serve as a parodic illustration of the limits of representational language use. According to this reading, this aspect of the text describes and enacts in hyperbolic fashion the impossibility of meaningfully categorising human identity according to "types". In the course of that process a number of themes related to identity are subjected to the same deconstructive strategies. These themes, which include issues of authenticity, subjectivity, and the gendering of language, are recognisable from previous chapters and once again demonstrate shared concerns of some

modernist women's texts and transgender representation and theory. An interplay between the themes, the practices of writing and reading, and the text's materiality lies at the centre of my reading of The Making of Americans.

To contextualise that reading, I will examine the relationship between Stein's sartorial and somatic self-fashioning and her writing, and provide some discussion of publishing issues surrounding The Making of Americans.

Stein's material wor(l)d

Stein's works and life have been subjected to a range of critical approaches from a number of structuralist and poststructuralist positions. The troubling intersections of Stein's "bourgeois", "masculinist" and "heterosexist" lifestyle and views, her same-sex relationships and the encoding of lesbian desire in much of her work are some of the main tensions that critical studies highlight. Shari Benstock argues that although Stein "was unconventional in her choice of sexual partner, in her dress, and in her writings . . . the coincidence of these oddities did not constitute a subversive feminism" (Women 176-77). Hence, although Stein "evaded gender categories in her choice of dress", as Benstock sees it, in her life and writing

she stayed "within the socially constructed dichotomies that distinguish the masculine from the feminine" (178). Benstock evaluates the unconventional traits of Stein's life and works according to a fairly rigid model of feminism. As such, her reading of Stein fails to address a subversiveness that is not so readily defined.

As Benstock suggests, Stein's physical appearance often eludes gender distinctions: she does not adopt the look of the "masculine woman", but neither does she conform to the image of the feminine "other". Photographs from the period demonstrate the individual and often eccentric style of Stein's sartorial tastes and seem to reflect her self-representation as "artist" and "genius", rather than suggesting any specifically gendered identification. Stimpson presents this as Stein's strategic reworking of the myth of the artist as "a genderless worker, as voice/eye/ear in time present who lives to work, without hope of an immediate audience" ("Gertrude Stein" 4-5). Although there are elements of this figure clearly present in the narrator of The Making of Americans, Stein's identification with what she saw as the exclusively male preserve of "genius" works against that non-gendered construction of the artist.

In her life and writing there is certainly evidence of Stein's reproduction of gender specific

roles and language. Stein may not have adopted a masculine image, but her long-term relationship with Alice Toklas was in many respects consistent with prevailing heterosexual models of same-sex desire. Stein's use of the word "wives" in writing or speaking of her partners is just one example of an apparent heterosexual role-playing. Yet Stein's use of the term "wife" has a certain perverse quality in its appropriation of the language of the socially regulated institution of marriage for a socially inadmissible relationship. The potential dissidence of that act becomes more apparent in the context of Stein's highly playful approach to language which allows for a satirical or parodic element that just would not exist if, say, Radclyffe Hall's Stephen Gordon (or Hall herself) used the same term. Although Stein's unconventionality might not amount to a "subversive feminism", the principles of self-invention evident in her life and the parodic effects of her writing practices suggest a parallel with queer theorisations of gender acts, especially drag.

If, as Judith Butler argues in Gender Trouble, the replication of "heterosexual constructs in non-heterosexual frames" highlights "the utterly constructed status of the so-called heterosexual original" (31), then Stein's transgressive deployment of grammar may have a similar potential in relation to

narrative constructions of identity. Randa Dubnick's essay "The Structure of Obscurity: Gertrude Stein, Language and Cubism" comments on how Stein's writing "constantly refers to conventional grammatical syntax, but only in a playful negation of its every rule" (40). Stein's positioning of grammatical constructs in a predominantly non-grammatical frame produces that "playful negation" of rules. In the case of The Making of Americans the practice of creating an illusion of "meaning" in the midst of grammatical disconnectedness results in a text which was initially unpublishable and, for many people, unreadable. In terms of Butler's argument, this potential absence of audience is crucial since the subversive content of parodic "performance" depends on "a context and reception in which subversive confusions can be fostered" (Gender Trouble 139).

Stein's struggles to be published, prior to the success of The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas in 1933, are one of the main concerns of Bridget Elliott and Jo-Anne Wallace's chapter on Stein in their book Women Artists and Writers: Modernist (Im)positionings. In the context of that troubled publication history, Laura Riding Jackson's comment that Stein "found a public to which she could make the queer presentation sound, if not natural, at least proper to the time" (243) seems misleading. Not only was Stein unable to find a "public" for her eccentric output but, in

inception, much of her writing might be deemed to be "before its time". The untimely aspect of her work is perceived by Stein as the main reason for her failure to publish.

In "A Transatlantic Interview 1946" Stein contrasts the fundamental "newness and difference" of her writing with the work of James Joyce, whom she describes as leaning "toward the past" (512). In "Composition as Explanation" (1926), an essay which Stein first presented as a lecture at Cambridge and Oxford Universities, she reflects on the fickle nature of conventional literary tastes. She describes how a new composition which is rejected by one generation for its "difference" will be valorised by the next for its "classic" qualities. Stein attributes these conflicting responses to a "compulsion for likeness" that will condemn and approve a text with equal force: "For a very long time everybody refuses and then almost without a pause almost everybody accepts" (23). Stein blames human apathy for this aversion to anything unfamiliar: "If every one were not so indolent they would realize that beauty is beauty even when it is irritating and stimulating not only when it is accepted and classic" (23). These pronouncements might be given a wider significance in terms of their insights into the prescriptive and reactionary practices of dominant orders. More specifically, they identify and challenge

those forces which, as Stein sees it, have caused the value of her own work to be overlooked.

Critical and biographical evidence supports the view that Stein's writing was being rejected by publishers because of its radical qualities. Ulla E. Dydo, the editor of A Stein Reader: Gertrude Stein, explains that although Stein submitted all her work for publication "most of it was returned because it did not represent a familiar world and could not be read in familiar ways" (3). Of The Making of Americans Dydo remarks: "Completed in 1911, the book that Stein always called her main work suffered rejection after rejection by publishers and did not appear until fourteen years later" (17). There were some minor breakthroughs: Elliott and Wallace describe how Stein's publications prior to 1933 were through small literary presses and the publishing house set up by Stein and Toklas in 1929. More generally, publishers' responses to submissions of work refer to it as "peculiar" and "curious" and generally express the view that such writing would not be taken seriously by the public (Dydo 96-7).

An interesting counter-view to this "official" response can be divined from letters to Stein from friends and contemporaries who had read parts of the manuscript of The Making of Americans prior to its

publication.³ Although the views expressed in personal correspondence cannot necessarily be taken to represent serious critical opinion, there are some revealing insights. Alice Ullman, a friend of Stein's, comments in a letter dated 30 November 1910: "it's the biggest conception imaginable but, dear girl, you are making for 'lonesomeness'! Of course it's going to be the finest thing there is to gain, that lonesomeness. And you'll have with you *the few*" (51). Ullman's observations on the book's "greatness" and yet its limited popular appeal anticipate the problem that Stein was to face in terms of public responses to her work. In equating literary worth with obscurity it also echoes the kind of elitist principles that were to underpin much "Modernist" thinking.

A letter from Mabel Dodge, written in Spring 1911, is particularly instructive in its judgement of the significance of The Making of Americans and in its comments on Stein's style:

To name a thing is practically to create it & this is what your work is—real creation. It is almost frightening to come up against reality in language in this way And your palette is such a simple one—the primary colors in word painting & you express every

³ For my discussion of these letters all of the references are to The Flowers of Friendship: Letters Written to Gertrude Stein, edited by Donald Gallup.

shade known & unknown with them. It is as new & strange & big as the post-impressionists in their way &, I am perfectly convinced, it is the forerunner of a whole epoch of new form & expression. It is very morally constructive for I feel it will alter reality as we have known it, & help us to get at Truth instead of away from it as "literature" so sadly often does.

Dodge concludes: "One cannot read you & still go on cherishing the consistent illusions one has built up about oneself & others" (52). The view that Stein's writing practices present a different version of "reality", and one that is specifically challenging to established concepts of identity, supports this chapter's central argument. It also relates to my discussion in the previous chapter of representations of personal "truth" in Woolf's Orlando and transgender life-narratives. The analogy with fine art has resonances that go beyond this chapter's parameters too; the reference to the "simple" palette and yet range and subtlety of expression recalls my commentary on Brooks's largely monochromatic but richly textured paintings. The mention of "primary colors" and description of Stein's "word painting" as "new & strange" set her work distinctly apart from the realist portraiture of her contemporary. The parallel drawn

between Stein's writing and post-impressionism is interesting; Stein was greatly influenced by artists, especially Picasso, and some critical accounts of her work liken her style to Cubism.⁴

Early in 1923, Carl Van Vechten, a writer of critical articles and fiction and the editor of Stein's posthumously published work, sent the first three volumes of the manuscript of The Making of Americans to his publishers, Alfred Knopf. Van Vechten wrote to Stein in April of that year: "my feeling is that you have done a very big thing, probably as big as, perhaps bigger than James Joyce, Marcel Proust, or Dorothy Richardson". But he expressed concern about the expense of publishing such a long book and the problems there might be with sales: "I mean, to the average reader, the book will probably be *work*". Van Vechten adds a conciliatory note: "I think even the average reader will enjoy it, however, once he begins to get the rhythm, that is so important", and concludes: "To me, now, it is a little like the Book of Genesis. There is something Biblical about you, Gertrude" (154). As will be seen in my analysis of The Making of Americans, Van Vechten's comments on Stein's rhythm recognise one of the text's key sources of meaning and his references to the Bible identify one of its many borrowed styles or

⁴ See Dubnick's "The Structure of Obscurity: Gertrude Stein, Language and Cubism".

"voices".

Van Vechten wrote again to Stein in October informing her that Knopf was inviting subscriptions for the book and, if there were sufficient orders, planned to publish it as a three or four volume collection. The whole set, which was to include portraits of Stein and the author's signature, was likely to cost \$25 (158).

In January 1924, Ernest Hemingway suggested to Ford Madox Ford that he serialise The Making of Americans in his periodical Transatlantic Review. In February, Hemingway wrote to Stein informing her that Ford had agreed and that James Joyce was to be published in the same number (159). Also that year Stein took the three volumes away from Knopf and sent them to another publisher, Liveright; but it was through Robert McAlmon's Contact Publishing Company that the full manuscript was finally published in book form in 1925. The Contact Editions series had already published McAlmon's Village and Hemingway's Three Stories & Ten Poems. McAlmon had written to Stein sometime in 1924 about the "zip of intelligence, and whoop of personality power" evident in The Making of Americans but not recognised in the review articles of its serialisation in Transatlantic Review (162). Following the announcements of publication Van Vechten declared in a letter to Stein dated 18 April 1925: "It seems to me that with the dawning of another year all

the world will know of your glory!" (172). Such talk of greatness was embarrassingly premature, however, as McAlmon's acrimonious communication to Stein in Spring 1926 bluntly reveals. McAlmon, who clearly regretted his decision to publish the book, states: "It has been on the market for six months and there is no evidence that it will sell". The letter concludes with a threat to "pulp" all remaining copies a year after the publication (190). Edith Sitwell's attempts to persuade Virginia and Leonard Woolf to publish The Making of Americans in England through the Hogarth Press in 1925 had also proved unsuccessful (184-85).

In view of Stein's publishing difficulties, it seems ironic that the narrator of The Making of Americans voices concerns about finding an "audience" for her writing. At the start of one chapter she dramatically announces: "I am writing for myself and strangers" (289). By this point in the text the narrator can be seen to have become a victim of the reductiveness of her own processes. The need to re-establish her agency produces a self-assertion which can have a somewhat false and desperate quality. There also appears to be a self-conscious anticipation of reader response in the narrator's admission that "repeating" (one of the dominant stylistic features of the text) can be "irritating" and "dulling" (302). Perhaps the narrator's fear of "artistic" failure is

most directly expressed in the following confession to the reader:

Bear it in your mind my reader, but truly I never feel it that there ever can be for me any such creature, no it is this scribbled and dirty and lined paper that is really to be to me always my receiver,—but anyhow reader, bear it in your mind—will there be for me ever any such a creature,—what I have said always before to you, that this that I write down a little each day here on my scraps of paper for you (33)

On the one hand, this is the "artist" figure referred to by Stimpson: the worker who has no "hope of an immediate audience" ("Gertrude Stein" 4). On the other hand, the apparent false modesty of this passage may in fact mask authorial insecurities and signal a real personal and professional need for public acceptance. Elliott and Wallace's discussion of Stein's desire for a popular readership observes that "her status as a writer and a self-proclaimed genius was seemingly not secure unless it was validated by the major publishing houses and mass circulation periodicals" (98). This evident wish for populist approval sits strangely alongside her self-representation as "genius" and provides another instance of Stein's personal and professional inconsistencies. Stein's own situation can

be viewed in the wider context of an ambivalent relation between a modernist aesthetic and the operations of a mass culture which, as Lawrence Rainey argues in Institutions of Modernism: Literary Elites and Public Culture, generated "a tacit but pervasive consensus that the market is the sole arbiter and guarantor of value" (171). Stein's personal ambivalence on matters of literary value and audience does not remain constant. In Everybody's Autobiography, published in 1937, Stein's views on "publicity" seem to have been substantially revised. In a scene in which she is speaking to Hollywood stars at a dinner party, Stein expresses the opinion that "the biggest publicity comes from the realest poetry and the realest poetry has a small audience not a big one" (292).

In The Making of Americans the overt presence of narrative and sexed and gendered conventions suggests a complicated relationship between the experimental aims of this project and its continuing dependence on traditional modes of signification. My reading of Stein's text begins by considering some of the potential effects and implications of its "anti-narrative" practices.

"And so now we begin"

Lisa Ruddick states that The Making of Americans "begins as a bourgeois narrative but ends as an avant-garde experiment, unique in its time" (5). To apply notions of origin and closure to a text which so perversely and thoroughly resists such principles seems somehow inept. Numerically, there is a first and last page in the book and there is some sense of movement in the writing between those pages. Over the long period of its composition there were certain shifts in authorial purpose and style. It was Stein's initial intention to present a fictionalised account of the personal and familial histories of various branches of the Stein family, including her own. This strongly autobiographical focus was then displaced by a more general interest in character types and in what Ulla Dydo calls "the nature of human being itself" (17-18). Although those changes can be loosely identified within the different sections of the text, to attempt to label them as "bourgeois" or "avant-garde" would seem to impose conventions falsely.

The following extract, taken from the early, more orthodox section of the book, evinces a syntactically complex but linguistically familiar style:

The wide and glowing meadows of low oaks, the clean clear tingling autumn air, the blaze of

color in the bits of woods, the freedom and the rush of rapid motion on the open road, the joy of living in a vital world, the ecstasy [sic] of loving and of love, the intensity of feeling in the ardent young, it surely was not so that Julia Dehning could win the sober reason that should judge of men. (27)

But even in these more conventional sections of the text there is generally an artificial quality to the writing which sets it apart from a realistic "bourgeois narrative" model. A pronounced self-consciousness of language and tone pervades the text so that it has the feel of parodying the styles of writing it imitates. Here, consecutive one-sentence paragraphs adopt a diction and sentence structure reminiscent of the patterns and rhythms of the Bible:

One was very strong to bear them and then always she was very strong to lead them.

One was strong to bear them and then always she was strong to suffer with them.

(4)

The writing is haunted by traces of narratives both ancient and modern: religious, mythical, and oral influences inhabit a text which can also mimic the didactic tones of a nineteenth-century novel. The

narrator's description of George Dehning solicits the reader's tolerance for any failings in the character:

remember, George was only fourteen just then, that time with a boy when he never can have much sense in him, for it nearly always is then with boys that the meekest of them are reckless dare-devil heedless unreflecting fellows, and so reader do not make too much for him of any present weakness in him. (17)

Through this allusiveness, conducted in an apparently knowing and calculated fashion, Stein's writing foregrounds and critiques some of its literary and discursive "antecedents". In seeming partly to construct itself on the foundations of these traditional styles and genres, The Making of Americans might be seen to disclose the materiality and contingency of all narratives, including its own. There is a sense here in which the language does not "simply refer to materiality", but additionally reveals itself as "the very condition under which materiality may be said to appear" (Butler, Bodies 31). The implications of this performative aspect of language for my reading of The Making of Americans will be explored in more detail later.

The presence of a distinct narrative voice in direct addresses to the reader in the passage quoted above is a prime example of how the text adopts and

subverts formal devices. In the following coyly worded advice certain narrative codes are evoked; at the same time, readers are gently cautioned against unquestioning adherence to such codes:

And so those who read much in story books
surely now can tell what to expect of her,
and yet, please reader, remember that this is
perhaps not the whole of our story either . .
. for I am not ready yet to take away the
character from our Julia, for truly she may
work out as the story books would have her or
we may find all different kinds of things for
her (15)

This passage also hints at what should already be becoming evident: the text's imperviousness to customary reading practices. Notions of linearity, evoked here by a first person narrator and a reference to "story books", are undermined at a narrative and stylistic level.

Any horizontal progression in the "story" is increasingly resisted and by the final chapter, "History of a Family's Progress", abandoned altogether. Consequently, even in the early stages of the book, readers can feel as if they are freewheeling in space as the writer "hasten[s] slowly forwards" (33). This oxymoronic phrase reflects the ironies and contradictions which characterise the text; it also

describes the experience of encountering a syntax and diction which simultaneously creates a sense of frenetic activity and inertia.

For the greater part of the text, any sense of development is derived incrementally through a process of accretion and minor alterations in the otherwise limited vocabulary and phrasing. The materiality of much of the language use in The Making of Americans creates a textual surface that is hard to navigate. Changing temporal markers imply linear movement: "Now there will be descriptions of every kind of way every one can be a kind of men and women" (289) becomes "There will *then* be soon much description of every way one can think of men and women" (290) and a little later reappears as "*Sometime* there will be here every way there can be of seeing kinds of men and women" (290) [emphases added]. Where Aristotelian conventions are invoked in the frequent use of "beginning" in relation to "middle" and "ending", such devices are adopted only to be set aside or circumvented by paradoxical statements such as: "he begins then at the beginning of the ending of his middle living to repeat more and more the whole of him" (142).

Notions of closure are also contradicted by the heavy recycling of a limited range of words and phrases within and between paragraphs, and the continuous present of much of the prose. New vocabulary is

introduced onto what is predominantly a severely limited palette (and palate), but we are warned: "To be using a new word in my writing is to me a very difficult thing" (539), and in the final chapter the language is pared right back to a core of largely abstract words. Breaks are also provided by a gradual shift of focus from one character or character type to another: accounts of named characters merge; descriptions of specific categories of people collapse into delineations of numerous sub-types. Such occurrences are experienced more as fluctuations in frequency than tangible, "real" changes. They act as buoys, keeping us from drifting off the pages altogether, and they produce a sense of direction in what can otherwise seem like a rudderless text.

A vague feeling of interconnectedness is engineered by the recycling of names (of people and places) and "types". In the "Martha Hersland" chapter, a semblance of order appears in the form of nine pages of conventional writing. The account of the developing relationship between Martha's husband, Phillip Redfern, and his work colleague, Miss Dounor, is an unremarkable piece of writing, but this reversion to traditional narrative can be a temporary source of relief. The mediocre but "known" is often preferable to an "unreadable" text, however potentially innovative. It may also fuel hopes of a more permanent return to

"meaning". Ultimately, such trails are false and readers can be left frustrated in their attempts to manage a narrative which refuses to be controlled.

One of the more constant elements of the text, already alluded to, is a narrative and textual preoccupation with "repeating". A kind of narratorial amnesia is at work in the writing, so that although paragraphs may bear earlier and subsequent traces, recycled words and ideas are frequently offered as if for the first time in what can pose as a continuous citation of the present.

Such textual repetitions have a number of interesting effects, including the production of puns. Jo-Anna Isaak's essay "The Revolutionary Power of a Woman's Laughter" describes how puns operate in Stein's work:

the pun by calling attention to itself as language causes a break in the production of meaning and brings into question the narratively depicted world, revealing the contingencies and lacunae in the depths of representation. (45)

The Making of Americans seems particularly illustrative of Isaak's point. Here puns centre primarily around variations on themes of "being" and "living", most typically in the phrase "being living", but also in the form of "being in living", "being being" and "living

the living". A narratorial verbosity contributes further to the potential wordplay, and frequently produces the effects of a riddle or tongue twister, as in: "He was living a living not any other one in the Hersland family living was living when the Hersland family was living the Hersland family living" (827). In another example identity is figured as a confused and ultimately destructive relationship between the subject—represented here by the gender neutral sign "one"—and the states of "being" and "living":

This one when this one is not being kept in living being by others being what this one is certain this one is being in living, by others being certain that this one is in living what this one is certain any one like this one is in living, loses the grasp really on what is what this one is certain any one like this one is in daily living. (645)

In this instance attempts to represent identity through a superfluity of words results in a loss of meaning as the "one" who is the subject of the sentence and the writing itself lose their "grasp" on reality, colloquially figured as "what is what".

The punning effects evident in the above examples derive from multiple meanings present in the interplay between "being" and "living" as present participles and gerunds. Freud's introduction to Jokes and Their

Relation to the Unconscious cites one critical definition of a joke as "a contrast or contradiction between the meaning and the meaninglessness of the words" (42). Something of this effect is evident in Stein's playful use of language. In Freud's terms, Stein's form of wordplay might be understood as a higher form of verbal joke in that, unlike other puns, its meaning depends on "identically the same word" rather than "some vague similarity" (80). The ungrammatical, tautological quality of the various permutations might also be understood to represent what Freud calls a "[p]leasure in nonsense" (174). Freud explicitly associates the pleasurable effects of nonsensical language with a period of childhood which is not subject to the "compulsion of logic and reality" (176). In this regard an unexpected intertextual link emerges. In The Well of Loneliness Radclyffe Hall's depiction of Stephen's childhood includes a period that is similarly indifferent to the restrictions of reason; a time when, as Stephen articulates it: "'I'm happy just being myself'" (37). The adult Stephen's nostalgia for her childhood can be understood partly as a longing for an ambiguity that is no longer permissible. Stein's transgression of linguistic rules can be seen to create tensions that have a similar source: verbal play, like gender play, belongs to a phase of childhood development that is free from the demands for

signification. As such, although "pleasure in nonsense" can be practised in adult life, it can imitate but never recapture that pre-rational spontaneity. Stein's evocation of the material pleasures of words may implicitly question the rules that demand personal and linguistic intelligibility. At the same time, the premeditated nature of that playfulness demonstrates the internal paradox of such an approach, for it is only from a coherent subject position that such challenges can be made.

There is an element of Bakhtinian carnivalesque in this aspect of Stein's writing too. In The Politics and Poetics of Transgression, Peter Stallybrass and Allon White describe punning as a form of *grammatica jocosa*, whereby "grammatical order is transgressed to reveal erotic and obscene or merely materially satisfying counter-meaning" (10-11). It is in this last respect of disclosing "counter-meaning" that the transgressive potential of Stein's writing, particularly in relation to models of identity, can be found. In textual terms, the phrase "being living" brings a feeling of open-endedness and fluidity to its representation of existence; grammatically, the redundant participle, "being", appears to weaken the signification of the gerund, "living", and interrupts the semantic flow. There is a sense of Stein's writing being caught in the process of transforming itself; or, to recall an

earlier critical comment, it appears to be "fixed permanently . . . in a state of awkward transition" (Mellow 122). The construction "being living" also draws attention to the ambiguities of language through its additional implications of "being" as a passive, inner state and "living" as an active, external experience. In previous chapters such distinctions have been seen to be a recurring theme of transgender narratives, particularly those structured around essentialist concepts of identity. In my reading of Stein's text, whilst the complex nature of identity is suggested through the intricacies of its various constructions of "being" and "living", the difficulties of meaningfully representing that complexity are reproduced in the absurd and incoherent effects that such convolutions create.

The juxtaposition of "sense" and "nonsense", "meaning" and "counter-meaning" in Stein's writing can lead readers to feel that if only they pay close enough attention a familiar order can be imposed. The pleasure and challenge of reading "nonsense" poetry can be seen to derive from a similar source: an awareness of sense but an inability to divine adequate meaning. Another shared consequence of nonsensical writing may be a questioning of meaning itself. In the introduction to The Chatto Book of Nonsense Poetry Hugh Haughton observes: "Just as failing to make sense is an absurdly

primary matter, it tends to raise primary matters in all their blank absurdity and make us question the order of the ordinary" (32). This is a potential effect of The Making of Americans where an awareness of "nonsense" may extend beyond Stein's perverse deployment of representational language and find its source in the words themselves. A parallel effect was suggested in my discussion of Brooks's and Cameron's portraits where the meanings of certain stock images are questioned by the particular ways in which they are re-presented.

In the reading I have suggested, textual repetitions of "being" and "living" appear to make a nonsense of symbolic representations of identity. In addition, the concept and practice of repetition links the narrator and readers in a shared quest for "meaning". In the following passage the narrator's avowed search for "completed understanding" of human identity mirrors the reader's search for understanding of the text. For the narrator, the "repeating" in human beings is the key to understanding identity or, as Stein might put it, to knowing every kind of kind of men and women being living. For readers, it is the repeating in the writing itself that is the key to "reading" the text:

Every one always is repeating the whole of them. Always, one having loving repeating to

getting completed understanding must have in them an open feeling, a sense for all the slightest variations in repeating, must never lose themselves so in the solid steadiness of all repeating that they do not hear the slightest variation. If they get deadened by the steady pounding of repeating they will not learn from each one even though each one always is repeating the whole of them they will not learn the completed history of them, they will not know the being really in them.

(294)

In this passage, "repeating" is something that represents the sameness that is in "every one"; but it is also the key to the difference that is in "each one". The distinction between sameness and difference is presented in absolute terms: "every one", "always", "all", "never"; the tone is one of commonsense logic; but the stylised grammar disturbs the sense of order and complicates that division. The confused syntax enacts what is in fact an unclear relation between sameness and difference; one that requires the narrator to be alert to minute variations in an otherwise unchanging pattern. The "steady pounding" of repeating that is reproduced in the rhythmic, verbal monotony of the writing suggests that the task of reading Stein's text must be approached with similar vigilance. It is

also perhaps another example of an underlying awareness of the "deadening" effect on readers (and writers) of language which conveys only limited meaning in any conventional sense.

Symbolic notions of difference in The Making of Americans are rendered meaningless through a proliferation of increasingly nonsensical categories and types. At the same time, a material difference is produced by subtle variations in the verbal and syntactical sameness of the writing. The dynamic function of the spectator in reading that difference seems to be central to Stein's vision both in The Making of Americans and in some of her other prose texts. Stein's essay "Composition as Explanation", discussed earlier, opens with the statement:

There is singularly nothing that makes a difference a difference in beginning and in the middle and in ending except that each generation has something different at which they are all looking. By this I mean so simply that anybody knows it that composition is the difference which makes each and all of them then different from other generations and this is what makes everything different otherwise they are all alike and everybody knows it because everybody says it. (21)

Stein's argument is a typical blend of artlessness and abstruseness. Again she talks in absolute terms: "nothing", "all", "everything", "everybody"; and the tone is one of professed candour: "By this I mean so simply". Again that surface clarity is belied by the awkwardness of the grammar.

These stylistic tensions can be seen to mirror tensions in Stein's argument where a "difference" that is contingent and subjective is placed in an uneasy relationship to a compulsion for sameness: a "likeness" that "everybody knows" and "everybody says". In psychoanalytic terms these conflicting impulses might be understood as the contending desires of subject formation: the ego-driven desire to identify with and the libidinal desire to objectify. But the simplistic, child-like diction and tone adopted here and in The Making of Americans seems to evade knowingly the intellectual formulations of such "grown-up" theories of identity construction. My discussion of Woolf's Orlando identifies how the narrator's adoption of a juridical language and tone has the effect of mocking the legal institution's rigid and inadequate approach to matters of identity. In Stein's text such ironic effects are harder to discern, being much more a part of the fabric of the writing and seeming almost to operate at a subliminal level rather than overtly.

A performative aspect of language is evident in the textual repeatings which contribute to that materiality. Judith Butler defines the performative as "that discursive practice that enacts or produces that which it names" (Bodies 13). Beginnings are repeatedly cited in The Making of Americans: "And so now we begin", the narrator states in traditional storytelling style six pages into the text. Over forty pages on the narrator announces: "But now to make again a beginning" (48). Following that, the phrase "begin again" becomes a stylistic tic in the text's surface. Multiple beginnings are also enacted by the recycled words and ideas. An immediate, structural effect is to diminish any conventional sense of origin, and hence closure, in the narrative itself. That subversion of linear models of narrative is also extended to the text's representation of identity in its various "characters" and "types". Notions of "original" identities are contradicted by the strategic reprocessings of the text. As will become clear in the following section, such notions are also unsettled by other deconstructive practices.

"Real being"

Jo-Anna Isaak observes in her discussion of the anti-linear effects of Stein's writing: "to circumvent

closure it is also necessary to give up the idea of origin; the teleological assumptions of narrative are dismantled along with its ideological presuppositions" (47). In the account of the origins of American identity offered by the narrator of The Making of Americans, references to the "old" and the "new" worlds set up a binary opposition which unsettles the "ideological presuppositions" underpinning that whole process. This dichotomy can be usefully read alongside the original/copy distinction of poststructuralist discourses of gender.

According to one reading of the text, the "real American" emerges from Stein's historical record as a national and cultural identity which has been manufactured out of the "old world" of Europe. In this light its origins are derivative. The narrator observes on the opening page:

It has always seemed to me a rare privilege, this, of being an American, a real American, one whose tradition it has taken scarcely sixty years to create. We need only realise our parents, remember our grandparents and know ourselves and our history is complete.

(3)

There are ironic tensions operating in the first sentence of this passage. The claim for an authentic cultural identity implicit in the phrase "real

American" might be questioned by the idea that "tradition", in European terms, could have been created in "scarcely sixty years". If the essential rootlessness of this version of tradition infers the false origins of that "real" identity, it also questions notions of authenticity that arrive at that judgment. In the second sentence the process of making a "complete" history is reduced to three generations and predicated on the basis of "realising" and "remembering". Here it is traditional concepts of "history" that are disturbed, but it is not just the temporal dimensions that are distorted; the choice and tense of the verbs "realising" and "remembering" represent history as a product of performative and subjective forces. The idea of self-invention inferred from these revisions of tradition and history is culturally specific: if you have neither a tradition nor a history in global terms, then you must construct one for yourselves; but this representation of the American identity can be applied to other "new" identities: cultural, sexual and gendered.

Elsewhere in the text, the manufacturing of identity is represented in relation to the "realising" of "others". The narrator describes the process by which the Hersland children came to "realise" the Wyman family: "they remembered them and reconstructed them and realised them and then reconstructed and realised

the foreign parents from a reconstruction from their reconstructed children" (261). The verbal replications of this sentence are matched by a narrative in which identity emerges as little more than a simulacrum: a copy of a copy. In the context of such contrivance traditional notions of origin are severely tested.

The concept of the "old world" and the "new", depicted in the early part of the book, is intrinsic to the reader's "realising" of the making of American identity. The narrator states her intention in the opening paragraphs of the text: "The old people in a new world, the new people made out of the old, that is the story that I mean to tell, for that is what really is and what I really know" (3). In this formulation the usual binary division deconstructs itself as both the "new" and the "old" are seen to inhere in the other: the old exists in the new; the new is a product of the old. The second part of the sentence constructs the subject position from which the "story" will be told. The repetition of "really" suggests the existence of different kinds of truth and, in this respect, it recalls Woolf's reflections on the reality of selfhood which concluded my previous chapter: "But what is 'oneself'? Is it the thing people see? Or is it the thing one is?" (Flush 46). Where the quote from Woolf's text represents reality as an opposition between objective and subjective perceptions, Stein's

narrator's version of reality has a more philosophical appearance in its seamless conjunction between the thing that (really) *is* and the thing that is (really) *known*. In terms of its reasoning, it seems to partly mirror Wittgenstein's proposition on the subject's relation to knowledge: "The subject does not belong to the world: rather, it is a limit of the world" (5.632). The childlike, self-conscious tone of the narrator's statement, or what Stein calls in a later piece a "complicated simplicity" of thought,⁵ works against the logic of her argument whilst, at the same time, drawing attention to the subjective construction of that viewpoint.

A more conventional representation of the relation between the "old world" and the "new" is provided by the account of the Hersland family's geographical relocation to America and the supplanting of an established identity by a transformed one. The elder David Hersland is reluctant to leave his home in the "old world" and Martha, his wife, has to return to collect him at several points in their journey. He feels that "there was no place anymore anywhere for Hersland, a place that really belonged to him" (38). There is a feminist or anti-patriarchal reading possible here. The new world (and new identity) to

⁵ Stein uses this term in "A Transatlantic Interview 1946" (Scott, The Gender of Modernism 515-16).

which they are travelling seems to be associated with the female: Martha's optimism drives the couple to a land which, in linguistic terms, they already inhabit through their feminised family name "Hersland". David Hersland's nostalgia for the familiar territory of the "old" could parallel a reader's resistance to the "new" linguistic territory of the text. It could also represent allegiance to "tradition" and "custom" as a male impulse.

In a different context, tradition and custom are represented as obsolete and anachronistic. An account of Julia Dehning's home in the "new world" observes: "the parlor was covered with modern sombre tapestry"; the chairs in one room are "as near to good colonial as modern imitation can effect"; in another they were "made after some old french [sic] fashion" and "covered with dull tapestry, copied without life from old designs" (31). Modern alternatives are little better. The carbon photographs which take the place of paintings in the house are "framed close, in dull and wooden frames", or "sadly framed in painted wooden frames" (31). The one sign of vitality in the house seems to be "the really burning logs" in the fire places (31), and even here a superfluous "really" is needed for authentication. In terms of their representational status, the various fixtures and fittings highlight an eclecticism in the American

identity (evident also in the Germanic influences of the name Dehning), which might also be applied to more general notions of identity. The furnishings are copies of styles and fashions that are themselves long dead. Photographs are as much an imitation of life as the paintings which they have replaced. In this setting, the "copy" is not only favoured over the "original", but is recast as part of a new national and cultural identity. But in terms of the language and tone of this passage, that borrowing of styles has a desensitising effect and the identity it produces is inimical to life.

At another point early in the text, the new world's requirement for conformity is expressed more explicitly:

We are all the same all through us, we never have it to be free inside us. No brother singulars, it is sad here for us, there is no place in an adolescent world for anything eccentric like us, machine making does not turn out queer things like us, they can never make a world to let us be free each one inside us. (47)

The narrator's address to "brother singulars" is perhaps a reflection of Stein's artistic identification with her male peers. A biographically inflected reading might surmise that highly elitist principles are at

work here and that Stein's valorisation of the "eccentric" would, in practice, apply only to a small, hand-picked group of "brothers" (headed by herself and Picasso).⁶ More generally, given current associations in gender discourses of "queer" with diversity and fluidity, its appearance in a discourse on human "types" may have a particular resonance for transgender, lesbian and gay readers. Stein's use of the word to describe eccentric, non-normative identities is especially notable in this passage. Prior to this declamation, "singularity" has been equated with the "real" and the "vital" and has been associated with "an older world accustomed to take all manner of strange forms into its bosom" (21). Here similar ideas are expressed and developed. The new or "adolescent world" with its emphasis on industry and mechanisation is seen as hostile to the existence of those people who are "singular" or "queer". This is an interesting inversion of "the old" and "the new" in that it contradicts customary views of progress. A world in which identities are churned out as if by machine imposes an order that might be more readily equated with the past.

In these terms, the late-nineteenth-century's categorisation of "deviant" identities has been a force

⁶ Elliott and Wallace discuss Stein's self-representation as "male genius" (90-102).

for repression, rather than liberation. Interestingly, Stein had read and discussed Otto Weininger's largely philosophical study of sexual difference, Sex and Character (1903). In this misogynist and anti-Semitic book, Weininger proposes that human sexual nature is widely variant and fundamentally "bisexual". Weininger states in the opening chapter of Volume 1, "Sexual differentiation, in fact, is never complete" (5). He explains:

Living beings cannot be described bluntly as of one sex or the other. The real world from the point of view of sex may be regarded as swaying between two points, no actual individual being at either point, but somewhere between the two. (9)

Although Weininger recognises a sexual ambivalence in all human beings, he also holds that society's aim should be the production of "ideal" types of men and women and insists that: "Such types not only can be constructed, but must be constructed" (7).⁷

Mellow's discussion of The Making of Americans suggests that Stein's "odd characterological system seems to have been partly inspired by" Weininger's text (120). The narrator's inventory of infinite human "types" in The Making of Americans certainly suggests similarities of methodology. Stein may also have been

influenced by Weininger's writing about the "ego of the genius" in her construction of the narrative voice of the text. The following passage from the Volume 2 of Sex and Character has echoes in Stein's narrator's self-representation as an omniscient and instinctual subject:

For the genius the ego is the all, lives as the all; the genius sees nature and all existences as whole; the relations of things flash on him intuitively; he has not to build bridges of stones between them. And so the genius cannot be an empirical psychologist slowly collecting details and linking them by associations (169)

Despite these suggestions of Stein's interest in Weininger any ideological parallels between the works are not immediately evident. In Stein's text, the heterogeneity that Weininger would have socially modified exceeds the boundaries of linguistic expression. Richard Bridgman's comment, already quoted, that for Stein "[t]rue confusion was superior to false order" (71) might be applied here: Weininger's ideal can be seen as the setting up of a "false order", whereas Stein's project upholds a "true confusion" of identity. Reflecting on her writing of The Making of

⁷ Joseph Bristow provides a useful account of Weininger's work and influence (Sexuality 37-44).

Americans Stein explains that in her attempts to "put down every type of human being that could be on earth" she wanted "each one to have the same value" ("A Transatlantic" 503).

Stein's narrator's musings on matters of identity include a survey of the relationship between an essential self and a lived identity. In typically pedantic fashion, the narrator lists all the possible outcomes that such a relationship will produce, so that while "[s]ome know of themselves in their dressing, in their daily living in everything what they are and what they are wanting from every one, from any one", there will also be some who "know what they are wanting but they do not have it in them in their daily living, in their dressing to show it to any one" (644). A further opposition is made between those who "cannot see the thing they are in daily living and dressing nor what they want to be in daily living and in dressing" and those who "see what they want to be in daily living and in dressing and then they are a little less than that thing so that they will not be queer to any one" (644). Finally, in the narrator's ultimate pronouncement we are told that: "Some have really the feeling of inventing themselves in daily living and in dressing, some are really doing this thing, some are feeling themselves doing this thing" (644). In each of these statements an individual's sense of "being" (who they

are, what they want to be) is compared to their actual "living" (how they express that "self" in daily life and in their choice of clothes).

The grammatical and semantic ambiguities in that conjunction of "being" and "living" have already been addressed in an earlier discussion of the text's puns. In this instance, certain ideological tensions between the two elements are more evident. The references to "daily living" and "dressing" foreground the cultural imperatives that mould identities into acceptable expressions. Although this is figured generally as a repressive force, there are also some people for whom life-style and clothing are the means to a highly conscious self-fashioning or "the feeling of inventing themselves" (644).

In the examples discussed above, the narrator presents her argument in explicitly non-gendered terms: a neutrality is suggested by the consistent use of "some", "they" and "themselves". In other instances, gendered pronouns are avoided through the use of "one". This has been identified as a feature of Stein's writing generally; Bridgman describes Stein's tendency to use pronouns that "lacked distinct referents and if possible, gender" (57).

In The Making of Americans, as with other elements of this text, the representation of gender is ambiguous and seemingly inconsistent. What this apparent

ambivalence could suggest about the nature of gender, and how that knowledge might impact on notions of "original" or "authentic" identities are questions that need to be examined in more detail.

"Every kind of men and women"

Conventional gender roles and differences are constantly evoked in the text. We are told that the narrator prefers to "tell it" in a woman because "it is clearer in her" (205); women have "less in them a unification" (226); and the "two kinds" in men "works out differently a little in them" (170). One female character is described as "a fair heavy woman, well-looking and firmly compacted" (13); another as a "sweet little gentle mother woman" (43). Male characters are discussed more in terms of their roles as husbands and fathers and their work. Women find husbands "to control them"; men go into business (59). A political point seems to be made in Phillip Redfern's childhood "realisation" of the false claims made for women: "He often said that he had often puzzled over the fact that he must give up his chair to and be careful of little girls while at the same time he was taught that the little girl was quite as strong as he and quite as able to use liberty and to perfect action" (429). Elsewhere, the seemingly self-evident statement that "David was a

boy when he was a young one" is followed by the observation: "That was a natural thing" (845). More generally, the signifiers "men" and "women" provide the foundational poles for the narrator's classification of human types and gendered pronouns appear to be used unequivocally throughout the text.

Although all of these examples reinforce essentialist notions of gender, there are numerous instances where those distinctions seem to be neutralised or disrupted. When the narrator informs us that David "was a boy" this may just be another example of the facile and self-evident nature of much of the commentary. On the other hand, by invoking the norm attention is drawn to the prescriptive (and patriarchal) effects of gender and gendered language. According to the sex and gender system in which Western society operates, we should already know that anyone called "David" is male and will have therefore begun life as a boy. At one level, to articulate that axiom purely reinstates its "natural" authority; but stating that which does not need to be said also highlights the extent to which our experiences of identity are already determined by basic cultural dictums. In the sentences that follow these observations the grammatical and "natural" order of the narrator's initial statement begins to give way to self-contradiction and confusion:

He was a boy then, he was not a boy to
 himself then, he was a boy to himself then,
 he was one being existing to himself then, he
 was one not being existing to himself then.
 He was a boy to very many knowing him then.
 He was not a boy to some knowing him then.

(845)

These semantic disturbances further undermine any initial semblance of meaning as the narrator's argument becomes trapped in the reductive cycle of its own very limited terms. In typically hyperbolic fashion, the nonsensical effects of this passage may draw attention to the highly subjective nature of an existence which is the product of conflicting internal and external perceptions.

In respect of the text's categorisation of human types, a similarly paradoxical effect is generated. Hence, although we are informed that there are "two kinds" of men and women, somewhat paradoxically we are to hear of "all the kinds of the two kinds of them" that exist. The narrator's apparent compulsion to offer endless permutations from a list of metaphysical traits produces ever more seemingly fatuous observations. The following passage is a typical example:

There are then two kinds of women, there are those who have in them resisting and attacking, and a bottom weakness in them,

women with independent dependence in them,
 women who are strong in attacking, women who
 sometimes have not bottom weakness in them,
 some who have in them bottom weakness in them
 and this inside is a strength in them

(169)

As is evident from this extract, although men and women are sorted into "two kinds", this duality is constantly contradicted by the narrator's own processes as her apparent awareness of the heterogeneity of human identity strives to express itself meaningfully. In other instances there are references to "minutest" and "subtle" variations and "mixing" in the composition of individuals. Ultimately, attempts to express that diversity in terms of absolutes always return to the same platitudes on the same theme: "There are many kinds of women then and many kinds of men" (166), and later: "there are many kinds, many very many kinds" (300). The narrator's confident prediction that "more and more it is surer that this kind of describing leads to complete understanding of men and women" (283) must surely be taken as ironic given the increasing obscurity generated by the output of that process. It will be an irony not lost on readers to whom the abstruseness of Stein's use of representational language has been only too painfully demonstrated.

The narrator's frequent recourse to such reductive commonplaces can render the referents "men" and "women" clichéd and seemingly worn-out through overuse. Each time the phrase "men and women" appears in the prose its ideological status becomes less stable as a perpetual tide of recycled words and phrases laps around it. As "natural" or constructed origins the words "men" and "women" can seem inadequate and empty ciphers, unable to contain a diversity and variety which is neither biologically nor culturally determined.

Similarly, in Stein's use of gendered pronouns there are frequent instances where the polarising effects of these textual signs are upset. Monique Wittig's essay "The Mark of Gender" states that personal pronouns are "the pathways and the means of entrance into language" (65). Here, that cultural power is strategically defused. For example, although the identical phrasing of "the kind he is each one, the kind she is each one" (299) achieves a balance between its opposing elements, the contrived nature of its diction draws attention to the artificiality of that equilibrium. By extension, such formulations may question not only binary constructions which privilege one term over the other, but the value of the binary model as a structuring principle. A non-gendered construct—the binary of the "independent dependent" and

the "dependent independent" (179) into which all men and women are divided—is shown to be similarly reductive. Weakened by both its palindromic form and by the perpetual abstraction of the sub-types which it institutes, it is a construct that cancels out its own oppositions.

Revisionary effects in relation to gender binaries can also be read in the text's production of fictional names. The family names "Hersland", discussed earlier, and "Hissen" invite a number of playful readings. Both the Herslands and the Hissens, we are told, descend from two of the "four good foreign women" (43) with whom the history of "a family and its progress" begins. That reference to "foreign" antecedents is evident in the Germanic influences of the names, and is a reminder of the newness and derivativeness of the American identity. The gendered pronouns of each name, "hers" and "his", evokes a polarity based on possession. The nominal roots of the names—the "land" that is Hers and the "son" (from the Scandinavian "sen") that is His—sets up an interesting dichotomy. "Land" as a non-gendered phenomenon offers the hope of geographical and personal autonomy; "son" as a gendered, genealogical construct evokes and, in this instance, sustains the hierarchies and binaries of the patriarchal family

unit.⁸ In the case of Fanny Hissen, the internal tension evident in the juxtaposition of a female first name and a male family name is linguistically resolved when she marries a Hersland. A more prosaic reading might argue that, by marrying, Fanny is simply exchanging one man's family name for another's. In the context of the gender crossing that I am suggesting the place where Fanny becomes a Hersland, the town of Bridgepoint, acquires additional meaning.⁹ The elder David Hersland experiences a loss of identity, already foretold by his feminised surname, when on leaving the "old world" for a new one he feels that "there was no place anymore anywhere for Hersland, a place that really belonged to him" (38). Other opportunities for verbal and gender play are provided by names with the common root "man": Wyman (another member of the quartet of families), with its recurring pun on: "Why man?"; and the comic pairing of Rachel Sherman with Adolph Herman.

Despite this perhaps overstated potential for verbal play, the writing constantly resorts to the gendered terms of its original premise: "there are many kinds of men and many kinds of women". A similar

⁸ The opposition I propose here invites a reference to Charlotte Perkins Gilman's Herland, written in 1915. Gilman's novel depicts the transformative effects of an all-female utopia on the lives and views of three male explorers.

⁹ Stein also locates her characters' stories in Bridgepoint in Three Lives. According to Mellow, Bridgepoint was the fictional name she had chosen for Baltimore (116).

tension has been observed elsewhere in Stein's work by Catharine Stimpson who describes Stein's poetry as:

a series of propositions about the possibilities of transposing gender, about the possibilities of breaking up its orders, codes, and poses. However, her poetry also demonstrates the difficulties of such fundamental, capacious alterations. For Stein often transposes gender in another, less leaping sense. She merely moves gender's orders, codes and poses from one point to another. She rearranges them. (2)

The tensions Stimpson identifies in Stein's attempts to transgress the rules of gender have been evident in the other texts discussed in this thesis and can be seen as a common feature of many transgender representations. Jay Prosser argues that "transsexual and transgendered narratives alike produce not the revelation of the fictionality of gender categories but the sobering realization of their ongoing foundational power" (Second Skins 11). Where Prosser's statement appears to oppose gender's constructedness to its intransigence, I would argue that transgender narratives frequently demonstrate both of these aspects of gender. It is this paradoxical conjunction which Stimpson finds at work in Stein's writing.

The reductive nature of the narrator's attempts to categorise "men and women" in The Making of Americans is apparent. Its gendered terms are recycled rather than revised and the further the narrator moves away from these familiar gendered co-ordinates, the more meaning breaks down. At the same time, the cultural markers that designate that axis have little more than nominal value. In her essay "Poetry and Grammar", written in 1934, Stein observes: "A noun is a name of anything, why after a thing is named write about it. A name is adequate or it is not. If it is adequate then why go on calling it, if it is not then calling it by its name does no good" (125). In respect of the narrator's characterisation of identity in The Making of Americans, the repetitive use of "men" and "women" may only serve to demonstrate the inadequacy of these gendered nouns to represent all its possible manifestations.

What is suggested by this continuing dependence on gender categories is that although the narrator's deconstructive strategies may disclose an instability in the binarisms around which identity is structured, they cannot in themselves release identity from what Roland Barthes refers to as "the binary prison" (Roland Barthes 133). In The Epistemology of the Closet, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick responds to Barthes's utopian vision of a post-deconstructive world in which "meaning and

sex become the objects of free play" (Barthes, Roland Barthes 133). Sedgwick argues that an awareness of the "irresolvable instability" of binarisms only reveals them as "sites that are *peculiarly* charged with lasting potentials for powerful manipulation" (10). In addition, Sedgwick asserts a view already discussed in this chapter; that is, to deconstruct something is not the same thing as to disable it (10).¹⁰

The dismantling of gender binaries in The Making of Americans can be seen to disclose their foundational role in the production of identities. Hence, however many grammatical rules are broken and whatever play language is subjected to, the narrator's attempts to represent identity can neither effectively employ those organising binaries, nor evade or transcend them. But if gender emerges as an effect of representation, what of the supposedly gender-neutral "I" of the narrative voice?

"Always I begin again"

In The Making of Americans there is something about its dismantling of the "idea of origin" that is distinctly queer. In this light, the failure to produce a coherent, cohesive narrative of an integrated, linear

¹⁰ Hugh Stevens also discusses Sedgwick's critique of Barthes in Henry James and Sexuality (15-16).

narrative of identity might be attributed not only to the eccentricities of Stein's writing but to the illusory foundations of all such narratives. That subversion of notions of origin and authority includes a narrator whose originating presence in the text is far from the stable, unified identity it usually denotes and whose agency is clearly questionable.

For ease of expression I have chosen to refer to the narrator as "she", but there is no clearly gendered "voice" in the text. Although biographical evidence of a personal investment in this "history" and preoccupations with issues of authorship would suggest a clear identification between Stein and her narrator, there is an ambiguity surrounding any gendered element of this link. The narrator's confession that she prefers to "tell it" in a woman "because it is clearer in her" (205) might indicate an empathy based on universalising notions of sexual difference, although it could equally be the essentialising view of a male commentator. The narrator's address to "brother singulars" is more explicit in its expression of a male identification and, as discussed earlier, has a biographical explanation. The phrase also has a figurative quality which weakens that effect. Elsewhere in the text there is a conspicuous absence of clues as to this aspect of the narrator's identity.

At various points in the text, in typically modernist fashion, the "I" whose sensations and perceptions construct the text literally exposes that role in the process of production. The narrator's more usual interventions have been noted: the chatty "as I was saying", the didactic and confessional addresses to readers; but the "Martha Hersland" chapter introduces a significant shift of focus. In a sustained passage of highly self-reflective utterances (in six paragraphs there are twenty-seven uses of "I"), the narrator becomes the subject of her own cognitive and linguistic processes in what Ulla Dydo calls, a "scrutiny of herself in relation to her ongoing perceptions and formulations—the writer in the act of writing" (21).

The initial sentence of the chapter, "I am writing for myself and strangers" (289), is typical of the repeated beginnings and constant deferrals of the writing. At the end of the previous chapter we had been promised "a beginning of a description of the being and the living in Martha Hersland", with the closing words: "To begin then" (285). A change of subject-matter is no surprise, but the nature of the digression is unexpected. The narrator continues:

I want readers so strangers must do it.

Mostly no one knowing me can like it that I love it that every one is of a kind of men and women, that always I am looking and

comparing and classifying of them, always I am seeing their repeating. Always more and more I love repeating, it may be irritating to hear from them but always more and more I love it of them. More and more I love it of them, the being in them, the mixing in them, the repeating in them, the deciding the kind of them every one is who has human being.

(289)

In this passage, a material relationship between the syntactical rhythms and verbal duplications of the text and the narrator's subject position is disclosed and analysed. The narrator, initially a self-appointed medium for the characterisation of American identities, is now exposed to that same process. This may serve a specific purpose in terms of the text's lack of trajectory. Prior to this point the increasingly unstable nature of the narrator's discourse has signalled a diminishing agency: her project is taking its toll; she admits to feelings of loneliness and fears of failure; she is becoming tired and dispirited; and her "voice" displays an increasing loss of direction and purpose. Here, the repeated citation of "I" might be read as the narrator's (and author's) attempt to reassert control over the text through revealing herself as the new object of inquiry. There is also, at this point, a sense in which the narrator's

subject position is materialising through the insistent "I", rather than having some prior, independent existence. According to this reading, the "I" becomes the organising cipher of a subject in the process of being written.

Queer theories of gender as performative implicitly contradict the idea of a "voluntarist subject" able to oppose "regulatory norms". Judith Butler argues:

"I" deploy the grammar that governs the genre of the philosophical conclusion, but note that it is the grammar itself that deploys and enables this "I," even as the "I" that insists itself here repeats, redeploys, and . . . contests the philosophical grammar by which it is both enabled and restricted.

(Gender Trouble 146)

In this statement, "I" is presented not as a linguistic device wielded by a controlling subject, but a founding dynamic of the subjectivity it produces and contains. Hence, although we may experience ourselves as stable, unified beings, that particular sense of identity is contingent and illusory. Butler pursues her theme in Bodies That Matter where she locates agency in a queer refiguration of subjectivity:

The process of . . . what we might call *materialization* will be a kind of

citatoriality, the acquisition of being through the citing of power, a citing that establishes an originary complicity with power in the formation of the "I." (15)

Here Butler draws on Derrida's reworking of performativity to present subject formation, and therefore agency, as derivative: "a reiterative or rearticulatory practice, immanent in power, and not a relation of external opposition to power" (15).

When Stein's first person narrative voice is read in this theoretical frame a number of interesting questions arise concerning the narrator's identity. How does such wilfully perverse prose affect ideas of "natural" authority evoked by the first person pronoun? How far does the "I" of the text designate an "authentic" subject position? And to what extent can the narrator's overstated pose as "the original wise one" (708) be said to parody ideas of what Judith Butler terms "an originating will" (Bodies 13)?

Where Butler links subject formation and citational practices, in Stein's text we seem to be witnessing the process in reverse. Towards the end of The Making of Americans, where the narrator is at her most stridently self-referential and least coherent, a disintegrating subject position coincides with an almost total breakdown in symbolic language use. The following frenzied "outburst" appears to describe and

enact a crisis of personal and linguistic
signification:

I mean, I mean and that is not what I mean, I
mean that not any one is saying what they are
meaning, I mean that I am feeling something,
I mean that I mean something and I mean that
not any one is thinking, is feeling, is
saying, is certain of that thing, I mean that
not any one can be saying, thinking, feeling,
not any one can be certain of that thing, I
mean I am not certain of that thing, I am not
ever saying, thinking, feeling, being certain
of this thing, I mean, I mean, I know what I
mean. (782)

Within the irrational syntactical movements of this
sentence the semantic nuances are quite dizzying. The
"I" strives for but fails to achieve "meaning" as both
identity and intelligible communication can be seen to
literally break down. This fracturing of "meaning" at a
textual level evokes certain disjunctions between the
"I" writing and the "I" that is written of; between
having meaning and *producing* meaning. In its
performative aspect, the narrator's "I mean" revises
Cartesian logic: "I" signifies therefore I exist. In
the context of such disordered and irrational
utterances that enactment of subjectivity is fatally
undermined. Gaps between meaning and being are

highlighted further by the tautologous nature of the statement "I mean"—to adopt the universal "I" *is* to "mean". In this instance, the false authority of that "voice" is illuminated by the narrator's incoherence both as a subject and as a speaker. In the passage quoted above the "I" can no longer signify by itself and must be shored up by false "means" (in both senses of the word). It is as if, at this stage, the breakdown of meaning that has pervaded every other aspect of symbolic language use in the text has finally turned on the gatekeeper itself.

There is perhaps an unusual degree of narrative progression in the fact that by the final chapter the "I" is no longer present as a distinct identity, having apparently been subsumed by the abstractions and repetitions of the text. Teleologically, the ultimate dissolution of the narrator's subject position has a pleasing logic: where conventional "meaning" is dislodged subjectivity is destabilised and may eventually become "unreadable". In other words, identity cannot meaningfully exist outside language if it is language which produces identity.

A similar link between language and subjectivity is articulated by Wittgenstein in the first epigraph to this chapter: "*The limits of my language mean the limits of my world*" (5.6). This proposition is frequently employed in discussions of language and it

has become somewhat of a cliché. Nevertheless, Wittgenstein's ideas on the relationship between language and the "reality" it purports to represent still retain their intellectual force and cultural relevance.

David Silverman and Brian Torode find opposing references in Wittgenstein's concept of the "limits of language". They explain: "On one side, it seeks to dispense with language in order to make space for some extra-linguistic reality. On the other side, it brings to the fore the impossible ideal of a language which 'tells it like it is'" (40). The central paradox that Silverman and Torode identify might also be applied to Stein's experimental project.

In many respects The Making of Americans can be seen as a greatly protracted discourse on the limits of language, specifically in its relation to matters of identity. It is also a patent demonstration of those limits and for that reason is, itself, highly constrained. I have argued that the textual rhythms and verbal patterns perform what might be referred to as an "extra-linguistic reality", but I have also acknowledged that such versions of reality have significant problems of accessibility. At a narrative level, attempts to "tell it like it is" have been seen to lead to linguistic abstraction and the dissolution of the narrator. Yet, as stated earlier, a kind of

meaning can be derived from the text's formal and narrative "failings". From the textual perversities may come a new awareness of the contradictions of symbolic language: it may be a system capable of evolution and change, but behind that suggestion of fluidity is a rationale that no amount of experimentation can break; it is undeniably repressive and yet essential, in both senses of the word, to human existence; it imposes an order but that order is false. If The Making of Americans is an attempt to produce a serious alternative to that symbolic order, then it does not work. If it is evaluated for its critical function it has productive effects, particularly in its exploration of the relationship between representation and identity.

Issues of language use have been an abiding concern of this thesis. Representation is a vexed and vexing matter for transgender subjects. It is also a troubling issue for the reader or critic (transgender or non-transgender) who speaks or writes about subjects who in gendered terms, and therefore cultural terms, cannot be defined or, more importantly, refuse conventional definitions. If the narrative construction of subjectivity, both written and visual, has been a recurring theme of this thesis a central question remains unanswered. To what extent can transgender subjects truly (re)write what Woolf calls "the thing

one is" in a language that constructs and constantly reinforces a single subject position? The texts discussed in previous chapters—The Well of Loneliness, Orlando and Brooks's and Cameron's portraits—have been shown to produce multiple, dislocating linguistic or spectatorial effects. In each case, to varying degrees, the reading of those effects is dependent upon and can only be expressed in terms of conventional language: subjects can only be read and written about meaningfully in a language structured around male and female subject positions.

What is evident from those other chapters, then, is the extent to which language enforces and polices polar subject positions. In each of the previous contexts in which transgender consciousness has been explored—science and medicine, the visual arts, the law, and life-writing—language has been shown to oppose and proscribe deviations from those recognised gender distinctions. Collectively, the various literary and visual texts that have been analysed demonstrate the inadequacies and limitations of a dual sex and gender system, but they also evince the necessity and, in some instances, usefulness of its binary codes. In this respect, The Making of Americans can be distinguished for its metanarrative tendencies: in its self-reflexive interrogation of linguistic and sexed and gendered rules, it can be set apart from and positioned in

critical relation to the other primary texts in this thesis.

On matters of identity, the narrative and anti-narrative strategies of The Making of Americans render ideas of familiar, "readable" subjects absurd and artificial. If there is any clear meaning to emerge from my reading of the text, it might be that it is subjectivity itself that is illegible, rather than particular non-normative identities; but that may perhaps impose more linguistic coherence than is warranted on this doggedly "meaningless" text. Nevertheless, the transgressive strategic procedures and particularly the self-conscious textuality of The Making of Americans can be seen to produce a work which describes and, to an extent, performs the shared foundational qualities of narrative and identity. In this respect, Stein's experimental text perhaps expresses most profoundly, if most obliquely, some of the central paradoxes which have characterised this study.

CONCLUSION

Two sexes are not the necessary, natural consequence of corporeal difference. Nor, for that matter, is one sex.

—Walter Laqueur, Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud (243)

In the introduction to Volume 1 of Sex and Character (1903), Otto Weininger poses a question about identity which has a particular relevance to my study. Weininger initially asserts the view that the assignment of sex to human beings on the basis of "one character only" is "illogical" (2); two pages later he remarks: "Are we then to make nothing of sexual differences? That would imply, almost, that we could not distinguish between men and women" (4). In posing this question Weininger touches on psychic and cultural nerves, for what could be more fundamentally threatening to the construction of personal and social identities than the blurring of so-called natural differences?

A text which illustrates the literal consequences of that threat of denaturalisation is Herculine Barbin: Being the Recently Discovered Memoirs of a Nineteenth-Century French Hermaphrodite (1980). Michel Foucault's introduction to Herculine Barbin begins with the

question, "[d]o we truly need a true sex?" (vii). The memoirs themselves record the discovery of Alexina's "true sex" when s/he becomes ill and is examined by a doctor.¹ The co-existence of male and female sexual organs in an undeveloped state leads to the medical, and therefore legal, view that the subject's original designation as "female" is a mistake which must be rectified. But if the subject of these memoirs is not wholly female in biological terms, neither is s/he wholly male. Such anatomical variations are possible—intersexual subjects, who are born with ambiguous sexual organs, constitute a rare but significant section of the population. What is unclear in the case of Alexina is the extent to which h/er erotic behaviour influences the medical decision that s/he is male.² Alexina's confessions to a priest and a doctor about h/er "condition" prior to the medical examination are alluded to but not described. H/er intimate friendships with females cause comment and some consternation for others, but they do not in themselves attract punishment or outright condemnation within the female communities in which they occur.

¹ Although the subject's birth name is Adélaïde Herculine s/he adopts the names Alexina and, less frequently, Camille, in the memoirs.

² Butler uses the contraction "h/er" for her critique of Herculine Barbin (Gender Trouble 93-106). This term seems especially apt for a discussion of an ambivalently sexed subject, as it implicitly questions the binary terms which continue to operate in the more usual "his/her" or "her/his".

There may be a political point to be made about how Alexina's environment influences responses to the anomalous elements of h/er identity. It is male representatives of patriarchal institutions who decide that Alexina's ambiguously sexed and gendered identity must be reshaped into a "normal", unequivocal one. Alongside the memoirs, Foucault brings together a range of primary sources which illustrate the ways in which a narrative of Alexina as "male" is constructed and legitimised by others. Official documents authenticating this particular change of sex include Alexina's Birth Certificate, which has been amended to register h/er male identity and which alters h/er birth name from Adélaïde Herculine to Abel (150-51).

It might also be argued that Foucault's representation of Alexina's story conducts its own reshaping of that narrative. Judith Butler refers to Foucault's reading of Alexina's narrative as a "romanticized appropriation and refusal of her text" (Gender Trouble 94). In his introduction, Foucault describes a change in attitudes towards and treatment of the "hermaphrodite" since the Middle Ages in terms of a movement towards one coherent (male or female) sexual identity. He explains:

Biological theories of sexuality, juridical conceptions of the individual, forms of administrative control in modern nations, led

little by little to rejecting the idea of a mixture of the two sexes in a single body, and consequently to limiting the free choice of indeterminate individuals. (Herculine viii)

Prior to this demand for greater distinctions between male and female identities, Foucault suggests, "hermaphrodites" enjoyed a degree of flexibility in choosing the sex to which they wished to belong. Foucault claims that, at the time of marriage, "hermaphrodites were free to decide for themselves if they wished to go on being of the sex which had been assigned to them, or if they preferred the other" (viii). Walter Laqueur adopts a less optimistic view of the treatment of indeterminately sexed subjects during the same period. Laqueur describes Foucault's claim as "perhaps utopian", arguing that "gender choice was by no means so open to individual discretion, and one was not free to change in midstream" (124).

Foucault's description of Alexina's life prior to the discovery of h/er "true sex" seems to rely quite heavily upon the utopian elements of his historical account of the hermaphrodite. The phrase Foucault applies to Alexina's existence prior to the redesignation of h/er sex—"the happy limbo of a non-identity" (xiii)—evokes parallels to Radclyffe Hall's Stephen Gordon, who recalls a childhood when she was

"happy just being myself" (The Well 37). As mentioned earlier, Alexina's story, unlike Stephen's, suggests a willingness within the female communities in which s/he grows up to accept her "difference". According to Foucault's reading, when Alexina is required to assume a male identity it is at the expense of an identity which, although it is designated as female, affords a significant degree of non-gendered freedom. However, as Butler argues, the "irresolvable ambivalence" of Alexina's sexed identity, and the pleasures and desires which it brings, does not evade or precede the imposition of a "juridical discourse on univocal sex" (Gender Trouble 99). Alexina's ambivalence is the product of the law which "requires conformity to its own notion of 'nature' and gains its legitimacy through the binary and asymmetrical naturalization of bodies" (Gender Trouble 106).

The "change" of Alexina's identity from female to male creates a highly unusual position. Alexina's memoirs include the observation, "I, who am called a man, have been granted the intimate, deep understanding of all the facets, all the secrets, of a woman's character" (107). This again distinguishes between Alexina's and Stephen Gordon's narratives: the depiction of Stephen's relationships with female characters emphasises her position of otherness; Alexina's position in the all-female communities to

which s/he is sent is one of belonging despite h/er sense of being physically different. Alexina's life-narrative is also distinct from the transgender autobiographies discussed in Chapter 3, in that it does not record a transition towards a sex that Alexina already knew s/he was. According to Foucault, Alexina wrote the memoirs "once her new identity had been discovered and established" (xiii). Alexina, like Stephen Gordon, does not know the meaning of h/er difference and the "truth" must be discovered by external sources. There is no sense of agency in this revelation; Alexina is told that s/he is "male". From the position of this changed status, Alexina makes retrospective sense of some of the ambiguities of h/er life as a girl and young woman.

Foucault's analysis of that narrative includes a footnoted comment on Alexina's adoption of masculine and feminine adjectives to describe the different stages of h/er life:

this systematization . . . does not seem to describe a consciousness of being a woman becoming a consciousness of being a man; rather, it is an ironic reminder of grammatical, medical, and juridical categories that language must utilize but that the content of the narrative contradicts. (xiii-xiv)

Despite the thematic echoes produced by Foucault's observation, Alexina's life is not the androgynous ideal represented by Woolf's Orlando who can "vacillate" between the sexes, knowing "the secrets" and sharing "the weaknesses" of both (Orlando 152). The unwanted imposition of a singular identity is, it seems, untenable and Alexina commits suicide shortly after writing the memoirs. As such, h/er story demonstrates what Butler calls in a different, but related, discussion the "cruel and fatal social constraints on denaturalization" (Bodies 133).

The material evidence of Alexina's narrative, which dates from the 1860s, provides an interesting counterpoint to D. H. Lawrence's dogmatic account of sexual difference presented in Fantasia of the Unconscious in 1923. Lawrence states:

A child is born sexed. A child is either male or female; in the whole of its psyche and physique is either male or female. Every single living cell is either male or female, and will remain either male or female as long as life lasts. And every single cell in every male child is male, and every cell in every female child is female. The talk about a third sex, or about the indeterminate sex, is just to pervert the issue. (96)

Lawrence's view itself seems perverse (or defensive) in the context of the fictional and non-fictional representations of sex and gender changes discussed in this thesis. However, this unequivocally worded resistance to developing discourses of sex articulates a view that is a recurrent theme of my study: that is, the cultural and psychic requirement for sex and gender binary distinctions to be upheld according to abiding notions of "truth" and "nature".

A text which, at least partly, consciously attempts to counter those imperatives is Irene Clyde's Beatrice the Sixteenth (1909). The ambiguities surrounding the authorship of this obscure novel—Irene Clyde is the pseudonym of Thomas Baty, the founder of the journal Urania—are discussed in my introduction. Clyde's novel loosely constructs its utopian vision on the premise that sexed and gendered distinctions are artificial and undesirable. The novel poses as the autobiographical narrative of "Mary Hatherley, M.B., Explorer and Geographer" (1). The narrator's credentials signal the novel's radical intentions from the outset: for a woman to be a doctor, explorer and geographer at the start of the twentieth century would have been a rare phenomenon. The gender transgression and culture-crossing implicit in this aspect of Mary's characterisation are matched by the desert setting in which she is located when the novel begins. Such

"exotic" settings evoke Western cultural fantasies of the East as a place of liminality and gender fluidity.³ In circumstances which seem to anticipate Woolf's Orlando, Mary awakens from a state of unconsciousness (induced by a hefty blow from a camel's foot) to find that she has undergone some form of change. Where for Orlando the change is visible and unmistakable, for Clyde's protagonist the nature of the transformation is less tangible. The location is familiar—Mary had been travelling through a desert in the Middle East when she had been knocked "senseless"—but the place names and the native language have changed. It is only later, when she consults an astrologer, that Mary discovers that her accident has propelled her into a different "plane of existence" (149).⁴

Mary is rescued by a group of mysteriously clad people who are described as "clean-shaved, fair, smiling people—all in kilted brown robes with a broad yellow stripe across the front" (2). She is escorted back to their kingdom—a place called Armeria ruled over by Queen Beatrice the Sixteenth. Mary realises that the language used by the Armerians is a mixture of Latin and Greek with which she is familiar, and soon finds

³ See Marjorie Garber's "The Chic of Araby: Transvestism, Transsexualism and the Erotics of Cultural Appropriation" for a discussion of this cultural association of the East with gender-crossing.

⁴ This notion of a genderless utopia as, in effect, a state of mind might be pursued alongside Marge Piercy's representation of a utopian future world in Woman on the Edge of Time.

herself able to communicate with them. She is increasingly drawn to Ilex, one of the leading figures in the kingdom of Armeria, who is described as a "graceful figure" (9) but to whom initially no sex or gender are assigned. Although Mary's claims to be from a place called "Britain" meet with some scepticism, she is gradually accepted by the people of Armeria and, having won the confidence of the queen, she assists them in their conflict with the neighbouring kingdom, Uras. The story ends with Mary and Ilex being united through a form of marriage ceremony and Mary sending her manuscript, by a means only vaguely described, to a friend in Scotland who, through "Miss Clyde", arranges for its publications.

Beatrice the Sixteenth is, as this synopsis suggests, a highly implausible tale which combines a rather turgid prose style with an idealised vision of what is ultimately an all-female world. At the start of the novel there is some attempt to present Armeria as a gender-free utopia. The setting, as I observed earlier, is suggestive of liminality. It seems that this is a place where individuals are released from the usual constraints of naturalised notions of sex and gender relations. The narrator's sense of identity is disturbed by her contact with its inhabitants; not only does she wonder "[w]here was I?", but also "[w]ho was I?" (25). Her conversations with Ilex and Brytas,

particularly those concerning language, aim to depict a people oblivious to the usual conventions of sex and gender. But the need to represent this meaningfully for the reader requires that the characters, including the Armerians, continue to distinguish between men and women. When Mary asks whether the "Parisôn" who is mentioned is a "lady", explaining that she thought it might be a man's name, Ilex responds: "'So it is. Where is the difference?'" (77). Yet when Mary questions them about their use of terms to distinguish between male and female she learns that they only have words to mean "person".

The first clue that this might be a female community, rather than a genderless one, occurs when Mary asks: "'How do you distinguish . . . between the people who—~~who~~ fight and wear whiskers and moustaches?'" At this point, Mary realises that "none of them did wear them" (77). Her question about whether any division is made between the people of Armeria is understood only in terms of the distinction between free people and slaves. Mary explains that she means "'[t]wo complementary divisions, each finding its perfection in the other'" (78), to which Ilex replies, "'[f]or my part, I cannot see how perfection is to be attained, except in one's own spirit'" (78). As a heavy-handed postscript to this exchange, Mary concludes that, "there was no second declension in the

language, and, consequently, no distinctively masculine adjectives. . . . So there was really no means of making or inferring any distinction of the kind" (79).

Although this section of Beatrice the Sixteenth recognises the relationship between language and identity, the author's handling of the issue seems awkward and overstated, especially when viewed alongside the subtle effects of Stein's The Making of Americans. However, whilst Clyde's novel has none of the subtle knowingness and innovation of Stein's text, the inconsistencies evident in its use of gendered language demonstrate some of the same intrinsic problems of representation.

The vision of a world without gender which Clyde seems to be wanting to suggest is undermined by its variable language use. At first the narrative adopts terms such as "personage", "figure", and "subject" to refer to the people Mary meets. Gender neutral names and carefully constructed sentences avoid the need for gendered pronouns: "Brytas began to play again, and kept us quiet, until, in the abrupt way which was usual, the music stopped, which we took as a signal to seek our own apartments" (59). But such devices give the writing a formal and rather detached feel and are virtually abandoned after about eighty pages. At the same time gendered nouns and pronouns continue to be employed in a conventional manner including references

to an "oldish man" (37) and a "beautiful girl" (61). During a visit to Ilex's house, in the first indication of Ilex's sex, Mary notes that, "[e]vidently my friend was mistress here!" (84). Ilex's account of the family members and friends gathered at the house uses gendered pronouns, enabling the author to indicate the existence of same-sex relationships (88). From this point onwards, although occasional reminders are posted of the presumed sexual ambivalence of the inhabitants through the phrases "him or her" and "she (or it might be he)", no consistent effort is made to maintain the initial vision.

The all-female world which provides the more dominant image of the novel is a strange affair. An old-fashioned view of "ladies" who call each other "dear" persists alongside the text's more radical representation of women as rulers, government officials, doctors, and soldiers. Similarly, although intimate relationships between the female inhabitants are described, they are presented as sexless and, at times, are heavily sentimentalised. The Armerian practice of purchasing infants from a nearby "barbarian" (presumably because heterosexual) community inadvertently constructs same-sex relationships as sterile and incapable of independent existence.

Far from being the ideal state it sets out to be, this world is riddled with its own divisions and

conflicts. Hierarchical and binary distinctions are the foundational poles of this alternative existence—Armeria/Uras, free people/slaves, civilised/barbarians—whilst in its practices of "conjux" (which means "a joined person") the Western conventions of monogamy and marriage are upheld.

Yet if Irene Clyde's novel loses sight of or significantly revises its original aims, there is still something quite remarkable about this text, however obscure and however flawed it is in literary terms. Part of its fascination must derive from the questions surrounding the author Thomas Baty, who pursues his fantasy through the pseudonym "Irene Clyde". But viewed alongside other discourses of sex and gender from the period, both fictional and non-fictional, Beatrice the Sixteenth provides further evidence of the radical responses which established notions of identity were provoking in the opening decades of the twentieth century.

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